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**NAVIGATING IDENTITY: HYBRIDITY, AMBIVALENCE, AND
RESISTANCE IN MOVIE, *MRS***

Dr. Aman Preet Kaur

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Dashmesh Khalsa College, Zirakpur (Mohali),

Punjab, India

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Abstract:

*This research paper explores the themes of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance in the context of identity navigation, using the Indian movie *Mrs* (2024) as a case study. The film's portrayal of a young woman's journey in a patriarchal society highlights the complexities of identity performance and the tensions between traditional and modern values. This paper seeks to analyze *Mrs* through a postcolonial lens specifically through the theories of Homi K Bhabha, exploring how the film portrays the protagonist's journey from compliance to resistance. It examines the ways in which the film challenges traditional gender roles and questions the normalization of patriarchal practices within the domestic sphere.*

Keywords: *Identity Navigation, Hybridity, Ambivalence, Resistance, Identity, etc.*

Introduction:

Directed by Arati Kadav, *Mrs* is the official remake of the Malayalam film, *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021) by Jeo Baby, a film that garnered unanimous critical acclaim. 'Mrs.' follows the same story arc as the unique, altering some cultural references like adding in Karwa Chauth, only to drive home the message further. The narrative subtly weaves in the shifting dynamics in relationships, the power play in traditional family set ups and the deep seated patriarchy which doesn't evade any gender. Abundant amounts of beautifully composed food shots, perfectly prepared meals delicately laid out on the table, stare back at you in stark contrast to the trail of sweat, toil and often filth that it leaves behind. The build-up to Richa's final showdown as her relationship with her husband completely breaks down, is seamless, with each emotion clocking in her ticking frustration. Identity navigation is a compound and multilayered process that involves negotiating and performing various identities. The concept of hybridity, coined by cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha, refers to the creation of new identities through the intersection of different cultures, classes, and social norms (Bhabha, 1994). Ambivalence and resistance are inherent in this process, as individuals navigate power dynamics and challenge dominant norms.

Literally, the word hybridity evokes mixture of races or miscegenation but this concept does not intend to serve as a moral ground for favouring racial mixture over the imperialist ideology of racial purity. Hybridity refers in its most elementary sense to mixture. The principal proposition is the hybridity of colonial identity which as a cultural form made the colonial masters ambivalent and as such altered the authority of power. Hybridity validates how cultures come to be represented by processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are

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vicariously addressed to. “Ambivalence” is a term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to “a simultaneous attraction to want and repulsion from an object, person or action” (Bhabha, *Of Mimicry and Man*, 161). According to John and Cacioppo, “ambivalence is assumed as one implication that is better to think of positive and negative as separate dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single dimension ranging from positive to negative” (Encyclopedia of Social Psychology, 57). The implications of positive and negative thinking maintain that ambivalence represents thought which on one side is positive and on the other is negative, and affects people at the same time. It can be inferred that the linking between the colonizer and the colonized is ambivalent. Therefore, this ambivalent relationship between the two can be related to hybridity because ambivalence decenters authority from its position of power, the authority becomes hybridized when it is placed in colonial context and finds itself inflected by other cultures.

The concept of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance has become progressively significant in the context of identity navigation, particularly in the postcolonial and postmodern era. The idea of a fixed and essential identity has been challenged, and individuals are now navigating complex and multiple identities. This navigation is characterized by hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance, which are interconnected and interdependent. Hybridity refers to the blending of different cultures, identities, and languages, resulting in the creation of new and complex identities. This concept was first familiarized by Homi Bhabha, who argued that hybridity is a subversive strategy that challenges the dominant discourse and creates a third space that is neither here nor there (Bhabha, 1994). In the context of identity navigation, hybridity allows individuals to navigate multiple identities and create new and complex selves. Ambivalence is another key concept in identity navigation, referring to the coexistence of contradictory emotions, attitudes, or identities. Ambivalence is a natural response to the complexities of identity navigation, where individuals are constantly negotiating between different identities, cultures, and languages. Ambivalence can be both allowing and debilitating, as it allows individuals to navigate multiple identities but also creates anxiety and uncertainty (Kraidy, 2005). Resistance is also a crucial aspect of identity navigation, referring to the ways in which individuals challenge and subvert dominant discourses and power structures. Resistance can take many forms, including cultural battle, linguistic resistance, and political resistance. In the context of identity navigation, resistance allows individuals to challenge dominant identities and create new and alternative identities (Hall, 1996). The intersection of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance produces a complex and dynamic process of identity navigation. Individuals are constantly negotiating between different identities, cultures, and languages, and are creating new and complex selves through this process. This navigation is categorized by a sense of ambivalence, as individuals are constantly torn between different identities and loyalties. However, this ambivalence also creates a sense of hybridity, as individuals are able to blend different cultures and identities to create new and complex selves. The concept of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance has been explored in various fields, including postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and sociology. In postcolonial studies, the concept of hybridity has been used to challenge the dominant discourse of colonialism and create new and alternative identities (Bhabha, 1994). In cultural studies, the concept of ambivalence has been used to explore the complexities of identity navigation and the ways in which individuals negotiate between different cultures and identities (Kraidy, 2005). In sociology, the concept of resistance has been used to explore the ways in which individuals challenge and subvert dominant power edifices and create new and substitute identities (Hall, 1996). In conclusion, the concept of

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hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance is crucial in understanding the complexities of identity navigation. Individuals are constantly negotiating between different identities, cultures, and languages, and are generating new and complex selves through this process. This navigation is characterized by a sense of ambivalence, hybridity, and resistance, which are interconnected and interdependent. Further research is needed to explore the complexities of identity navigation and the ways in which individuals create new and alternative identities.

The protagonist of “Mrs” embodies hybrid identity. The movie begins with Richa marrying with Diwakar. Diwakar is Doctor whereas Richa a passionate dancer, although Richa leaves her passion to accommodate herself as a housewife. Whole of the story is set up in Kitchen and household only. The marriage of Richa and Diwakar takes place and the family proclaims that Richa will stay there as a daughter. Things starts changing when Richa finds it that her routine starts with serving breakfast to her husband and father-in-law. Although initially she enjoys doing the household chores and also accepts her fault when her father-in-law tells her that there is difference between *Pulao* and *Biryani*. The very next day Richa amends her mistake and re-tries *Biryani*, which is not much liked by the father- in- law. Anyways days go on and Richa gets involved in kitchen and household chores. There is a scene when Richa picking out the waste from utensil sink with hand and her mother-in-law helps her in that.

She navigates her identity through various social and cultural expectations. The film portrays the tensions between traditional and modern values, highlighting the complexities of identity performance in contemporary India. The protagonist’s journey is marked by her attempts to reconcile her own desires and aspirations with the expectations of her family and society. Richa’s mother-in-law is also a Ph.D. in Economics and her husband announces with proud that we don’t allow ladies to work. This lady is shown in the movie working like a machine in home without grudges and same legacy is transferred to Richa. One day her mother-in-law goes to her pregnant daughter’s house and the whole responsibility of managing the house comes to Richa which she accepts happily. Days pass on and demands of Richa’s husband and father-in-law breaks nowhere hence Richa starts feeling bored with monotonous routine and once requests her husband to visit her friends. Diwakar accompanies her but feels embarrassed when Richa jokingly tells in front of her friends that she works at her in laws place like a maid. Diwakar fights with her without understanding her emotional turmoil and towards the end of the movie Diwakar hosts a party at her place and orders Richa like a waiter and cook, frustratingly she serves murky sink water to guests and throws the same on Diwakar’s face and leaves the house. The movie ends with showing Richa following her passion for dance and becoming a professional dancer and Diwakar remarrying and being served by her new wife. In the story kitchen serves as a metaphorical battleground for gender dynamics and societal expectations.

The movie also explores the themes of ambivalence and resistance, as the protagonist challenges dominant norms and expectations. The film’s representation of the protagonist’s inner confusion and conflict reflects the ambivalence inherent in identity navigation. The protagonist’s resistance to the patriarchal norms and expectations is evident in her attempts to assert her own agency and autonomy.

The concept of agency is central to the protagonist’s journey in “Mrs”. The film highlights the ways in which women’s agency is restricted and constrained by patriarchal norms and expectations. The protagonist’s resistance to these norms is evident in her attempts to assert her own agency and autonomy. The film advises that women’s agency is not a fixed or essential category, but rather a dynamic and context-dependent process. The movie also highlights the



importance of intersectionality in understanding identity and agency. The protagonist's experiences are shaped by her gender, class, and caste identities, which crisscross and overlap in complex ways. The film suggests that identity is not a singular or fixed category, but rather a complex and multifaceted process that is shaped by multiple factors.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, "Mrs" offers a nuanced exploration of hybridity, ambivalence, and resistance in the context of identity navigation. The film's portrayal of the protagonist's journey highlights the complexities of identity performance in contemporary India and the strains between traditional and modern values. The movie suggests that identity is a dynamic and context-dependent process that is shaped by multiple factors, including gender, class, and caste. The kitchen, traditionally considered the domain of women, serves as a microcosm of the larger societal structures that dictate and regulate women's lives. Richa's identity formation is characterized by hybridity and ambivalence, as she steers the intersections of tradition and modernity, patriarchy and feminism. Cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is particularly relevant here, as Richa's identity emerges from the "Third Space" of enunciation, where different cultural and social norms intersect and blend (Bhabha, 37).

Richa's hybrid identity is evident in her negotiation of traditional and modern roles. On one hand, she is expected to embody the traditional merits of an Indian wife and daughter-in-law, such as subservience, obedience, and domesticity. On the other hand, she is driven by modern aspirations, including her passion for dance and her desire for autonomy and self-expression. Richa's ambivalence is a key strategy for survival in a society that seeks to constrain her identity and agency. By embracing the contradictions and complexities of her hybrid identity, Richa is able to navigate the power dynamics of her marriage and family. Her ambivalence enables her to concurrently conform to and subvert the expectations placed upon her. For instance, Richa's decision to continue pursuing her passion for dance, despite her husband's disapproval, reflects her ambivalence towards traditional norms. By secretly practicing dance and eventually finding a way to pursue it openly, Richa asserts her individuality and creativity, while also maintaining a sense of duty and responsibility towards her family.

Richa's hybrid and ambivalent identity also enables her to resist the oppressive forces that surround her. By refusing to conform to traditional norms and expectations, Richa asserts her agency and autonomy, challenging the patriarchal structures that seek to constrain her. The film's portrayal of Richa's resistance is chiefly noteworthy, as it highlights the ways in which women can subvert and challenge patriarchal norms through everyday acts of defiance. Richa's resistance is not dramatic or confrontational, but rather subtle and strategic, reflecting the ways in which women often navigate patriarchal societies.

In "Mrs.," Richa's creation of a hybrid and ambivalent identity is a testament to her resilience and agency in the face of patriarchal oppression. Through her conciliation of traditional and modern roles, Richa asserts her individuality and creativity, while also maintaining a sense of duty and responsibility towards her family. The film offers a powerful commentary on the ways in which women can survive and resist patriarchal societies, highlighting the importance of hybridity and ambivalence as strategies for identity formation and agency. As we reflect on Richa's journey, we are reminded of the complexities and nuances of human identity, and the ways in which individuals can create and negotiate their own identities in the face of societal expectations and norms.



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