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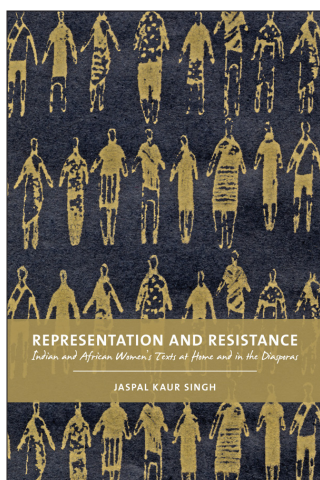
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REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE: INDIAN AND AFRICAN WOMEN'S TEXTS AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORAS

by Jaspal Kaur Singh

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Postcoloniality and Indian Female Sexuality in Aparna Sen's Film *Parama*

Aparna Sen's *Parama* – released in 1985 – aroused much interest in the Indian viewing public and was widely discussed in terms of its feminist thrust. This attention was due primarily to the fact that both the director, Aparna Sen, and the actress of the film, Rakhee Gulzar, popularly known as Rakhee, are stars in their own rights; also, both Sen and Rakhee are divorced women; Sen's remarriage at that time to a much younger man, Mukul Sharma, who plays photographer Rahul in the film, added to the media interest. In this chapter, I will examine the filmic narrative to pose questions related to a postcolonial feminist reading by examining the social position of the director and by critiquing the reception of this film in India.

Like the other chapters, this one also asks: How do we read texts that represent generalized views of oppressed and powerless Indian women, while at the same time representing Indian patriarchy as monolithically oppressive and backward? Is Sen perpetuating the colonial ideology of the oppressed Third World woman who needs to be rescued, or is she too trapped in various patriarchal and feminist discourses necessarily depicting oppression only through narratives of modernity and tradition

in a postcolonial world? Or, and here is my main point, is the director a transgressive artist showing empowerment and rearticulation of identity through the power of imagination and fantasy by showing madness as resistance?

Parama proved controversial, as it was very unusual to depict a sexual relationship between a married woman and a younger man at the time of the film's release. What is ironic is that the sexually explicit scenes in the film contributed, to a large extent, to the film's commercial success in India. While Sen's intention was to make a feminist film, the great response from a large crowd of sexually repressed male spectators – the censor board in India strictly controls sexually implicit portrayals or nudity, giving such films an "A" (Adult) certification – made it all the more popular (Arora 295).

Parama is the story of a married, middle-class woman who lives in an extended family structure of Bengal. Parama's life is drastically altered when New Yorker Rahul, a photographer for *Life*, comes to Bengal for a photo shoot of an Indian "housewife" and chooses Parama as his subject. Rahul, a diasporic Indian, eventually persuades Parama to explore her own dreams and ambitions. He encourages her to play the *sitar*, which she used to play before her marriage and which she has since neglected. Under his influence, Parama starts exploring her sexuality, which leads her into an extramarital affair with him. Rahul promises he will take her to America, where they will roam the country, giving sitar recitals while he accompanies her on the *tabla*. Her husband is mostly away on business trips, making it convenient for the two to spend time together exploring Calcutta, until Rahul is reassigned to another place. He leaves India, never to return, but the intimate photographs of Parama do appear in *Life* magazine and are seen by her family members. This incident precipitates a psychic and familial crisis for Parama, who is ostracized by family and community and suffers an emotional breakdown. She tries, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide, and ends up in the hospital with a fractured skull. She recovers physically after her surgery, but goes through a "mental breakdown" and becomes uninterested in anyone or anything, though her husband and her family are anxious for her to return home. In the hospital, however, she talks only to her divorced feminist friend Sheela (portrayed in the film by the director herself). She finally agrees to return home, but only on the condition that she be allowed to work outside of the home.

In this film, Sen deals with the psychic trauma that is part of a married, middle-class woman's life when the meaning of her life is restructured according to Westernized notions of individuality and sexual liberation. Can the character Parama, who suffers a nervous breakdown, reconstruct a new identity within the "Third Space" (Bhabha) that opens up as the two discursive systems of tradition and modernity clash in postcolonial India? How do we read a text about madness and gender without complicating the politics of location and reception, both of the film and the director?

There were various reactions to *Parama* when it was released in India. While the criticism varies, critics have been harsh to Sen when they maintain that the feminist bent of the film is flawed due to its easy and seemingly enforced resolution, while others comment on Sen's Westernized sensibilities.

Film critic Poonam Arora contends that in *Parama*, Sen provides a critique of Western ethnography, revealing the problems in the photographer's misreading of Parama in "Western bourgeois terms" (293–304). Arora critiques the photographer's "liberal tutelage" of Parama, which "encourages her self-expression and individuality" (300), because he disregards Hindu familial structures:

Individualism is a nonconcept in Hindu philosophy as well as Indian society. In Hinduism, one's subjectivity is defined by one's *Bhumika*, what translates as one's familial and social role. Thus Parama is addressed as daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, wife of a maternal uncle, wife of a paternal uncle, mother, or wife. The photographer is the only one who refuses to recognize her various other roles and insists on calling her by her first name; an act that not only disregards the sanctity of familial relations, but also tears the fine fabric of that society. (301)

In other words, Rahul's intervention into Parama's life resembles colonial intervention into the cultural sphere of the colonized.

Radha Subramanyam disagrees with Arora, arguing that the film's approach resembles the photographer's in the way it "conceptualizes subjects, subjectivity and resistance" (147–48). She argues that

the film itself privileges a postenlightenment narrative of independence and empowerment for its feminist and individual claims. Far from being a critique of western ethnographic constructions of the subject, or showing the inadequacies of western liberal tutelage, the film draws deeply, for its feminist argument, on western liberal notions of the subject. (149)

Subramanyam critiques the narrative structure that pays more attention to the oppressive family relationships than to any critique of ethnography. Whereas Arora sees Rahul, the photographer, as a “brown sahib” (historically, a native who was educated and trained to be the mediator between the colonial ruler and the native population), “a pseudo-westerner” whose “loyalties were and still are with the colonial ruler” (299), Subramanyam argues that the gaze of the photographer and that of Sen, the director of the film, are “congruent.”

However, I argue that although the position of the Westernized photographer is problematic, and he does act as an ethnographer in photographing Parama for *Life*, Sen does not simply position Rahul as a “brown sahib”; Rahul is a diasporic postcolonial subject, an immigrant from India, whose family settled in the United States when he was quite young. He himself is a subject formed by the discursive systems of Indian patriarchal discourse interwoven with Western individualism. To name Rahul’s intervention in Parama’s life as similar to colonial intervention of the British Raj constructs him as a mercenary exploiter. Granted, Rahul appears Westernized and intervenes in Parama’s familial and sexual life in a manner that would rarely ever be done by an Indian from India; his ideas of sexuality and individualism are Western and he sees Parama as limited in her abilities to savour life and sexuality fully. His ideas of Indianness are the ideas that inhabit a diasporic community’s imagination in transnational spaces. These ideas are taken to the far reaches of the world through immigrant narratives as well as through the Indian cinema. If he acts as an ethnographer (internalizing the myths of traditional and sexually repressed Indian women), myths deployed by the indigenous patriarchy during and after colonialism and nationalism remain current. Additionally, and more significantly, many diasporic Indian men are unable to resist mainstream forces like media stereotypes and racism, and have been racialized, feminized, and discriminated against in America.

If, as a diasporic subject, Rahul constructs his masculinity in opposition to the traditional Indian woman, we can see the hegemonic cultural and social forces working behind such constructions.

Arora also claims individualism is a nonconcept in Hindu philosophy, as well as in Indian society. Is she discussing contemporary Hindu society? Notions of individuality had already been introduced and selectively absorbed by the Indian populace when Western education was implemented in nineteenth-century India. This class of Indians, from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, consisted mainly of an English-educated, middle-class elite employed in government jobs or were part of the landowning elite. Middle-class Indian women had already made their entry into the public sphere during this time, producing texts written in English, conforming to the notion of femininity influenced by the English missionaries, administrators, and educators, tempered by indigenous patriarchy; nuclear families also came to be formed at this time.¹ Therefore, to claim that Rahul is introducing a concept unheard of in Indian society seems a bit farfetched.

While it is tempting to read *Parama* as a colonial narrative, and see Rahul as a colonizer or an agent of colonialism who must “unveil” the mysteries of the native woman, thereby supporting “Western penetration into the native society” (Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* 43), it is more useful for my purposes to look at it as a text that complicates the notions of companionate marriage, as opposed to the coercive system of the *zenana* and arranged marriages and of patriarchal control of female sexuality, in Westernized and elite female-authored texts.

While love and courtship were central themes in the developing, nineteenth-century English novel, relationships between men and women as individuals were not prevalent in India at that time. Meenakshi Mukherjee discusses the ways the concept of love was in “dissonance with the subjectivity” of the ideal woman constructed by nationalism: “In the contemporary Indian setting, however, romantic love could only be illicit, involving either a widow or a courtesan – since only these two categories of women were without legal ‘proprietors’ and thus seemed to embody a certain amount of unharnessed sexual energy” (*Realism and Domestic Fiction* 41). Therefore, love became necessarily associated with the fallen woman. Such an attitude was inherited by Indians, and it shows in Indian literary texts. As such, for the Indian woman, whose social identity is defined within such contradictions, the notions of love, romance, and

courtship are problematic. Most middle-class Indians' imitation of the ideal of companionate marriage, which was never clearly articulated in terms of romantic love, created ambivalence in the middle-class Indian woman's imagination. Although the system of companionate marriage, which was introduced during colonialism, with its notion of romantic love and mutual affection, still supports patriarchal structures, it was desirable to the educated Indian woman as it seems consensual; yet it enables the continuation of traditional roles for women as wives and mothers. Thus the ambivalence and confusion inherent in the rhetoric of nationalism follows postcolonial Indian women, as can be seen in the film.

In her marriage, Parama appears content in her many roles as mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, aunt-in-law; the household revolves around her in terms of activities and around her-mother-in-law in terms of respect and honour. Parama has control of the house – spending money, paying the servants, shopping – and she has the key to the house, which is symbolic of the power of the lady of the house. She has access to the family car and a chauffeur and can visit her many modern friends, who are activists, artisans, or academics, as they move in and out of the domestic sphere into the public domain.

When Parama hears about her friends' many activities outside the home, she is surprised that they have time to do anything outside the home, for she stays so busy she does not even have time to play the *sitar* anymore. While talking to her friends, she appears nostalgic at not being able to play the *sitar*, giving a small self-deprecating laugh, but does not act in the least bit deprived, only surprised. However, it is only later, when she comes into contact with Rahul, and especially when she relinquishes some of her familial duties, that we begin to see the hegemony of the West, with its notion of individuality, begin to make a stronger mark on Parama. Before her contact with Rahul, Westernization affected her but only to the extent that she was allowed to be educated – like the selectively modernized colonized woman – to the extent of becoming a fitting wife and mother for her urbane and Westernized husband. The postcolonial Indian man, who becomes Westernized in the material realm, finds his identity only in the spiritual, hence traditional realm. While in the public sphere identity is ordered through material wealth and Westernization, in the private sphere, the family is organized in terms of family values (Chatterjee, "Nationalist" 243).

Subramanyam accuses Sen's narrative of privileging a post-Enlightenment ideology of individualism for its feminist thrust (147). She refers to examples, such as the sexually explicit scenes and shots where Parama responds to the family's needs, claiming the film depends precisely on the notion of the subject for its criticism of patriarchal Indian society. Yes, the first few frames of Parama are through a photographer's lens, and when that lens is removed, she performs her religious and familial duties, constantly moving and smiling, and being praised by her mother-in-law. She is superbly confident and in complete control of the domestic sphere. However, Subramanyam sees Parama as completely disempowered. She writes that in each of the shots, "A woman is constantly, repeatedly, asked to perform a series of roles. Demands are being made on her continually without regard for her needs and desires" (150). Here Subramanyam herself constructs desire in purely Western terms and sees Parama's many roles as limiting and unfulfilling.

Here desire is constructed according to communal and individual categories. Middle-class Indian women "need" and "desire" to be a mother, wife, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, etc., in such a household as Parama's. Many women enjoy the empowerment that comes with such roles, no matter how coercive or oppressive they are considered. It is only through such gender roles that women acquire position and prestige, translating into power. Without such roles, access to power and agency are often denied them. As Parama moves in and out of the different roles, we see a supremely confident and contented middle-class Indian woman. She performs her gender role well while partaking of its many privileges.

While there are many role models, such as wife, mother, daughter, etc., within the Indian context, the role of lover – primarily seen by the middle-classes through its representations in Indian cinema, strictly controlled by the Indian censor board – is wrapped in mystery and silence. In Indian popular cinema, the love scene or the "bedroom" scenes are still performed in enigmatic ways, often with the screen fading into black, or alternatively, focusing on kissing birds and shaking bushes. Kissing scenes remain at the experimental level in Indian cinema and are still quite rare. Therefore, sexuality, in terms of sexual liberation and sexual identity, does not exist in the social discourse of the majority of Indians, and the topic of sexuality itself is still taboo within Indian family structures.

Though social and gender identities are clearly formed in Indian society, sexual identity in terms of the bourgeois notion of sexualized love is

still problematic and riddled with conflict. Such familial and sexual conflicts are represented in Bollywood cinema in superficial ways, while the Indian parallel, or art cinema, showcases them in complex and interesting ways. Domestic melodrama, as David N. Rodowick argues, “demands sexual identity to be determined by social identity” (240). In this way, Rodowick adds, “the family both legitimizes and conceals sexuality by restricting it to a social economy defined by marriage – men assume the place of their fathers in the network of authority, and women are mirrored in this network by their relationship to men as wives, mothers, daughters, etc.” (240). In domestic melodrama, “the difficulty which individual characters find in their attempts to accept or conform to the set of symbolic positions around which the network of social relations adhere and where they can both ‘be themselves’ and ‘at home’” leads to conflict (240). Here, sexual desire is seen as dangerous “to successful socialization and thus require the division of sexuality from sociality” (241). The manipulation of feminized bodies by patriarchy results in the representation of “feminine sexuality as excessive to the social system that seeks to contain it” (241). The internalization of such identity conflict leads to repression, which returns in the form of violent psychological disorders, such as hysteria, alcoholism or psychotic behavior (241).

While Rodowick discusses Western domestic melodrama, in Indian melodrama or Bollywood (as Indian cinema is popularly known), a hybrid of the Western and Eastern filmic tradition, the Indian woman’s repressed sexuality also returns in many uncanny motifs. In *Parama*, Parama’s pursuit of an active sexual life leads to a psychic conflict. However, it is not her sexuality that becomes problematic, but the naming of that sexuality for the sake of a sexual identity that leads to crisis. Thus, I argue that Sen provides a contradictory space and an oppositional viewpoint where it is not the male but the female character that tries to construct a sexual identity. It was and still is uncommon for Indian films to show sexually explicit scenes, but because Sen tries to articulate a specific sexual role for the bourgeois Indian woman, she provides a new and radical space for many such scenes in the film.

The spaces where a sexualized female subjectivity is produced are not clearly marked or predefined. Rahul asks the male family members’ permission to shoot Parama for his project, showing him as a hybrid diasporic and postcolonial subject who is familiar with both Western and Eastern cultures. And it is Parama’s husband who gives him permission to

photograph her, in spite of Parama's discomfort. The husband does not show any anxiety about a much younger, liberal, and Westernized male being in close proximity with his wife. Conceptualization of a sexual identity that is not part of the domestic paradigm is not even a possibility here.

Consequently, Rahul and Parama spend many leisurely days together, roaming around Calcutta, while her husband is away on business trips. Rahul does not tell Parama what to think about or what to read or learn. Because Parama already participates in an existent postcolonial consciousness, though parts of this hegemony have taken a back seat due to her domestic roles, Rahul's questions of "What do you do all day? What do you think about?" lead her into a space previously shut off. They visit Parama's childhood home; here, she reminisces about her girlhood, hinting of early sexual desires, now long repressed, as she talks about the plant of Krishna, the lord of love (Arora 300). She tells Rahul that, try as she might, she does not remember the name of the plant, signifying the repression of sexual desires in many young girls in the Indian culture (Arora 300). For many young women, who may appear well read and knowledgeable about sexuality in an abstract way, any personal knowledge or understanding of sexuality is neither possible nor permitted.

Thus, in the representation of the "bedroom" scenes between Parama and her husband, we see them talking about his business or her desire for a new home while they are having sexual intercourse; in the middle-class, joint-family system of India, intimate conversation is often difficult, if not impossible, due to the close proximity of rooms. Whatever conversation occurs, it is before or after the act, or during it as seen in *Parama*, and mostly about mundane matters; this, however, is viewed by many Westernized audience as undesirable because it is very different from notions of romance as perceived in Hollywood cinema. For many Indian women, there is a particular intimacy in being able to communicate in such a manner. Even in most Bollywood films, as I indicated earlier, love scenes are never explicit, even between socially sanctioned couples.

The affair with Rahul constructs Parama as a sexual being. But although Parama is finally a sexualized person, she is unable to name herself. In the middle-class home that she comes from, there is no space for sexual identification; thus, Parama's sexual identity (not her sexuality) remains unnamed.

However, after Rahul leaves, promising to come back for her, he sends Parama the *Life* magazine at her home address and her nude photographs

are inadvertently seen by her family members, exposing her affair with Rahul. This exposure leads to a crisis. Still, even at this point, Parama cannot articulate her sexual identity, even though she does not feel guilty or blame herself. Increasingly, she is alienated and isolated when the members of her family, including her son and teenaged daughter, shun her and all her previous roles defining her subjecthood are denied her. When her mother-in-law falls sick, Parama, whose previous care of her had brought forth lavish praise, is denied access to her room. In desperation, she asks her husband's forgiveness. Even at this point, Parama tries to define herself in terms of her old roles. She is punished when she can no longer play them, and we see her slowly going "mad" because she has neither language nor power to articulate her new identity. Because of her transgression, without language, she descends first into a void, and then into the "silence of madness."²

A subject who is being formed by opposing discourses of colonialism/nationalism, West/East or modernity/tradition undergoes conflict when the discourses collide; subject formation depends on how this conflict is resolved. If the hegemony of colonialism/Westernization is strong, then the conflict will lead to a crisis; if the traditional hegemony still has control over the consciousness of the subject, then the conflict is deferred until a later time. The transgressive new hybrid goes through a trying, albeit expansive, period in the rearticulating of subjectivity.

In the clash against the hegemonies of patriarchies, the Western hegemony, which is equally strong, if not stronger than the Indian patriarchy, renders Parama helpless, therefore, "mad." That is because the crisis has occurred too soon after her discovery of her new sexual identity; given time, she would have restructured her sexual and gender identity and would have been able to articulate her desires, even within the domestic sphere, in a powerful way (as she does later). James Miller discusses Michel Foucault's ideas of beginning anew in *The Passion of Michel Foucault*: "Discontinuity – the fact that within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way – probably begins with an erosion *from outside* ... the moment they (society) mark a limit, they create a space for possible transgression" (qtd. in Miller 115). While Foucault is discussing culture per se, I argue that Parama becomes a metonym for Indian culture here. Because her act is seen as transgression, and *is* transgressive, Parama collapses. "Society in this way is made to seem innocent: The guilt

is shifted inside” (qtd. in Miller 114). She will be able to rewrite herself, but not at this time. Parama, presently, is “caught ... in [the] culture’s web of ‘discursive practices,’” but may in time come “to speak of different objects, to have contrary opinions, and to make contradictory choices” (qtd. in Miller 161), but not now. When she does, the experience with Rahul will imbue her “with a new understanding of [her] sexuality ... with a new feeling of power – and a new, and utterly unexpected, sense of freedom” (qtd. in Miller 284). For Parama, first, language has to be freed from all its associations. As Foucault claims, “Language therefore calls into question the world and ultimately itself in a dizzying spiral of possibilities and impossibilities, realities and unrealities ... in a mad and lyrical embrace of the void, oblivion and death – that formless, silent, unsignifying region where language can free itself” (qtd. in Miller 133). But Parama still needs to go through another transgressive and transformative experience; when she is unable to find language or support at this time, she slits her wrists in the bathroom in an attempt to commit suicide.

At this point, the narrative structure and representational forms erupt. The narrative is no longer linear; red color fills the screen, and Parama in a white sari (the colour a widow wears in India) with her long, beautiful hair shorn off (she had fallen in the bathroom and had to undergo surgery) gazes aimlessly. In Bengal, widows’ heads used to be shaved: Parama’s image at this time is that of a disempowered woman in Hindu society. Long hair also signifies class and femininity. The narrative structures break down and the screen erupts with distorted images. Parama sits passively on the hospital bed. A distorted close-up of each family member appears, and while their lips move, no sound emerges. After a few moments of this, Parama, who is completely detached from her surroundings, turns her head away. The fragmented shots and distorted visions suggest dissociation and detachment. Her husband, who had previously removed their children from her care and who had taken the house money away from her, now appears contrite and apologetic. When Parama does not respond to them, they think she has gone “mad,” for how is it possible for the previously responsive Parama not to react to their needs? They want her back home, safe in her familiar familial role. They try to persuade her, with the help of her analyst, to admit her guilt so that she may be “cured.” They misread Parama’s detachment as the vacuous stare of a lunatic. How is it that she, who had begged to be forgiven, doesn’t seem to care anymore?

Parama uses this liminal space for reconceptualization and rearticulation. A “Third Space” (Bhabha) has opened up for the nervous subject. She represents the subject whose psyche is split by the two equally powerful discourses. At this point, Parama dwells in the in-between stage, where she tries to give shape to her emerging subjectivity without negating her previous self. She looks for words and language in the new imagination that is being constructed for and by her.

Arora contends that Parama recovers from this sickness by recreating another reality for herself, another myth. She equates her love for the photographer with divine love – the love of Radha for Krishna. In Indian mythology, even though Radha is married, her love of Krishna is sanctioned in Hindu society as divine love. Therefore, as Arora argues, Parama, who is being “subjected” by two competing discursive structures, resists by “constructing herself according to a third discursive system – that of myth” (301). While Arora’s essay concerns itself with Parama’s “escape” through a third discursive system – that of myth – I look at the moments in the text where Parama has a “nervous breakdown” and creates yet another space for rearticulation of her new role. Why is it that in the hospital Parama remembers her widowed aunt who had gone mad? Her aunt had been locked up in her (and Parama’s) childhood home because she had an affair with a man after she became widowed. How is Parama’s “madness” different from her aunt’s? Why is Sen juxtaposing the two “madnesses” in the film?

In the previous scenes, when she sees visions of her “mad” aunt, Parama compares her own conduct with that of her aunt. But after her “nervous breakdown,” Parama no longer equates her “madness” with that of her aunt; she seems to be reconstructing her images. Her aunt’s images are now sharp and clear. Her sympathies are clearly with her oppressed and “mad” aunt, and her feelings about her are no longer ambiguous or ambivalent. All of a sudden, Parama becomes resolute and firm. Her way is clear. She will return home, but on her own terms. And in this reconstruction, one person’s help becomes crucial, and that person is Sheela, her transgressive friend. Sheela had refused to relocate with her husband to another city, choosing instead to work with spastic children in Calcutta. Parama asks her to find a job for her; Sheela reminds her that when Parama got married, her education was interrupted and she never earned her bachelor’s degree. However, when Parama persists with her request, Sheela tells her about a sales job in a government cottage industry

– Khadi Bhawan – where she will earn only six hundred rupees. Khadi Bhawan stocks merchandize handmade by indigenous local artists – men and women – from poorer backgrounds. And although the money is not much, especially compared to her husband’s financial position, she decides to accept the job. The public space she chooses for herself is not that of corporate capital.

Her family members are upset that she wants to work outside her home; her husband, who has long forgiven Parama her indiscretion, is insulted that *his* wife, a wife of an important businessman like him, should deem it prestigious to work for six hundred rupees outside her home and offers to increase her household money. She replies that it will still be his money. While this can be read as Parama’s first step toward economic independence, I suggest that Parama is not so excited about economic independence as about an alternate space that opens up. In other words, the material world, the public sphere – particularly if it is in the non-corporate capital world – has to open up to women for rearticulation of their subjectivities. However, she fights to deconstruct the binary of inner/outer by deciding to return home to her family – as a working mother and wife, a contradictory state in that although a wife and mother works inside the home, her work is still not considered work because it is unpaid labour. She defines herself as a working wife, a concept which, although not privileged, is becoming extremely desirable in the marriage market in postcolonial India, in spite of the fact that a many Indian women, lower- as well as middle-class, have been in the work force for a long time.

And it is just after her announcement about her job that Parama, who has been trying to remember the name of the plant of Krishna, finally recalls it – Krishna Pallavi. It is precisely at this time that her teenaged daughter, who appears as a little feminist in the first part of the film but who has been shunning her mother, comes to sit by her side in a gesture of understanding and acceptance. As she reaches out to hold her daughter’s hand, we see luminosity in Parama’s pale face as she looks out the window to the plant of Krishna. Two phenomena occur here simultaneously: Parama again reconnects with a female member of her family, reinforcing the notion of women’s community and solidarity within Indian patriarchal structures, but more importantly, Parama’s sexuality, which became repressed during the aftermath of the recovery of the affair, finally resurfaces and she can name it. Instead of being displaced or returning as “uncanny,” it resurfaces in this new space, for here Parama can finally

see herself as a sexualized self. Thus, it is in this space of liminality that Parama finally recovers from her “madness” by reconstructing herself, free of guilt, as a sexualized subject. In her case, the stereotype of the “independent woman” does not include giving up her domestic space and the community of women; it just means that she reconstructs the traditional paradigm of marriage, where the domestic and economic spaces appear to merge. While this ending is seen as problematic by many critics, where they disagree with Sen’s depiction of Parama’s “paltry” job as “as a giant step for Indian womanhood” (Subramanyam 114), I suggest that Sen’s portrayal of a woman who is sexually aware yet can continue in the domestic spaces as a wife and mother is indeed bold. Sen paved the way for later, more radical feminist films in India in which female sexuality became the central theme.³ “A void, a moment of silence, a question without answer ... a breach without reconciliation” are created through such transgressive works of art, and “the world is made aware of its guilt” (Foucault, qtd. in Miller 228); transformation occurs in such moments.

Whereas in certain immigrant and diasporic writings, constructions of identity are necessarily violent, leading to the destruction of one or the other self, thus pointing to a certain notion of independence (see Chapter 3, for example), in earlier Indian women’s writings, identity reconceptualizations are not so binary. The nervous subject that is being formed by opposing hegemonies has to learn to negotiate identity in eruptive and unknown territories and must utilize spaces that open up for rearticulation; such spaces are necessarily ambivalent and produce conflict in the subject being formed, and how one resolves this conflict depends on the many shifting positions, such as the race, class, and caste of the writers as well as their representational subjects. Therefore, to read *Parama* as transnational, postcolonial critics, we must also keep in mind transnational multicultural feminist theories, practices, and concerns that take into consideration the politics of location of both the author as well as the audience and the “mutual embeddedness ... of race, class, national, sexual, and gender-bases struggles ... and the political intersectionality of all these axes of stratifications” (Shohat 1).⁴ Otherwise, misreadings and misunderstandings will lead to continued and prolonged oppression and marginalization of the people of the Global South.