IN SEARCH OF "SHE" IN *HER*: A CRITICAL READING INTO THE FEMALE STEREOTYPING IN THE SCI-FI MOVIE *HER*

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Abstract: Media always projected the futuristic psyche of human being, especially sci-fi movies. Her, the Spike Jonze created thriller actually sheds lights on the changing perspectives and nature of intimacy in the modern world. Interwoven with the lives of artificially intelligent machines, boards, screens and tech addict lives, humanity loses the touch of original love. Theodore Twombly, a complex, soulful man is heartbroken after a long-term relationship, now gets intrigued with an advanced technological creation, Samantha, an artificial intelligent system, impersonating female figure. The female machine is constantly in search of self-realization, "I am always looking for a body". There is a minor character, Alien child an AI in a videogame says "I hate women, they cry all the time..", actually is a voice of Theodore himself, unaided, alien in the vast new world. His only human date Amelia, is like a sensual siren, who pleases his physique but easily gets emotionally hurt when he retorts. An incomplete female, Catherine, his ex-wife could not digest the fact that her husband can't handle real emotions and needs a machine for satisfying his emotional balances. She accuses him that he actually wants a wife without having any challenges. Another female character Amy also faces the "othering" by the male counterpart. She is also torn apart from marital relation because of "physically not well controlled". She is a video programmer and idealises platonic love of womanhood. As Simone de Beauvoir remarked "one is not born a woman, but becomes one", the true woman, "she" is missing in her, only distorted versions and grey images of her is found in the movie.

Key words: Gender stereotyping, social roles, artificial intelligence, gender construction.

Feminist media studies is an area which is rapidly gaining momentum in research field. It tries to understand the correlationships, subversions, representations with media and female psyche, "desires to understand new images and cultural constructions, how they are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression"(7). It also creatively interprets how media react and respond with audience and vice versa. It also studies "how media images relate individual's sense identity and subjectivity"(8). It also raises some critical vocabularies against gender stereotyping and representations.

Early feminist media critique focused mainly on the studies made by university scholars who made analysis of why women are blind grey shades of media; "reporting of demonstrations and industrial disputes". They were upto the problems of male drawn lines. The second phase focused on the limited representation of female gender within and outside of media. They began to get agitated by the stereotyping and the patronizing of patriarchy. Many early studies revealed the fact that women were represented as "decorative objects" and portrayed as "unintelligent". The later studies followed opened up new vistas "how they operate to produce meanings, which produce dominant ideologies of gender" as noted by McRobbie. There were many works related to 'culture and representation in the battlefield of feminism'. Naomi Wolff(1990) *The Beauty Myth* concerned with the onerous cultural messages about women's appearances and bodies. Camille Paglia's (1990) *Sexual Persona* studies the recent cultural struggles in feminity, masculinity, and the construction of male and female subjectivities.

Thus media play a major role in controlling the stereotypical and ideological values about men, women and cultural constructs. Another major research area named audience studies has also drew on encoding/decoding model suggested by Stuart Hall (1973), "First that the same event can be encoded (represented) in more than one potential

way, secondly the message will always contain more than one potential meaning besides the preferred encoded one; and thirdly the messages therefore have the potential to be real in different ways"(17).

Science fiction films are the media-genre that uses speculative, fictional science based depictions of pheneomena that are not fully accepted as mainstream science such as extra terrestrial life forms, alien worlds, extra sensory perception and time travel along with futuristic elements such as spacecrafts, robots, cyborgs, interstellar travel or other technologies. Science fiction films have often been used to focus on political or social issues, and to explore philosophical issues like human condition, reality and rationality. According to Vivian Sobchack, an American cinema and media theorist and cultural critic: "Science fiction film is a film genre which emphasizes actual, extrapolative, interacting in a social context with, with lesser emphasized but still present transcidentalities in magic and religion, in an attempt to reconcile man with universalities" (Sobchack 63). Cultural theorist Scott Bukaman has proposed that science fiction film allows contemporary culture to witness an expression of the sublime, be it through exaggerated scale, apocalypse and transcendence.

Her is an American romantic science fiction film written, directed and produced by Spike Jonze. The film portrays the life of a solo man Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) who develops a romantic relationship with an artificial intelligent system Samantha. He works in a firm which makes personal or formal correspondences for the customers on request. He is a lonely man who gradually learns to play life objectively. He encounters with a phone sex worker, who is supposed to be an ideal of the pornographic media message, which is clearly "female oppression", a woman is being gazed as a body, not a human female. He buys an operating sysem, AI which as the manufacturer says "it is an operating system that assists you, understands you and knows you, it s a consciousness. Later we see Theodore programming the AI as female, a self-sufficient and intelligent

voice" marred by the fantasy of womanhood of the male protagonist". Samantha initially is untroubled, well equipped with her skills in operations. but later the AI is gradually troubled by her disembodied state. David Edelstein has remarked that the relationship between Theodore and Smantha is one of "Literally transcendent". Eventhough though the body of the main female protagonist is absent, she is a substitute for distorted version of female oppression. Female characters are obsessed with sexually oriented words throughout the film. Amy is his close friend, a video programmer married to Charles, she is also under the barbes of male definitions. She gets divorced for not being physically tune with the male partner. The sexist content in the movie is easily identifiable as Beasley observes," a film or television company is mini sexist society.

The film introduces an AI assisted video game called Alien Child, which dislikes women as they cry all the time. The character in game is a prototype of Theodore himself who continuously deteriorates the female characters, knowingly and unknowingly. It also legitimizes the stereotyping of gender. Amelia is another major appearance in the film who is "beautiful and brainy" but has very little role to play. She also poses as the sex siren with the intimate talks, but easily gets hurt and moves away when Theodore fails in her emotional wants. As Simone de Beavoiur observed "one is not born a woman, but made a woman", the female gender is being conceptualized in the film as an empty subject, as there are no strong female characters, but only traces of real woman, who actually is a representation of the male desires. Most of the female social roles played in the film are deeply oppressed with various forms of patriarchy.

Samantha chooses a surrogate sex partner for Theodore, she comes to her flat and is silent all the time. She advances for a relationship but fails. Both the woman and Samantha fail to actualize their true self. The introduction of such a character in the film is an ideological creation of a gendered framework

which only satiates the physical need of the male for the survival.

Catherine his ex-wife stands as a symbol of the futuristic enlightened woman, who is some what free from the male defined lines. In a meeting she admits that she can't be all that he wants. She stresses for her individuality which cannot be dwindled by the patriarchal rules. She gets upset by Theodore love advances towards a "machine", and openly criticizes for finding an emotional substitute in a machine. Taking marriage with all its challenges is the place where Theodore failed, she observes.

The movie *her* poses many difficult questions before humanity. Can there be machines who can think like humans? Can machines replace life partners? How much autonomous can machine can become? Is there a possibility of overpowering the human race by machines? Whether women still remain as the secondary netizens in future as well?. though the movie fails to locate the real She in *her,* there are wide scope for research on the topic women and computer.

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