

Rising Sisterhood in Cinematic Narrative: Evolving through the Lens of *Laapataa Ladies, Santosh and All We Imagine As Light*

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ABSTRACT

Sisterhood history is obscure as women-women relations have been a negative. The culprit being the Patriarchal narratives. Ingrained subconsciously and the added support of the institutions, the sisterhood faced challenges to survive. Despite the three waves of feminism in the twentieth century and phases of suppressed feminism in the twenty first century, the 'women problem' still exists. The so-called empowerment remains an illusion and distant dream. Women need to support each-other and also stand by each other. Lately, the thematic representation in cinemas has also been echoing the same. With a plethora of movies that aim to drum it in that women need to support women in order to empower each other. It is anything but surprising that the Oscar nominations under the category of Foreign Films this year are three Hindi language films – *Laapataa Ladies*, *Santosh*, *All we imagine as Light* from India, Britain and France respectively; and the underlying theme in them is the Sisterhood! *All we imagine as Light* has already claimed the Grand Prix award at Cannes Film Festival this year. Recognition through awards provides institutional support to create the awareness needed to combat the ignorance generated by years of patriarchal narratives. This Paper aims to highlight the growing instances of Sisterhood themes in films, with special emphasis on *Laapataa Ladies*, *Santosh* and *All we imagine as Light*; the consequential impact of these cinematic narrative on the social change as mirrored in the cinematic representation.

Keywords: *Sisterhood, Laapataa Ladies, Santosh, All we imagine as Light, Oscars, Grand Prix 2024, Cannes Film Festival.*

'Sisterhood' Term

Even though the term 'Sisterhood' appeared in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in the 14th century, its conceptual meaning evolved from the familial and religious realm of these centuries to the academic one in the twentieth century. Most importantly the juxtaposition of the term with 'female solidarity' appeared to have started from the second wave of feminism onwards. i.e.

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1960's onwards. Interestingly, the recent years have witnessed the term becoming expansive; including those that are defined by the gender roles - the banding together of the feminine energies or the traits (trans-woman, gender-fluid, etc.). Hence, Sisterhood has evolved – from religious and familial to academic and subsequently to social. The modern times' various dictionaries define Sisterhood as female solidarity. It appears that though sisterhood always existed in the private sphere, it began to emerge publicly during the Renaissance. With Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*, it was the birth of the thought of women-women coalition. Further on, 'an all-female formal coalition' can be traced to France during the French Revolution, as noted by Rosalind Miles in her book *The Women's History of the Modern World: How Radicals, Rebels, and Everywomen Revolutionized the Last 200 Years*. These were opportunities for women to confide their most intimate thoughts, fears and desires in the absence of the piercing male gaze. Olympe de Gouge suggested that women band together to solve their own problems. Sadly, she was executed for voicing her bold opinions. Probably a threat! The 'Sisterhood thought' has been repressed and countered from time to time to force a meltdown of the sisterhood. However, it is only recently that the rising number of women supporting other women publicly has become something hard to ignore. As evident, it has found its way into popular arts and representations of it in it. That brings us to the subject of portrayal of this theme in the films.

Interestingly, there has been a sharp turnaround from the historical depiction of women-women being 'frenemy' to being 'Sisters'. Taking a look at the Indian Cinema, from the 1950's onwards, one can find parallels with the feminist movements globally. The nineteen fifties' saw the sisterhood in the form of 'Sakhi' or 'Saheli'. Sohrab Modi's 1956 film – *Raj Hath* had two females (a princess and her aide) who bond during their supposedly-secret espionage operations to the enemy kingdom. Their 'picaresque-ish' - comic journey sees them display their sisterhood as they share their thoughts about their lives and the futuristic marital bliss. They undertake roles dressing up as soldiers and sages. This is one of the earliest instances of such a display. The sixties coincided with the time of the second wave of feminism wherein there were films that depicted the female solidarity; the portrayals were mixed up, including constructive and destructive sisterhoods. Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* and *Charulata* had shades of destructive and distrusting sisterhood while *Mahanagar* (1963 Bengali film) had shades of constructive sisterhood. The Nineteen eighties' saw a rise of backlash against the feminist wave of the sixties. Portraying the unifying force of sisterhood, there was the theme

of friends fighting the foes – specifically, women against men; notable mention is Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (1987) wherein women unite to protect one of the sisters of their own kind.

In Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (1987), the men are greedy, lascivious, entitled aggressors on the hunt in a drought-ravaged village in the Rann of Kutch. The women know they are prey—guarded, mute gazelles. Their safe space is the enclosure in which they dry and pound the season's red chilli harvest. It is where they taunt, chide, protect and encourage one another. In a land and a people divided by caste, class and misogyny, Sonbai's (Smita Patil) final revenge on the soobedar (Naseeruddin Shah) is a triumph of collective action. (Gupta)

The nineties was a time of the resurgence of the third wave of feminism. It saw some films on the theme of 'sisterhood globally'; notable mention is Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (Simran's Euro trip) and the non-hindi films such as Ladies Special (1993 - Telugu), Magalir Mattum (1994 - Tamil). The onset of twenty first century saw sisterhood in films, in the themes depicting the diaspora. While it was more pronounced in some films, it appeared to be on the fringes in films such as Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (Poo and her friends).

In The Namesake (2006), Ashima is a housewife who finds valuable company, after her husband has died and children have left the nest, is Sally from the library. In Bend It Like Beckham (2002), Jess and Juliette's camaraderie is forged on the football field. For Ashima and Jess, these friendships anchor them as they navigate fluid third culture borders. (Gupta)

The same time period saw the growth of the Sisterhood theme in Bollywood films; notable mentions are Filhaal (2002), Dor (2006), Firaq (2008), Anand (2004 – Telugu). In Filhaal, the sisterhood (Sia-Rewa) helping with surrogacy; Dor had a surprising sisterhood (Zeenat-Meera), exposing the areas where the female bonding can be instrumental in solving bigger issues related to violence. The second decade of the Twenty hundreds' was a time of the fourth wave of feminism. In the backdrop of this supposedly fourth wave of feminism or rather digital feminism, the sisterhood was more visible than before. Notable mentions are Vikas Bahl's Queen (Rani-Vijayalaxmi) and Leena Yadav's Parched (Lajjo-Bijli-Rani). Then there was Pink (2016; Minal and her roommates), Lipstick under my Burkha (2016; Usha-Shireen-Leena-Rehana) and Veere de Wedding (2018; Kalindi-Avni-Sakshi-Meera). As the third decade of the twenty first century approached, the sisterhood depictions have begun to peak. The year 2024 has seen more films such as Laapataa Ladies, Crew, Santosh, All we imagine as Light.

The sisterhood in *Crew* involves three air-hostesses working with an airline that has gone bankrupt and how they jointly deal with the consequential crisis – do they fight it or take flight off it. Yatamanyu Narain terms their sisterhood as “... the zany sisterhood shared by the trio...” (Narain). Then there is *Girls will be Girls* described as a coming-of-age story about a teenage girl at a boarding school in Dehradun. Woven into the plot is the sisterhood of a mother-daughter duo, complex and intriguing; interestingly the film had an all-women crew who shot it within 45 days.

Because of the limitations on the space here, this paper will focus on three films – *Laapataa Ladies*, *Santosh* and *All we imagine as Light*. Coincidentally, the three films have been official entry for Oscars this year from India, Britain and France respectively. *All we imagine as Light* has already won the Grand Prix award at Cannes film festival this year. *Laapataa Ladies* is about two young newly-wed brides who get ‘exchanged’ during a train ride to their husband’s home. *Santosh* is about a newly widowed woman who takes up her late husband’s job as a police constable due to a Government scheme. *All we imagine as Light* is about three nurses who are colleagues at the same hospital, navigating through life’s challenges in a big city.

Laapataa Ladies

On an auspicious day for weddings, two women, Phool and Jaya, are married to their respective men, but at two different locations. The lives of these central characters coincide when both the couples board a connecting train wherein their destinations are different. During this train journey both brides get exchanged; the confusion is created by the long veil and identical bridal dress they are wearing, along with many other brides in the train. While Jaya reaches Phool’s in-law’s home as a bride, Phool gets lost on the railway station and lands up with Manju Mai, a feisty-elderly lady who lives independently and runs a stall at the railway station. After some struggles and unpleasant incidents, Phool reunites with her husband, while Jaya is able to pursue what she wants.

The film’s plot portrays sisterhood amongst relations that have been traditionally depicted as enemies. Prime amongst these are the women within the household, the in-laws. Jaya and her mother-in-law, Jaya and her sister-in-law, Jaya’s mother-in-law and great mother-in-law, Phool-Jaya, Phool-Manju Mai. All the women are either a ladder to each other or need a ladder to come up. Phool learns from Manju Mai the power of financial empowerment and what it

means to be independent. Manju Mai does not impart these lessons in a polemic fashion, rather during the routine daily chores. Delivered in powerful dialogues, they hit hard the hard facts.

“Budbak hona sharam ka baat nahin hai. Budbak hone pe garv karna, ye sharam ka baat hai.” (to be a fool is nothing to be ashamed of. But to be proud to be a fool, that is something to be ashamed of!)

“Khud ka saath akele Khushi se rehna both mushkil hai, Phool. Haan, ek baar seekh liye, koi tumko takleef nahi pahucha sakta.” (To live with oneself is very difficult, Phool, However, once learnt to do so, then nobody can ever hurt you.)

“Ek baar ghunghat le liye toh aage nahi neeche dekh k chalna seekho.” (Once you have veiled yourself, then you need to look down rather than in front while walking.) (Laapata Ladies)

Jaya too becomes a source for some thought-provoking insights for her mother-in-law, the great mother-in-law and her sister-in-law. “Toh kaa ab auraton ki pasand ka khaana Banega? Dikkat toh ee hai ki humko ab who bhi yaad nahin ki humko kya pasand hai.” (So, will the food cooked be as per women’s likes? The problem is that I have trouble remembering what I liked to eat.) (Laapata Ladies) Jaya’s observations and her remarks on the same paves way for some powerful insights into the women-women relations. Jaya’s MIL and great MIL also share a wonderful chemistry. Far from being sugary sweet with each other, they don’t miss any chance of being curt with each other. At the same time they wonder aloud if they could be friends! Jaya and her sister-in-law also bond with efforts initiated by Jaya. She helps her SIL realize her potential and channels her creative talent to raise the latter’s self esteem. Moreover, it is this ‘creativity’ that Jaya uses to trace Phool.

Santosh

The titular character joins the police and is tasked with the duty of investigating a case that involves the rape and murder of a dalit-teenage girl. Inspector Geeta Sharma who has years of experience, is called in to lead the case. As the two work on the case, the older woman mentors the younger one. Highlighting sisterhood, Santosh portrays a tri-angular relationship amongst the two cops and the victim. She further shares this understanding and awareness with her younger colleague, going ahead and mentoring the latter. “... she ushers the young widow toward a form of self-actualization ... cathartic for Santosh herself...” (Adlakha)

All We Imagine As Light

In modern-day Mumbai, the three nurses are Prabha, Anu and Parvaty. They have moved from smaller home towns to the flashy city of Mumbai. Prabha and Anu share their accommodation while Parvaty lives in an apartment. Of the three Parvaty is the oldest and a widow. Prabha is older to Anu and younger than Parvaty. Anu being the youngest is anything but sober. Though Anu has just moved in, she requests her roommate Prabha to help with the former's share of rent. Moreover, Anu is too bold for the sober and simple Prabha. The former is at the center of the gossips for she is romantically involved with a Muslim boy. Then there is the third nurse, Parvaty who is fighting to keep the apartment she has been living for the past twenty years. There is a property developer who has bought the same building where she lives. Since her late husband 'forgot' to leave her the documents that would prove her ownership, she faces the tough choice of either being forcefully evicted or to get a compensation; the 'compensation' happens only if she proves that she is the rightful owner. Despite the differences in their personalities, they ladder each other. Though Prabha is quite conservative as she is conditioned to be a 'woman' with a patriarchal mindset, she helps Anu to the best of her ability. When Parvaty decides to move to her home in the coastal village, Prabha and Anu, both decide to help her. The film is replete with sisterhood bonds; these bonds are not just limited to the relationship of the three main characters and the interactions amongst them, it extends beyond them.

the amusing introductory scenes, in which an elderly patient complains to Prabha that the ghost of her late husband keeps bothering her when she's trying to watch television, and Anu slips a bottle of contraceptive pills to a 25-year-old woman who already has three children.

(Barber)

The three films reflect similarities as they portray sisterhood throughout.

Eyeing other females with suspicion and hostility, women have been divided for too long a time; the narratives and the institutional elements instilled this and conditioned them to follow it. However, there is a need to unlearn and relearn. How? With retelling of stories that instill the lost trust. And what better medium then films as evident from the recent researches. "Advances in neuroscientific understanding have shown that "the brain is more hard-wired for sociability, for engaging with others, and for empathy than we had realized," (Gary). The

visual-auditory imagery is better perceived and is more effective in altering identities; this is where films come that offer the power of visual storytelling combined with the social networkings' easy access. Moreover, "Story and character are the two most important elements for helping people connect with a film." (Gary)

In *Laapataa Ladies*, the women are anything but walls to each other. Jaya, an educated woman, has immense awareness that could be termed as 'female consciousness'. And more importantly, she uses it at every opportune moment to ladder her sisters. Phool needs help from her 'sisters' to realize some hard truths. Her 'female consciousness' is buried and needs to surface. Manju Mai is one such 'sister' with an alert and active 'female consciousness' who extends her hand to Phool. This is extraordinary as it is a turnaround in the women-women relations. Why would this be extra-ordinary? Because until sometime back, women-women bondings were anything but pleasant. They were traditional enemies. How? Let us take hypothetically the same film but set some years back, say the twentieth century - the nineties - the seventies, during the time of the second wave of feminism. What would have happened? With Phool being lost on the railway track, she would have most probably been raped or gotten into the hands of anti-social elements. Even if she didn't, then Manju Mai would have been a character who would have exploited her; this has been a traditional narrative wherein a woman 'lost' is 'lost' for ever; she is pushed to the wall, by all, including those of her own gender. Looking at Jaya, lot of things could have happened at her end too. She could have manipulated the entire household to her benefit. She could have in turn be manipulated too. With the MIL-great MIL-SIL nexus, she would have had a nightmarish life. However, this is the third decade of the twenty first century. So, a turnaround could happen. With so many women now being bombarded with awareness campaign and data in the form of books, films, etc. This is amazing. As portrayed in the film, women must work towards supporting each other; unlearning and relearning. So, when Phool gets lost and is vulnerable, Manju Mai does not merely feed her; because beyond the food, shelter and clothing, there is something else she sees Phool lacking. It is the discovery or awareness that she is complete in herself. It is the 'female consciousness' in Manju Mai that pushes her to push Phool further. Rather than indulge in self-pity, she asks Phool some thought-provoking questions. She also tells Phool to help with the cooking at home and at the stall as nothing comes free. And most importantly, Manju Mai gives Phool, her share of earnings from her work at the stall. Phool is naïve and would never even have questioned the elderly woman. However, Manju Mai feels it an ethical duty to not exploit Phool and instead provide her with

her rightful share. This does give Phool the confidence of surviving without her husband. Towards the end, Phool can be seen travelling in a train, towards her husband's village on her own. This time without a veil. There is a scene wherein she also stands in the doorway of the train to get some fresh air. The Phool here looks a strikingly different woman than the one at the start of the film. It is the time spent with Manju Mai that brings about this transformation. It pushes her ahead to evolve into an empowered woman person. As for Jaya, she has more awareness than Phool on account of the former's education status. Jaya is anything but naïve. She is smart. She is able to take her own decisions. This is remarkable as there are many educated women who need to learn 'how to think' and be able to execute their decision-making too. In an unexpected situation, Jaya keeps her calm and thinks; she thinks about what to do next. She attempts to make it a win-win for all – her efforts to find Phool, to evade being traced and returned to her violent and abusive husband and at finding a mid-way to complete her education that got stopped due to her forced marriage. She also makes remarks that set her two MIL's thinking about things they never thought for all those years of their lives. "Ghar ki auratein saas, nanad, devraani, jethani, sabhi bann jaati hai. Saheli nahin ban paati ek doosre ki." (Household women can be all relations: Mother-in-law, sister-in-law, co-sister-in-law, except friends with each other) Later on, they talk of the possibilities of negotiating their relationship. "Amma aap hum Saheli ban sakte hain ka?" (Mother, could we be friends?) (Laapataa Ladies). The fact that they are able to think this and verbalise it indicates the possibility of a sisterhood within the four walls of the household, a domain where it is needed more than anything. Jaya also connects with her SIL, encouraging her to draw. It is with the help of the SIL's sketch, Jaya plans to trace Phool, the bride she has mistakenly switched places with. The two MIL's also have their hilarious and strong bond. They have a comfort level wherein the younger MIL is able to chide the elder MIL without hesitation.

Kiran Rao's *Laapataa Ladies* has women talking—about abusive husbands, living alone, need for education over domesticity, forgetting their own favourite dishes while cooking to please men—inspiring each other and building sororities through these much-needed conversations. (Joshi)

Rao's film has been a light hearted watch with no major reprimand to anybody – Men or women. With a limited time frame, there is a limitation on what needs to be kept and what needs to be removed. She has successfully portrayed aspects of sisterhood that have seen maximum misrepresentations. And these depictions have been accepted across all parameters,

mostly women. It is the mouth-publicity that has made the film a hit. The film thumbs up the ‘sisterhood’ theory, - womens’ support can solve most women problems. Phool’s problem is solved when she finds an ally in Manju Mai. Jaya’s problem is solved when she is sheltered by her in-laws despite knowing that she is the wrong bride. In all the instances of women-women interactions, there has been no wall-ing.

... we are trying to ask women to find solutions to their problems within the periphery of the structure we are living in...” She added, "We don't want them to be revolutionaries or rebels in a very stereotypical term. But, we are asking them to take small steps towards independence, be it financial or emotional. (Kumar, Vineeta)

With a light-budget, Rao has succeeded in making a strong social statement.

In Santosh, it is the women boss-women employee dealing with a case involving a young dalit rape victim. There are the three broad age categories. Inspector Geeta is the oldest, Santosh is younger to her while the Dalit girl is a teenager. The unifying factor between the two cops is the ‘female consciousness’ and the act of ladder-ing each other. The older woman through navigating the patriarchal world has crafted her own perceptions and understanding of the system. This is a unique achievement as it is a peek into her mind and her ‘female consciousness’. “... Santosh is a very powerful statement of the inner solidarity between and among women even when the two women have never known each other, where one is raped and murdered and the other is a woman police constable and a Hindu on top ... ” (Chatterji) This is again extraordinary because the traditional narrative would pitch two women against each other without a doubt, esp in a professional set up such as this.

“Her [Santosh’s] bonding with the character played by Sunita Rajwar is a unique example of sisterhood between two women though the two women are as distanced as chalk is from cheese in terms of being canny and smart.” (Chatterji) The narrative by Sandhya Suri, the director projected the ‘unlearn and relearn’ aspect. What made her portray things differently? The answer lies in the inception of the idea of Santosh. Suri wanted to tell the story of a female cop following the 2012- Nirbhaya case protests that were flashed worldwide. In one such photograph, there was a group of female protestors who were held back by a line of female police officers.

“There was one policewoman who had such an interesting expression on her face,” said Suri in an interview at Cannes. “I was hooked. I was like oh my god, look at these women for whom it's not even safe to walk the streets, and their sense of powerlessness, but look at her power. She's them but she's also not them.” (Bains)

Suri can be credited with taking her sisterhood seriously. Though she began with the portrayal of the ‘power and the powerlessness’, she has unknowingly put the spotlight on the sisterhood of the two cops as well as the dynamics between the two females fighting the case involving the third one, the youngest of them. In making a film about the rape victim and the perceptions of the female police officers, she has brought to light the plight of her sisters. With a global reach, it is bound to generate more awareness about the banding of women to support the sisterhood.

Described as ‘a delicate ode to female bonding’, ‘radiant Indian drama [that] follows two nurses looking for love but finding sisterhood’ (Whānau Mārama: All We Imagine as Light), All we imagine as Light, talks about the three women developing a sisterhood bond while coping to survive in a big city. Working in Mumbai, Prabha, Anu and Parvaty discover themselves as well each other while they are hit by adversity in all forms. “The coming together is for no act of revolt ... but just for being there for each other.” (Praveen). Accepting the award from the American actor Viola Davis, Payal Kapadia, the director thanked her three leading ‘sister-cast’ who accompanied her on-stage. She said:

... This film is about friendship, about three very different women. Oftentimes, women are pitted against each other. This is the way our society is designed and it is really unfortunate. But for me, friendship is a very important relationship because it can lead to greater solidarity, inclusivity and empathy...
(Frontline News Desk)

It is because Payal understands the equation amongst women and how destructive they could be that she felt a need to make a film about how it could be different when they support rather than wall. Her choice of story and the dynamics it showcases through the portrayal of the characters is exemplary as it speaks of Payal's sisterhood with the larger and wider sisterhood it will eventually reach out to and the numerous lives it is likely to touch. Whats more, the Grand Prix award that All we imagine as Light won was judged by a jury headed by another woman “... Greta Gerwig ... this warm, female-led film resembles her own work in certain ways ...” (Barber). All we imagine as Light has sisterhood echoing in its very title. Is it difficult

to notice the ‘we’? This ‘we’ is the ‘sisterhood’ amongst the women in the film, extended by the female director to the countless women globally. This is the sisterhood that needs to surface that aligns with the ‘unlearn and relearn’.

... What *Laapataa Ladies* has achieved is beyond numbers. It aimed at appealing to the audience's conscience, leaving them with thoughts about not treating a certain gender as weak or beneath anybody. The idea was to build a conversation about change, and not introduce a battle where men and women experience a gender face-off ... (Kumar, Vineeta)

With so much female presence, a question arises about the role of the males. Where do men come in the sisterhood theory? What is there in it for them? A lot. Sisterhood theory is anything but anti-men. It is inclusive of men who believe in ‘women empowerment’ from within women communities. Be it the production team, or the script writer or any other aspect of film making, there are plenty of men who have contributed to them. And then to be nominated for awards that puts these films on the global platform, men have been involved here too. All providing support to the stories about female bondings – the sisterhood. With the involvement of males the message that gets across is that men are coming out of the shadows to embrace sisterhood too – the all women bondings that were a taboo until a decade ago.

Interestingly, the men are not dark too, except for one character, Jaya’s husband. He too.

In *Laapataa Ladies*, there is a sole character with dark shades, Jaya’s husband who is ably handled by another male character – Inspector Shyam Manohar, an interesting and other layered character with dark and hilarious shades. When Inspector Shyam Manohar discovers the truth about Jaya and traces her to be delivered to her husband, the rightful owner, something happens. Jaya’s husband slaps her in the presence of the Inspector who witnesses it unflinchingly. However, he finds a midway-solution to the professional crisis he faces in discharging his duties about the missing report filed by Jaya’s husband for her. Inspector Shyam helps Jaya to escape the abusive relationship she has been married into. Why is this unique? Because, a traditional narrative would have him collude with her husband to jointly exploit Jaya. However, he too ‘unlearn and relearns’. Thus choosing to help a woman, empowering her at the expense of the patriarchally glorified ‘brotherhood’, he has supported the ‘sisterhood’.

The popular arts, visual mediums are influential in shaping social perceptions. Consequentially, paving way for change in social behaviours. “... media influence acts through the individual

mechanism (via persuasion) versus the extent to which it does so through the social mechanism (via higher-order beliefs)” (Arias). Movies originated in 1913, and since then they have been an important medium of communication fulfilling dual responsibilities of entertainment and social commentary. “It is very intriguing to comprehend sometimes, whether it is the films that are shaping the society or vice versa (Bhugra, 2006).” (Chandra) Specifically and historically, it is the parallel cinema that has been instrumental in depicting the social issues, taking over the responsibility of creating mass awareness. In recent years, this theme has found favor with the larger audience with the success of mainstream films. Though *Santosh* and *All we imagine as Light* would largely fall under the parallel cinema, *Laapataa Ladies* can be categorized as a Mainstream cinema-film.

Cinema has dominated the modern world societies including the Indian social life. A typical outing or celebration for a middle class involves watching a film together. And if that film can provide entertainment with a social message, it would be just what is needed to bring about a shift in the conditioning of the mindsets. “The most powerful medium of communication in Indian society is commercial Indian cinema (Butalia, 1984).” (Chandra)

It is so because, it is with such narratives and characterizations that we most identify ourselves, consciously or sub consciously. We absorb them, implement them, imitate them. “Products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our identities, our sense of selfhood ... (Dines and Humez, 2003)” (Chandra). Films have been a medium of social expression and have often depicted the social themes prevalent around. They have also been instrumental in igniting a change.

“Social change films promote ‘accelerated crowd learning,’ ... A good film, artfully told, can be a ‘platform for a more complicated strategy for bringing about social change.’” (Gary, Loren)

With these three films becoming official entries for the Oscars, it is set to touch a wider spectrum. This global reach will make it iconic and something the masses would wish to emulate. With women embracing the sisterhood, it is likely to impact the social set-up as well. Finally, a beacon for the women problem, by the women in a language that women understand through the medium of cinematic representations.

Since the feminist waves of the past have resolved some problems and left many, the sisterhood is something that can address the problem. What is the problem? The problem is about women and the solution lies with them. Rather than pointing to the external factors such as men, women need to look within; it is something that each woman needs to understand. However, this awareness is lacking as being feminist is often interpreted as anti-men narrative. Stories can bring changes. Films are the popular medium of pictorial stories. The science of the Brain and the impact of a good storytelling can be best explained by citing a discussion that took place at Harvard's Centre for Public Leadership Communications' Panel.

“‘The brain developed as a visual-auditory sensory processing system, which, when you think about it, is what film does.’ A film is successful to the degree that it connects to the audience emotionally, said Guttentag.” (Gary, Loren)

Sisterhood support can be provided in many ways. For instance, being a mere listener is also a support. Women communities are also a support. Karma Lochrie and Usha Vishnuvajjala in their 2022 book *Women's Friendship in Medieval Literature* have talked of 'Godsibbe' and 'Cummarships' (Harris *Obscene Pedagogies* 26-66; "Cultivating Cummarship"), women communities as discovered in the medieval literature (Lochrie 217). These communities bear a close resemblance to the women communities as depicted in *Laapataa Ladies*. Women can be ladders or walls. The enlightened females need to support their yet-to-be-enlightened sisters. Sneha Desai, one of the writer on *Laapataa Ladies* says, "It's not necessary for all women to climb the ladder. If you cannot climb the ladder, you can hold it up for somebody else. And that itself is an empowering act." (Kumar, Sharanya) The sisterhood depiction has flooded all forms of media representation; most importantly for the films. Going a bit back, one can see the build-up. A turning point was the year 2018 as it was the year UN dedicated to 'Sisterhood'; this may have accelerated the pace and set the ball rolling. With the #Metoo moment of awakening in the vicinity, the sisterhood representations have risen to an all-time high. Reaching a crescendo in the year 2023 with the Google Doodle theme 'Women support Women' has been the contributing story from President Murmu, titled 'Every woman's story my story'. "Tracing the evolution of sisterhood in the Indian cinema post-independence, Nidhi Gupta terms the 2020's as the time of 'Sisterhood and Sorority'" (Gupta). Can it be interpreted as 'Sisterhood is rising!'?

What Laapataa Ladies has achieved and is yet to achieve on a global platform makes the Indian audience and filmmakers believe in the power of telling rooted stories. This could be just one film setting the benchmark ... Evolution doesn't always mean a big change, it could also mean going back to our roots and looking for the missing joy, finding answers and solutions to the many laapata problems we've grown up with” (Kumar, Vineeta)

Sisterhood and its depiction in these films and their subsequent, simultaneous nominations for cinematic awards point out to its popularity, propelling it further as a mirror of the impending social change. Sisterhood is about discovering Santosh in the ‘ladies’ that are anything but ‘Laapataa’ as ‘Light beyond our imagination’ has finally been cast!

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