

Identity Erasure and Female Mental Well-being: A Qualitative Analysis of “Mukherjee Dar Bou”

Mira Mondal*

Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune, Maharashtra, India

mira.mondal@tmv.edu.in

Abstract: The present research attempts to examine the depiction of the phenomenon of identity loss and the mental well-being of females in “Mukherjee Dar Bou”, a Bengali movie that focuses on the emotional and psychological aspects of females in a normal domestic setup. The paper will explore the representation of the gradual erosion of the personality of females in their regular social and familial roles and responsibilities. As opposed to portraying mental illness from a clinical point of view or using psychological language, the movie reflects that emotional distress, silence, and distress are part of life.

In order to conduct the analysis, a qualitative textual approach will be used to analyze the narrative techniques, character relationships, dialogue, silence, and symbolic imagery used in the movie. This approach will shed light on the implications of identity loss for the mental well-being of females in a familial setting. In addition, the personal identity of the protagonist will remain symbolic because her identity as a wife will become prominent.

It will also explore the impact of domestic interactions, generational pressure, and patriarchal customs on psychological exhaustion and invisibility. The film also demonstrates the role of empathy, acknowledgment, and consciousness in healing emotionally and asserting oneself. In addition, by focusing on regional cinema, this paper contributes to media and gender studies literature by revealing how female emotional wellness can be captured in everyday domestic realities instead of being framed by mental illness. This paper argues that Mukherjee Dar Bou is a culturally important narrative of women’s identity and emotional well-being in contemporary Indian cinema.

Keywords: Female mental well-being, Regional cinema, Bengali cinema, Domestic representation, Women in film

INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being has gained considerable attention in media and cultural studies when discussing the representation of women's emotional life in filmic depictions of their experiences as subjects within the socio-cultural constructs of everyday life. Although most discussions about the psychological health of characters in films revolve around more overt diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other psychiatric illnesses, many women's experiences have been found to be associated with psychological strains arising from societal pressures, relational responsibilities, and self-repression. In many cultures, especially among the South Asian family structures, the emotional anguish experienced by women has been perceived to be a part and parcel of their life in terms of

caring for others, coping with life changes, and sacrificing themselves without considering their psychological well-being.

Film is both a narrative form and an arena where the construction and reconstruction of social reality imbued with gender relations takes place. Films often reflect societal expectations of women within the domestic sphere, depicting their roles as nurturers, mediators, and self-sacrificers. Such representations construct societal notions of women by associating female virtue with suffering, silence, and service. At this point, issues of identity become significant as the identity of women, who are first and foremost wives, mothers, daughters-in-law, and nurturers, is always subordinated to the roles that society assigns to them. The gradual erasure of one's identity in day-to-day life results in emotional, mental, and psychological exhaustion, leading to feelings of isolation and invisibility.

In terms of looking at the effects on women's mental well-being, the notion of identity erasure serves as an appropriate frame of analysis when examining women's portrayal in films. Domestic identity erasure does not only occur through oppressive practices but also through repetitive forms of social categorization, cultural norms, and symbolic denial of autonomy. In many family-centered stories, women are recognized through others, not through themselves, and the expression of their emotions is made possible through serving others. This type of representation is important as it shows how cultural systems make it possible for women to emotionally suppress yet ignore their inner turmoil. Mental health cannot merely be understood in medical terms; it has to be examined also in the context of ordinary life experiences of being seen and valued.

In regional Indian cinema, there have been some films that have provided complex depictions of female subjectivity in the domestic space that contrast both with the typical mainstream storylines and the more direct therapeutic representation of mental illness in cinema. The very title of the film is indicative of how identity is assigned in a socio-cultural context. The female protagonist is referred to as "Mukherjee Dar Bou" or "the wife of Mukherjee." The movie does not use the language of psychiatry to show the condition of female mental health, but shows it through silence, daily conversations, delayed language, and negotiations inside the family unit. The process of daily communication, body language, and physical distance between individuals becomes a crucial narrative technique for the portrayal of psychological disorders. The emotional life of the main character is formed due to socially conditioned responsibilities that remain unspoken, resulting in an invisible form of exhaustion. Most

importantly, the plot also includes an intergenerational relationship between females, indicating that patriarchal norms and standards are perpetuated not just by men's dominance but also by gender-based education passed down from one generation of women to another.

There has been extensive academic writing on issues like patriarchy, representations, domesticity, and empowerment of women in Indian cinema; nevertheless, less attention has been given to the issue of how identity silencing is linked to mental well-being in films made in regional languages. Likewise, the studies on mental well-being in cinema tend to focus on illnesses rather than the everyday aspects of life that involve the emotional well-being of individuals. This presents a critical area for research because of the lack of investigation into the emotional well-being of characters through relational invisibility and naming practices.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scholarly discussion about the portrayal of women in movies has increasingly shifted from the visible gender stereotype to an analysis of how movies build the identity of females through the domestic roles assigned to them, silence, and other social expectations. In contemporary feminist media studies, it is believed that the movie industry not only reflects the existing cultural gender roles but also helps shape the general perception about women by constantly linking the idea of femininity with the role of care-taking, relationally and emotionally. A research study in feminist film theory has recently found out that the portrayal of women in movies today continues to be affected by the stories that highlight the relational identity of women more than their autonomy(Wilk, 2024).

In Indian cinema, there has been a lack of academic interest in the area of mental disorders, except in terms of explicit psychiatric diseases within commercial Hindi cinema. In this regard, the study carried out by Pathak and Biswal(2020) in media studies reveals that in the past, Indian cinema has depicted mental diseases in a way that was more of a dramatized version that ignored any connection between the psychological state and the reality of people's social lives. However, there has been a recent trend of realism in modern Indian cinema, but this has still been focused on the issue of explicit psychological problems and not emotions.

The link between the social status of women and their mental wellness has been discussed in detail by scholars in the field of public health, especially focusing on South Asia. In a qualitative research carried out among the rural population of Maharashtra, it was revealed

that mental wellness in women is highly influenced by factors such as social recognition, autonomy of decision-making power, and engagement in familial and communal affairs. (Kermode et al., 2007). Moreover, restricted agency, repetitive domestic chores, and lack of avenues for self-expression are known to lead to various emotional stresses that get normalized culturally but not medically.

In a similar vein, Atal & Foster (2021) observe that the experience of distress for women living in urban India is communicated using culturally loaded terminology associated with social pressure, domestic duty, and emotional burden, rather than psychiatric terminology. The implications of this study are extremely significant for film criticism since movies featuring female protagonists tend to convey mental anguish via silences, gestures, and controlled dialogues, instead of explicit verbalization of pain and distress.

Research into regional cinema in India has found that non-mainstream films tend to create a more realistic depiction of female subjectivity than that created by mainstream commercial films. The use of domestic realism, measured dialogue, and culturally specific inter-personal tensions in regional stories has enabled the representation of the subjective experience of women in ordinary reality. Indeed, the recent work done on regional film narratives has found that the portrayal of female characters has become less domestic, allowing the subtle portrayal of autonomy, dissent, and complex emotions (Rajkumar & Devi, 2023). In similar fashion, the recent study of South Indian cinema has found that emotionally realistic depictions of female subjectivity have increased (Parthasarathy et al., 2024).

In addition, recent theoretical work in cultural and media studies has continued to underscore the increasing representation of marginalized identities and invisible emotionality in regional films from India. According to the findings by Nair and Francis (2024), presented in Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, regional cinemas frequently construct unique representational spaces wherein aspects of psychological vulnerability, negotiation of identity, and social marginalization come to light beyond conventional cinematic representation. While the study focuses on the issue of gender minorities, the methodology used can certainly be applied to analyze women-oriented domestic tales, which express themselves in the form of invisible emotionality conveyed through nonverbal behavior and symbolic meaning. This theoretical framework serves as justification for the position that the genre of Bengali cinema and specifically the movie Mukherjee Dar Bou constitutes an important locus of expression of domestic emotions.

In addition to international research on film portrayals of psychological difficulties in females, there is an indication that the emotional state of women in movies may be portrayed through narrative conventions in a culturally encoded manner, rather than clinically. Ya Zhuo (2026) suggests that movies and TV series tend to move between realistic and stereotypical portrayals of psychological problems of women depending on the audiovisual language, determining whether the suffering of women is socially recognized or perceived as oversensitive behavior. It is found that the screen narrations still focus primarily on personal treatment and love-related issues while underestimating the importance of gender-driven problems leading to psychological troubles. Such research is very important when studying domestic films where silence, late reaction, relational position, and limited speech become tools of describing female mental health problems.

Even with all these advances, there is a gap that has been noticed in the current literature on how identity erasure acts as a representational strategy influencing the mental well-being of women in regional Indian cinema. The majority of the current body of research is focused either on the representation of gender, mental illness, or domesticity individually. There have been few studies on how symbolic naming, identity, and domesticity influence the emotional subjectivity of women in films in which mental disorder is not explicitly mentioned but only suggested. Thus, the current research tries to fill this gap.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the qualitative method will be employed by applying textual analysis to study the depiction of identity erasure and women's mental health in Mukherjee Dar Bou. Textual analysis allows for an understanding of the construction of meaning by analyzing narrative techniques, interactions between characters, dialogue, silences, and framing.

The selection of the film has been done by using purposive sampling, since the story line in the movie centers around the domestic life of a woman and how her identity gets suppressed along with her emotional presence in the household setting of a middle-class family.

Four major categories include the construction of women's identity, domestic role play, symbolism of silencing, and moments of self-awareness.

The feminist media perspective is used to understand how regional cinema represents the psychological condition of women by using the daily life of a housewife and without mentioning any term related to mental health.

ANALYSIS

- **Narrative Construction of Women's Identity**

The narrative construction of women's identity in Mukherjee Dar Bou is predominantly constructed in terms of relationships rather than by the individual herself. The main character is defined more as a daughter-in-law to the Mukherjee family than a person who can be identified as herself. This shows that in a family context, women tend to acquire their identities in terms of marriage.

- **Household Interaction and Gender Roles**

The movie shows that domestic space is where there is constant performance of gender roles without any emotion. The female character fulfills her tasks in the house consistently, but her emotions are never taken into consideration. She is important in making things work within the house, but her individuality is not recognized.

- **Relationship with the Mother-in-Law and Emotion Transformation**

An emotional transformation takes place for the main character due to changes in her relationship with her mother-in-law. Their initial relationship is influenced by hierarchy and stereotypical relations inside a traditional family. Over time, it turns from a strict hierarchical one to an emotional one, based on friendship. Both women come to perceive each other not only as representatives of their social role but also get involved in communication and sharing of emotions.

- **Psychological Consulting and Mutual Self-Reflection**

The very process of psychological consulting serves as an essential element that uncovers hidden emotional truths. Within the process of consulting between the two women, the characters open up about their personal concerns, problems, and emotions that they had never voiced at home. The characters describe how they see each other, thereby uncovering the conflicts, emotional exhaustion, and disappointment between them. The very process of mutual consultation acts as a means of self-reflection in which personal experiences get vocalized for the first time ever. It should be noted that it is vital to have a female psychologist involved as the consultant as this introduces empathy and emotional truth into the domestic life.

- **Silence and Psychological Health**

The element of silence continues to play a pivotal role in representation throughout the movie. Tension can be expressed without aggression but rather through pause, controlled dialogue, facial expression, and isolation of visual shots. Yet as recognition and conversation about one's psychological state become possible not only in psychological dialogue but also between generations, a shift in psychological state occurs for the main character of the story.

DISCUSSION

From the results, it is clear that Mukherjee Dar Bou portrays the mental well-being of women using the normal domestic scenarios rather than psychiatry. The main character is defined through relational name, domestic duties, and self-restraint, illustrating how a woman's individuality might be compromised within the family system. This corroborates the assertions by Wilk (2024), who argues that women are still placed within the relational and domestic domain by modern-day movies despite the feminist nature of the film.

In addition, it is clear that emotional suffering is portrayed not as a dramatic collapse but as an accumulation of silence, fatigue, and lack of recognition. This corresponds to the ideas by Atal and Foster (2021), stating that Indian women use emotional stress through the emotional struggle of everyday life instead of referring to psychology.

The scenes involving the psychological consultations deserve special consideration since they provide the means for discussing hidden emotions. With the help of the female psychologist, both the protagonist and her mother-in-law speak about their inner grievances and expectations that had never been discussed verbally at home. It resonates with the opinions of Kermode et al. (2007), suggesting that the mental health of Indian women depends on recognition, communication, and participation in society.

Yet another significant outcome is the shift in the dynamics between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. The move from a formal hierarchical structure to an empathic relationship brings women's unity to the family sphere. Instead of confrontation, the film proposes that intergenerational empathy becomes the means of psychological comfort for the characters. Thus, the discourse on domestic film is developed to indicate the possibility of female relations as therapeutic and recognizing within patriarchal families.

On the whole, the issue of psychological well-being in the film is presented through identity formation, recognition, and communication. The regional approach to filmmaking creates culturally readable emotional life through silence, understatement, and domestic realism.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that Mukherjee Dar Bou provides a sophisticated portrayal of women's mental well-being through the domestic realism approach and everyday interactional experiences. The movie illustrates how women's identities are erased through marital branding, cyclical domestic expectations, and emotional ignorance within familial relationships. Instead of showcasing psychological disturbance through illness, the film describes women's mental anguish through silence, monotony, and emotional neglect.

The development of the relation between the main character and her mother-in-law brings out how empathy and female camaraderie can undermine domestic distance and foster an environment that promotes women's emotional wellbeing. Psychological counseling plays a vital role in the development of women's identities by emphasizing dialogue and self-expression.

The use of the regional cinematic text not only contributes to gender and media studies by revealing hidden emotions and challenges in the lives of Bengali women but also provides a framework for investigating identity, gender, and women's psychological well-being.

Reference

1. Wilk, K. (2024). *Feminist film theory: The impact of female representation in modern movies*. *Studia Humana*, 13(4), 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.2478/sh-2024-0021>
2. Pathak, A., & Biswal, R. (2021). *Mental illness in Indian Hindi cinema: Production, representation, and reception before and after media convergence*. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(1), 74–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620927869>
3. Kermode, M., Herrman, H., Arole, R., White, J., Premkumar, R., & Patel, V. (2007). *Empowerment of women and mental health promotion: A qualitative study in rural Maharashtra, India*. *BMC Public Health*, 7, 225. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-7-225>

4. Atal, S., & Foster, J. (2021). "A woman's life is tension": A gendered analysis of women's distress in poor urban India. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 58(3), 404–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461520947836>
5. Rajkumar, J., & Rajkumari Lilapati Devi. (2023). *Beyond domesticity and women's agency in Manipuri cinema: An analysis of female characters in Aribam Syam's film. ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 4(2), 559–571. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.719>
6. Parthasarathy, S., Sundararaman, V., & Priyapalanimurugan. (2024). *Evolving female agency in contemporary Tamil cinema (2020–2024): A content analysis of women-centred narratives, representation, and emotional realism. Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11), 3015–3024. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i11.11204>
7. Nair, N. S., & Francis, D. M. (2024). *Screening trans narratives: Representation of transwomen in Indian regional cinema. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, 1623. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-04153-4>
8. Zhuo, Y. (2026). *The film and television presentation of female emotional disorders and its sociological analysis. Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 52(Supplement_1), S10–S11. <https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbag003.015>