

**FROM THE NAMELESS BLONDE TO BRAND:
DEFROSTING THE REFRIGERATED FEMALES IN THE
MOVIES OF CHRISTOPHER NOLAN**

Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
for the award of the degree of
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by

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. A. Krishna Sunder, hereby declare that the thesis titled “**From the Nameless Blonde to Brand: Defrosting the Refrigerated Females in the Movies of Christopher Nolan**” is a bonafide research carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Nila N. and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Place : Palakkad

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**From the Nameless Blonde to Brand: Defrosting the Refrigerated Females in the Movies of Christopher Nolan**” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a work of bonafide research carried out by Ms. A. Krishna Sunder under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

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This work is yours...as much as it is mine...

*All through my struggles, as and when I wriggled
The silence that consoled and the glances that hugged
For being the greatest critic of my works
For being the greatest gift of my life
This is for you Dad..*

*When pain freezes you, and when life jostles you
The warmth that embraces, the love that fixes
For melting my tears to smiles
For knitting my woes to wonders
The 'I' in me is coz of the mom in you
This is for you Mom..*

*The witching hours I penned, the long-stretched patches I slept
The patience you have showered, the muse you have powered
For keeping me sane amidst my temper tantrums
For making me sail through this journey
This is for you Sunil..*

*Those tiny palms that flipped through my pages
Those little fingers that played the keys on my system
Those stealthy hands that took away my books
Words cannot suffice, for my world swivels around you
My Little Mischief-Maker, who kept stealing my pens
This is for you my Little Bunny... My Little Ryan...*

To my Jujups... To my Biscuit...to all my Pats...

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PREFACE

The crux for this research originally stemmed from my sempiternal passion for Movies since early childhood. As the current world swivels around digital media, the extensive influence that they have cast upon our quotidian life is beyond imagination. Among the various spheres of the digital era, Films have infused a definite set of values and beliefs in our unconscious psyche. Consequently, this submerged realm can subtly surface towards our everyday life, within the social circle in which all of us are embedded. The on screen representations, especially women manifestations projected through Hollywood Movies have definitely constructed a layout through which women are portrayed everywhere on a global scale.

This Research work has mainly focussed on the movies of one of the greatest directors of the epoch - Christopher Nolan. The work undertakes a journey through his movies depicting how far women representations had been realistic towards women's lived experience within the theoretical substructure of the works of Laura Mulvey, Janey Place, Fredrickson and Roberts. The frozen female characterisations under the rigid patriarchal edifices have been carefully considered and analysed in the most profound way. Divided into four different chapters, the last three chapters discuss the cinematic methods and codes as well as the theoretical frameworks within which the female characterisations in the movies are analysed and further studied. The first chapter indeed gears up towards the groundbreaking works associated with Feminism and Film Criticism within the circumference of which the movies are put to scrutiny.

The views and opinions expressed in this thesis are purely mine and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of any other individual or group. I hope this work will amount to turn into an eye-opener regarding the methods and mechanisms through which women can be portrayed realistically in media, especially films. I believe this work will stand as a testimony for posterity with regard to further discussions and studies in this field.

A. KRISHNA SUNDER

INTRODUCTION

A Film can be considered as a cultural artefact, which represents the culture and tradition to which it belongs. Once it enters the cultural fabric of a society, it in turn influences the culture also. The actors also play a significant role in the means of expression in film.

Hence, it can be categorised as a performing art as well. An essential feature of this dramatic genre is its visual power. It differs from a literary text in the sense that the visualisation of the action is not merely left to the imagination of the audience, as in a work of fiction. (Babu 1)

Films have always been a ubiquitous insignia of social change since its inception. Movies have become an inextricable part of quotidian life that it is unimaginable to perceive a world without them. The current scenario with advanced technological facets in movies has indeed escalated the number of movie-watchers and the impact it inculcates in the psyche of a society cannot be underestimated. This mass influence that a movie contributes to the society is beyond description. Movies can definitely churn out a transgression in the mindset of its audience and can definitely bring about intimidating changes within a society. They often signify the passions and prejudices of an evolving society. They are capable of demolishing and rebuilding the existing social systems by sprinkling the seeds of change in the new generation.

Films are independent endeavours constructed through the medium of artistic creation embossing its reflections on cultural, social and political aspects of the then

society from which it is born. Living in a world where 'sight' is privileged as the keys to reality and knowledge, films have carved their own niche in constructing a world for its audience. Though manipulative in its own terms, Films have been acknowledged as one of the most powerful pillars in the firmament of visual media generating its conspicuous control over the emergence of a social perspective among the latest generation. As Walt Disney has opined, "movies can and do have tremendous influence in shaping young lives in the realm of entertainment towards the ideals and objectives of normal adulthood" (Schickel 222).

In the canvas of global cinema around the world, Hollywood stands as a larger than life symbol in influencing its mass spectators and in determining a set structural pattern on which all movies are built upon. Having led the culture and economy of the entire world for decades, Hollywood film industry has made its own impact in the history of the film world, both culturally and technologically. The cultural penetration as well as the seeds of domination in binaries has been officially authenticated as absolute principles through Hollywood cinema. The mass consumers of Hollywood movies speak enough for its colossal presence in the domain of the cinematic world. However, Hollywood and its production of commercially successful movies projected themselves as one principal reason in the development of Film Studies, Gender Studies and Feminist Film theories.

A glance at the history of Hollywood film industry will retell how technological advancements and predominant doctrines and the iconic directors in each era had spread its own wings in reconstituting the then social and cultural impetus of the society in which it has been embedded. "The well-chronicled history

of Hollywood moviemaking has been one long testimony to the immense power of visual images to evoke popular emotional responses, indeed to reflect and influence the process of social change” (Codell 232).

The classical Hollywood Cinema with its period ranging from the 1910s to the 1960s consolidated itself within a structured pattern of narration and stability. In every terrain of life, new models emerge as with the passage of time be it in politics, history, education or arts. This era of Hollywood industry had witnessed some major directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Victor Fleming, Josef von Sternberg, Charles Chaplin, David Lean and many more. Hitchcock had been the most studied director since his great movie *Psycho* (1960). He is popularly known as the master of suspense and has even grabbed an Oscar during his career. The concept of the audience as the voyeur was one of the abstractions in filmmaking introduced by Hitchcock. Fleming, another popular icon of the age boomed to the heights of glory with his impeccable style of direction with movies like *Wizard of the Oz* (1939) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Being credited with the introduction of Gangster movies, Sternberg was another famous figure during the golden age of Hollywood cinema. He is still remembered for his *Morocco* (1930) and *Shanghai Express* (1932). Despite the silent visuals and discreet playfulness, Chaplin was the most recognisable face of early cinema and hooked great popularity through his soundless movies. He wrote, directed and performed thereby amusing his audience. His contributions to cinema had been timeless. Known for his high dimensional epic forms, Lean became one of the most influential directors of all time with his movies

like *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957).

These classical directors have designed their own templates for the future of the movie industry and they had set their own yardsticks for the upcoming directors. The dominant ideology was well-preserved and a breakage from the existing order resulted in chaos during this period. Classical cinema customarily focussed on linear narration, dealt with family and romance and was so predictable with its cause-effect story structure. Lasting from the silent era to the world of incorporating sounds, Classical Hollywood cinema witnessed the splurge of the Renaissance elements too in its manifestations. The movies of this age had transcended space and time and are still watched, analysed and debated upon in multiple corners of the world.

Since the evolution of the cinema, diverse perspectives as well as varied stances have been accumulated in the context of film, filmmaking, production and reception by various theorists and critics. The enormous number of movies made around the world and its impact further corroborated the need for a systematic field of study in films with countless theories encompassed within. The early 1960s can be considered as a springboard from which emerged today's Film Theory. Being considered as an intellectual pursuit, many young students and scholars of the era entrenched themselves in questioning the movies like *Searchers* (1956) and *Psycho* (1960) with a new fervour. The American cinephilia of the period paved its way to the development of many film departments in and around the globe. These departments in due course helped in "legitimizing 'film' as an intellectual field of study" (Rushton and Bettinson 3).

The rediscovery of the rich legacy of the movies produced from Hollywood and American Culture slowly merged with the European-influenced filmmaking patterns. Assimilating the French Auteurism into American movie culture, Andrew Sarris, the American film critic, reconsidered the artistic credentials of the great directors like Hitchcock, Fleming and Lean in the light of new theoretical envisions. The affinity with literature restructured the concept of the director as the author in literature and marked its way as “a stylistic signature with a distinctive worldview” (Rushton and Bettinson 4). Just as literature was being analysed, films were also being analysed based on their forms, functions and styles.

With the turn in cultural changes, globalisation and the emergence of dominant markets in film production, inclusion of sex, drugs and violence became common platforms to build upon the threads in cinema. The ideals of the classical age were completely shattered and more politically challenging films arose. This phase which saw the dawn of new movies which were aesthetically and politically compelling came to be known as Contemporary Hollywood cinema. This new phase drastically contributed to the mass production of commercial blockbusters, sequels, science fictions and high budget movies. The popular figures of the period include Stanley Kubrick, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, David Fincher, Tarantino and many more. Movies like *Star Wars* and *Avatar* aimed at exploiting global markets by utilising the pedestals of animation and multimedia strategies.

Though Films had already implicated its importance in the earlier era, they became an industry in the technical context only in the late nineteenth century. Rather than mere film production, the study aimed at investigating the historic,

social, cultural and political mechanisms that bloated through these visual representations. The phenomena of Film in itself is complex and a substantive set of theories aided in determining those films to more accurate comprehensions. These theories could finally establish how a film worked, how they transmitted its meaning, the functions they accompanied with and the unchallengeable impact of these visual renditions. With the advent of the new phase in cinema, the field of Film Studies too escalated with new readings, strategies and theoretical conceptions.

As Film theory was evolving through its expansive network of new concepts in the 1970s, a fresh step towards individual identities and emancipatory borders slowly surfaced. Many film theorists including Mulvey made use of the different positioning of men and women in cinema based on a bourgeois categorisation. Marxism as well as psychoanalysis proved to be the solid allies for studies related to Films and Film theory. Redefining Marxist ideals of freedom and identity, a significant inquiry on Feminist ideals in Films became a domain of lasting importance. Meanwhile, Psychoanalysis, on a psychological level elucidated how society placed itself in postulating its structural patterns designed with a sexist perspective.

Irrespective of the glory and distinction that is sewn to Hollywood film industry, the 'Celluloid Ceiling', in association with under-representation of women existed unequivocally throughout the history of Hollywood. This indeed evoked an extensive enquiry in the fields of Film as well as feminism with a combined effect. 'Celluloid Ceiling' or 'Glass ceiling' is a metaphorical coinage which denotes an invisible barrier that keeps one particular community from rising above the set

pattern in a hierarchy. A glance at the History of Hollywood and its women representations would shed more light into this. Florence Lawrence, a Canadian-American stage performer and actress is often referred to as the first actress in the history of Hollywood who appeared in many motion pictures since 1906. She played the lead female role in the movie *Daniel Boone* (1907) and the story chronicles how a father rescues his daughter from a group of goons. This initial role played by Lawrence in this movie during the silent era has set the tone for Hollywood female characterisations for the centuries to come. Martha Lauzen, the executive director of SDSU's centre says, "The film industry has utterly failed to address the continuing under-employment of women behind the scenes. This negligence has produced a toxic culture that supported the recent sexual harassment scandals and truncates the careers of so many women" (Lauzen).

The groundbreaking essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* by Laura Mulvey, the British Feminist Film Theorist expounded the insignificant roles assigned to women in films. The essay illuminated how women are utilised as objects on screen to render pleasure for the male spectators. Initially published in *Screen* in the year 1975, Mulvey's re-reading of Hitchcock's movies like *Vertigo* (1958), *Rear Window* (1954) and *Marnie* (1964) and Sternberg's movies like *Morocco* (1930) questioned the objectified role of women as well as amplified the need for more authentic women representations in films. The history of Hollywood had always been one of male supremacy and male dominance and the emergence of Mulvey's essay opened its doors to more innovative and creative inquiries on the existing association of women and films.

Gender identities are often fostered through gendered representations, especially movies, where gender differences are projected in a visually subdued format and take its form in the most vigorous artistic contours. What is presented on screen take its ultimate shape through its audience in a society. An analysis of the current movies in Hollywood will give us a precise picture on the true nature of gender divisions as it is presented in today's world. The portrayal of women in films and how they are used as palpable tools to enhance the roles of heroes on screen turns out to be a grave concern in the current scenario whereby it can directly result in affecting the normal life of ordinary women within the society. Movies often highlight the physical aspects of the heroine ignoring her very many inner sensibilities. Though published in 1975, Mulvey's essay rebounds and glues its prominence even after decades due to its lasting importance in the contemporary scenario where women are denigrated in their roles on screen. The very same ignominious roles for women are clearly visible in Nolan's movies too. However, a reading of these movies in the light of Mulvey's essay will reframe them in a different landscape. Female representations either remain peripheral to the plot of the movie or are marginalised to disparaging terms in the present scenario. In both circumstances, it is her beauty that voices out rather than her competence and sensibilities.

The first step to qualify as female hero in a man's world is to be young and beautiful. If not young, then she must be Botoxed to look young. If not beautiful, then she must have silicone breasts, be aided

by plastic surgery, wigs, make up and never ever a wrinkle on her pretty face. (Schubart 34)

Uncovering the antiquated myths about women is of utmost importance to build a future devoid of gender bias. An analysis of the movies of the most influential director in Hollywood, Christopher Nolan, will illustrate as where we stand with women representations despite the struggles and movements carried over for women's liberation and emancipation for years. Nolan's movies spanning over a period of more than two decades will mark the presence of women representations and how realistic they stand towards the real lived experience of women. Though women liberation movements and feminism have come a long way, Nolan's women characters will prove as to how stagnant they remain in the current world reechoing the very traits of male domination.

Contemporary Hollywood cinema has pinned its focus on a large scale, towards the male protagonists and in due course has more or less dunked the women characters. Since Christopher Nolan's movies abound much in the substructure of Noir traits, the most evocative essay *Women in Film Noir* by Janey Place is also taken into consideration along with Mulvey's work and the movies are read in the light of these essays. The specific gender construction derived through this artistically created genre, focusses on the two extremes of women portrayal, either as a Madonna/Saint figure or as a Spider woman. In both cases, her diversity is nullified and she is pushed to a realm beneath the masculine power. Apart from the female representations on screen, the hazardous effects of such manifestations in society is also thoroughly discussed through the "Objectification theory". Thus, the

experiential consequences faced by a woman for being a woman in a patriarchal culture can be further understood through the *Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks* by Fredrickson and Roberts. A meticulous investigation of films in these frameworks can throw more light into the seriousness of this under-representation. Since the feminist movements from 1960s, women representations and women inclusions have been talked about in almost all domains of life. Surprisingly, Hollywood Cinema has masked the female representations as more independent and overpowering while they still float under the cyclical patriarchal constructions.

Christopher Nolan, one of the most popular figures in the world of Hollywood cinema has etched out his name in the list of the most influential directors of the time through his distinctive workmanship and adeptness in his artistic dimensions. His command over his inventive finesse has made him one of the most reputed directors of today's world. His movies have intricately questioned the intelligence of the audience and has tremendously entertained them in the most exhilarating way. Blending various genres to his insightful will, he has authentically proved to be the master of moviemaking. Being able to harness the complete power of the Hollywood studio system to his advantage, he has harvested monumental levels of success beyond measure and has become one of the favourites of the new generation. His in-depth study of the functions and credibility of his themes makes him the most influential director of the twentieth century. The innovations he brings in his structure, the digressions in narration, and his brain wrecking imagery makes him different from all other Hollywood directors.

Apart from being considered as one of the most exceptional and most successful directors of the period, what makes Nolan different from his contemporaries is a baffling question. There are multiple reasons which makes Nolan stand out from his contemporaries. Nolan is one of the few directors from Hollywood who does not possess a background of formal education from any of the Film Schools. This substantially makes him more genuine and more authentic in his filmmaking perspectives. His unorthodox narration, the psychological profundity and the intellectual funding invested in his movies makes him different from his contemporaries. While Nolan's contemporaries have quite often tried their luck with the element of simplicity to gain mass applause, Nolan has validated with his movies that complexity and convolutedness can be easily ingrained by the global audience and that there are more takers among the movie buffs who bask in this intricacy. No other contemporaries of Nolan have ever put the spectators to such bewilderment, and it is this complexity that keeps him distinct from his fellow directors. Despite the mass discombobulation and non-linear narration that he employs, the undebatable research that he conducts in each of his themes is what distinguishes him. It is this authentic knowledge about his filmic themes that makes his movies look veritable. His movies are indeed the keys to his personality and the time span between each of his movies spells out the research he conducts concerning the themes involved. His Literature background also has given him a certain advantage over the other film directors, and he is one of the modern directors who has taken a strong step in breaking the cinematic rules to his convictions. His continuous collaboration with the same actors has also helped him to set the recurring patterns on the screen exactly the way he wanted them to be. Being the collaborators for the

past missions, the same actors had guaranteed him with a commitment to showcase precisely what he wanted out of each of them in each of his movies. Apart from his contributions to films, Nolan has also been a great influence in the industry of video games and hence an idol among the young generation.

Nolan's movies offer multiple meanings within its entangled layers swaddled with psychological variations and artistic renditions. It is definitely this inner intricacy that still puzzles his audience and the reason why he is applauded globally amidst his intellectual impenetrability. Rupert Wyatt said in one of his interviews that he "thinks of Nolan as a trailblazer...he is to be hugely admired as a master filmmaker, but also someone who has given others behind him a stick to beat back the naysayers who never thought a modern mass audience would be willing to embrace story and character as much as spectacle" (Harding). Nolan continues to be an active presence in Hollywood as a director who is capable of enhancing the audience's experiences in films through his auteur persona.

Christopher Edward Nolan was born to British-American parents on 30th July, 1970 in Westminster, London. He was the second of the three sons. His older brother is Matthew Francis Nolan and the younger brother is Jonathan Nolan with whom he has collaborated with most of his movies. Nolan's father, Brendan James Nolan was a British advertising copywriter and his mother was Christina, an American teacher. The jarring cultural split that he went through due to the constant shifts between his residence at Britain and Chicago is more or less visible in his movie patterns.

Mesmerised by the very mechanism of cinema and being a great fan of George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), he was inspired to make his first motion movie with his father's camera at the age of seven. Having completed his degree in English Literature from University College, London, he continued his passion for making films. The University College provided a strong pedestal for Nolan in fulfilling his dreams. He joined the school's film society and established an on-campus cinema society collaborating it with Emma Thomas, his classmate and future wife. He was strongly influenced by the great film makers like Kubrick, Ridley Scott and Michael Mann. His first short film named *Tarantella* (1989) was made when he was nineteen years old and was telecasted on English television. The success encouraged the budding director to make his next motion picture named *Larceny* in 1996 which was debuted at the Cambridge Film festival.

After completing his studies from University of London in 1993, he worked as a script reader, camera operator and director of some short video scripts. He married Emma Thomas in the year 1997 and sought her help in producing his third short film *Doodlebug* (1997). Though a work of three minutes, *Doodlebug* became the first movie piece which gave Nolan public attention. The years ahead saw how Nolan conquered the Hollywood Industry through his mind-blowing movies. Nolan and his wife, Emma Thomas together founded the production company Syncopy Inc. in the year 2001. Nolan with his family is currently settled in Los Angeles, California and the couple have four children.

Nolan has ten movies helmed to his creative powers and his formative years in cinema began with the release of *Following* in 1998. Built on a low-budget, the film cracked its wild sensibilities among its audience and Nolan came to be recognised as a powerful storyteller. Followed by *Memento* in 2000, Nolan was slowly becoming notable among the spectators which triggered the release of *Insomnia* in 2002. The upcoming years mirrored his mastery in etching out the superhero through the Batman franchise. The period saw great innovations even in the villains cast in these movies. The series included three movies of Batman with Christian Bale at its lead beginning from *Batman Begins* in 2005, *The Dark Knight* in 2008 and *The Dark Knight Rises* in 2012. The next three movies of Nolan had been often designated to be the most knotty and complicated of all, namely, *The Prestige* (2006), *Inception* (2010) and *Interstellar* (2014). These three movies have signalled Nolan to a totally different network of film direction with its interplay on mind games, dream layers and further research on the dimensions of space and time. His latest movie, *Dunkirk* (2017), which depicts the evacuation during World War II also won huge popularity for its visceral and propulsive sequences as a combat thriller.

Being a contemporary director from Hollywood, Nolan's blockbuster movies have been a receptacle of a huge number of critical responses and reviews along with its popularity on a global scale. The increasing presence of critical discourses and reader responses has instigated the need for further investigation into one of the most iconic figures in contemporary Hollywood to assess and re-read the existing platforms that these directors dominate unwittingly. Despite the gradual escalation

from low-budget independent films to superhero franchises, Nolan's movies are the best examples for a case study involving the current scenario from a feminist perspective.

This thesis *From the Nameless Blonde to Brand: Defrosting the Refrigerated Females in the Movies of Christopher Nolan* primarily questions the mechanisms through which women characters have been portrayed in Nolan's movies. In a background where Hollywood Blockbuster movies dominate the entire cinematic landscape, the movies of a contemporary director like Christopher Nolan who is artistically accepted on an international basis would be the primary recommendation for a case study like this. Moreover, bearing in mind the vast magnitude of films released in Hollywood every year, a study on the movies of a single director would establish a singular focus within the scope of this research by fully understanding the multifarious levels of those films which are taken into deliberation here.

An analysis of the most appreciated and most applauded director of the epoch can give a stronghold on how far there has been progress with respect to female representations and women inclusions on screen. Though there are countless studies and analysis based on Nolan's successful career and blockbuster movies, there is a vivid critical void related to the contentions of his female characterisations. The thesis investigates how women characters are depicted in Nolan's movies and how they become a strong detrimental influence for the audience in popular culture. Apart from the relentless critical praise and the continuing consistency of work, there are two distinct reasons as to why Christopher Nolan has been chosen for this study.

The primary reason is Nolan's British upbringing far away from the Hollywood industry which has aided him to envisage cinema on a holistic perspective. The Hollywood propensity of casting American actors alone was a methodical structure which was completely splintered by Nolan. Though an American by citizenship, Nolan has always positioned himself outside the Hollywood pedestals as a British filmmaker. Nolan's continuous collaboration with actors outside America and his settings and locations beyond the U.S is one major reason to study him. His star cast is highly welcoming in its approach including actors from all parts of the world though they are popular in the Hollywood. The list includes Christian Bale (Welsh), Michael Caine (British), Ken Watanabe (Japanese), Garry Oldman (British), Ellen Page (Canadian), Marion Cotillard (French), Hugh Jackman (Australian), Rebecca Hall (British), Liam Neeson (Irish), Cillian Murphy (Irish), Heath Ledger (Australian) and many more. Nolan's continuous inclusions of Non-American actors and locations outside the United States makes him an effigy who has restructured the hegemony in Hollywood. This star cast and multiple locations has indeed given a global audience reach for Nolan's movies. Moreover, Nolan's upcoming movie in 2020 titled as *Tenet* is a collaboration with Indian actors like Denzil Smith, Dimple Kapadia and Himesh Patel and one of the locations where the shoot happened was in Mumbai. This American-Indian involvement definitely encompasses Nolan's wider range of visions regarding the scope of cinema and provides a secure basis to analyse his movies on a contemporary ground.

Secondly, the huge fan base that Nolan enjoys on a global scale unquestionably makes his movies a template for case study. His influence on Indian

cinema and Indian audience is one brawny reason to study how Nolan presents his women characters. The more the women shrink in Hollywood, the more do they recoil from Indian cinematic context too. Thus, Nolan's picturing of women in Hollywood can create a direct repercussion in the Indian film structure and hence a study will throw more light into the necessity of more women inclusions in the future film world.

An Auteur director, who has a signature style of his own is undoubtedly a microcosm of the larger society. A director is essentially a social reformer who can lead a society from antiquated myths to reality. Consequently, Nolan, a reputed director with mass influence has a strong hand in configuring the society around him.

Drawing on a hybrid theoretical framework incorporating Mulvey's Gaze theory, the work analyses how Nolan's female manifestations stick themselves to the conservative ideologies rooted in the phallogocentric world. The study further exposes the stance of these female characters within the discursive realm through the concepts of Janey Place's *Women in Film Noir* and Fredrickson & Roberts' *Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experience*. Nolan's female characters range from Femme Fatales to Redeemers and from Fetish icons to stage props and the study illuminates how consistently they are showcased over and over again in his movies.

The thesis consists of four Chapters and all the Chapters sink in an exhaustive expedition on the recurring female deaths and feminine representations demonstrated by Nolan. Chapter one, *Splintering the Antiquated Myths: The Advent*

of the Feminist Perspective in Films is an induction into the evolving of a feminist framework in the background of Film Theory. The evolution of the feminist praxis and the contextual frameworks of films through which women depictions had been analysed form the core discussion here. The second Chapter *Resuscitating the Archetypes: The Femme Fatale, the Redeemer and the Insignificant* examines Nolan's Femme Fatales and the discreet Madonnas. The chapter examines his first three movies in the formative years which are *Following*, *Memento* and *Insomnia*. The key elements of Noir films and the female character establishments are further considered and assessed in this Chapter. Chapter Three *The Fortified Masculinity: The Dwindling Females in Superhero Films* explores the Batman series in the context of male superheroes and testifies the diminishing women representations. The study looks into his three movies *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*. The fourth Chapter *The Subservient Counterparts: The Distortion of Truth in Filmic Representations* investigates his later three movies *The Prestige*, *Inception* and *Interstellar*. Considered as the heaviest movies in the filmography of Nolan, these movies have grounded its plausibility in scientific reality and the convictions involved revolves in an imaginary environment. However, the female depictions still lack their phenomenal power and are completely compromised for the sake of the male characters. The chapter substantiates how women can remain secondary despite their educational status, qualifications and skills.

The thesis displays the persistent triumph of patriarchy over the emerging women power in the visual media and the after effects it can validate in a society

where people are significantly influenced by movies. The greatest challenge before a director is the revamping of the existing cinematic codes. Despite fracturing the hitherto cinematic technical structure, Nolan does not exult in redrafting his scripts towards powerful feminine roles. Most of his women characters are either dead, frozen or psychologically extinct within the context of the plot. Despite his collaboration with his wife Emma Thomas, it has to be noted that Nolan has never ventured a screenplay with a female. A reconceptualisation of the structured femininity and the transgression from the calculated presumption of a patriarchal cipher would be the greatest social vision that a director can bestow to his/her society. A divergence from the unrealistic beauty myths and a representation of the realistic lived experience of women is what is obligatory in the modern world. The thesis accentuates the need to destabilise and overthrow the existing gender hierarchy and to retell and reconsider the true stories of women's lived experience where they have materialised their dreams in the most convincing forms.

Having discussed the contemporary film makers, having narrowed down to Christopher Nolan, his biographical details and movies and introducing the argument of the thesis using his movies, this dissertation moves on to the second chapter to highlight how Feminist Film theory evolved and how these theories become a foundation for the movies under scrutiny here.

Chapter One

Splintering the Antiquated Myths: The Advent of the Feminist Perspective in Films

Feminism has always been a vivid working vocabulary for the manifestation of Women's social, political and economic discrepancies amidst the social hub. Long before Feminism glued with movies, feministic viewpoints had been established in itself through a thorough systematic development of its cognitive pedestals by reassessing the typical female roles in a contrasting light. Feminism undoubtedly has spread its landscape in every belt of human existence today including social, religious, cultural and political arenas. Feminism is indeed a social commitment to refashion the world and unleash it from the tentacles of the hegemonic structure. This popular lexicon, *Feminism*, has thus banged itself into a boom through centuries of espousal, reassurance and restructuring. Concomitantly, the revolutions, the campaigns, the resurgence and the pressurised outlook of being a feminist, by and large, girdled the crux of the manifold sovereign-spheres accomplished by women through the movement.

When Feminism in one glance looks monstrously triumphant, with a detailed scrutiny of many realms, the destination of women emancipation looks further illusive than reality. In an era of Post-Feminism, the question still remains as to whether the term exists even as a valid phenomenon today. In a society which is persuaded by the media-inspired women images, the constitution of fridged filmic representation of women from great directors like Nolan signifies nothing but disillusionment.

Christopher Nolan has engraved his success traits as a director through his massive blockbusters. However, despite his global recognition and directorial auteur persona, his women characters stand secondary to his male characters. The entire thesis investigates this deficit that spreads through Nolan's movies and endeavours to bring forth the distinctive mettle tied along with these female representations that deliberately fades away within the substructure of the plots.

A comprehensive study of contemporary female illustrations can evolve only through the manifold layers of struggles and challenges women had endured through centuries. The masculine puissance has in fact shaped the powerlessness of the feminine realm from time immemorial. The recent findings and statistics suggest that women had been treated secondary since the time phase of Pagan religion and their status remained comparatively the same even during the ancient cultural life. The prevailing idea of women as inferior has begun since the infringement of Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. Rather than a natural derivative, inferiority or an incompetent status is a phenomenon which is culturally imposed on women. A range of cultural, social and religious restrictions have been imposed upon women across the globe denoting a symbolic male dominance as well as a psychological exploitation. Films are no different when it comes to distortion of women images. Most films, through their visual impact, have ideologically contributed to a major disregard against women. In other words, it is the society that reinforces and assigns these gender roles. Ann Rosamund Oakley, the renowned British sociologist and Feminist made a clear-cut distinction between sex and gender in her book *Sex, Gender and Society*, published in 1972 and asserted that "Sex is a word that refers to

the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. ‘Gender’, however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into masculine and feminine” (16).

The chapter focusses on the contextualisation of the basic tenets of Feminist Film theories that underpin the entire thesis along with a few related concepts of women representations and women’s lived experiences, configuring a canvas for a subsequent debriefing of the hitherto selected movies of Christopher Nolan, through which his intricate female characters can be mirrored. The first part of the chapter sheds light on Feministic frameworks spanning from Mary Wollstonecraft to Kira Cochrane through decades of penning, highlighting the theories of Laura Mulvey, Janey Place, Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts. The second part is an elucidation of how Films herald its way for a more convoluted vision of Feminism with women on screens. Feminism, as a movement is less despised in the modern era owing to the tangential solidarity it has proved with, through a feministic praxis. A defrosting of the solid characterisation of the refrigerated female figures of Nolan through these basic concepts of Feministic Film Theory will aggrandise them to a diverse level of perception.

Despite disagreements, it is overt that men inhabit and dominate news-rooms and political-rooms. The obdurate existence of gender inequality around the globe barely makes news. According to the British philosopher Janet Richards, “the essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there

are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism” (9).

Sexism is still alive, and it stems disappointingly rigid in every vivid platform of the society. A scream for a change has gained rapid momentum since the early eighteenth century with the dawn of the traits of Feminism. It is often this active/male and passive/female dichotomy that has solidified gender categorisations in the modern scenario. It is believed that Feminism is a movement aiding woman in identifying themselves and the major proponents believed that most of the disorders in the society arose from this social disparity. “Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation” (Bhasin and Khan 3).

The thesis surveys the hidden parameters of feminine power submerged in the extensive terrain of Patriarchy within the contextual frame of Christopher Nolan’s movies. Feminism has listed its own gateway for women from the dingy caverns to lambency. Thus, a re-reading of the women characters in the substructure of Feministic precepts will affirm an emancipated geography for the innumerable women characters silhouetted by Nolan. The Chapter considers the development of feminism and how feministic ideals evolved through several mechanisms over the past many centuries.

Feminism had dawned centuries ago in an era when the term in its present context had never been etched out. The philosophical contemplation from the

Western world began with Greek philosophy of Pre-socratic period influencing every corner of the world. The Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Plato discerned women as doomed and inferior to men. Aristotle in his *Politics* authentically declared, “as regards the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject” (Jowett and Butcher 14). This could be one of the reasons as to depict Aristotle as a dangerous male chauvinist by most Feminists in the later era. In *History of Animals, Book IX*, Aristotle openly declares thus:

Wherefore women are more compassionate and more readily made to weep, more jealous and querulous, founder of the railing, and more contentious. The female also is more subject to depression of spirits and despair than the male. She is also more shameless and false, more readily deceived, and more mindful of injury, more watchful, more idle, and on the whole less excitable than the male. On the contrary, the male is more ready to help, and, as it has been said, braver than the female; and even in malaria, if the sepia is struck with a trident, the male comes to help the female, but the female makes her escape if the male is struck. (3)

Commencing from this Archaic age through the Biblical period towards the modern era, women’s stance has, more or less, remained stagnant. As centuries passed, a well-defined discipline, incorporating the true ideals of feminine sensibilities that guaranteed an emancipated world for women became inevitable and thus emerged Feminism. Depending on time, culture and geographical location,

Feminism had cladded its cause in varied dimensions for women across the globe. Feminism, even before springing up into a palpable movement, started reflecting its ideas since the Elizabethan age in Britain during the sixteenth century. In an era where women were considered to be chaste, docile and obedient, publishing something of her own or even debating the context of her own status unwittingly, challenged the authority of patriarchy though Feministic identification was not acknowledged vividly then.

Feminism is often illustrated through the construct of ‘waves’ though much more had chronicled between the epoch of waves. Simone de Beauvoir cites Christine de Pizan (1364 – c. 1430), the author of *The Book of the City of Ladies* as the first woman to castigate misogyny and write about the correlation of the sexes.

The later centuries saw explicit increase in the number of women writers though many were still under male pseudonyms. Irrespective of the multiple social changes that were witnessed by different cultures, the predicament of women, however, remained unaffected. Women were still perceived as a group with less intelligence and less capabilities. The Biblical myth that draped Eve in the threads of temptation, absurdity and greed took more colours with the passage of time. Jane Anger, the first woman to publish the diatribe of Feminism, *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women* in 1589 speaks about Genesis thus:

The creation of man and woman at the first, he being formed...of dross and filthy clay, did so remain until God saw that in him his workmanship was good, and therefore by the transformation of the dust which was loathsome unto flesh it became purified. Then

lacking a help for him, God, making woman of Mans' flesh that she might be purer than he, doth evidently show how far we women are more excellent than men. (3)

Thus Anger contests the view that women are inferior and goes on to argue that the progression of creation that God made, in a logical sense, has to be a better creation than man. The workmanship in any creation stretches to more perfection with each make. Since it was the last creation by God, unequivocally, it has to be the best creation, says Anger.

The age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century brought forth the proto-feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Jeremy Bentham and Nicolas de Condorcet who laid a groundbreaking foundation for the early milestone of Feminism. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) still remains as a cornerstone for feministic ideals although it may vary immensely with modern standards of Feminism. The work was an uproar to the middle-class women, urging them to uplift themselves through educational and intellectual rectitude. The inceptive ebullient reception of Wollstonecraft's work was blighted soon after the publication of *Memoirs* by her husband which exposed her immoral journey of life. However, Wollstonecraft's work materialised out of the turbulence caused by French revolution and designed a pathway for the upcoming theorists to ground their concepts with a pervasive outlook.

No matter how, all variants of Feminism share the basic three assumptions: gender as a social construct, how patriarchy fashions these constructs and how

consciousness raising helps in envisioning a future non-sexist society since the personal can turn and merge into the political.

There is no sex. There is but a sex that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary. The contrary would be to say that sex creates oppression, or to say that the cause (origin) of oppression is to be found in sex itself, in a natural division of the sexes pre-existing (or outside) society.

(Wittig 25)

Monique Wittig, the French writer considered women as nothing more than an oppressed social class. She opined that the very structure of the oppressed and the oppressor creates the distinction derived in sex. Though Mary Wollstonecraft has been regarded as the foremother of Feminism, the term “Feminism” began to be used only in the 1890s. Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and Simon de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* triggered an easy path for supplementing a sturdy thrust by which the present sphere of Feminism got sculpted.

As discussed above, Feminism was compartmentalised into different waves pertaining to different periods in the history of the world. Nevertheless, the pivotal causes and reasons that revolved around Feminism, remained the same - the yawp for a more liberated society where her dreams are not chained anymore. “One is not born but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in the society; it is civilisation as whole that produces this creature” (Beauvoir 457).

The very mechanism to question this biased civilisation was Feminism. Feminism as a structural ideology, is never autonomous and is still evolving. The Feminist Movement is indisputably too humongous to pack into ideologically distinct boxes and yet a structured configuration is handy in scrutinising the evolution and development of each of the sequences. Each phase had its own set of attributes in retrieving liberation and an equal status.

“Waves” had been an outline of divisions of Feministic visions over a range of centuries. The visual concept of Waves mark as a befitting demonstration to denote the ebb and flow of the actualisation of the Feministic ideologies in different ages prioritising different aspects of unfettering the social chains with cultural as well as political mechanisms. Consequently, the tide continues in spite of the momentum it contoured in each of its phases.

The first phase of Feminism began in 1800 and culminated with the early 19th century. (1800s -1920). “Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman... Nature provides exceptions to every rule” (Fuller 18).

Margaret Fuller, the American Journalist thematises the fact that the traits of both masculine and feminine are visible in both sexes indisputably and therefore the concept of gender stratification does not really exist. Fuller’s essay was one of its kind during the period of its publication in United States and is paralleled with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft in London. The two proto-feminists were compared by George Eliot in her essay *Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft* in the year

1855. However, the urge to battle for uniform status came to the surface during the early eighteenth century which set foot for the first wave of Feminism.

The chapter chronicles the long struggle that women had battled through the ages bygone in claiming their rightful positions across the globe through inconceivable hurdles. The chapter glances through the emergence of Feminism, the Waves, the struggles and achievements through the centuries and culminates with the modern theories of film that sticks with feminism in liberating women from the false manifestations of under-representation on screen.

The first wave Feminism in a nutshell was the initial wave which demanded a legal equality thereby claiming the voting rights for women. The wave began almost closer to the years of the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. The first wave began with American Women's Rights Movement which gradually unfurled across the European countries. The movement finally turned triumphant after gaining the voting rights for women in 1920 with the nineteenth amendment.

The movement concentrated more on education, employment and voting rights. The spasmodic spill of activism, however, could clinch a specific pedestal for women in the social and political domain through voting rights. The major proponents though cannot be claimed as Feminists at the time, were mostly activists from parallel backgrounds who could galvanise support across the countries. Warring for a victory, the women around the globe unanimously huddled together, though their desires and goals differed in its terms, means and depth.

The Second wave began with the 1960s and extended till the 1980s. The Second wave was a period which was more organised than the first and there emerged a cohesive effort for gender equality. Feminism was a dead history for the Feminists of the second wave who thought it as an onslaught which was more resurgent with the second phase. The post World War period took women back to the traditional roles and they found themselves in the midst of a revolutionary track demanding more.

When the First Wave Feminism took women towards the triumph of a political sphere, the second wave demanded more into the social and legal parity through political means. Popularly known as the 'Women's Liberation Movement', the main advocates of Second Wave challenged the stereotyped roles of women in a social context where they were mostly handcuffed to the backrooms of their homes. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) dashed a breakthrough with the Equal Pay Act of 1963 as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Feminist theoretical frameworks exploded during the 1970s with the publication of *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* in 1970 by Shulamith Firestone and *Sisterhood is Powerful* by Robin Morgan. Millet argued that women internalised their role as inferiors and thus treated themselves as subservient to men. Millet says, "Let us begin the revolution and let us begin it with love: All of us, black, white, and gold, male and, female, have it, within our power to create a world we could bear out of the desert we inhabit, for we hold our very fate in our hands" (183).

The glorification and idealisation of women through the concepts of family and motherhood kept her reserved for the role of home, stuffing her dreams to ditches. Firestone's vision of an idyllic world with the expulsion of the reproductive mechanism in a woman created chills over the spine for many. She believed that this elimination from the procreative process could cast off the roles of a woman as a device of romance and sex. Firestone presumed this could shatter the entire patriarchal system which created the sex division. Firestone deduces that "male culture was and is parasitical, feeding on the emotional strength of women without reciprocity" (74).

The period of second wave Feminism witnessed the surfacing of radical feminism. While other forms of Feminism saw legal and political ways to ensure the equality of women, Radical feminists denied equality of women through socio-political aids and confirmed the equality only through the complete elimination of the patriarchal order. They believed that as long as the patriarchal structure remained, no new alternatives could find solution for women progression and emancipation. Since no other possibility paved assistance in Radical Feminism, it is quite often termed as the most rebellious and vituperative form of Feminism.

Radical Feminism viewed all societal institutions as a vehicle organised by men to oppress and hold women to the constricted circle. They saw this oppression as a never-ending, deliberate measure to subdue women. They rejected all social institutions like Marriage, Prostitution, Heterosexuality and Family which in itself tried to perpetuate the overall submissiveness women exhibited, incognisant of her hidden identity. They identified that masculine supremacy has got no determined

authenticity when set parallel to the biological and scientific terminology. The belief rooted in the fact that most women submitted themselves to the docile roles as they thought it to be right and natural due to the social conditioning that regulated gender roles from time immemorial.

Male sexual domination is a material system with an ideology and a metaphysics. The sexual colonisation of women's bodies is a material reality: men control the sexual and reproductive uses of women's bodies. The institutions of control include law, marriage, prostitution, pornography, health care, the economy, organised religion and systematised physical aggression against women.

(Dworkin 48)

Apart from being a movement of ideology or theory, Radical Feminism in itself was a movement directed in action. Unlike the other feminist approaches which claims to build up gender justice through gradual reformation, Radical Feminism seeks a full-fledged elimination of patriarchy by overthrowing the sexist roles. They even introduced the concept of *Consciousness Raising* where women shared their experiences to build up a women fraternity. Through these experiences, they tried fusing the personal experience to the political thereby reaching out to universal sisterhood.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* determining the cultural construction of a woman published in 1949 marked the zenith of the era with many of the theoretical concepts put to use even today. She says,

To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to primp and dress herself up but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it the grace and charm she has been taught by her elder sisters. Any self-assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness. (123)

Beauvoir's statement was a writing on the wall for many women of the period to realise and react based on their self-assertion. However, the theories and writings that surfaced during this period provided a stepping stone to create an awareness of self-recognition among women in the coming years. Rosi Braidotti, a contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician opined that much of the theory in Feminism during the phase of the Second Wave seems to be "written in the simple future tense, expressing a deep sense of determination, of certainty about the course of history and the irresistible emancipation of women" (223). Koedt's most pivotal essay *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* and Kate Millet's groundbreaking work *Sexual Politics* marked a new era and a new vision in relation to Feminism.

Third Wave Feminism (1990s - 2011) included an intersectional crosslink of women with queer base as well as women of colour seeking to destroy all sorts of binaries. The Third Wave engrossed in itself with more individualism as well as diversity in class, creed and race. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women*, published in 1990 by Naomi Wolf discusses how the social prominence of women have scaled exponentially, trapping women within the frames of adhering to the social standards in retaining their appearance. The pressure of mass media on women to touch the unrealistic standards of beauty too have been

questioned by Wolf during this phase. “You do not win by struggling to the top of a caste system, you win by refusing to be trapped within one at all” (Wolf 48).

When women eventually found the platforms to trash the hegemonic structure and build themselves up, the new challenges came in the form of beauty and her physical image. The grossing Film culture also contributed negatively in retaining zero figures and to cut short the extra pounds. Wolf analyses the following in her introduction to *The Beauty Myth*.

The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us... During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing specialty... Pornography became the main media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined, and thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal...More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers. (10)

While most of the problems dealt within Feminism were problems pertaining to white women and her concept of beauty, there were less voices to contest for the problems of the coloured women. Bell Hooks, who coined the term “oppositional

gaze”, speaks about the marginalisation and lack of diverse voices in Feminism through her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*. "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body” (43).

The labyrinth of oppression suffered by women in different circumstances came into limelight with the new phase and the emergence of blogs and online-features encompassed multiple ethnic groups to tie their hands together for a common cause. Broadening the ideals of Feminism, the Third Wave tried expanding its shade to all women who were geographically, culturally and racially distinct from each other.

Fourth Wave Feminism began with the year 2011 and is still relevant in today’s world. The vestiges of Third Wave gradually pushed Feminism to the next patch. The Fourth Wave Feminism is the reincarnation of Feministic ideals that linked its connection with social media. Fourth Wave is generally defined as the wave of technology with the particular use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Personalised Blogs challenging gender inequality. Many of the fourth wave leaders were teenagers and the hashtag culture of Feminism kicked off. Kira Cochrane describes the fourth Wave feminism thus: “Welcome to the fourth wave of feminism. What’s happening now feels like something new again. It’s defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online. Just how popular is sometimes slightly startling” (Cochrane).

The recent MeToo# campaign is a testimony of the new wave in reclaiming the self in the backdrop of a male dominated milieu. The digitally driven hashtag

activism is still evolving and maturing to find a more fruitful positioning of women in the social hub.

The champions of Feminism firmly believed that the inherent culture of domination prevailing in a society is the upshot of a patriarchal structure. The inequality vested upon in a society is ultimately the consequence of oppression against women by male supremacy. Necessarily, the pivotal role of Feminism was to abolish the patriarchal structure completely from the social order. “Feminism is not women as victims but women refusing to be victims” (Steinem 11).

Feminism, since its inception has appeared in various colours and hues. Through the four waves of Feminism, there emerged and expanded various spheres for women in regaining independence and a self-identity. However, the first three waves could effortlessly be described as a three-tier typology including Liberal, Marxist and Cultural as the mind map of white women where the basic issues relating to ethnic backgrounds of black women were completely brushed off. Opposing the sexual objectification of women, raising public awareness through Consciousness Raising (CR), awareness on rape and violence and challenging the concepts of societal gender roles formed the principal tenets of Feminism through different epochs. Shulamith Firestone wrote in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970): “[T]he end goal of Feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first Feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally” (11).

Consequently, in order to integrate women into the mainstream social structure of male supremacy, various forms of Feminism began one after the other with varying modes of desires and targets. Some of them are: Liberal Feminism, Marxist and Social Feminism, Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism, Eco-Feminism, Black Feminism, French Feminism, Multi-racial Feminism, Post-structural Feminism, Post-colonial Feminism, Post-modern Feminism, Third world Feminism and many more. All forms of Feminism had been impactful at each set of time and had reaped its own benefits in various forms accordingly.

Marriage and Motherhood had always stood as stumbling blocks in the progressive career of many a woman. Most of the features against which Feminism had raised its pedestals find its root in the female characters depicted by Christopher Nolan. Nolan's female characters are mostly constrained within the bars of marriage and motherhood. Some are indeed rape victims, some others are women who are psychologically disillusioned and some others, the scapegoats at the cost of glorification of the male characters. A reading of Nolan's female characters through the lens of Feministic tenets can imbibe new contours in the trajectory of exploring his movies as well as refurbishing new models for survey in the ginormous sphere of Feminism.

Though the four waves of Feminism constituted a conceptual division in the ideals of Feminism, multiple inclination to diversified theory linkage happened all through these phases. It was indeed through the Second Wave Feminism that feminist ideals started hooking itself with the visual media and movies. The towering number of British Television series created an insignia in women's

organisations as to analyse the representation of women through this media. “Like fish, we “swim” in a sea of images, and these images help shape our perceptions of the world and of ourselves” (18), says the English art critic, Berger. Accordingly, the recurrent images strewn into the psyche of the audience through visual indexes have shaped our beliefs as well as convictions guiding us through the predominant hegemonic structure thereby sealing them to our mental thresholds.

However, the association of Feminism with Film Theory has constituted some of the major breathtaking changes in both disciplines. From a universal questioning of identities, Feminism gave way to the recognition of individual identities though the process was gradual and rather unhurried. Narratives created by men for men more often than not made the female characterisations completely fall flat. Feminism locked hands with the Film Theory to challenge the insignificance of females delineated in the visual media. Consequently, the association of Feminism with Film Theory had an abiding significance as the new union produced a new vision of recognising cinema by scrubbing off the age-old dogmas and conventions.

The basic assumption here is that men and women are unequal and therefore women are always treated as subservient in all societies. In short, the status of women can truly be compared with the Proletariat in Marxism where women are dominated by men in all walks of life. Film Theory basically had its roots in Marxism as well as Psychoanalysis and these theories were well put to use by the Feminist advocates to bring a solid association with Film and Feminism. Thus, the answer to the question as why a particular group in a society is rendered with more

inferiority and how they came to be exploited continually and endlessly by the other group was relied upon Psychoanalysis and Marxism.

Thus the Second Wave Feminism gradually influenced the rise of Feminist Film Theory with a number of names including Laura Mulvey, Marjorie Rosen and Molly Haskell. Though Mulvey's essay came later, the early works on women representation in Film by Rosen as well as Haskell provided a pedestal to establish the concept of male gaze, which was predominant in the movie structure. The period of 1970s started envisaging an embryonic form of Feminist Film Theory with a more valorised and theoretical association to women's filmic representations. The Feminist Film Theory focussed on the portrayal of women through a sociological positioning of women in films, sticking it with female depictions and the screen time allotted for the characters. Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* published in 1973 created a broader spectrum to analyse women in movies. In 1974 Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* again characterised the role of women and their lesser screen time in movies. Chronicling the different images of women in films, it is considered as the first historic expedition of Feminism into films. With the advent of these new platforms, many others dedicated themselves in exploring cinematic production and how women representation on screens reinforced patriarchy. The pillars on which Feminist Film Theory developed included the British Marxist movement which concentrated on Cultural superstructure, the Feminist Art Movement and Feminist Psychoanalysis. However, the works of Rosen and Haskell slowly took a back seat

with the publication of Mulvey's essay in 1975, crystallising the concept of male gaze through systematic conceptualisations.

Feminism was taking a vigorous tilt in the later years of 19th century with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) and Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991). The development of Feminist Aesthetics intending to study and promote women as producers of art thereby accepting women's fluid identity too contributed in etching out a new theory-oriented perspective. The notion that the male gaze is always on the pictured female gave forth a distinctive gendered binary focus in the process of pleasure creation in movies. Roberta Sassatelli, the Italian sociologist opines that, "what we watch on the screen could and should be interpreted as bearing a latent, and partly hidden, meaning, reflecting the profound concerns of the culture it emerges from, thus eliciting emotions, pleasure and pain" (123).

Both Rosen and Haskell discussed the conventional roles of women as mothers and girlfriends which had little to do with the screen presence or the strong narratives. As discussed by them, the mainstream commercial cinema never represented the real lived experiences of women in and around us. Instead, they were set aside within the screens only to be used as a tool by the male protagonists. The increasing number of rape scenes and the porn scenes created in movies with women representation were also put to query through their essays. The intact masculinity seen in movies which are said to be the mirrors to a society has been mentioned even by Claire Johnston in her *Notes on Women's Cinema* (1973). The representation of

women as ideological signifiers in cinema was a new additional concept introduced by British Semiotic critics.

However, it was in 1975 that Laura Mulvey, the British Feminist Film theorist published her groundbreaking essay entitled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in the most influential British Film Theory Journal *Screen*. The essay was grounded on the concept of Freud and Lacan and paved a new rollercoaster ride in the trackway of Feminism and Films. The essay turned out to be a protean zeitgeist moment of visual studies emerging in a new line of trend. It combined Feminist Aesthetics and Feminist Theory in association with Psychoanalysis. The germinal essay combines voyeurism, fetishism and narcissism in one single structural layout.

The crux of Mulvey's essay focusses on how the gaze, spectators and pleasure in viewing forms a masculine structure only to please the male community in the society. Her essay relates to the scopophilic content inevitably present in every filmic representation of women. Thus, Mulvey connects these psychoanalytic terms with the Feministic representations to hold more light into the female roles in movies. While Feminism works with gender issues, Psychoanalysis partakes the identification that happens through the unconscious, which can execute the unsaid experience of the quotidian life.

No other single essay has ever excited and transformed the contemporary Film Theory into such depths and vastness. Mulvey's germinal essay was first coined as a paper at the French Department of Wisconsin University in the year 1973. The paper was subsequently published in the film journal *Screen*. Contouring the sketches of Psychoanalysis, Mulvey described mainstream cinema as a

Phallogocentric apparatus. She distinguished the female roles in movies as gazes - gazes created by men for men. Thus, the entire shaping of a movie inclusive of its narration, editing and camera shots denoted the gaze meant for the masculine orb. As the art historian John Berger had recently pointed out, “men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female” (74).

Mulvey’s essay looks into this surveyed female and her representations. Though the essay created a conceptual leap in film theory, the essay was attacked for its ahistorical, computed construction and as a result Mulvey later revised her essay. However, analysing the essay in its own historical moment, it relates to a diversified segment of observing film genre in a new perspective.

It is quite interesting to note that Mulvey had connected the spokes of varied theories to fit in with Feminism, ultimately tying it up with Film Theory. Her essay connotes a conglomeration of Freud and Lacan coupled with Feminism and Film Theory. As long as the theories of Freud and Lacan remain, the context of the spectatorship Mulvey talks about hardly diminishes.

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 19). The basic statement in which Mulvey’s essay revolves is that the society is a world of imbalances and men and women are unequal in a society and it is this inequality

which stands as the originating point of a Feminist Critique. Secondly, the feelings related to pleasure and the modes of pleasure are specifically directed for the male - to cater to the needs of men in society. Thus, the society has a structured platform in which *looking at* and *to be looked at* are two standpoints different for both men and women. Thus, the process of looking at and deriving pleasure from looking is exclusive for the males and this constitutes the active male role in society. On the other hand, the females are just rolled up into objects of erotic pleasure - the passive females, *to be looked at* by the active males. So, the women in a society are structured in a way as if her only distinctive quality or virtue is to offer pleasure to the active male and she fades away into oblivion soon after the promised pleasure is directed towards the male. Mulvey here ascertains that in order to offer this pleasure to men, women are styled accordingly - as per the norms of a phallogocentric world.

Mulvey alleges that Hollywood cinema arose exclusively on the basis of providing ample space for visual pleasure. She discusses in length the erotic pleasure that emerges through visualisation of women and how far women images had retained the dominant composition of patriarchy. Mulvey reiterates the fact that this imbalance in society is again reincarnated through Hollywood cinema in a wider sense. "However self-conscious and ironic Hollywood managed to be, it has always restricted itself to a formal *mis-eeen-scene* reflecting the dominant ideological concept of cinema" (15).

On one side Mulvey argues that an alternative cinema can challenge the ideology. But on the other hand, she elucidates how Hollywood cinema exacerbates

gender inequality in its worst form. She builds up her essay with this standpoint with the support of theories from Freud and Lacan.

The concepts of Scopophilia (Freudian) and the stage of identification (Lacan) with which Mulvey equates Visual Pleasure is further explored in detail in the following statements.

The Freudian concept of Scopophilia is explored by Mulvey throughout her essay. Mulvey uses Freud's Psychoanalytical theory as a political weapon to testify the patriarchal unconscious which has shaped our minds and our experience in watching cinema. Scopophilia is a term introduced to translate Freud's *Schaulust* which means *the pleasure of looking*. In his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud discussed Scopophilia as an inherent drive placed within the erotogenic zones. In his later work *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, he further developed the fragments of Scopophilia towards the holistic representation of Voyeurism. This trend begins with the infant stage with the desire to know about the private and the forbidden, other people's bodily functions. Freud contemplated Scopophilia as a basic built-in instinct of childhood which provides pleasure by looking into the private moments of others. This continues and develops and evolves into a space of *looking at*, where the thing that is *looked at* becomes the object of focus. The real sense of sublimation arrives when the other object which is viewed, is seen as an erotic object. This tendency is termed as customary unless it takes a voyage into the extreme privacy, where someone can derive pleasure only by looking at, as *Peeping Toms*. Originated as a character from the legend of Lady Godiva, Tom used to watch Godiva naked and thus became a symbolic representation for a male voyeur.

Mulvey advocates that the spying of a private moment of another person in real life is something which will be considered derogatory - an act of shame. But the same spying sets off to be an indispensable element when placed in a cinema hall in the dark, where your eyes can determinably wander through the private moments of others while the screen provides that constructed exclusive private space. Taking her cues from Freud and his terms in Psychoanalysis, she explains the term Scopophilia in relation to cinema. Mulvey believes that a movie theatre is an apt place to ensure Scopophilia since it is a dark room where one spectator is separated from the other giving enough scope for voyeuristic pleasure.

In addition to Scopophilia, Mulvey talks about the phallogocentric world and the castrated woman. Her lack of penis constitutes the castration effect and hence she is decoded to be unpleasurable and can only offer pleasure to the superior presence with the phallus - the man. The lack of penis in a woman thus signifies the sexual difference.

Castration Anxiety is a Freudian theoretical aspect which is the fear of emasculation. Emasculation can be both literal and metaphorical as it is considered as a symbolic universal experience by Freud. Castration Anxiety is an overwhelming fear of damage or loss of penis which is recognised as an unconscious paradigm that sustains in a male. The theory states that this anxiety develops during the infant stage between three to five, which is the phallic development stage. As per Freud, Castration Anxiety is experienced in multiple ways by both males and females. The counterpart of castration anxiety which is seen in females is known as Penis Envy. The Castration Anxiety originated from the Greek storyline of Oedipus through

which Freud introduced the concept of Oedipal Complex. This in turn forms the base for Mulvey's appraisal of the pleasure in narrative cinema.

As per Freud's agreement, Castration Anxiety is ingrained as a feeling that develops in young boys when they witness that the young girls lack the penis and it is a stage in which the boys believe that the girls have lost this as a part of punishment meted out to them and hence they fear of losing their own sexual organ. This theory had been one of the most formidable theories put forward and is still controversial and debated on. A metaphorical castration can make the male feel insignificant and puny. It is a symbolic castration by which they might feel degraded and diminished in their life which is quite detrimental to the ubiquitousness of Castration Anxiety. In a male oriented world, Castration Anxiety is regarded as a threat and the woman thus represents an unconscious threat to the male. "Thus the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is two-fold, she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic" (Mulvey 15).

Once this raising is achieved, she is relegated into the background and she remains only as a memory of maternal plenitude and as the memory of lack. As Freud says, she can never be the meaning, she can only be the bearer of meaning. She is never the maker of meaning because it is always the man who creates and embodies meaning.

According to Mulvey's assessment, the female figure in cinema is a paradoxical one. She signifies attraction but along with that, she plays with the fear of castration. Thus, the male subconscious which has to break free from the fear of

castration can access it only through two strategies. They can either dismantle, crush and ruin her or they can save her as the saviour.

In the first strategy, films are based on voyeurism where the female figure can be tamed, unveiled, demystified or even punished for the fact that she is a woman. Mulvey calls attention to the three films by Alfred Hitchcock to penetrate deep into this voyeurism. They are *Vertigo*, *Rear Window* and *Marnie*. In all these movies, the woman as a signifier of lack, generates Castration Anxiety and is therefore, either tamed or punished. Contrary to this ideology, some Hollywood movies have gone to the other extend of idealisation where the female is idealised to the role of perfection with her innate beauty and inherent virtue where she supersedes the Castration Anxiety and will never pose a threat to men. The woman is thus carved into a highly tempting and desirable figure and enables the male spectators to engage in Fetishistic Scopophilia thereby repressing the fear of castration. Mulvey terms this as Fetishistic Scopophilia. Thus the turn of events become rather reassuring than being dangerous in casting off man's fear of castration. This strategy is actually used by Sternberg in his movie *Morocco*.

Hitchcock uses both Scopophilia and Fetishistic Scopophilia in his movies which makes it furthermore complex. By raising the image to the idealistic, the woman is no more the agent of the guilt but a perfect woman in a perfect body. But even then, she falls a prey to the direct gaze of the spectator. Hitchcock's camera positions are mostly from the perspective of the male protagonist and since the male spectator identifies himself with the hero, the spectator has a full-fledged access to share the uneasy gaze of the hero.

Lacan and the mirror stage of identification forms the second core segment of Mulvey's essay. One of the structural qualities of cinema that the spectator seeks for and cinema offers is identification. Considering Lacan's Mirror stage, Mulvey takes into account how the spectator identifies himself with the character of the movie. This identification is not just looking at another person which is separated from the self, but on the contrary, it is a matter of recognising a character who is like oneself or like one everyone would like to be. Thus, the relationship of a spectator towards the hero in a movie is not that of Scopophilia, but that of identification which is in a way supreme, compared to that of the first order.

Mirror stage is one of the most popular concepts in Psychoanalysis. The concept begins with the belief that infants identify themselves in the mirror as objects inducing apperception right from the age of six months. According to Lacan, the mirror stage is not just a moment or a phase in the life of an infant but is a process of identification which is carried over to his later years too. Thus the mirror stage is a parallel with an imaginary order with a subjective structure. This ideology gets crystallised in his later essay *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire*.

Primary narcissism is a first state, prior to the constitution of the ego and therefore auto-erotic, through which the infant sees his own person as the object of exclusive love – a state that precedes his ability to turn towards external objects. From this ensues the constitution of the ideal ego. Secondary narcissism results from the transfer to the ego of investments in objects in the external world.

Both primary and secondary narcissism seem to be a defence against aggressive drives. (Roudinesco 29)

Lacan, in fact holds on to the shoulders of many previous theorists in forming his concept of the Mirror stage. Darwin's paper *A Biographical Sketch of an Infant* and James Baldwin's paper *Imitation: A Chapter in the Natural History of Consciousness* had discussed the other self or the mirror image as a stage of development in the infantile days of a child long before Lacan came up with the concept.

As Lacan states, the first image that a child sees in the mirror helps him to configure the primary identification as 'I'. The infant identifies with the image and the image serves as a gestalt of the infant's emerging perception of his own childhood. The mirror phase occurs at a time when the child's physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than his own experience of his body.

In the mirror stage, Lacan compressed the two phases into one. At the very moment when the ego is formed by the image of the other, narcissism and aggressivity are correlatives. Narcissism, in which the image of one's own body is sustained by the image of the other, in fact introduces a tension: the other in his image both attracts and rejects me. (Julien 34)

Since the infant's perception is not fully developed and due to his physical vulnerability and weakness, he persistently identifies the mirror image as an ideal image which he tries to attain throughout his life. In other words, the mirror image can be instrumental in identifying another image - the other - throughout the life of the individual. This "other" will perpetually drive the subject to identify the image of self in the external environment that he seeks for in his later life. As Mulvey puts it, this mirror image is the matrix of the imaginary for the child. This Lacanian study has indeed tilted a number of perspectives all through the layers of cultural studies in Britain during the 1970s.

Thus the impact in perceiving a male hero through a screen is undeniably different from the objectification discussed earlier with women. The male protagonist of the narrative is often identified by the male spectator as a surrogate or in a richer sense, as a complete perfect identification with the self.

A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of the motor coordination. (Mulvey 20)

Thus the male figure gets a three-dimensional space in the psyche of the spectator where he internalises the hero's image as his own imaginary image of perfection. The male protagonist articulates the look and creates the action on the

screen. Therefore, a female figure epitomised as a sexual object on screen falls in love with the hero and becomes his sole property. The spectator who identifies himself with the hero takes delight in the heroine in his own private space of the theatre. "By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too" (Mulvey 21). This assumption stands as Mulvey identifies the spectator as a male and not a female. Thus a movie transcends the instinctual (Scopophilia) and the imaginary (self-identification).

Thus, with the conglomeration of Scopophilia as well as Identification reflected in a male spectator, Mulvey concludes her essay by mentioning the male gaze. The Cinematic gaze, as Mulvey puts it, branches into three types of gaze. The first is the gaze through the Camera lens which propels the real network of actions by the female heroine. The second involves the gaze of the male hero within the screen who views the heroine as an object. The third kind of gaze initiates from the male spectator who watches the movie and identifies with the male hero by secretly possessing the heroine in the darkness of the theatre. He observes the heroine within the screen through his Scopophilic voyeurism. All the three gazes are quintessentially masculine in nature and the woman on screen is thus objectified and degraded in every sense.

Mulvey thus brought into light what a cinematic gaze is and how a cinematic gaze is coded just like a systematic language, with its conventions rooted in Patriarchy and masculine authority. Thus, the male gaze is constructed through sadistic voyeurism and Fetishistic Scopophilia. 'What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she

inspires in the hero, or who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance' (Mulvey 19).

Since Mulvey analyses the entire essay from the standpoint of a man, the question as to the effect of the gaze through a female perception remains questionable. Thus, in her essay *Afterthoughts of Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey identifies a trans-sex standpoint where the female spectator shifts from a feminine passive identification to a masculine active identification. The former is the socially accepted mode while the latter is psychoanalytic. However, the paradox stated here by Chapman and Rutuherford is that "most Feminists drew from male psychoanalytic and deconstructive theorists to challenge the phallogocentrism prevailing around them" (7).

Mulvey desired for an alternative cinema far away from Hollywood strategies, which can challenge the hitherto concepts followed by Hollywood. Her essay has voiced the necessity for a theorised female spectatorship wherein feminine roles differed from the age-old conventional systematic showcasing. She concludes her essay with a three-dimensional scope of the gaze: "that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion" (24).

The incessant injustice meted out towards women representations in films had never been interrogated till the dawn of the nineteenth century. However, the advent of theories in the wake of late nineteenth century started challenging the hitherto manifestations of female essence, especially in visual media. Though

cinematic techniques had taken up new shapes, the fortune of women representations continue to remain the same even in the current scenario.

A re-reading of Nolan's female characters in the present scenario is thus possible through the aforesaid features of Mulvey's essay. The pivotal five features of the essay, woman as an object of pleasure, Scopophilia, Narcissistic identification, woman as the image and man as the bearer and the three gazes, when applied with Nolan's female characters can definitely bring forth how puny and how objectified they are in their representations.

Hollywood has always been a pedestal portraying gender segregation. From time immemorial, the onscreen inequality has run rampant in this industry. The concept of the celluloid being, or the glass ceiling still persists in the industry as the women representation still remains scanty in spite of all the progressions and developments in the field of Feminism. Considering a number of scholarly articles and various statistical reports, the field of cinema still remains as a male dominated world. It is crystal clear that this gender difference is not because of the lack of talented or trained women in the field. The gender gap in top film institutions is actually very minuscule but when it comes to the practical field of the Film Industry, the disparity remains intense. As per records, the number of women graduating from these institutions are in fact higher in number compared to the males. But however, when it comes to behind-the-scenes and onscreen-representations, these women just disappear into vacuum. Undoubtedly, it is the gender bias that plays the antagonistic role here. Apart from the provocative exposition of skin and the sidelined role of

supporting the heroic male, a woman's appearance in a movie is rather undersized to the entire narrative.

As per George Gerbner's and Larry Gross' *Cultivation Theory*, continuous exposure to certain cultural codes presented through media will in turn affect the real life experience of the spectator (17). Similarly, the under-representation of women in films can only reiterate the image of a stagnated society where women are denied of their opportunities, unparalleled with their aspirations and capabilities.

E. Ann Kaplan states in her *Introduction to Women in Film Noir* that "one of the depressing aspects of the study of women in art works is the repetition of the same structures, showing the strong hold of patriarchy" (1). Hollywood's hefty tilt towards men and the blatant absence of women has been meandering since the breakthrough of Hollywood movies. Though women occupy roughly half of the world's population in the real world, the depiction of these women within the silver screen is still sparse. The under-representation of women is common in movies all over the globe where they are sidelined either as mothers, wives or girlfriends.

The Bechdel Test, named after the American cartoonist, Alison Bechdel is a litmus test to measure and identify the rendition of women in fiction as well as in media. The test considers if a work features two named, identified women conducting conversation with each other about something other than a man. The test in fact signals the active presence of females in fictions and films to gain attention to existent gender inequality. However, the test results have probably confirmed the fact that the role of women on screen is evidently less. Since the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, their roles in social, cultural, political and economic life has

drastically changed and progressed for the better, seemingly giving women an equal footing to men in most aspects of life. But the male dominance of the film industry, like many other industries around the world, is still evident in the 21st century. While females have made tremendous strides, how much of these progressions have been translated into popular culture and the media we consume regularly? “Radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female” (Kellner 235).

There is nothing astonishing in noting the fact that women roles in movies are always set to traditions. Women either occupy the traditional family role or the role of the giver - the one who sacrifices everything for the dominating male figure. On the other hand, the number of superhero movies tower high in Hollywood where the male characters are raised to magical levels from ordinary status. Hollywood movies like *Superman*, *Batman*, *Captain America*, *Incredible Hulk*, *Fast and Furious*, *James Bond* and many more in the category stands as a testimony to reveal the glorious pedestals to which male heroes are embossed. The role of women does not look considerably substantial even for movies designed for female spectators as they remain in the realms of motherhood, family and marriage, never unfettering themselves from the constraints of society by being dependable on the independent male characters. “Women are portrayed as dependent on other characters, over-emotional, and confined to low-status jobs when compared to enterprising and ambitious male characters” (Bussey and Bandura 1296).

Though not a Litmus test to identify the women screen presence, Jane Wick Phenomena helps us in understanding where we stand with respect to women equality and women liberation. A successful franchise that is remade with women in leading roles is what is called as a Jane Wick Phenomenon. The phenomenon in itself is derogatory as it portrays women as secondary. As Linda Hutcheon mentions in her *Theory of Adaptation*, it is not particularly necessary to consider a work of adaptation as something derogatory or of a secondary status. However, a remake of a successful male oriented movie with females, go through this denigration not once but on a double layer. The women in lead roles stand as an experiment as to which men had already reaped the success part in the earlier released movies. *Ghostbusters* and *Oceans8* are movies reshaped with female heroines and the trend has not brought obvious changes to upgrade the position of women within the screens. Contrary to this, women movies which had been very popular never get converted to men movies later nor do they accept the success of these movies in its real sense.

2017 Blockbuster movies like *Wonder Woman*, *The Beauty and the Beast* and *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* stands as a testimony to prove that female driven movies too can generate box offices. Parallel to these female oriented movies, if we take a look at Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* released in the year 2017, it surprisingly disappoints and disillusion us as there is not a single strong female character present in the war movie except for a nurse who nods and a woman who travels across the English Channel. The film deliberately expunges the female territory and celebrates a male world. What Nolan has reaffirmed here is that the woman in the role of a nurse reiterates the fact that her role is to nurture, to nurse and to calm and

soothe the man - the superior sex. *Dunkirk* is doubtlessly a male movie weighing only to the side of the masculine world. Thus, with each set of progressive foot that is made up through women in films, there comes a bang which effectively pulls down the strings back to the convention.

Cinema, in fact should act as a mirror to the society where the real achievements of women should be focussed in the narrative. However, movies often overburden women with their female roles of nurturing, care-giving and sacrificing mentality wherein their self is completely negated. Thus, a movie in the real sense can either reflect the renewal of an emerging independent woman or will surpass her capabilities and showcase her as an incapable, docile, inefficient woman. "They show us what we are, what we were, and what we could, should, or (do not) want to be. When at their best, movies give birth to new visions of female strength and freedom. At their worst, movies ridicule, denigrate, deny what real women have long achieved, and replace it with spectres from the past" (Kord 18).

Noir Movies of the early decades are no exceptions when it comes to the portrayal of women as mere narrative tools. Most of the movies of Christopher Nolan are deep-rooted within the rudiments of noir structure though they swerve and advance through a different technical aspect designed by Nolan himself. Thus, a methodical analysis of Noir movies and their structure can indeed relate to a number of movies directed by Nolan.

It was during the early 1970's that Noir films sprouted, which characteristically depicted mysterious and minute roles of females in doomed circumstances. Noir Films are a cinematographic genre of films and the term was

applied to a set of American thrillers which were released during the 1940s and 1950s. Literally known as 'Black Cinema', the term Noir was first used by the French critic Nino Frank as he identified how dark and black these movies are. Noir movies are exceptionally regressive when it brushes up the female orb and often plunges these female characters to death in order to monopolise the male. The autonomy of her body which represents both sociological and symbolical labyrinths are constituted by branding her as the radical diabolic force which ultimately needs to be suppressed. These insidious constraints fettered the feminine susceptibility through sexual objectification as well as the perverted courtship of desire and pain.

According to Andrew Spicer, the author of *Film Noir*, the articulation of the patriarchy in film Noir is understood as one of the style's most consistent features, no matter to which decade the film belonged to. The Post World War II saw a decade in which women were pressurised to get back to home even after gaining emancipation in work places. The feminine psycho-sexuality depicted in movies like *Phantom Lady*, *The Big Sleep* and *The Reckless Moment* reveals the sexual narratives portrayed through women characters. The Noir movies of the earlier period were often dark movies relying on dark, mysterious themes, often creating a negative effect and ending with an unhappy tilt.

Christopher Nolan's first movie *Following*, released in 1998 is indeed built on the heels of many relative Noir Movies such as *The Usual Suspects* in 1994 by Bryan Singer, *Seven* in 1995 by David Fincher and *L.A. Confidential* in 1999 by Curtis Hanson. Nolan's Neo-Noir adhere to most of the explicit features of Noir films except for the sexual portrayal of the females in the vivid sense. Though not

vivid, the erotic ambiguity established through the movies of Nolan are desirably undesirable. Nolan's female characters are more or less demarcated by sexuality though with different undertones. This sexuality in turn paves way to display more flesh. "The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her... on the street, men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh" (Beauvoir 333).

Janey Place's *Women in Film Noir* is one of the most evocative essays on gender and sexuality. Place, through her essay narrates the characteristics of the women in Film Noir and how her representation is again meant for the rooted stability of the male protagonist in the movie. She explains the hidden configuration of a female sinner in Film Noir through the movie *Double Indemnity*. Place begins her essay thus.

Film noir is a male fantasy, as is most of our art. Thus woman here as elsewhere is defined by her sexuality: the dark lady has access to it and the virgin does not. That men are not so deterministically delineated in their cultural and artistic portrayal is indicative of the phallogentric cultural viewpoint: women are *defined in relation* to men, and the centrality of sexuality in this definition is a key to understanding the position of women in our culture. The primary crime the 'liberated' woman is guilty of is refusing to be defined in such a way, and this refusal can be perversely seen (in art, or in life) as an attack on men's very existence. Film noir is hardly 'progressive' in these terms – it does not present us with role models

who defy their fate and triumph over it. But it does give us one of the few periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful, if destructively so, and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality. (47)

The structure of the Noir has been designed in such a way as to reflect the gender hegemony in an aesthetically fit manner. The false archetype of women as the harbinger of all evil, constitute the crux of Noir movies. According to Place, there are basically two archetypal females portrayed in art as the two extreme bands: the whore and the Madonna. The first connote a diabolical force which stands totally against the patriarchal structure while the latter strongly identifies with the male dominated world and is an idealised woman who can supplement traditional values for her man and her family. Family, which is recognised as the cornerstone of social traditions and values, reinstates the patriarchal order and thus a woman restricted within the walls of the family is an idealised woman and thus termed as a Madonna - the maternal virgin. The Whore, on the other hand is a *Femme Fatale* - the spider woman who hovers around the man with her web of sexual powers only to trap the ideal man.

The concept of a family reiterates the father as the head of the family and the mother as the care-taker under the control of the father - her husband. Thus, gender roles are specifically assigned, the moment we use the term *Family*. To supplement to this structural hegemony, the Noir Film does not discuss family in its ancient concept. Instead, a Noir, a rebellion against the structural base of a family will ultimately bring upon destruction. The Family here is a large metaphor for a

patriarchal society. The Film showcases the consequences when there is not a family and how you might be trapped within the dark hands of a Femme Fatale in the absence of the family. Place, in fact, draws strong lines of her observation through Noir Film to talk about the specific features of women characterisations in Noir.

The Spider woman is in fact an independent woman aware of her mind and body and is definitely stronger and more independent than the docile maternal figure. Femme Fatale in French means *A Deadly Woman*. This indeed resonates the earlier discussed Castration Anxiety in the hero. It is this active independence of the Spider woman which is considered as a threat to the social order of patriarchy. She is powerful to break the concept of society and she can rise her self to the most prominent levels. This mysterious, duplicitous woman is an icon of tough-sweet character traits. She is capable of her active skill and she is independent to use her sexual skills unlike the maternal figure who knows only to direct her powers of love and sex towards the single owner of her, who possesses her completely. Mary Ann Doane defines the Femme Fatale as, “a figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma (whose) most striking characteristic, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be; [she] transform[s] the threat of the woman into a secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered” (1).

Though the Femme Fatale is regarded as an object of sexual desire, at the same time, she is juxtaposed with her hardworking, ambitious nature. Unlike the submissive female heroines, a Femme Fatale has the power to take control of the entire sequences in which she is present. She even controls the hero she is with and

thus controls the camera focus too. She is highlighted in the scenes and her visual presence is inevitable in a Noir film. She is mostly dressed up in masculine costumes and uses cigarettes and guns which are in fact phallic symbols. Nevertheless, saving the hero from the hands of this hellish force turns obligatory and ultimately this female presence is destroyed by the male. Thus, killing the spider woman is unavoidable as to retain and bring back the order of the patriarchal structure. Her destruction brings back the ideal man to the roots of the so-called family - the base of patriarchal representations.

The ideal man is in fact intimidated by the presence of this active woman as she is more active and independent and is capable of wielding her power to the targets. The cinematic style of Film Noir, although problematic, given its glorification of white female golden beauty, gives an active, intelligent symbol of a female character, which is empowering and both relatable for women. According to Janey Place, "there is a threat to the male that women are conducting when they are in opposition the female expectation or standard, which is understood, in a dramatic way, a threat to man's existence" (47).

The man who cannot surpass the complexity of this active female has nothing else, but to destroy her to go beyond her excellence. The extension of a masculine tint in her character makes the man feel more dread than desire in her and it is only through ambushing her that the man can triumph the Femme Fatale. Thus, the fate of a Femme Fatale is in no way different as she consequently turns out to be an aesthetic prop in the hands of the hero for his sake.

Place's essay has given rigorous undertones in evaluating the features of a woman character in a Film Noir. The major features including the unusual independence of the Femme Fatale, her non-traditional symbolic iconography, the false value systems in which she remains and the contrast with the archetype of the Nurturing women can be re-read in terms of Nolan's female characters. A reading through the ideology of Place can doubtlessly systematise the positioning of the women in Nolan's movie and how their active presence is subtly pushed off through Nolan's unparalleled directorial skill. However, Place strongly argues about the strength of these non-traditional characters and believes that they leave a lasting image in the memory of the spectators. "It is her strength and visual texture that is inevitably printed in our memory, not her ultimate destruction" (63).

Though women occupy roughly half of the world's population in the real world, the depiction of these women in the silver screen is still scanty. Gingered by the miasma of gender inequality, women's standpoints have always been a submerged pick beyond the ambit of conclusions. As Humm puts it, "Feminism has no single vision, although it is a visionary way of seeing" (3). The powerlessness and ostracism experienced by women through the inequality of hegemonic structures in reality had been one of the fundamental causes for the diminutive female roles on screen.

It was Gaile Simone, one of the most discussed popular American writers of comic books, who first coined the term "Women in Refrigerators" during an online conference on comic books. The term recalls a fictional incident in *Green Lantern* by Ron Marz, where the hero, Kyle Raynor, finds in his apartment, his girlfriend

Alexandria DeWitt, who had been brutally killed and stuffed inside the refrigerator by the villain Major Force. Since then, there developed a catalogue of female fictional characters who had either been murdered, depowered or maimed and used as a mere flashback agency alone to push the story line of the male figure. The untimely and icky end of female characters is thus an idea totally conceivable in the present scenario rather than being put to questions. WIR or Women in refrigerators was a website launched by Simone in 1999 to discuss the disappearing women in the comic series. Similar to the silver screens, the comic series also witnessed an abundance of female deaths, rapes and disappearance while the males retained their presence in spite of all odds in the plot device. The egregious trope of Refrigerated Women has been put to analysis since 1999 even with respect to Hollywood movies.

Irrespective of the country of origin or language of origin, movies replace the same ideology everywhere around the globe. Cinema, which actually should be reformative in a society, instead, becomes a microcosm of the society archiving the patriarchal, gender roles in more typified scaling assortments. However, the greatest blow to women comes from Hollywood as it is seen as a firmament of universal benchmark to which the progress of women in visual media is judged across the world. When Hollywood fails to intervene or to take necessary amendments in its cast, the reiteration of the same phenomena around the globe automatically goes unnoticed. The actress Geena Davis says in an Interview thus: “What are we saying to kids when the female characters are Hyper-sexualised, narrowly stereotyped, or not even there? The message clearly is girls are not as important as boys, women are not as important as men, and they take this all in unconsciously” (Conor).

Hollywood had never been kind to women, and it swings heavily in favour of men. Early Noirs have already imprinted the negative roles of women and the stereotypes have been cast immensely as female representations since then. The countless sexual abuses and allegations that have sprinted out recently adds up to the necessity in analysing and revamping the mechanisms in Hollywood. In spite of innumerable efforts for a progressive society with equal status for men and women, Hollywood has always lit up its light to guard and idolise the male heroes. The elimination of women from independent and ambitious roles and the pigeonholing of women as objects become a common scene in the platform of Hollywood. However, the consequences of being objectified is not minor for they pose an uncertain threat to the entire society through a set of false values.

Sexual Objectification is one such mechanism which relegates the role of women to background and projects them as pure material objects. Being a strong leaf in the pages of Feminism, Sexual Objectification instigates and further fuels the gender inequality remaining in a society by posing serious physical and mental issues to the women thereby providing more chances for men to testify their tyranny and violence on women. Germaine Greer opines that, “Every human body has its optimum weight and contour, which only health and efficiency can establish. Whenever we treat women's bodies as aesthetic objects without function we deform them” (176). Objectification theory has been the most utilised theory in judging the ontological positioning of women as a sexual, erotic object in movies. Objectification in a metaphorical sense is an equivalent to ‘dehumanisation’. Sexual

objectification in media can range from a complete lack of female characters to explicit sexual content of women through stripping, prostitution and pornography.

Proposed by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997, Objectification theory is a framework for understanding the experiences of women in cultures that sexually objectify them. The essay *Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks* was initially published in the journal, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. The theory claims that the women who view females who are sexually objectified, try internalising those perspectives into their personal psyche unknowingly. This makes a woman alienate her own body from herself and to view it as a tool meant to satisfy the whims and fancies of the men. The result of this self-objectification is the rocketed feelings of shame, decreased state of inspiration and a sense of lack in being aware of oneself. On an individual level, women objectification can lead to body shaming including eating disorders, cosmetic surgeries, dieting and exercising. But on a social level, it has far reaching consequences wherein the sexist culture is reshaped and thrust into the veins of a society to believe that it is right.

A study of sexual objectification will ultimately lead us to analyse, intervene, understand and examine a woman's life in a socio-cultural context. An objectified female's worth is assessed only through her physical beauty and her capabilities as a human being goes unnoticed and unappreciated. Thus a woman is identified only through her physical, palpable aspect and the rest of her charm stinks and remains unidentified.

Admiration for a woman's body and objectification of a woman's body has a thin line of difference and the area is often gray. A single glance in itself is a powerful tool of intimidation to make a woman feel unsafe. According to *Objectification Theory* published by Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in *Psychology of Women Quarterly* back in 1997, sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are isolated from her whole and complex being and treated as objects simply to be looked at, coveted, or touched. On the other hand, the admiration towards a woman's body is defined differently because it is an admiration towards the whole of a woman's body including her mental traits like skills, brilliance, humour etc. and is not directed towards any of her body parts or its functions distinctive from its whole. The moment when you start visualising a woman by disintegrating into her different body parts without seeing her as a whole, that moment is described as the moment of objectification of a woman's body.

The Objectification of women have extended in an exorbitant rate that we often tend to forget that objectification happens since we have embedded objectification too much into our socio-cultural practice of day to day life. As media plays a decisive role in shaping the structure of the society, the objectification of women through movies have indeed cast a reflective stigma in the society against women. Irrespective of the efforts of feminist theorists and feminist movements, the Objectification of women through visual media is still all pervasive and the masculine force in film industry is bound to please the men-force outside industry through this mechanical use of women images. "If future direct tests of

objectification theory produce further evidence to support it, then the most important contribution of the theory may be to prompt individual and collective action to change – minimally to diversify – the meanings our culture assigns to female body” (Fredrickson and Roberts 197-198).

Many cultural critics have accused mass media and visual media for promoting the objectification of women. Most of the Hollywood movies are also designed in such a way as to promote this objectification and please the male hub. Christopher Nolan’s movies also have geared on in the same track though direct objectification does not really happen in many occasions. However, the implicit idea conveyed is the same giving a real negative impact on both the male and the female spectators.

Fredrickson and Roberts define the theoretical impacts of Objectification through five different features - how body is constructed in a social level, how women are treated as objects, how visual inspection or gaze of the body happens, how visual media enhances this male gaze and how this objectification can ultimately cause self-objectification in women. When studied in the light of these arguments, undoubtedly, the movies of Nolan offers a strong negative impact in the audience which can inadvertently stir up male violence towards women in the society.

A film director is a live human lens who sprinkles life and translates the script to the screen by his magical renditions. As Movies can bestow us with food for thought, they can even push us to the realms of perplexing disconnected spokes where they get linked in the conscious strata of the audience in jumbled latitudes.

A single Christopher Nolan film is a puzzle. What, then, can we make of ten? From *Following* (1998) to *Interstellar* (2014) - from a three-minute, thousand-dollar movie set in a cramped apartment and shot in grimy black and white, to a three-hour epic with a \$165m budget, which starts in widescreen cornfields, then soars into space - what do we see, and what can we hope to solve, when we examine the collected cinema of Christopher Nolan ? (Furby and Joy 9)

Nolan makes his movies for global audiences, grounding them in the real world, even though they hinge on wholly fictional concepts. Audacious enough to push his storyline to challenge the audience, he stands out amongst the greatest filmmakers of our time. However, the unmistakable absence of women in the movies of Christopher Nolan corroborates how they decode the messages of patriarchy to the heterogeneous audience visually. The women in his movies are either dead or killed or sidetracked and are almost unheard and unseen in the long movie script where masculine action continuously flourishes. With the elements of Noir movies reconstructed by Nolan, the explicit sexual display of female characters are comparatively less. But there are indeed occasions where they serve the purpose of display alone.

Most of the characters in Nolan's movies are perfect models of womanhood, especially on a physical basis. Older women are technically away from his movies while older men do enjoy powerful roles as confidantes and mentors of the heroes. The evaluative attention that the women in his movies enjoy are undoubtedly due to their youth and beauty. Nolan's heroines are always well dressed in their body-

hugging attires with pointed stilettos reminding us of the mannequins. They do etch a model of physical perfection in the mindset of the audience. A subversion of this physical representation is what Fredrickson and Roberts dreamt for through their writing. Movies do initiate the young generation into a false world where their ideology on sexuality culminates with women being treated as an object.

The sexual objectification of women is not absolutely nil in the movies of Nolan and he uses them through their demise, to exemplify his male roles. Thus, the absence of the female figures is intensified and vividly noticed as he makes his male characters remain strong in the limelight with unbeatable potentials. Though Nolan cannot be completely accused of being a misogynist, yet it has to be noted that there is a repeated stretch of characters instituted by him reinforcing the patriarchal social hegemony. His films are anti-feministic, and the women characters are somehow wiped off from the main game-plan of his movies. When placed in the larger context of the cultural and social hub, his women characters fail to come forth with valid relevance and power unlike his male protagonists.

Nolan's feminine characters feature as the 'Damsel in Distress' and the male heroes are always in the backdrop of 'The Lost Lenore' (Farah). The Damsel is a coinage in early French Literature and British Literature. The Damsel recreates the power struggle in the society which in turn refurbishes the inferiority of women. Women in Nolan's movies act as protégées, catalysts who draw a motive towards the hero for the rest of his life. The new wave of Noir termed as Neo-Noir definitely runs in Nolan's blood where women are depicted in darker light as perfectly dubious and uncertain in their character sketches.

Nolan's movies have even been described as the 'Dead Wives Club' spanning to the disappearance of the female characters. Most of his heroes are already in pain losing their counterparts as the movie begins where as in some others, they lose their wives half way through the movie. Anyhow, the conspicuous absence of the female character has been a phenomenon mandatory in Nolan's movies.

Leaping to the big screens with lauded applauses, Nolan's movies had been received and appreciated by the heterogenous audience group all over the world for his complex heroes. However, his female characters are often cast off with minimum characterisation and dialogues. They appear in minimal roles either as a part of flashback scenes or in the unknown unconscious strata of the protagonist thereby showcasing themselves as weak and powerless. The quest here is to bring out those female manifestations of the movies in connection with the storyline.

Auric Goldfinger, the fictional character in *James Bond* once said, "Mr Bond, they have a saying in Chicago. Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. The third time it's enemy action" (Fleming 47). Consequently, we feel this as a deliberate innate action by the director, casting off the female versions in his movies.

Nolan has portrayed around sixteen women characters scaling from The Nameless Blonde in *Following* to Brand in *Interstellar*. Through these movies, he has delineated characters ranging from spider women (femme fatale/ seductress), unexciting wives, obstinate daughters, demanding partners and incorrigible girlfriends to boring scientists and nagging spouses. In a modern backdrop where women's lived experience prove to glorify the political, social and economic

participation they have blended in with, the under-sized female representation in the movies of a British filmmaker like Nolan keeps the audience puzzled.

Thus, to conclude, it is understood that Nolan tactfully plays with the gender subtleties and feminine susceptibility and thereby reinforce the patriarchal tunes to the society through his well-knit movies.

Gender, as socially constructed embodies it, not the reverse. Women and men are divided by gender, made into the sexes as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality, which institutionalise male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. If this is true, sexuality is the linchpin of gender equality.

(Mackinnon 533)

Despite being prioritised as an auteur in every post-modern sense, his representation of the archetypes undeniably continues. Though a perfectionist and a classicist, Nolan turns out to be cold and emotionally icy as with the depiction of the women characters. Nolan, indisputably, is one of the high-grossing directors in Hollywood industry. When a Director's choice of characters and dialogues infiltrate the psyche of the cinematic audience, his/her ideas sprinkled in the movies gradually turn out to be the law for the fan crowd. This situation can be inspiring as well as awed, depending on the permissible characterisation and context he/she spawns. Nolan's influence in modern cinema is unmistakable as he has a significant orbit of layering his movies and offering the fragments which finally gets hemmed by the audience.

His male characters, however tough their life turns to be, get a chance to recoup and return to life. The heroes are thus redeemed heroes. The females on the other hand vanish without reasons into emptiness. One of the most pertinent components of Nolan's cinema is how the heroes overcome their fractured mind and turn back to reality. The heroes are offered chances and choices one after the other until they get into the desirable track of life. Masculine heroism and masculine prowess get projected throughout the sequences.

The polyphonic voices, the hybridity in the structure, multiple perspectives and modern cinematic styles should have actually ensured more with the women representations, but unfortunately the answer to Nolan's movies is a big 'no'. Nolan's anti-heroes too never leave unrecognised. His anti-heroes, namely, Joker and Harvey Dent had reaped accolades beyond imagination. The iconic performance of the Australian actor Heath Ledger has pocketed the Academy Award for the best Supporting Actor. The affinity of the world towards violence is once again stabilised when the psychopath, schizophrenic, mass murderer - Joker is seen winning the hearts of many and grabbing a distinguished award.

A survey of Christopher Nolan's movies will reaffirm the fridging of these female characters and the thesis attempts in drawing conclusions by studying the characters in the light of the theoretical frameworks discussed above. A re-reading of the movies through the lens of Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* and Janey Place's essay *Women in Film Noir* will spill light into the current scenario of women positioned in movies and enable us to take further steps to improve their portrayal and to eliminate the objectification of women in movies. The

Objectification Theory of Fredrickson and Roberts will substantiate the above said theories and connect them to women's lived experience and the damaging effects of objectification in our society.

The following three chapters will examine the nine movies of Christopher Nolan, specifically the heroines and the supporting women characters. His latest and the tenth movie *Dunkirk* hardly gets pictured in the context of Refrigeration since there are no female representations at all in this war-movie. The upcoming chapters will be assessing the stereotypes in which the female characters were cast and sets forth to break them free from the gendered mould in which Nolan placed them up for the gratification of the audience.

Analysis in the following chapters further explores Nolan's application of women archetypes to demonstrate his powerless women against his superheroes. The utilisation of camera perceptions, cinematic techniques and lighting further aids in studying them closely. The canvas of transience in which these women are placed will be gauged from diverse angles to recreate the warp and woof of their self which conceptually and theoretically surpass the ordinary male characters of the movies. The unprecedented glorifications bestowed upon the male characters and the ignorance of the mettle of each woman character will be thus discussed. A resurrection of these female characters will indeed create a new arena of space for the women in the industry to shake themselves off from the mainstream roles of being fixed within the male institutions of marriage, motherhood and family. The thesis aims at a sweeping change in the outlook of the society we dwell in, through which a woman can be ultimately seen and named better as a human being rather

than a female. A heightened sense of awareness at the least can check the damaging effects on women prevailing today through media images.

Though Nolan is not aggressive in depicting his women through violent and brutish sexual images, he figures them through subtle subjugation in a method of his own. But unfortunately, when placed within the larger context of the society, these movies can induce a potentially harmful message. An intellectual band of audience can easily distinguish the consequences and thus the movies will not alter or frame their positive beliefs. But the inexperienced and uneducated viewers, who are ripe for manipulation can be easily deceived with these images. Consequently, the depressing reality is that the majority of viewers are stuck within this immature group. The *Objectification Theory* thus discusses the disparaging effects of objectification on women while internalising these portrayed images, which can further enhance a kind of self-objectification on themselves which will truly bring multiple negative effects.

In a more complacent way, we can argue that Nolan is beyond the conceptualisation of misogyny and gendered representations when we comprehend the elliptical plots as a plot that plods after the death of a female love interest thereby kicking of the subsequent guilt in the hero. But, the continuous usage of the same theme, fixing its foundation in dead and buried females over two decades in around ten of his movies can be criticised as ultimate lethargy. This is not exactly what the society seeks for nor asks for from an auteur director who has full-fledged freedom to create and recreate liberation in his own terms.

Soaring high in its non-linear construction and hovering around the ground of male glorification, Nolan has often gone into oblivion regarding the facets of female presentation. When his men steal away the show, his women surge behind the curtains fading into shadows. Once we finish watching these movies, what is left with us is indeed the brooding sense of a disoriented hub, rotting into nothingness.

The upcoming chapters will discuss in detail the refrigeration of Nolan's female characters. The literal as well as the metaphorical refrigeration will be dealt with linking it with the theoretical spokes in Feminist Film Theory and women's lived experience in society. A detailed exploration will indisputably bring in the mettle of these female characters had they been alive in the movies. The thesis foregrounds the historical context of woman's liberation in accordance with Feminism and Film Theory and the findings break from the ideologies that dominate the field suggesting for a new framework of justice to women.

The bold and distinctive movies would have been read differently if the women characters had given a key to more screen presence. The chapters will decipher the worth of these females and bring forth the ideology of inculcating an equal reverence and standpoint for women in the society. Thus, we can remind ourselves the words said by Raja Rao while illustrating the significance of women in this world.

Woman is the earth, ether, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, The articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge; woman is fire, Movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; The woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra, she is

Varuna, to Indra, she is Agni, to Rama, she is Sita, and to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breath, touch, and act, woman that reminds man of that which he is and reminds her through him of that which she is. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, and the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born , woman rules, for it is she the universe. (357)

Chapter Two

Resuscitating the Archetypes: The Femme Fatale, the Redeemer & the Insignificant

Christopher Nolan is one of the directors who has manifested himself from the margins of British cinema to the blockbusters of Hollywood classics in the span of a decade. Nolan's fully-developed explorations in the field of filmmaking has helped him reap gargantuan scales of success than any other contemporary of his time. Nolan's films have been stable and steady through a span of twenty years which began from his incredibly low-budget feature-length movies into his high-grossing blockbusters. Not all directors possess the punch to design and bring forth what they really want in their movies. However, Nolan had been with a razor-sharp focus in his directorial flexibility in creating his independent storyline in realistic backgrounds. The whack with which he materialises his meandering narrations, his all-pervasive backdrops, the mindgames that could nonplus the audience and the labyrinths of visuals push him to stand out from his contemporary directors. Nolan got his foot in the door with his initial movie *Following* in the year 1998. Nolan's crowning as one of the most beloved filmmakers in the era is not something that stuck him magically through filmic ladder, but on the other hand was an incremental flow of characters and storylines through a consistent pattern of trust which he built up within his massive audience. On a visceral level, his movies are inclinations towards human psyche and fascinations as well as its complexities and manoeuvres. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, his "ability to combine box-office success

with artistic ambition has given him an extraordinary amount of clout in the industry” (Fritz).

The visual language of Nolan’s cinema has always been autonomous in its take while clubbing it with its narrative elements. The shifting narrations, evocative portrayals, realistic film locations, hand-held camera work, graphic light shifting techniques and nonlinear story telling has always placed him with a distinct halo, relatively diverse from other directors of his time. Being one of the most influential directors of the twenty first century, Nolan’s movies have bagged multiple Academy awards in the past many years. A spin of 34 nominations in the Academy Awards and a win of ten out of that, Nolan began his career with the release of his short film *Doodlebug*. His accelerating journey from *Doodlebug* to *Dunkirk* has been commendable though his visions pertaining to certain aspects remain unchanged amidst a span of twenty years. Geoff Andrew of the British Film Institute (BFI) and regular contributor to the *Sight & Sound* magazine, called Nolan "a persuasively inventive storyteller", singling him out as one of the few contemporary filmmakers delivering highly personal films within the prevailing Hollywood structure (Andrew).

Nolan’s movies, in fact, can be categorised into three levels. As per his filmography, his first three movies almost resemble feature movies with much less technical features of modern cinema. His movies have then slowly scaled through cinematic techniques into commercial movies capturing millions of hearts through his trilogy of Batman. His later trio indeed infiltrated the most puzzling moments to the audience by jamming them through delusions and reality simultaneously

jeopardising the set patterns of modern cinematic views. It is not quite surprising to know that Nolan's movies cannot be grasped in its full measure in one watch. Each time his movies are screened, new strophes of meanings break through, different from what the audience had presumed with the earlier watch. This indeed is the spice of Nolan's movies.

The aim of this thesis is not just to chronicle the achievements of Christopher Nolan as a director through the years or to analyse how far Nolan has come with his films, but to examine how close he stays with a few of his predilections such as the recurring dead females and the superheroic men even in today's films. And among those inclinations, lie the pivotal thread of the thesis - his female characterisation.

However, his inclination towards the refrigeration of women in all of his movies is evident. Beginning from *Following*, his approach towards female characterisation remains unchanged. A re-reading of his female characterisations through the theoretical framework of Feminism, Film Theory and women's lived experience in current society will establish new lights and claim a new pedestal of justice for women.

Nolan's movie list commences with the dark Noir debut *Following* in 1998. Film Noir, a distinct genre of films, dealt with Hollywood's crime drama, emphasising cynical attitudes and sexual motivations. The anti-hero, the Femme Fatale and the dark ambience of fear and pain inculcated a special sense of feeling for the audience. Though the genre was highly unrecognised in the early 19th century, Film Noir emerged in French movies and was termed as Noir Films for the first time by Nino Frank in 1946.

This movie was followed by *Memento* in 2000 which granted him with numerous accolades for its non-linear narration and convoluted plot. 2002 witnessed the release of *Insomnia* - a thriller set in Alaska rewriting the story of a cop. The year 2005 began with the Batman series intro-movie titled as *Batman Begins* which was followed by *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) blending action sequels as well as scrabbles of suspense and chilling thrills. 2006 brought forth one of the classics directed by Nolan which was titled as *Prestige*, showcasing the mystery drama and a magical extravaganza through rivalry and unfathomable illusions. *Inception* released in 2010 depicted a mishmash of human dreams in layers, in linkage with Freud's psychoanalytical themes put into practical filmmaking sequences, having the added advantage of the star cast with Leonardo DiCaprio as Cobb in its lead role. A two-year break in his film career gave him the opportunity to get back to the industry with *Interstellar* in 2014, an engaging science fiction developed in the light of experimented and researched scientific theories. Meanwhile, *Dunkirk*, Nolan's latest movie in 2017 discusses the horrifying effects of war through its three-dimensional narrative plot.

Even with a chain of ten movies to his personal directorial bank, the dearth of female presentation in Nolan's movies remain a mystery. His first set of movies displayed a very minimum of female characterisation when the role of men had a substantial visibility during the screen time. While *Batman Series* saw a considerable increase in the number of women characters, the ultimate destiny to which they had been tied to, remained the same. His latest trio though portrays skilled, educated modern ladies in full dimensions, the movies finally retrace its

steps towards the regressive state of pushing the females back to the dark. Though there is an accomplished Magician, a skilled architect and a sophisticated Scientist in his later three movies, they do typically fall before the sturdy male characterisation seeking their advice and statements of wisdom. In a nutshell, with the advancement in cinematic techniques and Nolan's brilliance in shaping the arcs of his directorial execution over a period of more than twenty years, his females still stumble over the narrative progression.

There is definitely a massive gulf between the producing cost of the movies, the new cinematic techniques, his auteur persona and the thematic structures from *Following* to *Dunkirk*. The phenomena of 'Less-women on the screen' persists and it is all the more framing up vigorously with each of his movies. The total absence or complete elimination of women in *Dunkirk* is indeed an issue serious for the current scenario. The claim that a war movie does not require women sounds rather absurd since there were a number of war movies with very many strong women characterisations. Movies like *Wings* (1927), *Rome, Open City* (1945), *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), *Julia* (1977) and many more stand as a testimony to prove strong women characterisations during wartime. Nolan pushes women from his storylines and the attempt has to be assessed as a deliberate move since this is visibly articulated in all of his movies consistently and continuously. The continuity can be traced down from *Following* to *Dunkirk* in a very balanced way, never making his men characterisations at stake and casting off the females at the cost of his heroes. Irrespective of their identity, profession, wisdom, brilliance and strength, they gradually fade off from the main plot and as the movie ends, the spectator leaves the

theatre with a shade of these women never to be remembered again. The lightings, the camera shots, the dialogues, the costume and even the minute structure in which they are moulded, speak volumes about how these women are overshadowed both through filmic technicality as well as cinematic performance.

Nolan's movies tend to be anti-feministic in many aspects and they do convey the same message irrevocably in all of his movies. The repeated trajectory that Nolan uses in his movies remain the same, though the mechanisms differ with each of his movies. However, the women in his movies stay unchanged and occupy roughly the same position in each one of them. The Noir elements that he fixes in his movies, at times gives a strong characterisation for them. But however, in due course, their sturdiness gets diluted and is again relegated to the background.

This chapter focusses on the delineation of female characters by Nolan in his initial set of three movies namely *Following* (1998), *Memento* (2000) and *Insomnia* (2002). Before sweeping into the blockbuster success story, the first three movies of Nolan gave him a platform to fixate his imprint in the film industry. This can be considered as his embryonic phase where he began to sketch his female characters. A profound dissection of the movies in the light of theoretical substructure including Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* and Janey Place's essay *Women in Film Noir* will further magnify the seriousness of the disappearing women in Nolan's movies. Rather than ruining the contrivance within his films, a scrutiny of these female characters will make us think and assess the movies in a different frame of mind. *Objectification Theory*, a concept that dehumanises the relevance of female susceptibility, suggests the need for making the society understand the

mechanism behind degrading women and the necessity to curb this societal tendency. Fredrickson's and Robert's essay on *Objectification Theory* will further supplement towards the consequences of such women portrayals in society on a global level.

Following remains as the fulcrum on which Nolan boomed into the Film Industry though it was completely funded and filmed by Nolan himself on a meagre budget. The movie was even claimed to be a leaner and meaner version of the Hitchcock classics. Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* was impressed with its "spare look" and agile hand-held camerawork, saying, "As a result, the actors convincingly carry off the before, during and after modes that the film eventually, and artfully, weaves together" (Morgenstern). It was *Following's* victorious ratings which gave Nolan the opportunity to do *Insomnia* in the year 2002. Based on Nolan's own experience of living in London, he tracked the storyline of *Following* with a hero who is a budding writer.

The story of *Following* unfolds as the hero trails strangers to get hold of fresh materials for his first novel which ultimately clasps him through the doors of an underworld, making him face the music. The hero starts following strangers and finally ends up meeting a young man named Cobb - a serial burglar. Along with Cobb, the hero undertakes a number of burglary and gets impressed with the life style of Cobb. Cobb teaches the hero that his intention is not really to rob but to give the shock of a robbery to the victims. He also adds that they take it away only to show them what they had. Thrilled by the actions of his new friend, the hero changes his appearance and assumes the name of 'Daniel Lloyd' based on the credit card

given by Cobb and begins a relationship with a Blonde whose flat he and Cobb burgled once. With a series of complicated events, the hero comes to know later that he had been manipulated by the Blonde along with Cobb. It is only a little further that it is understood that the Blonde too gets killed and is also tricked by Cobb. As the story ends, the hero gets arrested for the murder of the Blonde, a crime which he has not committed while Cobb vanishes into the crowd.

Though the movie excels in its choice of Nolan's visual artistry, the edgy Noir tones, flash forwards, white and black photography and a promising gratification one would derive from a movie, the patchy shades of women disappearing from shadows to silhouettes and from silhouettes to oblivion commences right from this first movie. The range of presence of the female characters as well as the stance through which they are drawn, leans back to the conventional mode of patriarchal undertones. The seventy-minute movie testifies the truth that Nolan disliked the presence of women in his creations. However, he had to create them only to instigate and motivate the men of his movies. An assessment of the female presence in this Noir movie will make Nolan's intentions more vivid. His inclination towards making women secondary in movies begins right from *Following*.

Nolan had always been frugal in sketching women characters and the scarcity is very much visible in his first movie *Following*. *Following* sketches only one principal female character though there are two more lady figures who appear in the movie without any specific prominence, only to reiterate the values of patriarchy. Apart from the heroine of the movie - an unidentified Blonde, there are

two more characters designed as mere revenants. There is a waitress who appears for a moment and a lady whom the male characters meet with, inadvertently in just two scenes. *Following* is basically a male-oriented movie and the only visible female character has been loaded with nothing but diabolical qualities only to enrich the audience with more contempt towards her rather than any appreciation or reverence. The women of Nolan is a pastiche of the undertones of gender hegemony as well as hierarchical subordination. An exploration of these characters will redefine the ideas that Nolan ever wanted to translate to the outer world.

Actress Lucy Russel plays the role of the Nameless Blonde in Nolan's *Following*. She is one character who is indispensable for the plot. Nevertheless, she is the least significant character as it is rendered by Nolan in the movie. Hollywood genres often intersect with the audience expectation through repetitive storylines and familiar plots though in diverse methods according to the range of different directors. However, the final product that appears on screen most necessarily trickle towards the stereotypical representation of women as subordinates. An analysis of the Nameless Blonde in *Following* can thus configure the inner layers of the director's cinematic landscape and how this female character turns out to be a harbinger in triggering the creation of many more females in the same set pattern.

Cinema on a global level has always been about men. In such a scenario, the presence of a woman character goes unnoticed right from its screenplay to the screen. A woman is in fact inserted into the screenplay only to serve the varied platitudes of men and to evoke sensation in the male audience. A specific re-reading of the Nameless Blonde in association with the postulations put forward by

Feminism and Film Theories will prove to a certain extent about how irrelevant female characterisations become within the filmic landscape of Nolan - the acclaimed filmmaker. A rigorous reading of Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* regarding 'women screen presence' facilitates to look into the character in a more deep-seated level. The disparaging vitiation in clipping the wings of women characters through Noir movies can also be put to use in connection with the female characters in *Following*.

In a scenario where a lot of debates and discussions hail upon with the current issue of one's identity, a filmmaker has the greatest responsibility to prove about those terms through his storylines as well as character delineation. Unfortunately, Nolan's first feature length movie *Following* pictures a female character with no specific name or singular identity. She is defined throughout the movie as the "Blonde" - one of her physical attributes. Her wisdom, her intellect or any of her abstract attributes are not defined at all throughout the movie. Instead, her physical aspect reigns high and is acknowledged to enormous terms.

According to Mulvey, Hollywood Cinema which is apparently phallogentric, represents women only as objects for pleasure designed for men. The presence of a woman on screen thus equates with the visual pleasure she triggers in the male audience. She embodies the seductiveness which can lure a man and thus turns to be a mere puppet in the hands of the male characters as well as the male spectators. "The magic of Hollywood style at its best (and of all the cinema which fell within its sphere of influence) arose, not exclusively, but in one important aspect, from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure" (Mulvey 16).

Nolan's *Following* or Nolan's Nameless Blonde is in no way different from the habitual Hollywood road where women are often diluted into objects of pleasure alone. "She is a fox" ("*Following*" 00:31:31-32), says one of the main characters Cobb (to Bill), during the ransacking that happens at her flat in her absence. Her comparison to a fox is good enough to spill light on the very many facets that lean on to women's secondary status as a sexual object and how cinema objectifies women. Fox has always been a ubiquitous eponym in expounding a woman's seductive outlook since centuries back. If a few brand names were to be evaluated that obviously related to women's fashion brands, it is astonishingly named as "Fox". In East Asian folklores, Foxes have always been described as shape-shifting authorities of seduction often in the form of beauty deceiving men. In *Handbook of Native American Mythology*, Dawn Elaine Bastian discusses Foxes as clever but cunning companions (67). Jill Stanewick, a naming director mentions that the name "fox" is something which is visually and orally appealing. Stone Fox Bride, Fox and Rose Lingerie, Flying Fox Bags, Kitsune (the Japanese term for Fox) Brooklyn Fox lingerie and many more add on to the list of women-associated fashionable and iconic products (Arnold). Thus, this hackneyed construction hardly gives room for further investigation as it is conspicuously evident that the term "fox" denoted the seductiveness and sexual appearance of women. Nolan's deliberate attempt in calling her a 'fox' reverberates with his intention in establishing the set patterns of gender to the psyche of his audience. This systematised inclination towards gender hierarchy is what Mulvey touches upon in her essay.

Mulvey argues that “there is an obvious interest in this analysis for feminists, a beauty in its exact rendering of the frustration experienced under the phallogocentric order. It gets us nearer to the roots of our oppression, it brings an articulation of the problem closer, it faces us with the ultimate challenge” (15).

The greatest threats to Feminism had always been the same patriarchal lines which would backlash and hit against any continuation in the field of Women’s liberation. The most disturbing facet in Hollywood is the hyper-sexualization of women on screen. However, there had always been malicious and visible dangers hidden within the substantial parameters of Feminism. Feminism which is ultimately aimed at women’s empowerment and liberation collapses as its meaning is misinterpreted and misjudged. As Choice Feminism asserts, a woman can enhance her freedom and ability in making her own individual choices. But quite often, these opportunities are misinterpreted and mistakenly represented by most Hollywood movie representations. It was Linda Hirshman who coined the phrase “Choice feminism” in 2006 in her book *Get To Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*. Claire Snyder argues that Choice Feminism which grew out of Third wave feminism is more inclusive and diverse as it gives complete freedom to women as they can choose to work or stay at home, choose to marry or not, or have children or not (Snyder 175). However, this individual choice of a woman is often underestimated and is pushed to mere mockeries of life. Contesting for a career-oriented life or facing the music in a situation of trials and tribulations in the most authentic way, can in fact kick off a rhythm in flow of continued Feminism. But media often

lightens this choice in favour of choosing the right clothes or right cosmetics and sometimes things which are more trivial than this.

Lucy Russell is thus represented in the most trivialized form in the movie. She is an icon of beauty and sensuality for both the protagonist Bill and his associate Cobb. She is rather designed to invoke desire in them and bring them into action rather than spilling her own mettle. Mulvey coordinates her essay with Freud's Scopophilia or the pleasure in looking at and establishes the dilapidated role of a woman on screen. The overwrought burden of the Blonde in *Following* doubles when she is known to be a model in the movie. Her task of creating the voyeuristic pleasure thus becomes a mandatory function and runs throughout in a subtle way in Nolan's *Following*. "The extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation" (Mulvey 17).

A movie like *Following* with the cast of a Nameless Blonde is quite surprising especially during the late 90s when the wake of Feminism had already sprawled its entanglements in vivid angles. Contrary to the ideals of building up a society in balance, Nolan's movies go back to hit the conventional mode of Patriarchy wherein a woman's role is only to please a man. Moreover, Cinema, according to Mulvey, is actually enjoyed within the darkness of a theatre allowing a magical rendition of what is displayed on screen as it offers a private space for each of its spectator, to enjoy what is displayed, in his own way, within his privacy of the darkness in theatre.

At first glance, cinema would seem to be remote from the undercover world of the surreptitious observation of an unknowing and unwilling victim. What is seen of the screen is so manifestly shown. But the mass of mainstream hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. (Mulvey 17)

Feminism argues for the complete negation of Patriarchy in a society with equality for both men and women. Feminism also takes into consideration the consequences of women pornographic presentations and the harm it does as well as the consequences of prostitution. Women's reproductive power has been one fundamental reason to distinguish and slice her off from the mainstream to margins. According to Ti-Grace Atkinson,

The first dichotomous division of this mass [mankind] is said to have been on the grounds of sex: male and female ... it was because half the human race bears the burden of the reproductive process and because man, the 'rational' animal, had the wit to take advantage of that, that the child bearers, or the 'beasts of burden,' were corralled into a political class: equivocating the biologically contingent burden into a political (or necessary) penalty, thereby modifying these individuals' definition from the human to the functional, or animal. (85)

Women's sex appeal had always been an icing on the cake for most movies and there were many direct protests against this during the 1960s. However, it is disheartening to notice the endless set pattern of beauty regimes that slide through even today and the most horrifying truth is that it is more or less popularised by the media. Media, especially movies, have a compelling role in determining these factors and Nolan as a director could have allocated more space to portray women in a better stance to his audience.

The Nameless Blonde serves only as an objectified material in the movie and is literally used both physically and mentally by Cobb. The camera shots as well as the designated dialogues carve out the denigrating nature in which she is pictured. During a ransacking that happens at her home, Bill says "she got pictures of herself everywhere. Look at her. She's a babe" ("*Following*" 00:32:51-52). When Bill asks "Why does she have so many pictures of herself?", Cobb replies, "She's certainly vain" ("*Following*" 00:32:52-56). The term 'Babe' communicates a lot about the Blonde. Apart from the affectionate form of addressing someone, the term introduces the viewer to the unfathomable inner trend of someone who is sexually attractive. The whole of Russel's presence in the movie is only to validate the spice and thereby making her a visible form of pleasurable piece through her words as well as her deeds. A set of polaroid photos Bill and Cobb find at her flat makes Cobb comment about her narcissistic attitude. The tendency of the media to brand the woman who owns a couple of her own photographs as narcissist is in fact derogatory, pejorative and deliberate while the burglary conducted by both men goes below the borders of silence, unnoticed.

As the movie begins, the Blonde is judged through the perspective of the Protagonist Bill, as she descends the staircase and appears before the screen. She is visible to the viewer in her full figure and is mostly portrayed in the same way throughout the movie. While there are evident heavy close-ups of the male characters, the female is mostly represented with her full figure showcasing her charm and charisma to her male audience. A close-up in a film basically narrates the detailed facial expression and the emotions running underneath. In short, it marks the inherent feelings of the character to which it is highlighted through this very shot. In a way, a close-up shot gives more autonomy to the character. However, the Blonde is visually presented in the close-up shots only in scenes where she is highly erotic. The deliberate insertion of the unwanted shower scene and the unbuttoning scene definitely inspires the realms for scopophilia in the audience. All through the seventy-minute movie, she comes only in eight scenes and a lion's share is to showcase her charm in those minuscule scenes. This kind of a sexual objectification is what Fredrickson and Roberts consider as a socio-cultural barrier for the empowerment of women in our society. They argue that,

The mass media's proliferation of sexualised images of the female body is fast and thorough. Confrontations with these images, then, are virtually unavoidable in culture. In sum, sexual objectification of the female body has clearly permeated our cultural milieu: it is likely to affect most girls and women to some degree, no matter who their actual social contacts may be. (177)

The Blonde is depicted in close-ups in very few scenes, especially the scene where she stands in front of the mirror and eventually gets involved with Bill, the protagonist. Contrary to this, Bill, Cobb and even the Police Inspector in the last scene played by John Nolan gets into clear close-ups and in better coverage than the Blonde. The less number of close-up scenes inadvertently dictates the insignificant role of women in the movie.

As Mulvey puts in her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, the current world is indisputably a phallogocentric world and the mechanics of Cinema is to echo this trend. Thus, a film focusses mainly in offering pleasure, significantly voyeuristic pleasure through a female. Nolan's *Following* is also designed in such a way as to configure the physical attributes of the woman rather than her abstract sensibilities. In Mulvey's opinion, a female within the screen is possessed by the camera lens, the male characters within the screen and the male spectators outside the screen. A scrutiny into the Blonde's character helps to identify that she is indeed a possession in the hands of the two men in the movie, Bill and Cobb, who hold a greater say within the screen. She is used as well as abused by three men in the movie. They include Bill, Cobb and the Bad Guy. Reading between the lines, it is comprehensible that the bad guy had abused her and she believes Cobb and joins him in framing Bill without knowing that she herself is being played upon in the scene.

Above all, she invokes the possible voyeuristic pleasure in the male counterpart and it is introduced even through the dialogues that she opens up with the protagonist. She says, "They even rifled through my underwear" ("*Following*")

00:27:12-13). She is known to be the bad guy's girl initially and is later seen in a bed scene with her ally, Cobb. Another scene determines that she has already slept with Bill not because she wanted to but because she had to as a part of the pre-planned game.

Cobb : Did you have to sleep with him ?

Blonde : You told me to.

Cobb : I said you should if you had to,
but that's not really the same as telling
you to. (*Following* 00:58:00-06)

The conversation evidently portrays the dislike Cobb had, for the Blonde sleeping with Bill. The male possession and the male callousness is revealed in the last scene when we realise how Cobb bludgeons the Blonde to death thereby framing Bill for the crime. While all the men in the movie are described and pictured as single-woman oriented men, the heroine is carved as a piece of sex-value sleeping with all the men in the movie. This specific kind of representation of women had been a deliberate attempt by most directors to testify the hegemonic structure in society.

As Cobb talks about the *box* as an unconscious collection of things in display, Nolan's women characters too speak loud about his unconscious attitude towards women.

Cobb : And here is the box.

Bill : What box?

- Cobb : Everyone has a box
- Bill : But mainly it's just a shoe box. - Is there valuables in it?
- Cobb : No, more interesting. More personal things like snapshots, letters, little trinkets from Christmas. See, Envelope, photo, calling cards, notes. Sort of an unconscious collection, a display. (*Following* 00:13:08-18)

According to Cobb, such trivial boxes that one finds during burglary is more important than the valuables there, since it reflects the genuine personality of the one who holds it as well as depicts the labyrinths of his/her unconscious affinities. Nolan's female characters, though brings up his auteur realms, points more of his negligent postulation over women. This unconscious could be the fear of emasculation that Mulvey discusses in her essay which is evidently related to Castration Anxiety. Such anxiety stems out of the solid independence and strength displayed in a woman and men usually can overpower this anxiety only through punishing or destroying this strong woman. Mulvey opines:

The woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the

concerns of film noir); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star). (21)

However, the male counterparts, irrespective of what they do with their females, win the sympathy of the audience and carve a niche in the golden records of filmography. In spite of their crimes, deeds and misfortunes, they symbolically become an icon whom the spectator easily identifies with and easily appreciates. This apparent distinction between a male character and a female character is what Mulvey questions through her essay. The male however is glorified irrespective of his past whereas the female is simply forgotten or intentionally killed for the continuation of the plot. While the function of a woman is to drive the sexual instinct in the audience, the man on screen functions as an alter ego through which the spectator brings upon an identification with himself clinging on its base to the Mirror stage Identification put forward by Lacan.

Apart from the Blonde, there is a waitress who just glances and fades off in one of the cafe scenes. She comes to Bill only to ask him regarding the menu and disappears. Nolan somehow wanted to prove that women are fit for two scenarios alone - either like the waitress talking about food and home (being dependent), or like the Blonde, who pervades a sense of strength which must be shut off through her killing. In one of the scenes, during a burglary in an apartment, Cobb analyses that the lady belonging to the apartment has brought home another young man who is not actually her boyfriend or husband. He finds the same lady again in a restaurant

where she is identified with another young man. Thus, within a frame of seconds, Nolan brings forth the plot in tarnishing the image of the lady in the apartment. Nolan, through Bill and Cobb, in a way enjoys this and makes fun of this. Nolan could have used the guy in the apartment and could have showcased him roaming around with different girls, but instead he pushes the lady figure into this mockery. This very scene can exhibit the idea that Nolan wanted to convey to his audience about how vacillating a woman can be, contrary to a man.

Despite the amount of screen presence and the puny segments of dialogues, the Blonde, however has exerted a power of her own in the movie. Her untimely death, in a way, is an excuse for the power she depicts. The more power a woman weaves, the more she is dreaded by her male counterpart. And the final outcome in overcoming the powerful woman is only through her death which is again designed by the male. He decides her end as well as the mode of her death. This intimidating power is usually bestowed with a Femme Fatale in Noir Movies.

Janey Place in her essay *Women in Film Noir* discusses at length the features of the heroine or the Femme Fatale in Film Noir. To fully comprehend the layers of the moviescape that Nolan pictures, a steady knowledge of Noir features is inevitably essential. *Following* which was certainly written through the lines of Noir mechanisms, exemplifies the characteristics of the Noir Femme Fatale and the doomed protagonist. The concept of the Femme Fatale is an inevitable part of Noir Films and it does take its own shape with Nolan's movies. Though the Blonde has been defined in disparaging terms by Nolan, she is an intimidating presence all through the plot. "Often the original transgression of the dangerous lady of film noir

(unlike the vamp seductress of the 20s) is ambition expressed metaphorically in her freedom of movement and visual dominance. This ambition is inappropriate to her status as a woman and must be confined” (Place 56).

An inevitable archetype of literature and art, a Femme Fatale or a spider woman is a feminine representation which invokes fear rather than affection. Femme Fatales flourished in American Cinema during the 1940s with the emergence of Noir Films. She is also known as a man-eater who deliberately tries to ensnare a man through her charms. She is seductive, appealing and mysterious for the crowd around her. She is an epitome of danger and is connected with evil in every sense. She wraps the heroic man in shroud which compels him to kill her. In brief, she is a potential threat to everyone who gets associated with her. The Blonde in *Following* is indeed a strong woman, but her strength is permeated through the undertones of her diabolic tentacles waiting to swallow the masculine essence. Anyone who gets associated with her is supposed to reap the consequence. “In Film Noir, we observe both the social action of myth which damns the sexual woman and all who become enmeshed by her, and a particularly potent stylistic presentation of the sexual strength of woman which man fears” (Place 48).

As we get closer into the details of *Following*, we find that the protagonist who kicks up a relationship with the Blonde is finally doomed. It is almost in the last scene that we get the proof of the Blonde’s relationship with Cobb. Unaware of this, Bill falls a prey to her. Thus, the Blonde is presented as an incarnation of evil, a parallel signatory of Satan or as an incarnation of Eve, misleading men. Yvonne

Tasker defines four particular features of the Femme Fatale through which he identifies the iconic persona of the spider woman.

First, her seductive sexuality. second, the power and strength (over men) that this sexuality generates for the femme fatale. Third, the deceptions, disguises and confusion that surrounds her, producing her as an ambiguous figure for both the audience and the hero.

Fourth, as a consequence the sense of woman as enigma. (120)

The Blonde is presented as a bold lady, enticing men with her charm. As a pivotal point, she holds the three male characters of the story and connects them. She is strong enough to turn down Bill's flirting from the Bar. She is audacious enough to witness a murder happening in her drawing room and she is impudent enough to join with Cobb in framing Bill with a murder. Though negligible in her screen presence, she takes up action in most of the scenes she is in. Though highly seductive, she is masculine in her manners and carries the phallic symbol, the cigarette - an indispensable prop for a Femme Fatale. Her attitude is firm and poses the same poise and calm till the last scene where she is bludgeoned to death by Cobb.

"Visually, film noir is fluid, sensual, extra-ordinarily expressive, making the sexually expressive woman, which is its dominant image of woman, extremely powerful" (Place 48). When Bill, Cobb and the Blonde are considered on a single plain of assessing their capabilities, undoubtedly, the Blonde stands above them. Her self is strong, independent and bold. She retains in her a mettle which cannot be even visualised by Nolan's male characters. However, it is her power which disrupts

the hegemonic structure and to bring order to the patriarchal pattern, she has to be killed. Her promiscuity and her rejection of motherhood makes her stronger than an ordinary woman committed in her rigmaroles. Leeching the virility and power of a man through her charm, she is seen as a sexual vampire. Thus, her murder stems from the fear towards her in gaining power over the men. Had she been alive throughout the movie, the destiny of the male characters would have been different, and Nolan basically wanted to highlight and offer more strength to his male characters and thus her death becomes indispensable in Nolan's movie.

Cobb calls her vain in one of the scenes when he comes to see about her photos in her apartment. She is pathetically caricatured as a narcissist and is criticised vehemently by the men on screen. Bill's very many dialogues often point to a clue to the impending danger he is to confront from the Blonde. She is portrayed as an essence of fear and dread and to cast off the terror, her death becomes inescapable.

Barely begun to be explored, Nolan's persistent strategy in killing his female characters need to be analysed more profoundly as it harks us back to the initial points from where the struggle for equality began. "Don't follow women down dark alleys after dark" (*Following* 00:03:40-42), says Bill, mapping his terror regarding the seductress woman who might entangle him into her seductive web.

The female character in film noir stand outside the male order and represent a challenge to it. They symbolise all that is evil and mysterious. Sexuality being the only weapon women have in relation to men, they use it to entrap the investigator and prevent him from

accomplishing his task. Dangerous because their sexuality is so openly displayed and so irresistible, women become the element that the male investigator must guard against if he is to succeed in his quest. (Kaplan 81)

The all-pervasive charm that the Blonde sprinkles throughout the movie is achieved through her physical attributes - her curvy body, her blonde hair, her eyes and her round lips. Despite the sensual gratification that she ensures for her male audience, she conveys a more dangerous message to the women audience through which they are inclined to learn and internalise the concept of feminine beauty as displayed on the screen. Accumulation of such messages will ultimately lead girls and women to habitualise more on body monitoring thereby increasing their anxiety about their physical features.

Objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalise an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual monitoring, which, in turn, can increase women's opportunities for peak motivational states, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states. (Fredrickson and Roberts 173)

The body, which is the basis for distinction of sexes, exist within the social and cultural contexts, says Fredrickson and Roberts in their *Objectification Theory*. Thus, the construction of body happens through a set of socio-cultural practices and discourses. Thus, a body conveys a social meaning and that social meaning takes its form and shape through practices that it explores, and media is one channel through

which the female body is placed in a framework to analyse. As Fredrickson and Roberts discuss the negative impacts of such portrayals in media, they also mention the disastrous impact it can thrust on women who watch these displays.

A handful of theorists have ventured to explain why visual evaluations of the female body, which can lead to sexual objectification, are integral to male heterosexuality. Evolutionary theorists contend that women's physical attractiveness indirectly signals reproductive value, and so evaluating women's physical attributes has become an important criterion in men's mate selection. Others argue that the cultural practice of objectifying female bodies originated to create, maintain, and express patriarchy. Distinct from attempts to uncover why objectification occurs, objectification theory takes as a *given* that women exist in a culture in which their bodies are - for whatever reasons - looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified. (Fredrickson and Roberts 177)

Therefore, such portrayals can internally harm the psyche of a woman who is a spectator and can invariably create an ideal image of feminine beauty standards in their mind thereby corroding their self. Fredrickson and Roberts assert thus in their essay: "the common thread running through all forms of sexual objectification is the experience of being treated as a body (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others (174).

Thus, a woman who is sexually portrayed on screen is an unhealthy ideal for a normal woman's lived experience as the essay discusses. The seductive woman on

screen, or a woman who is deliberately killed in a movie can give a catastrophic impact in the spectators thereby providing a malevolent glance of a society. “Though the psychological repercussions of sexual violence have begun to capture substantial research attention, those arising from the more subtle and everyday practice of sexualised gazing have gone understudied; this is an imbalance we seek to redress” (Fredrickson and Roberts 175).

There is a vivid message that Nolan gives to his audience when his Blonde is killed by a hammer by her gangster-companion Cobb. At the very outset of the movie, the Bad guy had started blackmailing her. All the fragments put together, it is understandable that Nolan wanted the age-old strategy of eliminating a woman who speaks for herself. There is nothing unusual about the male characters though the reviews keep praising them all through these years. If we conduct a deeper analysis, it is very clearly known that both Bill and Cobb stand as a symbolic representation of the dread in society - through the burglary they conduct unnecessarily. However, the ill effects of their crime is not highlighted while the Blonde scales high with her seductiveness and diabolic tint, creating the use and throw mechanism of the male world.

Nolan’s strategies somehow follow the same pattern in his second movie as well. Released in the year 2000, *Memento* is regarded as the first classic created by Nolan benefitting him with a breakthrough into the world of Film Industry. Enumerating the threads of Noir elements and psychological aspects, *Memento* turned out to be a benchmark for discussions among the then greatest directors of Hollywood. *Memento* deals with the story of a young man named Leonard Shelby,

suffering from anterograde amnesia or short-term memory loss, trying to find the murderer who raped and killed his wife. Shelby's inability to form new memories makes him go through the new situations with the aid of tattoos as well as polaroid photographs. The movie became popular for the contrastive method in which the story unfolds, juxtaposing sequences in colour as well as black and white. The movie baffles its audience so drastically with its intriguing plot that the audience who had watched them once were prompted to go and watch it for more times to unspool the puzzles depicted.

The dilapidated mental state of the protagonist is displayed through this non-linear method of narration and the black and white as well as colour scenes merge and bring a cohesive structure as the story comes to an end. More than the storyline, Nolan was praised for the method of initiation he used to portray his story line. Though the threads of the story was taken from a short story named *Memento Mori* written by Nolan's younger brother, Jonathan Nolan, it was revised and rendered with magic through the screenplay. Most of the critics appreciated Nolan for blending the contrasting themes like grief, self-deception and memory. Apart from numerous accolades, the movie entered different nominations for the Academy Award. Berardinelli, the famous American film critic, praised the film's backward narrative, saying that "what really distinguishes this film is its brilliant, innovative structure" (Berardinelli). The confabulation as well as the methodical manipulation that heralds the movie throughout has been praised by many and is still baffling the audience. To understand Nolan's subsequent movies, his initial movies can be

considered as a base with its structural as well as thematic elements. If *Following* is a scabbled drawing, *Memento* is a meticulously constructed finished product.

Nolan has sketched about four female characters in *Memento* and all the characters revolve around the protagonist in the usual structured pattern. Leonard's wife and Natalie are the two well-defined female representations in *Memento* and though defined in two different ways, both the characters redefine the same age-old concept of male glorification and thus gives a reason for the hero to continue his errands. Though many critics had celebrated the role of Natalie to be strong and sturdy, more detailed explorations testify that she too falls into the same category of how a woman tends to be fridged. By breaking up the character dialogues and by establishing a link with Nolan's *Following's* women characters, it can be noted that they fail miserably to take the lead of the film. Apart from Natalie and Leonard's wife, there is Mrs. Jankis and another blonde who vanishes within a single scene.

While Nolan's women characters are always less attractive in their character sketches, his male characters are often depicted as educated, intelligent and stuck with a haunting obsession, mostly devised through the demise of a female character. Women only act as protégées and companions to the stabilised hero of his movies. It is usually the demise of the woman which trigger the action for the protagonist. Reiterating traces of Nolan's first female character, the Nameless Blonde, Leonard's wife too trudges the same path. She is the one who is at the centre of the story and everything in the movie revolves around her. Leonard is all set to take vengeance for his wife's death right from the beginning of the movie. However, she retains the same fate as that of the Nameless Blonde and does not even carry a name of herself.

She is known as Leonard's wife or Lenny's wife throughout the movie and disappears into memories right from the beginning. She is already dead as and when the movie begins. From Leonard's words, it is understood that his wife was raped and murdered and his goal in life is to avenge his wife's murderers.

Leonard's wife captures only a slice of the entire screen time and she appears only through the shattered memories of Leonard. Appearing through Leonard's jigsawed reflections, her images are mostly related to the stereotyped, conventional images of women. She is seen through the recollection of Leonard as a montage of numerous aspects like working in the kitchen, washing dishes, going for shopping and taking a shower. Nevertheless, these images are the images through which Nolan perceived women. Feminists wanted to throw out these prevailing images of women because they knew that these illustrations will push them back to the lines of patriarchy - the customary hegemonic structure. Leonard's wife is tied to the household work of cleaning and working within the home and is not seen outside the platform of her home. This is a clear indication of how Nolan wanted women to be portrayed in his scripts. Apart from the hackneyed idea of a woman in kitchen, to make matters worse, she is killed to fulfil Nolan's agenda of frosting his women characters. Another repeated scene in the movie is Leonard's wife sitting upright on the bed, combing her hair, being a reliable object for the hero. Mulvey says "the film opens with the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised" (21). Akin to Mulvey's words, Leonard's wife is seen sitting in her bright bedroom where sunlight breaks in and she sits on the bed dressed in a bikini. Though in the lines of

Noir, Nolan portrays her in pure daylight, deviating from the darker ambience, showcasing her body which is objectified through the screen. She is defined as a woman purely dedicated to her home and husband. It looks rather denigrating to see the character delineation of a woman in 2000 to be seen as a conventional woman closed within the four walls of her home.

Natalie too is used as a tool in objectifying her physique. Her short hair and her role as a bartender makes the audience feel the same ignorance they felt for the Nameless Blonde in *Following*. With reference to Mulvey's essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, there is no doubt that the female representation here is twisted as well as under-represented. Mulvey begins her essay thus:

It takes a starting point the way film reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle. It is helpful to understand what the cinema has been, how its magic has worked in the past, while attempting a theory and a practice which will challenge this cinema of the past. (14)

Cinema, since its inception, has tried representing women in the way men wanted. As we study *Memento's* female representations in the light of Mulvey's essay, they can be easily identified as the castrated woman, the woman incapable of pleasure. Thus, their main intention on the screen is only to play an instrumental role in the path of the hero. Natalie revolves around the lives of four men, namely, Leonard, Jimmy, Dodd and Teddy. She brings all these men together just like the

Nameless Blonde in *Following*. Even then, her role turns puny soon after her entrusted responsibilities.

Though under the threat of his short-term memory loss, Leonard becomes instrumental in being the real force behind killing his wife. Though Leonard is the real killer, the sympathy of the audience rests with him and the murdered wife just fades into nothingness. The hero receives the sympathy of the audience and the spectators sway with his weighing emotions. However, the dead heroine crawls into nothingness and is unheard and is never spoken about apart from the charm and seductiveness she willingly displays on screen before her demise.

As Mulvey puts it, the main focus of her essay was to confirm the role of cinema in reinforcing the conventional patriarchal forms. When the tools of psychoanalysis are put to use, the voyeuristic pleasure that cinema offers is beyond words. In a method not so explicit, Nolan too tries the same sequences and patterns, but in a technique different from others. The voyeuristic pleasure of looking into Leonard's bedroom is one such scene where his wife is the only targeted property. She unknowingly becomes the property of the viewer too with the scene. Mulvey's essay is equally applicable to the characterisation of Natalie too. Natalie shares her bed with Leonard and encapsulates him through her seductiveness. Natalie, as an object of beauty, is not just possessed by the males within the screen, but also by the masculine audience within the theatre.

As the narrative progresses, she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalised sexuality, her show-girl

connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too. (Mulvey 21)

According to the first part of Fredrickson's and Robert's essay, women's bodies are always looked at, evaluated and always potentially objectified. "As we live in a culture saturated with heterosexuality, men are socially sanctioned with a right to sexualise all females regardless of age or status", says Westkott (95). Similar to Mulvey's essay, *Objectification Theory* too identifies three gazes - the actual gaze in interpersonal arena, the sexually objectifying gaze reflected in visual media and finally how visual media triggers in interlining these objectifications.

The sexually objectifying treatment of women in the visual media is certainly not limited to pornography. Analyses of main stream films, visual arts, advertisements, television programming, music videos, women's magazines and sports photography each provide evidence that women's bodies are targeted for sexual objectification more often than men's. (Fredrickson and Roberts 176)

Though not implicitly, the kind of objectification in Nolan's movies continue to give dangerous results to the entire society. Sexual Objectification in the eyes of Fredrickson and Roberts is one form of gender oppression that paves its way for more brutality against women including violence and trivialisation in women's accomplishments and work. The vulnerability towards sexual objectification can induce a lot of other psychological negative experiences too.

In all of his movies, Nolan practices the same strategies to incorporate his ideals. Leonard Shelby in fact is a mouthpiece of Nolan when he says “I’m disciplined and organised. I use habit and routine to make my life possible” (“*Memento*” 00:16:46-52). Christopher Nolan too makes use of his habitual routine reinforcing the same theme of action in exposing his women characters. He somehow identifies a pleasure while refrigerating his females. Leonard’s wife suffers the same fate as that of the Nameless Blonde in *Following*. In both reality and in Leonard’s illusory perception, his wife gets killed. Though Leonard believes that she was murdered, in reality, he kills his wife inadvertently with an overdose of insulin.

Compared to Leonard’s wife, Natalie is more comprehensive with an outlook of a modern woman. Natalie is one of Nolan’s characters who has been poured with umpteen amount of praise on account of her characterisation. But with a deeper look into her bruised soul, it can be understood that she is equally maligned just as any of his female manifestations. The first scene in which Natalie appears gives an idea regarding her inner pain.

In an Industry where sexism is rampant and growing rapidly, the considerable less pay given to Jenifer Lawrence or Amy Adams in *American Hustle* than their male protagonists will not tilt many heads or will not make many eyes roll. “Feminism is a social movement that has had an enormous impact in film theory and criticism”, says Anneke Smelik in her *Feminist Film Theory* (491).

An important shift that has to be understood here is that, cinema, other than reflecting reality, tries to construct a set pattern thereby making the audience believe that this is the reality.

Cinema is a cultural and social platform where the myth and feminine ideologies as well as myths about masculinity is defined for the society or the mass audience in terms similar to that of the set patterns. Claire Johnston put forward a view of how classic cinema constructs the ideological image of women. Drawing on Roland Barthes' notion of myth, Johnston investigated the myth of 'woman' in classic cinema. The sign 'woman' can be analysed as a structure, a code or convention. It represents the ideological meaning that 'woman' has for men. In relation to herself, she means no-thing. Women are negatively represented as not-man. The 'woman as woman' is absent from the text of the film. (Smelik 503)

Memento is quite interesting when it comes to the representation of women. As Feminism puts it, most female images in movies are seen to be dominated by the male figures. Male domination is exercised exorbitantly in silver screen and thus the female characters suffer at the hands of the male characters. Though Natalie survives from the hands of the male characters within the screen as well as from the director, she is indeed a victim of male domination. The first scene in which Natalie appears, which is in fact the very last scene in the chronological order, she comes with bruised lips. She suffers because of her boyfriend, Jimmy, who is a drug dealer, who abuses her persistently. In another scene, Natalie is seen hiding in her room fearing

the arrival of another gangster Dodd. In a few real scenes, far away from the perception of Leonard Shelby, she is beaten up by Leonard himself soon after a verbal combat. All these scenes give a clear-cut pattern of how women are within the control of men and how Nolan penetrates the set ideas of patriarchy once again through the psyche of his audience.

While Nolan's *Following* determined only a Femme Fatale, his *Memento* brings a foil and places in contrast the nurturing woman in comparison with a Femme Fatale. Janey Place in her *Women in Film Noir*, discusses the difference between the nurturing women and the spider women. Place defines the iconography of the conventional heroines and determines the features of stability and security, passive and static demeanour and the redeeming capacity she possesses. On the other hand, Place describes a Femme Fatale as "exciting, very active and sexy" (50). While Leonard's wife remains as the virtuous Madonna - the nurturing woman, Natalie is portrayed as a spider woman who deliberately brings danger to the male protagonist. The usual female sequencing that ranges between two extremes such as a virtuous Madonna or a Femme Fatale is once again implemented by Nolan in *Memento*. It is quite easy to notice that Nolan finds it hard to place his female characters somewhere between these two extremes, as ordinary women capable of tasks around her.

Natalie comes straight from the Noir clan and is a spider woman who takes advantage of the condition of Leonard. However, her vengeance is not innately directed against Leonard, but against the cop Teddy and she uses Leonard to kill Teddy. She is a character who has a detailed depth in her and remains poignant and

stoic even after losing her drug dealer boyfriend Jimmy Grantz. She does not take the situation into her hands and deals with these convoluted men in a way that even bewitches the audience. Nevertheless, she possesses the witching power to trap Leonard and use him to her whims and fancies. A Femme Fatale is a spider woman who carves out a man from his family bond and traps him to slavery through her seductiveness. Natalie even provokes Leonard by calling his wife a whore and faces the consequences in order to make Leonard act the way she wants him to be. Natalie is portrayed as a bartender and most Nolan films represent women in lowly and mean jobs with a meagre income. On the other hand, his male characters are more recognisable, educated and hardworking. Leonard Shelby in *Memento* is an Insurance Investigator and is shown as a refined, educated man until he gets into his condition of short-term memory loss.

Natalie is more independent and powerful rather than Leonard's wife. While Leonard's wife is seen as meek and docile, Natalie exercises more power on the men around her. This is how Teddy describes Natalie in an initial conversation with Leonard. Leonard asks "Who's Natalie?" to which teddy replies, "A Schmuck" (*Memento* 01:05:36-38).

Echoing the real traits of a Noir character, Natalie is genuinely independent in her own ways. But unfortunately, nothing solid is showcased in the last scene for us to know what happens to Natalie thereafter. While the fate of Teddy, Dodd, Jimmy and Leonard is clearly visible, we do not really know what happened to Natalie. She just races into the background after her designed deliberations. While it is compelling to admit and praise Nolan's innovative strategy in structural

composition, it is truly pathetic to note that his exploration never ever touches the realms of female arena. Nolan constantly continues representing his stock female characters proving again and again that women are not fit to rule the screens. The movie's dual structure that revolves around the delusions of revenge has excelled in every manner except for its caricature of the women characters.

As and when a director's auteur persona is discussed, it is often their mindset that gets reflected through the story line, plot, characters as well as the dialogues. When the Nameless Blonde in *Following* is described as a Fox, Natalie in *Memento* is defined as a schmuck. Fox pertains to seductiveness and the term Schmuck relates to the absurdity in Natalie. A trait conferred on the female characters on the screen is in a way by and large, a trait that is attached universally to every woman.

Leonard's most remembered dialogue in *Memento* goes like this. "The world doesn't disappear when you close your eyes, does it?" ("*Memento*" 00:19:16-18). Similar to Leonard's dialogue, the idea of Feminism or women equality is subsequently something to which Nolan cannot shut his eyes forever. The light that is sure to break after every dark hour will immensely contribute to the empowerment of women in the upcoming days.

With each of his new movies, Nolan's filmic canvas is scaling high. But, however, the canvas of his female presentations just shrinks with each new movie and they fade and recede with each new film. Nolan's fear of the empowered femininity could be one reason why he deliberately trashes them before the plot really sets in.

Insomnia, released in the year 2002 was Nolan's third movie which reaped herculean scales of success soon after the hit-maker *Memento* in 2000. *Insomnia*, the remake of the 1997 Norwegian movie of the same name by Eric Skjoldbjaerg, is a psychological thriller which rose to high commercial success beyond imagination. Set in Nightmute, the fishing town of Alaska, the story begins as two Los Angeles detectives Will Dormer (Al Pacino) and Hap Eckhart (Martin Donovan) arrive to investigate the murder case of a young teenage girl. With the mind-blowing performance by Pacino and the apt star cast, *Insomnia*, is undoubtedly a riveting psychological drama. The movie explores and reexamines the themes of morality and guilt and treads through the gamut of distinguishing what is right and what is wrong.

Drawing out the same sinister lines, Nolan's *Insomnia* commences with the mystery behind the death of a sixteen-year-old girl, Kay Connell. Al Pacino plays the role of the protagonist, Will Dormer, the veteran cop, who is placid and peaceful in his temperament while dealing with the investigation. His partner Hap Eckhart on the other hand is waiting to furnish testimony against Dormer in an undecided case at L.A. for an exchange of personal benefits from the superior officers. Dormer accidentally shoots Eckhart in a fog-clad area mistaking him for Connell's murderer. However, his accidental crime is witnessed by Connell's murderer Walter Finch, played by Robin Williams and Dormer is threatened and bargained thereafter for a crime he committed inadvertently. Instead of admitting his guilt, Dormer tries to protect himself by switching the bullets and by joining an ally with Walter Finch, the murderer of Kay Connell. The story stumbles across the guilt that Dormer

carries, his multiplied emotional complexities, the expiation he seeks and his associated sleepless nights due to the perpetual daylight in Alaska.

Insomnia is comparatively less complex compared to Nolan's *Following* and *Memento* and is more intelligible for a typical spectator. The linear episodes as well as a clear-cut narration strategy makes it more undemanding than his earlier movies. Despite its unpretentiousness, the movie is intriguing and keeps the audience at the edge of the seat as to see what might eventually happen to the Connell murder case as well as to the plight of Will Dormer. The excellent cinematography and the picturisation of the meandering rivers and icy-ridges in the Alaskan region keeps the viewer mystified throughout the movie. Apart from its complex tones and narrative successions, the deep-seated emotional complexities and switching camera movements, Nolan keeps certain of his areas untouched in *Insomnia* too. The treatment towards the female characters does not alter much as with Nolan's *Insomnia*. Nolan's tendency in refrigerating his women characters towards eternal rest is conspicuously discernible in *Insomnia* though the extent to which he does it is not as stark as his earlier two movies.

With a lack of women filmmakers, the balance is often not placed as most characterisations take shape to allure the consideration of the male perspectives. One of the major female characters in *Insomnia*, Ellie Burr, played by Hilary Swank has been appreciated by many as one of Nolan's strong female characterisations. However, an extensive study by diving into the conversations as well as the body language involved will ultimately prove that Burr is yet another shadow of Nolan's refrigerated women characters. Just because a female character survived through

Nolan's movie, it does not make her robust enough to be compared and identified with his male heroes. Nolan's character Burr is nothing but a silhouette of his previous women characters except for the truth that she holds on to life in the storyline.

There are four women characters introduced by Nolan in *Insomnia*: Ellie Burr played by Hilary Swank who is a young local detective at Nightmute town in Alaska, Kay Connell, the murdered young girl, Tanya Francke, the close friend of Connell and Rachel Clement, the house owner of the building where Dormer and Eckhart stays.

Ellie Burr is the most prominent female character sketched here. Unlike the women characters in his earlier two movies, Burr is educated, refined and more independent. She serves as a local detective dealing with theft cases and is teamed up with a bunch of men during her work course. She is portrayed in good light for a spectator who visualises her workaholic spirit and her enthusiasm in conducting her job effortlessly. She is the one in charge of the two homicide detectives from L.A. and therefore greets and takes them to Pioneer Lodge in the opening scene. She is outlined with a bit of her autonomy and has a trait of a strong woman initially. She remains more refined and sophisticated compared to Nolan's earlier women like the Nameless Blonde who is a model, or Natalie, the drug dealer's girlfriend who uses Leonard to her aid. Burr possesses a strong hold in what she does and her vigour somewhat distances her from the usual women objectification as seen in movies.

Despite her dedication and willingness to continue in her precarious job, Nolan subordinates her in many occasions as in the presence of the male protagonist,

Will Dormer. During the initial car ride with Dormer, Burr is represented with utmost zeal and fervour in having a chance to work with the veteran cop. The super-heroic image of the Police officer and the multiple cases he has dealt with makes her eyes roll and it is understood that Burr is a deep fan of the heroic cop, Dormer.

Nolan even makes her say that her case study was in the murder case investigated by Will Dormer during her training in the academy. Burr says with amplified enthusiasm, “The Leland street murders was my case study at the academy” (*“Insomnia”* 00:05:59-00:06:03). In spite of her education, her experience and her perseverance, she remains an amateur in front of the male protagonist seeking his guidance and advice. Over the long haul, Nolan tries to testify that men are superior to women and a woman ultimately has to seek his guidance for the right kind of decisions. Mulvey’s arguments, vividly show how the male hero is glamorised by Nolan despite his guilt and anxieties. Though not objectified and used for the sake of voyeuristic pleasure as per Mulvey’s lines, the heroine here is trivialised and the hero is inexplicably manifested with more majesty on her behalf. Corresponding to the mirror image in Mulvey’s essay, the male hero is identified soon by the spectator and the sympathies finally rest with him irrespective of the fact whether he is right or wrong.

The active male figure demands a three-dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror-recognition in which the alienated subject internalised his own representation of this imaginary existence. The male protagonist is free to command the

stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action. (Mulvey 20)

Though Burr is portrayed as a workaholic detective, nevertheless, her hard-work is often underplayed and her efforts go unnoticed before the masculine axis. She is even nicknamed as Nancy Drew, the fictional female detective created by Edward Stratemeyer. In one of the scenes during a discussion with the male police officers, she is completely negated and her ideas are unreservedly ignored by others including Will Dormer.

Ellie Burr : I found this on the beach.

Fred : What is it ?

Ellie Burr : Shell case 9 mm. The murder weapon was a 38. None of us carries a 9mm. Or backup weapon, right?

Police officer : Get a hobby, would you ?

Ellie Burr : It's a legitimate point. Isn't it detective?

Will Dormer : This case is closed, Ellie. ("*Insomnia*" 01:35:44-61)

The conversation clearly elucidates how Burr's vital identification goes unnoticed by the men in her group. The taints of male domination and the treatment towards women and the secondary status that they retain irrespective of their independent, educated status is once again highlighted here. However hard she works, whatever be the effort that she chips in, she finally paves way for the male to walk in and take up the ultimate glory. Contrary to the mockery by the police

officers, the spectator finally understands that Burr's evidence was true to the core and that Dormer's guilt of accidentally shooting Hap was discovered by her. But her discovery goes unrecognised in the movie and she even tries to throw away the bullet, the only evidence, in order to save the male hero - Will Dormer. As Mulvey states, the audience moves out of the theatre with a heavy heart loaded with sympathies for Dormer and in the meanwhile Ellie Burr fades into darkness and far away from memory.

Though secondary in her screen status and though not sexually objectified, Burr's character reverberates the undertones of the females in Noir movies. Nolan's *Insomnia* is far away from the usual techniques of the Noir genre. Precisely, *Insomnia* would be the only movie where Nolan has not labelled his signature with Neo-Noir ideas. Ellie Burr definitely is not a Femme Fatale if one is to go by the argument in Janey Place's essay on Femme Fatales. Contrary to the spider woman, she leans more to the side of the Madonna or the nurturing woman who is compassionate enough to provide solace to her male hero. In Place's words, Ellie Burr possesses the "redeeming qualities" (60) of a nurturing woman. She is an icon of peace and fulfilment for the male. She is less powerful than the man and therefore is more reassuring. Though Burr brings forth the truth and Dormer's guilt, she pacifies him till the last moment and her admiration towards the male hero hardly fades. Dormer dies in her arms and she even gets ready to cast off the only evidence against Dormer to save him. Nolan makes her forget her duty, and her dedication for her profession, just to save the guilt of a superior officer whom she admires. She waves him goodbye by comforting him and he slowly goes for his eternal sleep.

Despite the accolades poured on Burr, she indeed is an undernourished character compared to the male figure.

If her unrelenting admiration towards Will Dormer is not noticed, there is in turn a strong sign of womanhood she would have come up with, in the movie. Being an enlightened, independent and workaholic woman, she would have carved a niche in the mind of the audience had she been portrayed with a clear stance without compromising her ideals for the sake of the hero.

Though a revenant throughout the film, the entire plot of *Insomnia* revolves around Kay Connell, the sixteen-year-old murdered teenager. The first time Kay appears on screen, she lies on the postmortem table with her naked body. The sexual allusions that can trigger from a lifeless body could be nil. But the harrowing manifestation on screen of a sixteen-year-old girl's rotten body which had been beaten to death infiltrates a terrifying message to the society. There is indeed a subtle question as to why Nolan refrained himself from thinking of a sixteen-year-old boy in place of Kay. The reports suggest that she was not raped or mutilated. Even then Nolan wanted a female figure in the crux of his storyline and the entire plot revolves around her murder.

The conversation between Dormer and Finch (the murderer) gives a clear picture about how he killed her. This is how Finch explains her death:

I kissed her and got a little excited and she started laughing at me. She wouldn't stop laughing, Ever had someone laugh at you when you are like that ? Vulnerable. Laughing their ass off? Someone you

thought respected you? You ever have that happen? I just wanted to stop her laughing. And then, you know...I hit her. Couple of times, to stop her. Get a little respect. And then everything was clear.

There was no turning back. And after that, I was calm. Real calm.

(*"Insomnia"* 01:19:08-33)

Finch's lines resemble those in *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning. The Duke in the poem says in a calm tone, "And all smiles stopped together" (line 14). Similarly, Finch explains in a relaxed voice how he had to kill her just because she did not show enough respect to him. Finch played by Robin Williams, is a local writer and Kay was his great admirer. Finch says his role was that of a mentor towards Kay. However, her uncontrollable laughter flustered him and he felt it as an irreverence which ignited his anger and made him take the brutal step of beating her to death. The message of patriarchy is evident here as and when Nolan indirectly demands respect towards the higher sex - the male. Connell's deep admiration for Finch parallels with Burr's deep-seated appreciation for Dormer. However, Nolan makes Dormer share his excellence par Finch as he becomes a foil to Finch when he turns out to be a fatherly figure for Burr, pouring his affection towards her.

As the story unfurls, it becomes clear that Kay Connell had a boyfriend named Randy Stetz who used to abuse her continuously. The violence against women can be seen in all movies of Nolan and such representations can invariably create a miasmatic tone in the psyche of the spectators. The continuous presentation of violence against women in cinema can obviously hint upon the feeling that it has become an inevitable part of the society. Finch even states that Connell never

disliked Randy despite the physical abuse he had meted out to her. Finch tells Dormer, “Randy did it all the time. She liked it when he did it. She never blamed him. Never wanted to leave him. I do it. She starts screaming. She wouldn’t stop” (“*Insomnia*” 01:18:32-40). Thus Connell becomes a commodity in the hands of both Randy and Finch and her characterisation shows how deeply a woman bears the ignominy of abuse on a universal basis.

Tanya Franchke, the friend of Connell is another female character who appears for a few scenes and serves only to showcase her charming body. She is seen together with Randy in the first scene and is then seen in the interrogation sequence with Dormer inside the car. She tries seducing Dormer and the camera focusses on her body parts. She serves to represent the modern generation and stands to manifest the dating girl who is callous enough to jilt her close friend. As Mulvey puts it, even though she appears only for a fraction of a second, her low-cut gown and her seductiveness add to the voyeuristic pleasure intended in cinema. Though Dormer ignores her sexual advances, she unwittingly becomes a possession for the spectators for a minute. “The image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favourite cinematic form” (Mulvey 24).

Tanya’s feeble role comes to an end as Dormer makes her speak the truth without responding to her sexual advances. The male hero is once again defined as a pristine man who is even capable of discarding the sexual advances of a beautiful teenager whereas the young girl is depicted in poor light even though she appears

only for a few seconds. Thus, she fulfils the structural necessity of the cinematic landscape in which a woman's body is objectified. It is this representation framed within the sociocultural window that *Objectification Theory* analyses through the psychological aspect of women spectators. Such representations on screen can easily tamper the mental schema of the spectators and can create unnecessary standards of beauty and objectification in their mind.

Far beyond the idea that adolescent girls simply do not like the size and shape of their maturing body, girls learn that this new body belongs less to them and more to others. Empirical studies document that with the changes of puberty, a girl's new body in a sense becomes "public domain": it is increasingly looked at, commented on, and otherwise evaluated by others. It increasingly becomes the target of sexual advances, harassment and sexual abuse. (Fredrickson and Roberts 193)

Thus, filmic representations can create an unnecessary set of beliefs in the mind of its spectators, both men and women. While men assess this voyeuristic pleasure as a tool of liberty to downplay the sexual harassments happening in society, women start treating themselves as commodities from the perspective of others, clouded with a low self-esteem.

The fourth female character Rachel Clement, the house owner of the Pioneer Lodge, is a significant slighter version of Ellie Burr. She is a listener for the bruised soul of Dormer since the beginning of the movie. She patiently listens to the conversation of Dormer and Hap and pacifies both when things take a different turn.

In Place's words, she is the woman who reassures and calms down a man and obviously a woman with secondary status. She becomes an ideal passive counterpart in Mulvey's words, reassuring the man. Though she is in touch with Dormer only for a few days, Dormer turns confident enough to confide in her his earlier stories in L.A. She becomes a prototype, a mother figure, who heals the pain of the hero.

When analysing *Insomnia*, it is well understood that Nolan fixes his female characters in two edges. They are either placed as objectified commodities or as the nurturers. Of all the movies of Nolan, *Insomnia* is the only movie where we can find the Madonna-nurturers in two forms - as Ellie Burr and as Rachel Clement. Usually his movies comprise of the fridged women and the Femme Fatales. Though Kay Connell's murder proves his track through his refrigerated females, the other females survive with their minor roles.

Hollywood had always carried the mistaken notion that the spectator prefers male heroes to female heroines. The gender problems in Hollywood is still under scrutiny and a consolidated solution has not yet been initiated. The iconic roles that the male leads play, had significantly filled in the imagination of the general public. Despite the advent of Feminism and the interference of various women's associations, women still account only to 15% of the Hollywood screen, says the statistical archives.

Gender representation in fact counts on two levels: the presence of females on screen and the ways in which women are represented on screen. Hollywood unmistakably proves to be a solid failure in both these realms. The shocking under-representation of women has been under question since the second world war period.

It is more dreadful that the patriarchal attitude is again and again engrained through the stream of Hollywood by the most prominent directors like Christopher Nolan from whom the society expects revolutionary changes. Despite the many upheavals in Hollywood, the film industry still remains to be a hot seat only for males, tarnishing the female images. “It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged” (Mulvey 24).

Women representations on screen are pivotal to the growing society as Hollywood movies are globally released and it has got far reaching consequences. The manifestation of women on screen does have an impact on the perception level of ordinary women who are seen in everyday life. The misrepresentation of women on the silver screen can definitely create a misguided conscience in each of its spectators. When female characters are mostly projected as sexualised in movies, the message it imparts can be a sense of terror where young women are forced to believe that their physical appearance matter more than anything else.

Men on screen are mostly seen as powerful, educated and independent where as women are often sketched in the roles of lovers, models and supporting characters for the male protagonists. Tracing back to Nolan’s three movies discussed above, it is seen that Bill is a writer, Shelby is an Insurance Investigator and Will Dormer is a reputed detective. Nolan’s women in his first three movies are hardly notable for the positions they occupy. Though Burr is a detective, she is depicted as an amateur growing in the shade of Dormer. Thus, the ultimate message delivered is that women are supporting characters for men and will remain only as secondary to the male

roles. The Founder and Chair of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in media, Geena Davis, opined thus in a press release: “the fact is - women are seriously under-represented across nearly all sectors of society around the globe, not just on-screen, but for the most part we are simply not aware of the extent. And media images exert a powerful influence in creating and perpetuating our unconscious biases” (Conor).

Films do possess a magical aura to influence people’s perception about the world and their perception about women. Women are often forced to fit into the concepts and ideals of femininity to satisfy men’s needs. The misrepresentation as well as objectification of women on screen can only fuel the existing disparity and gender inequality in our society. The real reformation can indeed climb up through filmic ladders and the real reformers in a society are the directors who can create and break the existing societal patterns. When women refrigerations happen constantly and continuously from the great directors like Christopher Nolan, the ultimate consequence that it sprinkles down will be heavily devastating and disparaging. Had these women characters been alive, the fate of the male characters would have been different or in other words the women characters would have dethroned these men through their independence and liberation. However, the director easily casts them off and stuffs them up forever in death. The recurring female deaths in Nolan’s movies have definitely chiseled a set notion about women in the mindset of the audience. When women occupy roughly half of the global population today, the final question still remains as why women continue to be totally absent from a glamorous Industry like Hollywood.

Chapter Three

The Fortified Masculinity: The Dwindling Females in Superhero Films

The over representation of men in movies and the undermining role of women on screen has not been manifested as an atypical practice since the inception phase of movies. The abundance of the provocative skin that is paraded on and the powerlessness of the supporting characters braced by women have always pushed them into poor light. This peculiar phenomenon is not just something that happens in Hollywood cinema but a repetitive cycle that occurs unequivocally on a universal basis. This very mechanism of subduing the female roles had been a part of the movie-history since time immemorial. They have slowly garnered into each and every sector of media through which an undercurrent of gender differences had been stated and envisioned unknowingly. Since Hollywood cinema seeks to step on to a privileged magical arena which stands out to be a benchmark for evaluating and analysing movies on a global scale, a restructuring of the current Hollywood model cinema turns out to be inevitable with its minority in women representations.

The prime objective of any media is to disseminate information and to inculcate the value system held by the then society. Media thus has a decisive role in framing the socio-cultural practices and traditions in a community. The dawn of the 21st century saw discernible changes in the field of feminism and its evocative roles. Though Hollywood has tried in imparting feministic ideologies in the latest decades, the inherent molecules of patriarchy still retains and regrettably the effects of feministic ideals were never visibly put to the screen.

Hollywood often tries to sell a different picture externally by giving itself a pat on its back for having popularised and promoted gender parity. But however, numbers do not lie and out of the top 100 movies of 2018, hardly 33 featured female lead roles. Thus the existing picture of Hollywood in connection with female representation is absolutely disheartening.

Movies, in general, portray stereotyped men and women. The roles assigned to both men and women reiterate the age-old traditional roles where a man is defined beyond his capabilities and a woman beneath her powers. “Rather than providing realistic representations in the media, men and women both tend to be depicted in a hyper-traditional manner, which maintains stereotypes of personality traits, capabilities, and aspirations” (Bussey and Bandura 1298).

Though women had made substantial contributions in the field of cinema, their roles remain insignificant even today when in comparison with masculine roles. This representation is in no way different in Hollywood movies as well. Gender representation in media can often create an unwelcome channel through which gender roles are recreated and made to be perceived by the audience.

Gender development is definitely the principal factor in shaping and reshaping the hegemonic structures in a society and the role of a woman is very often determined by these social components. The restrictions these structures impose on and the conventions that they force upon, continuously inhibits the vital capabilities of a woman. Unfortunately, these structures come back more fortified through meagre women characterisations being showcased in movies. Hollywood is indeed accountable for this inclusion crisis and unless a real transformation happens,

the destiny of Hollywood would remain the same with women looking through the curtain from the backstages.

Christopher Nolan's movies are in no means away from the typical gender renditions according to the social dominant order. Nolan's initial phase which boomed him up into the threshold of Hollywood Movies were solid representations of the existing gender order in the society. His initial three movies *Following*, *Memento* and *Insomnia* were graphic bestowals of the negligible role of women. These movies had recapitulated the secondary nuances through which women are decoded. The conglomeration of women whose skin had been exhibited and the women who were considered as spider women had taken up their puny share in all these three movies. They are either defined in strong terms of negativity or in subtle segmented variations. These manifestations had been investigated and studied thoroughly in the last chapter through a re-reading within a new conceptual framework. How far Nolan's men have scaled high in the movie screen is an undebatable question as they are furnished with much strength and courage despite their psychological inaccuracies. The women however tread the same stereotypical path of aiding these men through their tracks.

When movies, on a general assessment, signal the marginalisation of women on screen, a superhero movie, on a logical basis, can only sideline women more often than imaginative perception. The real progress of a society can be assessed when a heroine-centered movie is released and treated the same way as a hero-centered movie. Most of the superhero movies use female characters only on a marginal level as sidekicks.

Visual representation of female characters are undoubtedly important to understand and analyse how the civilized society is evolving. Movies are a testimony bearing the innate thoughts and feelings of a society which is generated through an iconic director of the epoch. Thus, a movie of a particular era speaks volumes about the society from which it actually emerges and evolves. Superhero movies, as the name suggests, are extremely male-centered movies and the masculine power and persona is glorified and highlighted to an unimaginable zenith. The female characters, however, become a prop either to work with the gratification of the hero's gaze or to be depicted as a weaker character who is often rescued at the mercy of the male hero. The real hassle begins as we realise that none of these women in superhero movies have their own stories. These female stories in fact revolve around the male stories. Most of these female characters are sketched by male writers or male directors and therefore the story often takes its shape and form through male perspective. "Writers often overlook the female perspective, because the male story lines are considered dominant or universal" (Fisher and Russell 222).

Women representations can indeed have a strong social effect on the upcoming generation thereby teaching them that a man is always superior to a woman in his physical strength as well as his charismatic mental valour. Superhero movies have in a way contributed to this imbalance in perceiving male and female characters. According to the senior Vice President of Marvel, Tom Brevoort, "It's not that you can't have a successful or well-written female superhero, but in general, historically, proportionately, we just haven't had as many" (Murphy 1).

Christopher Nolan's Second phase of directorial finesse showcases the blockbuster box office hit - the Batman trilogy comprising of three Batman Movies with the same superhero figure ruling the screen. Batman comes directly from the most celebrated characters of DC comics. Comic books are in fact a window to the past in understanding the role of women in the previous decades. Most superhero movies are rooted in DC comics and a resurrection of these movies have given ample space for the heroes to build up and flourish their characters through the gargantuan movie screen. On the other hand, the women characters still find no space in these reincarnated movies and their minute role is only to serve the man - the master.

Nolan's Batman Trilogy emerged as a remake of the DC comic character - Batman. A revival of the Batman character had been endeavoured by many a directors in the past years. But unluckily, the majority of these rebooted films on Batman failed to supplement enough chances towards the levels of box office hits. However, Nolan's take on Batman was different, and he portrayed him through a psychological subversion juxtaposing his real identity as well as his identity as the Batman. This parallel schema succeeded and created a loud applause among the audience globally and his series on Batman became a blockbuster hit. Kevin Feige, one of the greatest film producers and President of Marvel Studios stated, "Chris Nolan's *Batman* is the greatest thing that happened (to superhero films) because it bolstered everything" (Jackson).

Nolan's second phase of directorial chart commences and culminates with his Batman stories. The first movie in the Batman Series was released in the year

2005 and it eventually turned out to be a successful recreation of the ever loved superheroic character Batman. This turned out to be the eighth highest grossing movie in the year 2005 in US. The massive success and accolades reaped by the movie enhanced a clear signal that the superhero was accepted by the mass audience on a global level. This is how Nolan explains his connection with Batman.

All I can say is that I grew up with Batman, I've been fascinated by him and I'm excited to contribute to the lore surrounding the character. He is the most credible and realistic of the superheroes and has the most complex human psychology. His superhero qualities come from within. He's not a magical character. I had a fantastic experience with the studio on 'Insomnia,' and I'm keen to repeat that experience. (Leitch and Grierson)

Following the poor reception of *Batman and Robin* in 1997, directed by Joel Schumacher, there were many recurring attempts based on the character of Batman. However, Nolan's attempt was something different and clicked the fortunes of an era, different from many other futile attempts of other directors. The emotional investment that Nolan could invest in his audience through the Batman was a major difference he had set forth for his movie. Nolan aimed for a more realistic version of the Batman with social commitments though the movie was rooted in a more dark and grim ambience. Thus, the concept of a superhero was redesigned by Nolan with his punctilious mechanism of directorial artistry.

In the past few decades, the superhero film has become the contemporary version of the western, a genre that became extremely

prolific in the 1940s and 1950s. Like the western, the superhero film most often focuses on an isolated hero who exists outside the constraints of the social order and the law. But at the same time, the western hero fights for the sake of the social order. This hero is the exception to the law that makes the law possible - often going so far as to found the social order by ridding it of violent threats.

(McGowan 167)

Released in the year 2005, *Batman Begins* is a story that unfolds through a social reordering performed by its hero. *Batman Begins* narrates the story of Bruce Wayne and his psychological investigation through his double personality. Not being worn down by the incessant exploitation from social crimes around him, he continues his sojourn through his superheroic errands thereby creating an order to the disordered city of Gotham. Cast in the film genre of a Vigilante movie, Bruce Wayne, the protagonist, follows his own systems of law to defeat the filthy crime revolving around him. A vigilante movie is a kind of a revenge movie in which the legal system fails the protagonist pushing him to become a vigilante or to take law into his hands. Bruce Wayne is a symbolic representation of a vigilante who administers his own set of laws using his own *modus operandi*. The prominent American movies of the 1970s like *Death Wish* and *Dirty Harry* reiterated the cinematic themes of the era denoting crimes and its solutions. The movie is a meditation for seeking varied reasons or motivations for the purpose of violence. The Caped Crusader's quest in bringing justice back to the city of Gotham is the crux of the storyline.

The Batman or Bruce Wayne is played by the most distinguished actor of Hollywood, Christian Bale. Witnessing the death of his parents at an early age, Bruce becomes an orphan and is raised by his family butler Alfred Pennyworth (played by Michael Caine). The unexpected injustice meted out against his parents by a robber named Joe Chill disappoints Wayne and he is all the more dejected when the culprit is paroled by the court after fourteen years. Wayne's fear of bats and his stance as an orphan and industrial heir to the Wayne enterprises worth millions triggers him towards an unassigned role of the Batman. His actions to thwart the diabolic plans of the city mafia boss Falcone, the Scarecrow and Ra's Al Ghul follows the rest of the storyline as he glides between the role of his self-identity Bruce Wayne and his secondary vigilante identity of the Batman.

However, while the success story of the Batman still remains, the negated women within the story never come to the surface. Nolan's inevitable leaning towards Female killings is evidently established in his Batman Trilogy too. It is not surprising to note the dearth of female characters, especially in a superhero movie where the hero is poured on with glorifications. With an outstanding role like that of the Batman, it is quite customary that his girlfriend should be easily forgotten. As such, the woman character in *Batman Begins* - Rachael Dawes, occupies a very insignificant role in spite of her status as an Assistant District Attorney who could have in fact taken part actively in a movie within the spectrum of social issues. Unfortunately, Nolan has not blown much air into the character of Dawes and she just vanishes to be a sidekick following the trepidations that the hero makes with his secondary identity. Despite the enormous studies on Nolan's thematic excellence

and his craftsmanship in his narrative complexity, there has always been a limited scholarly analysis based on Nolan's body of work pertaining to gender schisms. Consequently, this chapter seeks to address the critical void that has not been touched upon till this date.

Nolan had accurately pinned down his disinterest towards powerful women characters since his first movie *Following*. His initial three movies had drawn the sturdy lines against women and his embryonic phase consisting of *Following*, *Memento* and *Insomnia* had been read and analysed in the previous chapter. Nolan's usual practice of refrigerating the females does not cease to exist even with his second phase of directorial dexterity with his Batman Blockbusters. There is only one major female character that Nolan delineates in *Batman Begins*. Apart from Rachel Dawes, there is Bruce's mother Martha Wayne who is on screen for a very limited time. Rachael Dawes played by Katie Holmes is depicted as Bruce's childhood friend and love interest. She serves her role as the Assistant District Attorney at Gotham city. This movie undoubtedly seals the very fate of refrigeration of females within its frame of the plot.

The character of Rachael Dawes had been appreciated and applauded many a time by many critics. A preliminary glance at the character of Rachael Dawes gives a deceiving impression that she had been sketched in full vigour with all the necessary sensibilities pertaining to her character. But an extensive study on her characterisation offers more insight to understand that she is in no way different from Nolan's quintessential female characters. It is only when the sequels to this movie are watched that it is understood that Rachael Dawes had been created only to

transmit the smouldering wrath of the protagonist when she gets killed in the second part of the Batman Trilogy. Nolan keeps her alive in the first part as Bruce Wayne already had an effective reason to keep his fury burning through the death of his father and mother. His quest for revenge and his enthusiasm to settle the score is already set in motion in the first part with the death of his parents.

Being the only prominent female characterisation that pervades through the movie, Rachael Dawes had been constructed and demolished by Nolan only to manipulate the trajectory of his male hero. She could be easily read from her two different perspectives in the movie - her personal as well as her professional perspectives. She is a childhood friend as well as a confidante of Bruce Wayne. In one of the initial scenes where Bruce laments his inefficiency in avenging the death of his parents, she turns out to be a paramour, inculcating values in her boyfriend. Beyond the dialogues, Nolan was indeed trying to extend his ideology of the subtle values that should be inherent in a woman but not entirely expected from a man. Dawes teaches him about love, compassion and brotherhood. She just automatically becomes an epitome of the delicate feelings which could only be generated in a female psyche.

Bruce Wayne : My parents deserved justice.

Rachael Dawes : Well, you are not talking about justice. You are talking about revenge.

Bruce Wayne : Sometimes they are the same.

Rachael Dawes : No, They are never the same, Bruce. Justice is about harmony.

Revenge is about you making yourself better
which is why we have an impartial system.

Bruce Wayne : Well, your system is broken. (*Batman Begins*
00:26:30-39)

Nolan himself has stated that Dawes is portrayed with tremendous warmth and a great emotional appeal. She becomes a true nurturer for Bruce - representing a mother figure for him. While the Batman undertakes his solitary battle for justice in Gotham, whatever Rachael does just escape into void. Throughout the movie, Batman/Bruce Wayne remains as the hero with his unshakable quest for justice and his staunch commitment towards the society. Dawes appears for a while with her filling physical presence and indeed provides a soothing pleasure for the male spectators as well as the hero in the movie. On the contrary, the protagonist is only assessed in terms of awe and power and each of his movements are appreciated by the spectators as well as the minor characters within the filmic canvas.

There is no doubt that Christopher Nolan's Batman has amused the avid fans as well as thrill-seekers of the era. Nolan landed in the film world during the late nineties when there was a considerable change in the process of filmmaking. His earlier movies were noted for their intricate ways of narration and the complex technicalities. But unfortunately, the message imparted to the society is nothing but male supremacy. As Nolan had gone to unimaginable heights in sketching the character of his protagonist, the heroine just wrinkles out in oblivion. She appears to be a pure alien in the film and the plot would have plodded easily to its endpoint even without her presence. There is nothing substantial that she does in the movie.

But her towering physical presence is rendered throughout the movie. Without any doubt, her presence offers a pleasure to the audience as Mulvey states in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. “The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at” (Mulvey 16).

To simplify, a sexual connotation is not always mandatory to attain pleasure. At times, the presence itself can contribute to pleasurable feelings. The costume, or the gestures or some unguarded actions too can offer pleasure. However, this root of pleasure anyhow originates from the female world. She becomes a necessary source to offer pleasure to the unaccounted millions of spectators. The burden of this objectification falls only on the female, and not on the male as per Mulvey’s essay.

According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the physical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between the spectacle and narrative supports the man’s role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense. (Mulvey 20)

A man is always bestowed with superior power and thus he becomes the active power agent in the movie. A woman is powerless as well as a substantial commodity of pleasure directed to gratify the male audience.

In a conversation between the drug dealer Falcone and one of his thugs Flass, in *Batman Begins*, Rachael Dawes is being described thus:

Flass : Word on the street is you got a beef with somebody
in the DA's office.

Is that right? And that there's a fat prize waiting for
anybody who's willing to do anything about it.

Falcone : So what's your point Mr. Flass ?

Flass : Have you seen the girl ?

Falcone : It's a cute little assistant D.A. ("*Batman Begins*"
00:58:24-33)

This is how Falcone defines the Assistant District Attorney, Rachael Dawes. She is described just in terms of her physical presence and her position, education and power of the post that she occupies just vanishes into nothingness. Thus, she turns out to be a "cute presence" not just for the protagonist, but for the other male actors within the screen as well as the male spectators watching the movie. This bears resemblance with what Mulvey has stated. "A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment, the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space (19).

Mulvey's statements correlates with what Fredrickson and Roberts opined in their essay. According to them, our sociocultural structure is saturated with heterosexuality. Therefore, a concealed permission is authorised to all male

spectators to have a look at the females around them. Fredrickson and Roberts discuss this context thus: “Sexualization occurs in many forms, ranging from sexual violence to sexualised evaluation. The most subtle and deniable way sexualised evaluation is enacted - and arguably the most ubiquitous - is through gaze or visual inspection of the body (175).

To magnify the physical presence of Dawes, she is seen in close-up scenes. Nolan has used strong close-up scenes with his male characters to augment their characterisation on a whole. But very often Nolan uses close-up scenes with his females, and this is mostly to enhance their physical beauty and not to emphasise their significant inner power. Her face dominates the object of vision of the male hero as well as the spectator. Mary Ann Doane discusses the complexity of such a shot in this way:

The face, more than any other bodily part, is for the other. It is the most articulate sector of the body, but it is mute without the other's reading. In the cinema, this is evidenced in the pause, the meaningful moment of the close up, for the spectator, the scale of the close up corresponding less than other shots to the dictates of perspectival realism. And this being-for-the-gaze-of-the-other is of course, most adequate as a description of the female subject, locked within the mirror of narcissism. (47)

The physical charm and the sexual appeal of a woman portrayed within the filmic canvas thus becomes mandatory for the progress of a movie. This is often consigned as an element of narcissism in association with the female. Apart from her

soaring physical presence, Dawes's powers are underestimated throughout the movie. The thugs do not even find her as a substantial opponent and even Bruce warns her as she undertakes a few challenging roles in *The Batman Begins*.

Wayne : Whats wrong ?

Dawes : It's Falcone. Dr. Crane moved him to Arkham
Asylum on suicide watch

Wayne : You're going to Arkham now? Its' in the Narrows,
Rachael.

Dawes : You enjoy your party Bruce. Some of us have work
to do.

Wayne : You be careful. ("*Batman Begins*" 01:21:53-59)

Despite her powerful position, she is showcased as requiring the help of the Batman in every attempt that she makes as a part of her social commitment. When she gets exposed to a fear inducing hallucinogen by Dr. Crane and turns incapacitated, Batman comes to her rescue. She is portrayed as wanting man's help despite being bold and powerful. He comes like a whirlwind and swoops down and lifts her up. His actions make him a superhero and the character of the Batman unwittingly gets glued to the viewer's memory list. Nevertheless, the incapacitated, weak, unconscious Rachael Dawes waits for the hero's arrival for her impending rescue operation. The superhero even evades the Police force and administers an antidote for her and rescues her and leaves her in her bed chamber at her home. The protagonist who turns out to be the saviour for the heroine is essentially a symbol of a traditional and conventional pattern that retains the hegemonic structural presence

and this masculine symbol of strength, independence and dominance is reiterated in many scenes by Nolan. She is rescued again in the last scene by the very same Batman. Nolan's titular hero serves to be the reincarnation of the heroic warrior in the primordial period. When a man rescues a woman, the agenda behind such a performance is definitely to depict the heroine as meek, powerless, dependent and undistinguished.

Bruce Wayne's mother, Martha Wayne is another female character who appears in the movie. She comes exactly in three different scenes and then gets killed in the last scene. There is an undebatable difference in the way in which Christopher Nolan had pictured Bruce Wayne's father and mother. His father has been depicted as a visionary, a noble man, who wanted to see his Gotham city flourishing. His benevolence has been sprinkled on each and every segment of the city. His affection towards his son, his interest in taking care of the poor, the value lessons that he inculcates to his son, his fondness towards his wife and many more pass through within these fragmented scenes. He appears to teach his son lessons for life which he learns and adheres to in his later life. In a scene where Bruce falls into a cavern hovering with bats, his father comes for his rescue and consoles him thus: "And why do we fall Bruce? So we can learn to pick ourselves up" ("*Batman Begins*" 00:10:43-45).

He appears to be an exemplary and ideological father instilling the values of life to his son. Unfortunately, his mother does not appear anywhere along with him in imparting these life lessons. Her dialogues are almost nil except for a single one soon after the opera session. During the opera when little Bruce witnesses a number

of bats on stage, we see how his father understands the terror going through the mind of his son and instantly takes him out. Martha Wayne remains silent all through these scenes and is never seen highlighted in any of them. She is presented in poor light as a mother with no insight or maternal plenitude.

Moreover, to touch the zenith of patriarchal conventions, Nolan introduces an expensive piece of jewellery which is being gifted by Thomas Wayne to Martha Wayne. The jewellery piece is of substantial prominence since they both get killed in the name of this jewellery ultimately in the scene soon after the Opera. Though unnoticeable in the scene, Nolan's innate mindset is revealed through the connection between the jewellery piece and a feminine passion for material constructs. The portrayal of Bruce's parents are not justified and does not seek a balance in which they are showcased. While his father is demonstrated as a visionary basking in munificence, his mother is portrayed as a meek and passive lady thus designated to the chores of her home. She disappears from the screen with one single dialogue and comes back only as the memory that is ignited in Bruce's slumber.

Despite Nolan's auteur persona, his Batman trilogy thunderously delineates the typical Hollywood archetypes. Rather than putting his ideas to reconstruct and revamp the existing social order, he has followed and established the hitherto traditional gender archetypes through his movies. Instead of demolishing this archaic concept of women as the dependent soul on men, he constructs his women in the same framework.

Apart from Bruce Wayne, the protagonist, there are a few male characters present in the movie who have been characterised in a very strong way. There are

four strong male characters projected through the storyline including the villain - Alfred Pennyworth, Lucious Fox, Jim Gordon and the Draconian villain Ra's Al Ghul.

Alfred Pennyworth played by Michael Caine is the butler at Manor House as well as the guardian of Bruce Wayne. He continues to serve Master Wayne even after the death of his parents and occupies the role of a foster parent to the tormented soul of Bruce. Nolan had effectively portrayed a foster father element through Alfred Pennyworth which in every sense stands above the role of the biological mother, Martha Wayne. Alfred is placed in the role of a father figure for Bruce and remains faithful to him throughout. He is a true confidante for Bruce and stands with him for his secondary identity as the Batman in saving the city of Gotham. Alfred played by the senior artist Michael Caine is presented as a character with a strong will just like the Batman. He stands for what he believes in and is steadfast and determined in his role throughout.

Lucious Fox played by Morgan Freeman is another important and sturdy character portrayed by Nolan. He is a distinguished employee at Wayne Enterprise and conducts advanced research studies in biochemistry and mechanical engineering. He provides all the necessary gear for Bruce to carry on with his role as the Batman. His Batsuit and the techy car named as Tumbler is offered to him by Fox. He is depicted as a master of technological innovations and is recognised as a master brain in the movie. While Alfred metaphorically symbolises the power within Bruce Wayne, it is Fox who supplies the Batman's external power literally.

Jim Gordon played by Gary Oldman is one of the few uncorrupted police officers remaining in the city of Gotham. Gordon stands for everything good in the movie and is a symbol of virtue throughout. Oldman himself has stated thus about his role. "I embody the themes of the movie which are the values of family, courage and compassion and a sense of right and wrong, good and bad and justice" (McClellan).

Gordon is portrayed to be sharing a special bond with Bruce and aids him in all of his endeavours. Gordon embodies the goodness in the city of Gotham through his hard work and dedication as a police officer.

The fourth and the most important character is indeed the villain of the piece - Ra's Al Ghul played by Liam Neeson. Nolan has always emphasised his magical powers on his villains and especially in his Batman series with his three exceptional villains including Ra's Al Ghul, the Joker and Bane respectively. Ra's Al Ghul is the leader of an ancient group named as the 'League of Shadows' that fights injustice in their own methods. Though he comes back at the climax of the movie as the real villain, his role is a parallel one to that of Alfred thereby being a mentor to Bruce Wayne. He is the one who relates with the greatest life lessons to Bruce and teaches him what is right and what is wrong. Nolan himself has claimed about his villains thus during a two hour talk at the Cannes Film festival when he offered a unique take on his Batman series. "To me, each film is a different genre. They tend to be defined by the villain" (Setoodeh). However, his villains in the Batman series are very much masculine and they begin with Ra's Al Ghul and moves on to Joker and culminates with Bane in the third series.

There is no doubt that Batman is the most distinguished superhero creation of Christopher Nolan. However, his enemies absorb an equal status in accordance with the hero. Sometimes, Nolan makes his villains more presentable through the inexorable delineation that the villain stays in our memory even when the movie comes to an end. Nolan's antagonists have always emitted their stock of power in varied ways and they have carved a niche in the mind of the global audience. Though their actions cannot be completely accounted on an ethical base, they are fondly remembered and praised by the spectators all over the world. The real contradiction touches here when his fragile women characterisation and his solid projections of the masculine roles are observed.

In *Batman Begins*, Nolan has unquestionably magnified the character of Bruce Wayne. We notice that as Wayne's character gets enlarged with each new scene, Rachael Dawes diminishes into oblivion with each passing scene. Nolan has not deliberately given her the DA position and he subtly makes her an Assistant DA serving another DA who is again a man. Nolan's Bruce Wayne or Batman is thus a powerful symbol of patriarchy which does not rule out the notions of conventions and traditions. There are evident scenes in which Rachael laments for Bruce when she finds him in the company of other dancers in an expensive hotel. Her continuous longing to be in his company and the transformation of her childhood friend into an unauthorised vigilante pains her and she is once again structured within the conventions of patriarchy through these depictions. She is presented as a Madonna-nurturer in its full length and her only role is to comfort and assist him. As Mulvey puts it, women in movies are sometimes illustrated with their beauty to the zenith

and are treated as perfect objects. Being perfect, in this sense, makes it rather less dangerous. She terms it as Fetishistic Scopophilia. "The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look (22).

Thus Nolan has tactfully squeezed Dawes into a corner of the plot making her the real nurturer for the bruised soul of Bruce Wayne. Even the other major male characters have a profound solid character base compared to that of Rachel Dawes.

The critical acclaim that Nolan received through the success of *Batman Begins* ensured the necessity of its sequel. The long three years that Nolan worked on for the creation of the second part triggered an unfathomable curiosity in Nolan fans as well as Batman fans who were eagerly waiting to see how Nolan would outdo the original first part. The stunning performance of the Batman and the villain - the Joker in the second part was a real boon and triggered political as well as ethical questions towards an evolving society. It was during George Bush's war on terror that Nolan worked on the second part, and the expanded authorities that functioned beyond original law systems had ample similarities with the vigilante in Batman. Thus *The Dark Knight* was released in the year 2008 with great expectations on a bombarded budget. However, the movie indeed outdid the first part and even scored multiple awards and recognitions apart from its gross collection in the year 2008.

Though the movie pushed itself to a set of new ethical and social questions disturbing the set pattern of the system of law enforcement, the most important

realm which required a change remained stagnant in Nolan's hands. Though Nolan uses the same set of characters in his trilogy, he introduces his innovation in the villains he creates in each of his movies associated with Batman. The women in his movies however never see light and the pattern echoes continuously even in the second part.

Rachael Dawes continues her presence in *The Dark Knight* until she gets murdered brutally by the schizophrenic villain - the Joker. Her portrayal as a meek, passive woman continues even in the second part though the role is handled by a different actress this time, Maggie Gyllenhaal. She occupies a very shadowy role and serves to be the same childhood sweetheart in the mind of Bruce. But surprisingly, she is depicted as dating Harvey Dent played by Aaron Eckhart, the new District Attorney of Gotham. She is a strong inspiration for Bruce and her dialogue in the ultimate scene of the first part pushes Bruce to think again to drop his Batman mask and to forge a romantic relationship with her in *The Dark Knight*.

Rachael Dawes : I never stopped thinking about you. About us.
And when I heard you were back, I started to
hope. But then I found about your mask.

Bruce Wayne : Batman is just a symbol, Rachael.

Rachael Dawes : No, this is your mask. Your real face is the one
that criminals now fear. The man I loved..the
man who vanished..he never came back at all.
But maybe he's still out there somewhere.

Maybe someday when Gotham no longer needs
a Batman, I'll see him again. ("*The Dark
Knight*" 02:07:45-58)

However, a totally different and matured Rachael is seen in Part two. She is seen working with Dent and dating him. She takes up the social commitments in a more matured way though her attempts are seen thwarted again. As the movie progresses, it gives the true realisation that the main purpose of Rachael Dawes is just to ignite the fury of the Batman to avenge her death. Thus, in a nutshell, she acts as an agent to carry forward the reason for the protagonist to exist. She appears in the initial scenes of *The Dark Knight* in more pomp and majesty than the first part. Her costumes are even more colourful and attracts the attention of Bruce Wayne, his romantic rival Harvey Dent as well as the spectators. Unger argues that,

Physical beauty can translate to power for women; Attractiveness functions as a prime currency for women's social and economic success. The value of this currency, however, may differ across subgroups of women. Arguably, to be traded for social and economic power, a woman's beauty must appeal to the tastes of the dominant (white male) culture. (4)

Dawes is dressed in elegant scarlet costume with Harvey Dent where they meet Bruce Wayne with his ballet girlfriend. The camera focusses her quite a number of times to showcase her physical charm. Even for the fundraiser that Bruce Wayne throws, she is seen dressed up as a mannequin. The representation of Rachael Dawes in terms of her physical charm and grace in turn is a threat to the

new generation of the existing society. These beauty pageants portrayed through films do set a benchmark of beauty and fashion which can trigger further consequences in the real world as suggested by Fredrickson and Roberts.

Understanding the messages women receive within our objectifying culture helps to explain this difference. First, in American culture, we are continually exposed to images of idealised female bodies. These idealised images are almost invariably of youth, slimness and whiteness. Indeed it is difficult to find media depictions of female beauty that are different from this Western European ideal. The mass media's broad dispersion of these idealised images of women's bodies has all but universalised them. (181)

The appalling female deaths in Nolan's movies are equally disappointing as the unachievable beauty standards set on screen. The celebrated physical appearance of the heroine actually meant to invoke visual pleasure for the male spectator can damagingly intensify the harmful concept of the benchmark of what feminine beauty and fashion should be. These paramours of beauty while appeasing men, can be a threat to the existing ordinary women community in the society. The failure to achieve this filmic standard of beauty can trigger the feathers of shame in the internal psyche of a woman which can obviously motivate her to attain the unattainable.

Viewed in this light, women's ongoing efforts to change body and appearance through diet, exercise, fashion, beauty products, and, perhaps most dangerously, surgery and eating disorders, reveal what

may be a perpetual and hardly adaptive body-based shame. The extent to which body “correction” is motivated by shame elevates the task of meeting societal standards of beauty to a moral obligation. Thus, women who fail to live up to this obligation have been deemed uncivilised and immoral. (Fredrickson and Roberts 182)

There is indeed a special concern for Feminist Critics when Nolan deliberately kills Rachael Dawes half way through the movie. The recurring theme that Nolan introduces through the refrigeration of the female characters character beyond questions and seem to be implausible with each of his new movies. The villain of the piece realises Batman’s romantic relationship with her and uses her as the bait not once but twice. Rachael is thrown out into the air from a towering hall where Bruce Wayne’s fundraiser party is going on. However, Batman appears from nowhere and rescues her through the thin air that she floats in. The villain kidnaps Dawes and ties her up in a hidden place making Batman appear again. However, the Police fails in finding her on time and she goes through a brutal death burning into ashes. Nolan somewhere was trying to hint that the heroine is incapable of defending herself without the aid of his male hero - the Batman. This very scene is definitely a call for concern not just for feminists but for anyone who stands for gender equality.

Rachael’s death would seem to be a psychological inspiration for her two sweethearts Bruce Wayne as well as Harvey Dent. However, the heroes are glorified in their own mechanisms while Rachael becomes washed out embracing death. Rachael Dawes had been an innovation that Nolan tried out beyond the characters in DC comics and it had been one of the characters who had been raised to superlative

degrees to the equivalent of a Saint. The methodological catapulting by which she turns out to be a worshipping statue, becoming an embodiment of everything good was one logical way through which Nolan tried to suppress her very character. What Mulvey states as fetishistic Scopophilia is a mechanism through which a female is unnecessarily raised to the level of a saint and thereby gradually relegated to the margins.

Rachel Dawes is also defined with the innate vacillation of a woman. She herself seems confused at her freedom of choice between Bruce Wayne and Harvey Dent. She requests Bruce Wayne to cast off his mask of Batman for her to continue her relationship with him. Contrary to this, she is seen dating Harvey Dent in the second part *The Dark Knight*.

Racahel Dawes : Harvey called. He said Batman is gonna turn himself in.

Bruce Wayne : I have no choice.

Racahel Dawes : You honestly think that's going to keep the Joker from killing people ?

Bruce Wayne : May be not, but I have enough blood on my hands. And I have seen now what I would have to become to stop men like him.
You once told me that if the day came when I was finished, that we would be together.

Rachael Dawes : Bruce, don't make me your one hope for a normal life.

Bruce Wayne : Did you mean it ?

Rachael Dawes : Yes. If you turn yourself in, they are not gonna let us be together. (*"The Dark Knight"* 01:08:38-56)

She gives enough hope to Wayne and at the same time keeps her relation in tact with Dent. However, in her last scene, before her death, she openly declares her love for Dent which is clearly understood by the spectators. "Harvey, just in case, I want to tell you something, okay. I don't want to live without you. And I do have an answer for you. And my answer is yes" (*"The Dark Knight"* 01:35:30-38).

Rachael thus gives an answer to Harvey's proposal before she dies. However, the question still persists as to why Nolan had portrayed her through the lines of indecision. She lays down the condition of casting off his Batman mask to be with Bruce. When he does not, she goes back to Harvey and continues her relationship. Thus the subtle reality regarding her true emotion gets questioned due to her fluctuating nature sealed with a conditional love. Nolan had tried to represent the essence of vacillation in her romantic tie through her frailty. Nolan indeed was trying to re-echo what Shakespeare had said in Hamlet with reference to Hamlet's mother Gertrude. Hamlet speaks against his mother by stating "Frailty thy name is woman" (Shakespeare 1.2.146). Nolan too tries to illustrate her fluctuating heart as to whom to choose among the men she had a romantic connection with.

She entrusts an unsealed letter to Alfred in the name of Bruce Wayne which Alfred burns out believing that it would hurt him. Dawes' letter reads thus:

Dear Bruce, I need to be honest and clear. I am going to marry Harvey Dent. I love him and I want to spend my life with him. When I told you that if Gotham no longer needed Batman we could be together, I meant it. But now I'm sure the day won't come when you no longer need Batman. I hope it does and if it does I will be there, but as your friend. I'm sorry to let you down. If you lose your faith in me, please keep your faith in people. Love, now and always, Rachael. ("*The Dark Knight*" 01:37:04-53)

To emphasise her words again, she seems to be conditional enough in dealing with her love as Nolan depicts her. But the male characters had been represented as the denominations of unrelenting devotion to their love interest. Bruce Wayne is seen to be unconditionally in love with Rachael even after her death and her photograph is placed along with his deceased parents. Even after her death, she lights up in his heart and proves to be a burning promise within his actions in Gotham. Harvey Dent is in no way lesser to Wayne in his loyalty towards Rachael. His mental anguish and deep torment after Rachael's death transforms him to a totally different man and he becomes the real sinister presence in Gotham inflicting his revenge on everyone.

The prominence of masculinity has been highlighted in a number of scenes by Nolan. Batman is seen reaching the place where Dent is kidnapped as the Joker had lied about the locations of both Rachael and Harvey Dent. Thus Dent is rescued by Batman whereas Rachael could not be saved by the police officers. To signify the masculine potential further, Nolan makes Dent finally identify the officer who could

not save Rachael and that turns out to be Ann Ramirez, another female detective.

The most striking aspect to notice here is how incompetent Nolan's female characters turn out to be, despite being Detectives and Attorneys.

Through his usual trajectory, Nolan has portrayed very strong male characters even in this second series. The protagonist as well as the Antagonists has been roped in with almost equal mettle and the question remains still debatable as to who is more powerful within the movie. The villain in the piece, the Joker, is in fact a beefy presence and his manifestation in the movie is of high signification both visually as well as through dialogue delivery. It is persistently disappointing that a movie which portrays a strong villainous character fails tremendously to represent a strong woman character. Nolan's Joker has been praised to lengths and the women characters just turn out to be mere shadows and revenants. Nolan's Joker played by Heath Ledger has bagged the most coveted Academy award for the best supporting actor in the year 2008.

The villain of the piece, the Joker has been pushed in with an equal sturdiness along with the hero of the story. They compete with each other throughout and the audience understand that the antagonist is in no way a lesser target than the hero. The Joker's identity is not mentioned nor his intentions. The ethical reasons behind his evil incarnation too is not mentioned in the storyline. However, all that is understood is that though he is diabolic in his intentions and his will, he is a powerful equivalent to the protagonist of the story. Though malicious in his nature, he is meticulous in his calculations and determined about his intentions.

Nolan had given a very strong character sketch for him and no wonder Heath Ledger who played the role won the award posthumously.

Nonetheless, the Joker's comments about Rachael Dawes too is filled with necessary sarcasm expressing the age-old secondary status of females. In order to win the Batman, she is turned into a bait and made a prey to his evil intentions. She becomes instrumental in pushing the story forward even in her absence. The Joker asks the Batman, "Does Harvey know about you and his little bunny?" (*The Dark Knight* 01:29:56-58). The little bunny mentioned here is Dawes. The Joker gives a choice to Batman to save one of them, either the "District Attorney or his blushing bride to be" in his own words (*The Dark Knight* 01:30:08-09).

The Joker has been designed in such a way as to deliver a number of anti-feministic quotes apart from what he does to Rachael Dawes. During the fundraiser programme by Bruce Wayne, the Joker narrates a totally different story about his wife in association with the scar on his face.

So I had a wife, beautiful, like you, who tells me I worry too much. Who tells me I ought to smile more. Who gambles and gets in deep with the sharks. Look at me! One day, they carve her face. And we have no money for surgeries. She cant take it. I just want to see her smile again. I just want her to know that I don't care about the scars. So I stick a razor in my mouth and do this to myself. And you know what? She cant stand the sight of me. She leaves. Now I feel the funny side. Now I'm always smiling. (*The Dark Knight* 00:51:25-41)

This may not be termed as a true account of the story behind the scar on his face. He is seen narrating different stories on different occasions. However, the psychological restriction with which Nolan is stuck is evident through the Joker's dialogue when he mentions he "had a wife". The villain in the first piece, Ra's Al Ghul too speaks about a similar anecdote. Ghul says that once he had a wife, his great love who was taken away from him. The women who occur only in the past or in their lost memory is what Nolan ever wanted through his films. He attaches the stigma of the loss of a wife not just with the protagonists but with every male character that he delineates.

With the death of Rachael Dawes and the police detective officer Ann Ramirez in *The Dark Knight*, the female presence almost comes to a halt except for Gordon's wife who survives as she gets rescued by the Batman from the hands of Dent. The loss of women is a persistent preoccupation that is found in Nolan's directorial artistry and this particular trend which has been set to roll still continues, wrecking damage to all female characters he had created.

Nolan's third and the last in the Batman series, *The Dark Knight Rises* was released in the year 2012 after a span of four years. *The Dark Knight Rises* is a 2012 superhero movie which is the final instalment in Nolan's Batman trilogy and a sequel to *The Dark Knight*. Eight years after the events that happened in *The Dark Knight*, Bruce Wayne is compelled to take up his robe of the Batman to save Gotham from an imposing criminal named Bane. Nolan along with Christian Bale has definitely revolutionised the earlier concept of the superhero from colourful action sequences to a distant meditating call for justice and ethics. Sinking its

grappling hook into a lot of moral and social concerns, the movie has ingrained its imprint in the mind of its global audience. As the accelerating pace of Christopher Nolan as a director is noticed, what strikes most is not where he stands right now, but how persistently he returns to his particular visions associated with women and how continuously does he keep his track in killing them off.

Contrary to his saint-like-figure Rachael Dawes depicted in the first two series, he comes up with quite different characterisations in the concluding series - *The Dark Knight Rises*. There are two major female characters present in the movie and they are indeed characters who run throughout the storyline. They are Salina Kyle - the Catwoman and Miranda Tate whose real identity is Talia Al Ghul - the daughter of Ra's Al Ghul. Both these women characters are very diverse from the way in which Nolan has designed Rachael Dawes. However, the destiny of these women remain almost the same irrespective of the way in which they are patterned. Christopher Nolan has brought in the conventional Femme Fatales back to the screen to offer more sympathies towards his protagonist. The tormented soul of Bruce Wayne was not enough to trigger the sympathy of the audience. Instead, Nolan introduces two female figures who happen to take advantage of the hero till the last scene until the revelation comes out. They can be easily grouped into the category of the spider woman or the Femme Fatale which Place describes thus:

The dark lady, the spider woman, the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction is among the oldest themes of art, literature, mythology and religion in western culture. She is as

old as Eve, and as current as today's movies, comic books and dime novels. (47)

Male perceptions have always recorded the female archetypes as two categories - the Femme Fatale or the spider woman and her sister or her alter ego, the innocent or the virgin or the redeemer. Certain myths produce and establish certain ideologies necessary for the existence of our society and the myth behind Femme Fatale is one such one. The women in the society had always been determined by the men of the era. When men wanted women to work in factories during the Second World War, such portrayals were cast in movies and when they wanted their women back to home after the war, the depictions effortlessly changed. The strong female characters of the 40s were slowly replaced by the sex goddesses of the 50s and the shift continued as per the needs of the era.

Nolan's women characters had always leaned towards the demands of the era and as such they have always partaken a trivialised position compared to the male figures. An analysis of the two female characters in the movie will throw more light to their ontological position with respect to other male characters. Selina Kyle or the Catwoman is a reincarnation from the Batman story of DC comics. She belongs to the immediate circle of Bruce Wayne and is a creation by Bill Finger and Bob Kane through DC comics. She is often pictured as an anti heroine as she does the wrong things though for the right reasons. There is a light of Robin Hood in her character and she targets the rich and the wealthy of Gotham. Her high tech weapons include an infrared goggles, bladed high heel boots and a belt with lock picks. In

Christopher Nolan's movie, *The Dark Knight Rises*, he has portrayed her both on her personal level as well as her psychological level.

The Catwoman retains partial features of a spider woman and at the same time serves to be an accomplice of Batman in serving the city. Since the 1940s Spider Women had been represented as strong characters appearing in Film Noirs. A Film Noir being a movement or a genre in itself, the representation itself had some specific recurring motifs. The socio-political as well as cultural positioning too matters with the representation of any character in any movie. Drawn from a few conventional strategies and drawn from the filmic genre, the sexuality and the power of a woman is expressed through Film Noir.

The complete meaning of a movie image is a mix of its camera movements, light settings, screen presence, sound, position and the angle from which it has been shot. More than the juxtaposition of the context and the narrative, the period in which the movie is made and the people who view the movie too matters with respect to the portrayal of a specific character in a movie.

Though inept with all the qualities of a Femme Fatale of a Film Noir, the Catwoman is diminished by her characteristics within the actions of Batman. Nolan has in a way deconstructed her from head to heel and filtered her through a set of targeted feminine characteristics. While Bruce Wayne with his Batman mask rises to the level of a superhero, Selina Kyle in her mask of Catwoman never touches the zenith of a superheroine. While Nolan fills the virtues lost in the evil of Bane, Selina Kyle is just left to the definition of the audience. Her character does not fill the

innate qualities that the male hero possesses. What she ultimately spills is just her feminine role of settling down with a man.

Selina Kyle, played by Anne Hathaway is a cat burglar and a mistress of disguise. Though she is depicted as devious and cunning, she has a deep sense of honour in her nature. To analyse her physical presence, she wears high heel boots which has a special function. The goggles that she wears rises up and down aiding in infrared function and appear like cat ears when they are in the upright position. She appears in the initial scene of the movie, disguised as a maid, only to steal the pearl necklace of Wayne's mother as well as his fingerprints with which Bane manipulates the shares of Wayne Enterprises later.

She comes in her cat costume throughout the movie and is just transformed into a doll in the hands of the Batman in the second part. Her physical attributes do match the features of a spider woman. She is dressed in tight black costume and her long legs are indicative of her sexuality. Her long legs covered in black stockings are exposed in the initial scene when she robs the uncrackable pearl necklace which is preserved in the safe of Bruce Wayne. Clad in her skintight bodysuits, she climbs over the window using her long legs and disappears into the darkness. Her long legs and her body-hugging costume is a powerful visual element representing the strength of her character, just like any other Femme Fatale. She controls the camera movement and the spectators' gaze through which she seeks attention towards her physical beauty.

The camera and the lightings focus on her movement, especially her seductive moves through the action sequences. She is mostly visible in her full

structure through the camera lens and offers a full-fledged pleasure for the male heroes as well as the male spectators within the theatre. Mulvey has clearly stated in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* that a movie runs with its formal preoccupations reflecting the psychic obsessions of a society which produced it and she discusses the need for an alternative cinema which is capable of attacking and reacting against these obsessions and assumptions.

The power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned on to the woman as the object of both. Power is backed by a certainty of legal right and the established guilt of the woman (evoking castration, psychologically speaking). True perversion is barely concealed under a shallow mask of ideological correctness - the man is on the right side of the law, the woman on the wrong. (Mulvey 23)

Mulvey wanted to subvert this societal perception of binaries leaning towards sexism and gender bias. While women were subjected to erotic gaze, the hero or the male characters demanded and occupied a supreme position where male spectators identified them as ideals of virtues and values sticking to the right path always.

While the Catwoman's slinky movements offer a pleasure in looking for the male spectators, it is completely different when it pertains to the movements of the Batman. His movements and his actions instil a sense of recognition and identification with the male spectator and he draws parallels with the Batman's

identity. On the other hand, the female counterpart is viewed only as an object and do not deserve anything more than pleasure.

As per the myth, the Femme Fatale is initially portrayed with her dangerous powers so that the hero gets enough backing to destroy her power through her death. Contrary to his own set conventions, Nolan does not kill the woman here, but he definitely kills the power in her gradually.

Her disguised authority in the name of Catwoman again is questionable. Quite often than not, male perceptions are just instilled into the characterisations of women. Catwoman is just another creation of a masculine mind. The term “cat” consolidates something silly or puny. The cats had had long term connection with women in the public imagination of the society. Though the reasons are completely unknown, from ancient Egypt through the middle ages to the current scenario - there had been very strong comparisons and associations often made between femininity and felines. St. George Jackson Mivart shares an extraordinary theory about cats in his most popular book *The Cat: An Introduction to the Study of Backboned Animals*. “The cat is favoured by that half of the human race which is more concerned with domestic cares; for it is a home-loving animal and one exceptionally clean and orderly in its habits, and thus naturally commends itself to the good will of the thrifty housewife” (4).

Thus, the male perceptions had always tried connecting females with cats thereby imposing certain qualities like cleanliness and order on women. The associations are not just metaphors, but a solid tool to make women believe what they owe to men with respect to their characteristics. On the other hand, a dog is

often associated with its masculine powers inclusive of loyalty, sturdiness and power and a cat exhibits more or less a vulnerable nature cushioned with the comforts of life. There is nothing surprising when Bob Kane named Selina Kyle as Catwoman - comparing her with a stealthy and prudent nature. Bob Kane defines the association of cats and women thus:

I felt that women were feline creatures and men were more like dogs. While dogs are faithful and friendly, cats are cool, detached, and unreliable. I felt much warmer with dogs around me - cats are as hard to understand as women are. Men feel more sure of themselves with a male friend than a woman. You always need to keep women at arm's length. We don't want anyone taking over our souls, and women have a habit of doing that. So there's a love resentment thing with women. I guess women will feel that I'm being chauvinistic to speak this way, but I do feel that I've had better relationships with male friends than women. With women, once the romance is over, somehow they never remain friends.

(Odonnell)

Bob's explanation is questionable as well as disparaging in every way and does not seek any base on which human characteristics can be compartmentalised and defined. Though Kyle's second name does not get reflected anywhere in the movie, Nolan has adapted and exhibited the same myth of Bob throughout this movie again.

Cats are defined as manipulative and knowing when to insinuate themselves into the mode of affection as and when their requirement is necessary. Cats are termed as opportunistic and it is believed that they enslave others according to their will. They are always portrayed as highly selfish and they get engrossed in themselves. All these ordinary descriptions on cats could be one reason which might have prompted Bob Kane to depict Kyle as Catwoman. Selina Kyle is indeed manipulative, opportunistic, selfish and dangerous. Cats have always been connected with female sex appeal and their seductiveness and this feminine allure is visibly portrayed in the character of Kyle.

However, Nolan had just reincarnated the Catwoman in the same furnace and does not entrust her with any power during the course of the movie. Though projected as a Robin Hood in her nature, she remains only as a petty thief before the gigantic altruistic Batman. It is now clearly understood why Bob Kane could not name her on account of any other bigger mammals. For Nolan, Batman is the greatest hero and the Catwoman is introduced only to make the Batman more heroic than ever. Nolan had made enough changes in the characteristics of these characters to fit them into the dark universe of his movie.

Nolan has depicted her as an archetype of the typical *Femme Fatale*, and the Catwoman becomes a quintessential female character who aids the Batman. She is beautiful but at the same time threatening. Mary Anne Doane describes the *Femme Fatale* as:

A figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma (whose) most striking characteristic, perhaps, is the fact that

she never really is what she seems to be; (she) transforms the threat of the woman into a secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered. (1)

Her very presence as a maid and the swift change as a burglar gives a clear hint about the fact that she is not what she seems to be. In a later scene, she leads the Batman making him believe that she is leading him to Bane but instead actually leads the Batman to the trap of Bane. She appears to be a threat for Batman and becomes a love interest for him in a later stage. There have been obvious areas where Nolan had brought vivid changes in her role as a traditional spider woman. A spider woman always becomes a strong love interest of the male hero. But the Catwoman here becomes Bruce's love interest only in the ultimate scenes presumably in the scene which Alfred imagines. Though a sexual relationship does not occur between them initially, there is a romantic tension that indirectly happens as they talk and argue about the capitalistic ignorance and the torment suffered by the oppressed class. Though the development of the relationship is never identified or questioned, it is understood that Bruce Wayne has faked death and has absconded to some European country with his love interest, Selina Kyle.

Richard Dyer describes the woman of Noir as "unknowable" (116). Selina Kyle is unknowable in every respect. She appears to be a very shy maid and suddenly changes to a burglar catapulting her moves through the windows. The female mask that Nolan introduces with the females is again a segment of glamour. A glamorous woman always wields power over the spectators through her presence on screen. Annette Kuhn defines this as "a sense of deceptive fascination, of

groomed beauty, of charm enhanced by means of illusion” (7). Bruce confronts both the women, Catwoman and Miranda Tate during a masquerade. The Catwoman is also presented as an implied prostitute in one of the scenes and her mask is a protection against the society in which they are to retain their inner self.

Though depicted within the spectrum of negativity, the Catwoman indeed exerts her own power in her own way but unfortunately Nolan has trivialised her ability completely to glorify the attempts and actions of the Batman. In the final scene, it is the Catwoman who kills Bane, the terrorist and saves the Batman. Even then her role does not get magnified and she just becomes a puppet which works according to the instructions given by the Batman. Nevertheless, she is seen in the very last scene with Bruce Wayne through the eyes of Alfred as a very ordinary lady - destined to her domestic life casting off her mask as the burglar. Though Nolan is found allowing Selina Kyle to survive in the movie, it is only after destroying the power in her that she is seen alive. She is presented as a very ordinary woman devoid of her burglary powers or her Catwoman attires as seen with Bruce Wayne in the last scene.

Thus, Selina Kyle or the Catwoman cannot be completely pushed into the skeleton of a Film Noir Femme Fatale. Her seductiveness is comparatively less with no specific bedroom scenes or shower scenes. She is never seen using a cigarette, the phallic symbol, which in turn is a solid signifier of her formidable nature. But she is always equipped with guns which can be a different representation for the phallic symbol. Though she is not destroyed by the hero at the end, she can still be analysed in terms of a Femme Fatale as she possesses a solid number of qualities of

a spider woman. Irrespective of her backing as a Femme Fatale, she is independent and is a strong character and that could be the reason why Nolan pushes her into the realm of the love interest of Bruce Wayne finally. Her physical powers are put to a halt and she is believed to follow the habitual footsteps of an unexceptional woman by being the caretaker of the future family of Bruce Wayne.

However, the introduction of Miranda Tate brings a clear justification to the inclination of the director and his psychic vibrations against the will of strong, independent women. Miranda Tate is an indubitable character as she is portrayed in the storyline and shows true justice to the sketching of a Femme Fatale. It is Miranda Tate who appears as a real foil to the character of Rachael Dawes. While Dawes played out the role of the Redeemer for Bruce, Tate becomes the true spider woman targeting the sexuality of Bruce Wayne.

Tate is initially seen as a sophisticated lady, as a wealthy executive and a philanthropist who is eager to meet Bruce Wayne. She is presented as ostensibly interested in a clean energy project in collaboration with Wayne Enterprises. She slowly pushes herself into the executive board of Bruce Wayne's company through her charm and contrivance. She is placated by Wayne for a number of times until Wayne meets her for a party she initiates. With the association of the fusion project, Tate gets the complete authority of the reactor which she ultimately transfers to the power of her old friend, Bane.

She is elegantly dressed throughout the movie except for the last few scenes. She wears heavy make-up, high heels and low-cut attires and meets Bruce for the first time with a masquerade. This is how Alfred describes her, "Miss Tate was

asking to see you again. She is very persistent. And quite lovely, in case you were wondering” (“*The Dark Knight Rises*” 00:13:06-08). During the party that Tate throws up, the camera focuses on her bare shoulders covered with her curly hair before her face is exposed. She is all colourful throughout the party and offers a very strong colour sequence in the mind of the spectators. In a scene where she is seen with Lucious Fox, she is again presented with heavy make-up, with red lips and her long visible legs. Such bodily perceptions on screen can trigger harm as the repeated concentration and monitoring of the physical body can ultimately make the female spectators less sensational to their own inner sense.

Because women are vigilantly aware of their outer bodily appearance, they may be left with fewer perceptual resources available for attending to inner body experience. This limited-resources perspective would predict that those particular social contexts that highlight women’s awareness of observer’s evaluation of their bodies would be associated with a correspondent muting of inner sensations. Arguably, repeated experiences in such contexts could lead to a more generalised loss of the privileged access people typically have to their own inner states. (Fredrickson and Roberts 185)

Tate’s physical aspects are magnified throughout the movie and she becomes a set model of feminine beauty. Movies indeed replicate the wrong message of internalising the concept of female beauty among the spectators. Such screen models can instigate an ordinary woman towards continuous body monitoring in her own

life which can be detrimental to their physical as well as mental health. The present movie culture in fact encourages a woman for this continuous physical appraisal.

Despite her stunning physical features, Tate becomes a strong love interest of Bruce Wayne and sleeps with him giving a complete hold of scopophilia for the spectator. Gliding in the love circle of Wayne itself is a testimony for her role as the Femme Fatale. She comes to Wayne Manor and a drenched Miranda Tate heading to his home is witnessed. Tate is seen looking at the photograph of Rachael Dawes which Bruce had placed along with the photograph of his deceased parents. Thus the scene offers a stark contrast with the two characters - Dawes and Tate. While Dawes is presented as the redeemer or the Madonna, the one who is passive, Tate is the one who is very active and therefore more formidable. "The redemptive woman often represents or is part of a primal connection with nature and/or with the past, which are safe, static states rather than active, exciting ones, but she can sometimes offer the only transcendence possible in film noir" (Place 63).

Even though Dawes had been set apart in the shielded zone, not possessing a threat towards the men force, Nolan swaddles her in death. In a scenario where female killings happen in successions, there is no wonder when Nolan intends to kill the more powerful yet dangerous female figure - Miranda Tate.

She is strong in her characterisation and is manipulative to the core in her role. Miranda is seen taking an initiative in kissing Wayne and the scene blends forward where both of them are sleeping together.

Independence is her goal, but her nature is fundamentally and irredeemably sexual in film noir. The insistence on combining the two (aggressiveness and sensuality) in a consequently dangerous woman is the central obsession of film noir; and the visual movement which indicates unacceptable activity in film noir women represents the man's own sexuality, which must be repressed and controlled if it is not to destroy him. (Place 57)

Her initiative in sexual advancement and the inner motif of taking advantage of the male sexuality is of supreme importance in the role of a Femme Fatale. Different from the usual Noir style of a shower scene, Tate is found covered in a bathrobe, sleeping with Wayne. Her bare neck and the cascading black hair that falls on her bare back indeed excites the involvement of the male spectators. In the bedroom scene, Tate not only becomes the property of Wayne, but a property of the spectators too as Mulvey states in her gaze theory.

Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a storyline, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. (Mulvey 19)

The unavoidable female representation, as Mulvey puts it, is predestined in any storyline. Yet, the shadowy way in which she is represented gets frozen in those moments where she is just objectified as a sex tool for the male spectators.

Secrecy or unknowability forms the core with which a Femme Fatale gets created. Miranda Tate is totally unknowable and unpredictable till she reveals herself as Talia in the last scene. Even Wayne is ignorant about her origin and her history. The story of the child in the pit cannot foreground him with any facets pertaining to her. The legendary child who escaped from the pit surprisingly turns out to be a girl who had been a witness seeing her mother being raped and killed in front of her. Being rescued by Bane, she becomes an associate of him leading the League of Shadows which her father had been a part of. The final revelation that she is the daughter of the villain Ra's Al Ghul comes as a shock equally to Bruce as well as the audience. All the power that Bruce had possessed hitherto as a male hero dematerialises completely in the intimidating presence of Talia. She stabs the Batman at the most vulnerable point and sets forth to complete the mission of her dreams by destroying the city of Gotham.

Nolan sketches her in full details beginning with her physical attributes. Her physical capabilities coerce into her psychological prudence paving an easy track towards her journey into Wayne's heart as well as Wayne enterprise. Her intimidating power is initially demonstrated, and Nolan slowly shows that she is dangerous enough to be killed by the man. "The ideological operation of the myth (the absolute necessity of controlling the strong, sexual woman) is thus achieved by

first demonstrating her dangerous power and its frightening results and then destroying it” (Place 56).

Her aggressive and sensual nature links her again to the characteristics of a spider woman. Played by the most refined actress Marion Cotillard, Miranda Tate is full of vigour and is a greater heroine compared to the actions of the Batman. Her dialogues do convey a profound vision when she is preparing to undertake a mission that her father has already begun. In the climax scene, she tells Bruce,

Innocent is a strong word to throw around Gotham, Bruce. I honour my father by finishing his work. Vengeance against the man who killed him is simply a reward for my patience. You see, it’s the slow knife...the knife that takes its time. The knife... that waits years without forgetting...then slips quietly between the bones. That’s the knife..that cuts the deepest. (“*The Dark Knight Rises*” 02:19:39-59)

She is described as a child born in hell. The hell that she was born from thrives to be her life force as she proceeds in her life. Just before she deceives Bruce, she says, “Bruce, if you want to save the world, you have to start trusting it” (“*The Dark Knight Rises*” 01:02:21-28). We see her strength when she remotely activates the emergency flood to make sure that they failed in stabilising the bomb in the reactor. She dies believing that she has completed her father’s mission in wrecking havoc to the city of Gotham. She says, “there’s no way...this bomb...will be stopped. Prepare yourselves. My father’s work...is done” (“*The Dark Knight Rises*” 02:28:16-32).

In both movies we find that it is through women that the villains trap the hero. It is the Batman's belief in Miranda's innocence which makes him come back to their trap allocated in the City Hall. In a way she subverts the traditional concept of a conventional woman. She questions the context, authority and the power of the masculine orb in a universal sense. This indeed could be the pivotal reason why Nolan slips her into death because it is only through her failure that he can establish the success of the Batman.

The women characters in the Batman series stand to bear the testimony of Nolan's recurring habit of refrigerating his female characters. Multiple researches have been done with regard to female presence in cinema in various contexts. American mainstream cinema or Hollywood had always been a timid enterprise that followed the trajectories of existing formulas and genres. Though Hollywood had tried many bold revisions of the old archetypes and powerful new generation women, they have somehow trodden into some gray areas in contradictory arrays and they remain disgustingly monochromatic. A change is inevitable, and the question remains as to who would begin with this Hollywood revolution. Media, which can propagate deep-seated ideologies into the unconscious mind of the audience stays stagnant at times which can only filter in the repeated doctrines of the static society. When a society evolves, it has to evolve both culturally and socially and the real upgradation of a society comes only when women are represented in the true status. The shoring up of the male ego is always seen in filmic representations and unless there is a change initiated, the women on screen will forever be in their diminished nature. Though seemingly innocuous, the underrepresentation of women

and the psychological after effects that it could produce in a relatively patriarchal society has hardly been studied in detail. Women are often recruited in movies to offer pleasure to the audience and as Mulvey states unless a new system is initiated, the status of women on screen will remain unchanged.

The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked. Not in favour of a reconstructed new pleasure, which cannot exist in the abstract, nor of intellectualised unpleasure, but to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film. The alternative is the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms, or daring to break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive a new language of desire. (Mulvey 16)

Chapter Four

The Subservient Counterparts: The Distortion of Truth in Filmic Representation

The twentieth century has seen an acceleration in the process of the emancipation of women and an intensification of the contradictions surrounding the sexual division of labour and reproduction, so that women perhaps more crucially than before constitute a consciously perceived social problem. At the same time Feminists have discerned how women occupy a tangential position in relation to production and culture, and, as guardians of reproduction, or a reserve labour force, or the mythical 'other' against which man takes his definition, are defined as constitutive functions in society rather than among its producers. (Gledhill 25)

The Hollywood movie industry has been lately witnessing a backlash over the underrepresentation of women in the past many decades. A feminist resistance which started brewing up in the late 90's in the context of cinema has triggered in questioning the hitherto blockbusters with men in the leads. Inculcating the values of Feminism as well as determining the impact of Feminism with respect to movies has quite often been cumbersome. However, in order to regulate the mainstream movie mechanisms and to filter it through the dogmas of Feminism, the primary mission would be to address the issue of redefining the feminist perspective in films. Daunted by the very methodical structure of male chauvinism and patriarchal signals in the current movie scenario, a complete restructuring within a short span of time

would be beyond imagination. Nevertheless, the emergence of a number of female led movies in powerful sequences in the current course of events has embedded indubitable faith in the belief of a gross revamping in the movie society.

Global cinema in the 21st century undoubtedly has gone through a set of major shifts including what is termed as authentic cinema through a multitude of digital systems and technologies. They have also encompassed the different stages in exhibiting gender parity as well as rooting its ideologies through feminist perspectives. The outcry for more women inclusions with more robust female representations has in fact flooded the recent scene at Hollywood industry. The pressure on Hollywood to make women more inclusive within the films created a sudden surge in the number of women-oriented movies. A number of Reboots as well as women centred movies emerged as a result of this. From *Incredibles 2* to *Mary Queen of Scots*, the new gender-bending has given a wake in the market to exemplify the fact that women can perform beyond the traditional roles of a helpmate or a sex object. Similarly, the female remake of *Ghostbusters* (2016) or *Ocean's 8* (2018) too has been reflected with great success in the box office. However, in spite of the peripheral success denominated through writings and statistics, the underlying fact is that they could not but really create a space among the global audience as does a male centred movie. Replacing their male idols with female storylines was like a narrative murder for most of the aggrieved fans.

Moreover, it is quite true that the result of such a female momentum could not shape up a solid area for women presence and the reboots and the recent women led movies still remain as a tricky territory in the whole expanse of Hollywood. In

other words, the recreated gender flip could not cement the pedestal for feminist ideologies or feminine susceptibilities on a holistic base.

The number of female protagonist movies had hit high in the year 2018 with movies like *A Star is Born*, *Halloween*, *Crazy Rich Asians* etc and represented very strong female characterisations. Nonetheless, the most phenomenal and the most reliable characters were still played by the men in Hollywood. According to a report from the Centre for the study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University, the films with female leads rose to 31% in the year 2018. Martha Lauzen, one of the authors of the earlier study says,

While female protagonists rebounded last year, slightly besting the previous high achieved in 2016, the percentages of females as speaking characters and major characters remained relatively stagnant. Protagonists are the characters from whose perspective the story is told and so seeing more females in these roles is tremendously important. However, we are not seeing similar gains in the broader populations of major characters and in all speaking roles. (Stone)

In the path of these gender overturn and increasing importance to the roles of women characterisation, multiple voices have been raised one after the other. These strong voices ranged across many popular feminists of the era, women activists and even actresses of the current Hollywood. One of the greatest and youngest performers from *The Harry Potter Series* and the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador since 2014, Emma Watson says, “I have always insisted on being treated equally and

have generally won that equality. Most of the problems I have encountered have been in the media, where I have been treated so incredibly differently from my male co-stars” (Couch).

Thus, the major concern with gender inequality in the movie industry is not to be identified just with screen representations. This equality has to commence right from its base by linking its opportunities for female direction, screenplay and many more technological fields within cinema before hitting upon the silver screen. The dearth of female directors or female technicians in today’s world is not just because of their lack of mastery or talent but it is more due to the lesser possibilities and openings assigned to them. This deficit in turn takes us back to the hegemonic structure of our society where men rule most of the distinguished positions and women just glide over the surface and vanish into vacuum despite their innate potentials. The concept of men leading and women following was one fixed ideology which could not be diminished in one go within the Movie frames. As indicated earlier, certain glass ceilings are often difficult to budge and a true space for women in Hollywood remains to be an unfathomable fantasy.

In spite of all the uproar and commotion that had been pushed into, the very many movies of many great directors still remain obscure when judged within the window of its female representations. Since a director is considered as a mouthpiece of the evolving society, he/she would be the most adequate persona to bring about a subtle change in the society through his/her mass audience. Moreover, 21st century is an epoch where the authority and significance of the directors have become more or less homologous to the importance of the star cast. Thus, a director is abundantly

liable in what he showcases to his society and the messages that he implicitly delivers to his fans.

In the context of an auteur director, an equivalent to an author, applying his highly centralised and subjective control to multiple aspects within the movie is mainly to influence his audience. Through this influence, he slowly turns himself to the role of a social reformer thereby bringing effective changes to the rotting society abutting him. Being the sole creative force behind the movie, an auteur director can literally enhance his concepts through his characters to the audience. Christopher Nolan who is regarded as an Auteur is praised to the zenith for his creative construction of his movies with manifold subjects and philosophy. Though Nolan is indisputably one of the greatest directors of the period, the explicit lack pertaining to his movies regarding female characterisations has not been accounted by any of his critics. Despite his creative extravaganza and mind games that puzzle his spectators for ages, the critical void he fosters for his women representation can palpably become an impasse within the global structure of cinema. The death of a woman character within the frame of a film constitutes far-reaching consequences round the globe. The easiness with which Nolan shoves most of his women characters to death has not been put to question in many of the readings about Nolan. The substantial emptiness of women characters has often been submerged within the larger diagram of his directorial panache and virtuosity. Thus, the main aim of this chapter is to look into that void and to fill a major critical gap in the studies of Nolan relating to his female characters in *The Prestige*, *Inception* and *Interstellar*.

Christopher Nolan's directorial prism indeed is a magical flamboyance. Nolan has mesmerised his audience continuously with his fierce intellect and his meticulous plots, triggering the audience towards the most convincing mazes and puzzles through quotidian strategies. The complex intersection that he employs between the artist and the industry, his explorations beyond the concepts of time and memory and his continually evolving auteur persona has perpetuated his central positioning in locating himself as one of the greatest directors in the firmament of Hollywood movie industry.

Every magic trick consists of three parts of acts. The first part is called the pledge. The magician shows you something ordinary. A deck of cards, a bird or a man. Perhaps, he asks you to inspect it. To see that it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But, of course, it probably isn't. The second act is called the Turn. The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now, you're looking for the secret, but you won't find it. Because, of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn't clap yet, because making something disappear isn't enough. You have to bring it back. That's why every magic trick has a third part, the hardest part, the part we call the Prestige. (*"The Prestige"* 00:01:17-00:02:06)

A film definitely identifies itself as a magic trick; a trick that explicitly projects itself on screen and leaves the audience to swim through its mystery and

fantasy. And when such a mystery cuts through female characterisations and rips open her mere sexuality, there is no further study which can go ahead without considering this pivotal aspect.

Christopher Nolan's third phase of Filmography includes the most enigmatic and most complex of all movies - the science fiction thrillers - transporting the spectators directly to a world of mesmerising delusions and illusions. The concepts of double identity, dreamy realities and the temporal structure of time and space have been explored in with exceptional details all through these three movies. Nolan has always made his audience think beyond the walls of the movie theatre and to immerse themselves in the riddles that can never converge into one reality.

Nolan's third phase which is considered to be his best phase includes his most complicated movies, namely, *The Prestige* (2006), *Inception* (2010) and *Interstellar* (2012). These movies have depicted women characters in a more thicker way compared to his earlier set of movies. The number of women characters are considerably more and the social positions attributed to them are also comparatively on a lofty scale. From models and home makers, Nolan shifts the images of his women to more educated and more independent characters. His characters are more professional, and they are more self-sufficient and occupy more prominent rankings. The audience does come across stage performers, scientists, architects and many more. However, his female presentations have often been overlooked amidst the directorial finesse he has created through the aura of fallacies in these movies.

A great inspirer for a number of directors and a telling influence among the audience, Nolan's movies like *The Prestige*, *Inception* and *Interstellar* have baffled

millions around the globe and is still perplexing multitudes with its magnificent plot construction and ideological reincarnation. Nevertheless, the deeper the analysis of these movies go, the harder the reality is. Though there is an ample female cast present in these movies of Nolan, strong enough to break the earlier existing chain of traditions, the concept of idealisation as well as the power struggle tends to hold on to the same pitch as in his earlier movies.

This chapter deeply analyses these characters in a contextual relationship with Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* and will prove again the decadence of the storylines in plunging women to the caverns. The bold Noir women who is known for her visual sexuality, measured in the light of Janey Place's essay *Women in Film Noir* will further corroborate the weakness and inclinations of Nolan as an auteur director. The sexual objectification that stealthily revolves around, in all these three movies can also be validated through Fredrickson's and Robert's essay on *Objectification Theory*.

Released in the year 2006, Nolan's movie *The Prestige* is a dazzling piece of magic in every respect. Filled with all the period details, this iconic movie set in the 18th century London, is an intricate tale of two magicians who keep baffling the audience with their nonplussing performances. The crux of the movie lies in its scattered clues and disoriented scenes which ultimately takes the viewers towards the most brilliant climax with the concepts of doubles, duplicity and identity crisis. The irresistible plug-ins of the illusions and the executional skill of a magical trick which seals its ingenuity, conspires together to determine the merits of its plot construction. Nolan has adapted the story of this movie from the 1995 novel by the

English Science fiction Writer Christopher Priest. Considering Nolan's impeccable character delineation and his mastery over the promise to solve the mystery running within, *The Prestige* is definitely Nolan's masterpiece.

Set in the late Victorian London, *The Prestige*, a science fiction thriller, exhibits the rivalry between two prominent magicians Robert Angier (played by Hugh Jackman) and Alfred Bordon (played by Christian Bale) soon after a tragic incident during one of the stage performances. The story shifts back and forth in time as with all Nolan movies and unfolds the story of these two astute magicians. The movie begins with a death - the death of a female - which serves to be the source of a very strong question as to what Nolan tries to represent through his films. As the story advances, it appears that Angier's wife Julia fails to escape from a water tank while tied up and drowns. Angier, who is devastated to the core accuses Bordon who tied her knot thereby causing her death. The tragic incident splits them up and they compete with each other in launching their own magical masteries. The story further enhances itself in trickery, obsession, deceit and secrecy.

While Bordon gets married to Sarah, Angier employs his assistant Olivia to spy on Bordon's way of manipulating his tricks. Bordon's "Transported Man" becomes a success story while Angier dedicates the whole of his life trying to identify Bordon's trick. In the meantime, Bordon's wife is driven to suicide owing to Bordon's contradicting personality. Believing that Bordon makes use of a mechanical device to showcase his magical trick of the "Transported Man", Angier goes to meet the great scientist Tesla and buys one which has the capacity to duplicate. Unfortunately, even the new machine fails to provide Angier the

gratification of his performance and the original trick of Bordon still remains a mystery to Angier as well as to the audience.

While Bordon continues performing his tricks, reaping success, Angier executes his magic with the aid of his machine creating a double during every performance which he has to kill night after night. His disillusionment as well as his feeling of uncertainty regarding whether he himself is the original or the double created through his machine, he finally frames Bordon with the charge of murder by proving it with the evidence of his own dead body (the double created through the machine each time he performs) while he goes into hiding. Thus, as the movie ends, Bordon is seen being sentenced to death while Angier (now disguised in the name of Caldwell) witnesses another Bordon who comes to meet him, the twin brother of the real Bordon. The surprise of Nolan's magical movie is the fact that he keeps the secret of Bordon's twin brother till the last moment. The excitement and confusion that Angier goes through in the ultimate scene is equally applicable to each of the spectators watching the movie.

Being a masterpiece of his impenetrable talent and a movie with three female characters, there lies a natural tendency to believe that Nolan's presentation of females will shift from his earlier concepts. The movie reflects an equal share of male-female representation. There are three major male characters as well as female characters. The radical move in Nolan's latest movies will deliberately make the viewers think there is sufficient escalation in female representations as well as honourable mettle thrust in their characterisations. But as a profound study of the characters is undertaken through the gender representations, the movies retell the

same account as witnessed in his earlier set of movies. Being a movie that induces its spectators to analyse the concept of identity, it fails miserably in creating a parity between male and female manifestations. As the illusion of the whole story disappears, the identity of both the protagonists come up to its true lights while their female counterparts just get brushed off from the screen either through death or complete disappearance to nowhere. Though the structure of identity crisis runs all through the movie, the identities of the women are more in jeopardy than of the males. There are three women characters in the movie, and they are Julia, Sarah and Olivia in the order in which they appear in the movie.

Though Nolan has designed his characters in a much sharper way here, the ultimate fate and the track through which they progress do not distinguish them to any extent. Though they are played by three different actresses, they manifest the same ideologies that the director wanted to convey to his audience. They differ in their appearance, their costume as well as in their dialogues. However, they transmit the same ideologies and suffer because of the men around them. Though Olivia survives, she is also devoured by the same tricks which had wiped out the other two female characters. While the wives of the protagonists convey and transmit the ideas of the patriarchal codes, Olivia represents herself more throughout the movie as a sexual toy who keeps being exchanged between the protagonists in their attempts to decipher each other's mysteries.

The process of how female representations are looked at has been dealt in detail by Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. The social, cultural, and political power between the two sexes - male and female is what

is represented by Mulvey in her essay. The concept of male gaze and how female depictions on screen can contribute to this gaze has been discussed thoroughly in this essay. As per Jean-Paul-Sartre, the great French philosopher and one of the proponents of essentialism and phenomenology, the act of gazing at another human being creates a subjective power difference that is felt both by the gazer and the one gazed at, because the person gazed at is seen as an object. (Stack 42)

The first female image that Nolan portrays in the movie is that of Julia McCullough, a stage performer and the wife of Robert Angier. Played by the American actress Piper Perabo, the role of Julia is ineluctable to the whole context in which the plot of the movie spins around. Apart from being Angier's wife, she is a stage performer and coalesces and brings substance to the unified performance of John Cutter and his co-assistants Robert Angier and Alfred Bordon.

Julia, who is presented as a stage performer shoulders one of the most dangerous feats on stage - to free herself from the ties and bonds after being placed in a fully filled gargantuan water tank. She is particularly fixed up with this role because of two specific reasons. More than a performer like the other magicians, she is employed here as a stage prop amidst magical tricks which can seize the attention of the audience. If she is to be read through the lens of Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Julia, without a doubt, is an instrument giving visual pleasure through her physical charm to the male spectators. The second reason could be that she became a choice for Bordon to take revenge on his rival magician Angier if it is to be believed that Bordon tied the Langford knot

deliberately to kill her. In both cases, her centrality is only for the male protagonists to locate their own prominence.

Her physical appeal is put to maximum use as Nolan portrays her. She is showcased on screen for the first time as an elegant piece of attraction on stage. Her short costumes and her bare thighs to which Angier plants a kiss makes her an object of gratification not just to the male figures on stage, but even to the spectators present for the stage-show as well as the real spectators of the movie. Thus, her sexual presence disseminates four layers of masculine glances – the camera lens, the men on stage, the men watching the magical performance and the real spectators of the movie.

Mulvey's essay sets in motion with this sardonic hypothesis of the social structure in which women are placed in various filmic segments only to please the male imagination. Thus the established norm of a filmic structure is to entertain a man with women as its objects. This is how Mulvey begins her essay. "It takes as starting point the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (14).

Thus the concept of this sexual difference is strongly imposed by Nolan in this movie too. Apart from the stage appearances, Julia is seen only through the bedroom scenes with Angier. As Mulvey says, the main intention of a narrative convention is to offer the illusion of a private world as per the convenience of the audience's repressed desire.

Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer. (Mulvey 17)

Thus, she either remains as a common object on stage pleasing the audience or as the sole property of Angier - the hero, in his bed chamber as his mate. In both cases, she is narrowed down to the role of a pleasure-bringer and is hardly being shown with the merits of a performer. As Mulvey states, "looking itself is a source of pleasure" (16). To exemplify this, Julia's physical attractiveness is made use of. Though she participates equally in all these magical associations, she is never called as a great magician and is often reduced to the role of an assistant or a helpmate. Her sole responsibility within the movie lies not in following the thread of the story but to offer the so-called voyeuristic pleasure to the male audience.

Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changed in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. (Mulvey 24)

Mulvey argues in her essay that these codes and their relationship to the external structure within which a society is built upon has to be broken in order to recreate a real space for women presence.

In a bedroom scene with Angier, she wears a silk gown and talks to Angier regarding a name she has found for him for his stage performances.

Julia : I thought of a name for you.

Angier : Ohh ?

Julia : The Great Danton. Do you like it? It's sophisticated.

Angier : It's French. (*The Prestige* 00:17:58-00:18:14)

To the dismay of the audience, Angier does not seem much impressed with the name she suggests though he enrolls with the same, months after Julia's death. This single conversation is a clue to the respect and regard Julia has been bestowed with even in the perception of Angier. Most unfortunate is the lack of appreciation that glues with Julia even after the dangerous trick that she performs day after day.

Described only with her peripheral qualities like beauty, charm and attractiveness, she is never paid recognition for what she does. Her long bare legs and curly golden hair is put to scaling heights of visual pleasure for the audience. This sexual objectification in itself is a measure that can instigate sexual violence in a society as Fredrickson and Roberts opines. "A culture that objectifies the female body presents women with a continuous stream of anxiety-provoking experience, requiring them to maintain an almost chronic vigilance both to their physical appearance and to their physical safety" (183).

While Julia becomes a memory of the visual pleasure ignited in a man, she becomes an exemplary ideal in female perception with regard to the concept of beauty and recognition. These representations which can habitually make women concerned about their appearances can infiltrate extensive levels of emotional and motivational health risks. Thus, when a woman is strategically represented or signified through her body, her visualised physical presence does more impairment than pleasure. Though objectification does not affect all women alike, they are likely to produce and henceforth trigger at least some aspects pertaining to the concept of elegance and beauty in the present visual scenario. Sexual objectification, incontrovertibly, is one of the social barriers that can inhibit a woman's prospective to an indescribable extent. A persistent monitoring of one's own body based on the set models displayed through the silver screen can in turn affect the real quality of a woman's life.

Julia's tragic death that happens during one of the performances, however, ignites the rivalry between Angier and Bordon. Bordon who had tied the knot for Julia cannot exactly recall the kind of knot he tied on that particular day. In a scenario where these two magicians had started competing with each other, there is even a possibility to re-read the story and bring to conclusion that Bordon might have deliberately used the Langford knot to tie Julia's hands to wilfully kill her. Even while shedding light to such a reading, it is the woman who turns out to be the bait amidst the revenge of these men.

Julia is the one who sets the story of the movie in motion and triggers the emotion of rivalry and revenge in the minds of the two great magicians.

Nonetheless, she retracts as a revenant and never comes back. Unlike *Following* or *Memento*, even her memories do not stand a chance to roll through the plot. Olivia Wenscombe takes up her position soon after her death and she becomes a mistress for Angier while working with him as his assistant.

Julia is easily forgotten though Angier holds onto his revenge for the death of his wife until he is able to frame Bordon for his own death and lock him up in prison. Similar to his earlier movies, Nolan takes pleasure in acknowledging the death of his female figures and the literal method of fridging is perspicuously visible with Julia's death. As audience, Julia is seen drowning within the glass windows unable to loosen her knots and the futile attempts of the men around to rescue her. More than Julia's death, the most unfortunate events lie when the sympathies of the audience still work with the male protagonists rather than the dead female soul. Nolan has once again proved his predisposition towards his male characters while pushing the women characters into further darker chambers.

While Julia is a clear-cut object in the hands of the director, the second character named Sarah is a prototype of a woman configured within patriarchal norms. Played by Rebecca Hall, she is an ordinary young lady who happens to meet Bordon during one of his stage performances. She falls in love with the great magician and sacrifices her entire life for him.

Sarah's introductory appearance is with her nephew when she watches one of Bordon's stage performances. The friendship that slowly blooms, culminates in a wedlock. However, the sail is too uneven that she ends up her life half way through the movie. In short, she seals her fate with death just as Julia, Angier's wife.

The main idea behind representing Sarah in the plot is basically to create a foil to the other two female characters and to prove how a traditional family-woman should be as per the codes of a male dominated society. Sarah's physicality is not exposed as with the case of the other two women. Her costumes are more traditional, and it fits accurately for a traditional home-bound woman whose entire devotion goes to her husband and her home. While Julia and Olivia are stage performers, Sarah is more tied to the household chores, taking care of their only girl child, Jess.

Nolan makes sure that the camera focusses Sarah more or less with indoor activities like cooking and raising her baby rather than outdoor exposure. She is seen a few times in the market which can again be associated with her daily chores at home. Sarah is the only woman with a child and that makes her role more legitimate for the family. The unwarranted glorification that is attached for motherhood is a symbolic way of chaining the women back to the forgotten era of conventions and traditions trapping her self within.

Shulamith Firestone, one of the greatest theorists and activists of second wave feminism, establishes her radical perspective about motherhood by condemning biological reproduction. According to Firestone, motherhood has been one of the favourite allies of patriarchy in repressing women. She says in her radical manifesto, *The Dialectic of Sex* that "Pregnancy is barbaric" (7). Beauvoir also shared the same opinion about motherhood and maternity. "Women is of all mammalian females at once the one who is most profoundly alienated and the one who most violently resists this alienation; in no other is enslavement of the organism to reproduction more important or more willingly accepted" (Beauvoir 12).

However, one main aim of Feminism was to restructure this maternal power to more progressive levels than to denigrating terms. Many feminist critics believed that biological reproduction is the future of patriarchy. However, the institution of marriage and the mechanisms of motherhood has been utilised even in visual media to render women incapable of their powers.

Sarah is one such mother though good looking but not as attractive as Julia or Olivia. She is a moderate woman in the concept of a traditional man who can look into his eyes and spend her whole life. Sarah fits exceptionally into her role with the accustomed coding of the family - being a wife and being a mother. The concept of family has been encompassed within the structure of mainstream global cinema since its early inception and the ideology behind the concept is to strengthen women's oppression and to exemplify her weakness in general.

The political mechanism behind introducing the concept of a family is to establish the hierarchical relationships, the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. The presence of the family is to establish the values of the society through the women involved. Sylvia Harvey in her essay *Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir* in Ann Kaplan's book opines thus:

The representation of women has always been linked to this value-generating nexus of the family. The value of women on the market of social exchange has been to a large extent determined by the position of women within the structure of the family. Woman's place in the home determines her position in society, but also serves as a reflection of oppressive social relationships generally. As

Engels suggested, within the family 'she is the proletarian, he is the bourgeois.' (36)

Thus the concept of relationship and the institution of marriage along with motherhood is once again used as a device through movies to make a woman roped to the traditions. The erosion of these values had created an impact which could not be fathomed by most of the men and the internal psychology of pulling those strings back through movies is in a way more obnoxious to the entire womenfolk round the globe. Nolan exercises his directorial power to wield those traditional dogmas back into the very social structure of our society. Sarah becomes an epitome of self-sacrifice and devotion, making herself a total foil to the other women characters of the story. Sarah's character strongly contradicts the strong Noir woman of the 1940s. "The material for the film noir heroine is drawn from the stereotypes of the *Femme Fatale* or evil woman and the good-bad girl, and generally contrasted in the film with a marginal female figure representing the good woman, who is worthy of being a wife, and often the victim (Gledhill 31).

Thus Sarah becomes a foil to the other two women in her sacrifice through her death. It is her self sacrifice and her commitment towards her husband that makes Bordon say that he loves her, even in his last statement from the prison before being hanged to death. On the other hand, though Angier is determined to avenge his wife's death, he speaks rather in a cold-blooded way about his late wife, Julia. A conversation with Olivia scatters more light into this fact. Olivia says, "It won't bring your wife back" and Angier replies "I don't care about my wife. I care about his secret" ("*The Prestige*" 01:12:00-01:12:06).

The way in which Bordon talks about his late wife from the prison is quite different from the way in which Angier discusses his wife. Both of them had been afflicted more or less in the same way. However, Bordon continuously talks about his love for Sarah because she was not a performer like Julia. Sarah was a completely devoted wife to Bordon. She is the mother of his daughter. She is seen more fastened to household activities like cooking and cleaning up his home, dressing up his wounds and being in the market to fetch household goods. Disparagingly, Nolan draws a line between the two female characters and makes it clear that Julia was forgotten so easily than Sarah because she was more independent and more self-sufficient and a public performer, which could not be appreciated much by her husband.

Of all the three women characters, Sarah is the most complicated. Her psychological dilemma all through the movie cannot be underestimated and she commits suicide at a stage when she cannot bear with a few facts anymore. As the story progresses, it is evident how Bordon continuously makes her feel that she is loved. However, Sarah approves it on some days while she turns reluctant to accept and trust his words on some other days. As audience, there is a strange confusion that befall us.

Bordon : I love you very much.

Sarah : Say it again

Bordon : I love you.

Sarah : Not today

Bordon : What

Sarah : Well, on some days it's not true and today you don't mean it. May be today you're - you're more in love with magic than me. I like being able to tell the difference, it makes the - the days it is true mean something. (*"The Prestige"* 00:30:17-36)

The mental anguish that Sarah goes through is beyond words and she realises that she had been living her life being shared between two Bordons or Bordon-twins as a part of the magical trick that they carry through the whole of their life. Bordon himself tells Angier that living two lives was not quite an easy task. "There's nothing easy about two men sharing one life. We each had half of a full life which was just enough for us, but not for them" (*"The Prestige"* 02:00:14-18).

Bordon himself found it agonising living two lives and the disillusionment of his wife Sarah could be easily understood. Her confusion and frustration builds up as she cannot identify the Bordon whom she loves and the Bordon who loves her. She cannot unravel this enigma and she ends up by committing suicide. In one of her conversations with Bordon, she says thus:

Sarah : Why are you being like this, Alfred ?

Bordon : I had a terrible ordeal today. I thought that something very precious had been lost to me. So I just wanted to celebrate just a little.

Sarah : Alright, what ? What did you lose? (A long silence from Bordon) I see, more secrets.

Bordon : Sarah, secrets are my life. Our life.

Bordon : No Alfred, stop. This isn't you. Stop performing.

(*"The Prestige"* 01:19:46-60)

As the story unfolds, it is clear that Sarah realises the two lives that her husband leads. Though she gets agitated when she finds Bordon with his stage assistant Olivia, it was not Olivia which was the true reason behind Sarah's death. Though it is believed that it is Bordon's illicit relationship with Olivia that angers Sarah, it is not difficult to figure out that it is not the exact cause when she does not go to meet Olivia the next day as stated before. The final realisation comes that it was not Olivia, but Bordon's trickery that he lives through, which could not be accepted by Sarah.

Bordon : I Love you and I will always love you alone.

Sarah : You mean it today.

Bordon : Absolutely.

Sarah : Which makes it so much harder when you don't. (*"The Prestige"* 01:27:28-43)

Sarah's astounding intellect in identifying the true trick behind her husband's magic is highly commendable because it was a paradox which was beyond the reach even by the great magician Angier all through his life. In another conversation between Bordon and Sarah, she says his love for her is true on that particular day. Bordon says, "Sarah, I love you" and she replies, "See, today it's true" (*"The Prestige"* 00:46:51-56).

The last conversation between the couple ends thus: Sarah tells Bordon, “I want you to be honest with me. No tricks. No lies. And no secrets. Do you love me?” to which Bordon responds, “Not today, No” (“*The Prestige*” 01:34:24-28).

The plot but nowhere acknowledges that she got the drift of Bordon’s real trick but her very death itself is the testimony to the fact of realisation of her husband’s magical contrivance. Even Nolan himself has forgotten to pursue the merits of this female character and the discovery and the reversals just vanish subtly from the plot.

Even Bordon is not away from distress, but he keeps up his secret of the twins to retain his magical credibility. Bordon himself is both Bordon and Fallon and Fallon himself is both Fallon and Bordon. Nolan’s unrelenting capability of drawing undercurrents which intersect and diverge at the same moment, puzzling the audience to its zenith is revitalised in this movie too.

Bordon’s greatest threat opens up as Sarah understands the double life he leads and may be she killed herself to protect this very truth for her husband’s survival in the sphere of magic. Thus she becomes a piece of sacrifice, a martyr, with her mixed feeling of devotion as well as dilemma in her psyche. She hangs like a birdcage after her suicide in the workshop hall of Bordon, becoming another magical piece without obstructing his future course in trickery.

Though Bordon claims to love her intensely through his verbal abundance, his passion for his profession seems to supersede than his commitment towards his family. Even Angier, after reading Bordon’s diary, describes Bordon’s family life

thus: “The family life that he craves one minute, he rails against the next, demanding freedom. His mind is a divided one. His soul is restless. His wife and child tormented by his fickle and contradictory nature” (“*The Prestige*” 00:47:05-12).

However, it is quite disdainful that Nolan has introduced Sarah to make her a symbolic representation of a family, a microcosm of the society. The determinants of dominance and subordination which is the essence of a larger society is represented through Sarah. The methodical mechanism through which Nolan establishes a family into Sarah’s character is largely a cause to bring in a balance to the current society and in pulling women back to homes through male perception. The burden of reproduction is thrust upon through a sanctified institution like that of a marriage and the movie cuts through clear substantiation that the longer the marriage goes, more the sacrifices that women will have to make.

Though Sarah is betrayed by Bordon in every sense, the story has been fabricated in such a way to have the spectator’s compassion flow in naturally towards the male hero - Bordon. Similar to Lacan’s “mirror image”, where the image can perform better than the real person, Bordon on screen becomes a surrogate for the male spectator who is watching the movie. The male hero, thus, is not an object of erotic desire but a “more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego” (Mulvey 20). Thus, the spectator easily identifies with this male hero and firmly believes that his actions are more controlled and more organised than his own and the spectator starts believing in this imaginary existence of the hero on screen. Thus, this difference of perception between a male hero and a female heroine is what Mulvey discusses in her essay.

Each is associated with a look: that of the spectator in direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for his enjoyment (connoting male fantasy) and that of the spectator fascinated with the image of his likes in an illusion of natural space, and through him gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis. (20)

Thus, Sarah is a representation of the female archetype - the woman as the redeemer. She is totally tied to her family - her husband and her daughter. "She offers the possibility of integration for the alienated, lost man into the stable world of secure values, roles and identities. She gives love, understanding (or at least forgiveness), asks very little in return (just that he come back to her) and is generally visually passive and static" (Place 60).

A world of Sarah distinct from her family is not seen. The scene where Bordon gifts her with the key of a new house is a clear indication of a trap to cage her within the frame of the patriarchal order. She is seen as a nurturer throughout the movie. She admires Bordon and understands him more than anyone else in the movie. She is a contrast to the modern independent woman and is often dull and unexciting and capable of higher grades of sacrifice. Her death does not redesign the plot nor refashion any characters and her sacrifice is celebrated as a desideratum to keep the man's work going on without interruption. Sarah brings only shades of disappointment to any female spectator because there remains nothing inspiring or electrifying about her character sketch.

Olivia Wenscombe, played by Scarlet Johansson is the third female character as well as the only woman character with the lengthiest screen presence in the movie. Olivia, unlike Julia or Sarah, interacts and spends her days and nights with both Angier and Bordon and therefore is a character who knows all the men in her circle better than anyone else.

Olivia is extremely attractive in her appearance with her long blonde hair, blue eyes, pouted lips, make-up and jewellery. She is the only woman in the movie who works with all the male characters including Angier, Bordon, Cutter, Fallon (Bordon's twin) and Root (the double introduced for Angier). Her attractiveness is greatly put to use as she performs as a stage assistant with Angier initially and with Bordon lately. Even John Cutter, the one who organises stages for Angier brings Olivia as an assistant by stating thus. "A pretty assistant is the most effective form of misdirection" (*The Prestige* 00:36:52-55). Cutter presumes that the seductiveness of Olivia on stage can, to a great extent misdirect the audience even when things go wrong on the stage. Her cleavage as well as her bare long legs - a symbol of a Noir woman - is displayed frequently to quench the visual desire of the male ego. This intention connotes with what Mulvey states in her essay: "Similarly, conventional close-ups of legs or a face integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism. One part of a fragmented body destroys the renaissance space, the illusions of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon other than verisimilitude to the screen" (20).

While the female objectification mainly happens through the emphasis of her body, male prominence is quite often achieved through the focus on his head and

face. While the men are portrayed with exceeding prominence given to their faces, women are completely negated with their identity through face as they are more or less centred on their physical aspects. Archer and colleagues call this tendency as “face-ism” bias. This “face-ism” of men is often complemented with “body-ism” of women (Archer 731). Fredrickson and Roberts who argue against this mode of sexual objectification of women in their essay Objectification theory, affirms thus:

Men tend to be portrayed in print media and artwork with an emphasis on the head and face, and with greater facial detail, women tend to be portrayed with an emphasis on the body. Indeed, it is not uncommon for magazine photographs to portray dismembered women, eliminating their heads altogether focussing exclusively on their bodies or body parts. (176)

The experiential consequences of such presentations in the lives of ordinary women can be terrible. The convictions that a movie offers to its audience is certainly through the visual representation. Olivia’s costumes and the colour patterns are thus designed to highlight her sexuality. She is mostly seen with Angier and Bordon in their bedroom scenes. She is also seen with Gerald Root, the double of Angier. She is sexually used by both the protagonists and there is nothing spectacular that Nolan attaches to her character apart from her beautiful body which is set for display throughout. The internalising of such visual representations on one’s own physical self can be detrimental in every aspect.

Olivia is partly a Neo Noir woman constructed by Christopher Nolan. Nolan has consciously subverted the norms of a pure Noir woman and has made her

character quite distinct with her own attributes. She is not completely a Femme Fatale disturbing the family circle of the man she is behind. She is bold and independent to a great extent and is highly demanding in her nature. She opens up about those things which she cannot chew in and reacts vehemently in very many occasions.

Unlike an ordinary unravelling of the story, a Noir movie explicitly lines up through a set of ciphers unknown to the usual plots as Christine Gledhill points out in her essay *Klute 1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism* published in Kaplan's *Women in Film Noir*. "Consequences are intensified by the fact that the centre of the plot is dominated by questions about female sexuality, and sexual relationships involving patterns of deception, seduction and unrecognised revelations rather than by deductions of criminal activity from a web of clues" (Gledhill 29).

Olivia's character too gyrates within sexual relationships, deception and seduction. She shuttles herself between the two great magicians and becomes a part of their magical feud. She turns out to be a mistress for Angier after Julia's death and provides him with all the emotional support to fly high with his new trick. But she is sufficiently strong to display her dislike when Angier decides to send her to Bordon as a spy. Olivia talks about her frustration to Bordon thus. "I loved him and I stood by him and he sent me to you like he would send a stagehand to pick up his shirts. I hate him for that" (*The Prestige* 01:21:02-08). Instead of taking her life or sacrificing herself, she continues to showcase her mettle even after feeling betrayed by Angier. She could even tell Angier openly that she has fallen in love with Bordon

during the conduct of the spy-work. She tackles her sexual power and makes Angier fathom how deceitful and dangerous she can be if provoked. “The source and operation of the sexual woman’s power and its danger to the male character is expressed visually both in the iconography of the image and in the visual style” (Place 54).

She calls Bordon as ‘Freddie’ and she is not scared to call him so even in the presence of his wife, Sarah. She is bold enough to speak for herself. She even warns Bordon who is desperate thinking about his family affairs. Olivia says, “I told you before when you’re with me, you’re with me. Leave your family at home where they belong” (“*The Prestige*” 01:28:28-31).

Like a Noir Spider woman, she is not completely diabolical and does not try weaning the men from their families. Sarah’s death affects her and she believes she is partly responsible for the unfortunate incident. When Bordon talks about Sarah in the most detached manner, she responds in a bitter way without knowing that this is Fallon and not Bordon. She says, “Its inhuman to be so cold” (“*The Prestige*” 01:39:31-33).

Olivia’s final predicament is not shown in the movie and the viewer realises that the surviving twin of Bordon is the one who loved Sarah which clearly indicated that it is Olivia’s Freddie who had been hanged to death. Unlike Sarah, Olivia is a free soul and she does not hold on to commitments. It is her visual presence and the irresistible sexuality that constructs her image in the movie, and not her cognitive inputs.

Nevertheless, the consistent visual motif is not necessarily the entire meaning of an image, says Janey Place in her essay *Women in Film Noir* (50). A spider woman is in fact a woman who operates and functions under her sexuality. Apart from the common origins of a Femme Fatale, a sexual woman in any context of any movie is multi-dimensional. Thus, Olivia through the lens of Christopher Nolan is multi-dimensional as she partly identifies herself with a few traits from *Women in Noir* movies.

Though Olivia is not seen as smoking cigarettes or using a gun in the movie, she in turn possesses a valour and independence closer to the *Femme Fatales*. Neither does Olivia meet with death at the end nor does she become a monstrous threat to the men around her. Thus, she deviates to a major extent from the typical *Noir* woman and becomes a piece of construction which is partly *Noir* and completely objectified on the screen according to the terms of Nolan's storyline. Olivia is neither a deadly seductress nor a rejuvenating redeemer. Her visual dominance and her spatial independence often make her similar to a *noir* woman. Nevertheless, she cannot be completely placed into the chart of a *Femme Fatale* despite her strength of sexuality and intellect. With his classic deviations and abundance in the skill of character crafting, Nolan has created his own space in representing Olivia partly with *Noir* features.

However, the extreme independence possessed by these women is often rewritten in the name of absorbed narcissism and as a result, the woman often gazes at her own reflection in the mirror. This kind of a self-interest rather than utmost devotion to the male figure is one reason why she is disdained. There is a strong

mirror image portrayed where Olivia is seen in front of a mirror. Though her mirrored image is not portrayed to the audience from the camera angle, the scene signifies the duplicity or her treacherous nature. The mirror scene itself is a testimony for the lack of credibility and her dubious nature. Thus, the verity of her character is deeply questionable and the mirror scene is a visual representation of the visual split in her personality. "They are visually split: thus not to be trusted. Compositions in which reflections are stronger than the actual woman, or in which mirror images are seen in odd, uncomfortable angles, help to create the mood of fear and threat" (Place 58).

Olivia's relationship with Angier makes Bordon distrust her initially and it is only by the second half of the movie it is understood that Olivia had betrayed Angier by giving clues about Angier's double Gerald Root, to Bordon.

The place of the female figure in the puzzle which the hero has to solve often displaces solution of the crime as the object of the plot; the process of detection - following clues and deductive intellection - are submerged by the hero's relations with the women he meets, and it is the vagaries of this relationship that determine the twists and turns of the plot. (Gledhill 28)

The greatest conundrum here is how a woman is projected to a woman through the eyes of a man. With Olivia's power in her character, it is still debatable and ambiguous as to how far her power has been established in a male centred orbit. Beyond the door of the theories, Nolan has specifically designed the character of

Olivia by subverting her Noir traits to please all the men on screen and undoubtedly, the male spectators, as long as they immerse themselves into it.

The Prestige is the only movie where Christopher Nolan has sketched three female figures with almost the same prominence throughout the story structure. Julia, Sarah and Olivia are identical in one sense that they rotate and revolve around these male protagonists having no identity of their own. While Sarah and Julia remain faithful to their husbands, Olivia keeps shuttling between the magicians unable to fix her slot firm with one. However, the three characters are identical as well as distinct in various aspects throughout the storyline. Nevertheless, the contemptuous effects of such women portrayal can in turn decipher the most pathetic reincarnations of female characters in the current scenario.

With a span of four years after the release of *The Prestige*, Nolan's most thrilling science fiction entitled as *Inception* appears in the year 2010. Being one of the much-awaited movies of the year 2010, the global audience had vested themselves with lot of expectations over the movie's star cast as well as character delineation. Apart from its booming star cast with Leonardo Di Caprio at the lead, the movie could not bring any substantial satisfaction to those looking for more sturdy female representations.

Nolan has been pushing over the concept of lucid dreaming since 2002 as he needed a more detailed study over the subject regarding its magnitude and intricacy. The idea was revised and worked upon again and was released in the year 2010 as one of the most baffling films ever produced in the history of Hollywood. Winning four academy awards including the award for the best cinematography, best sound

editing, best sound mixing and best visual effects, *Inception* has carved its niche in the history of Hollywood thrillers.

The movie narrates the story of Dominic Cobb, a mind extractor, who performs corporate espionage using military technology to infiltrate the subconscious of his target audience along with a team of skilled members with which he performs the extraction through a shared dream world. Cobb, on the other hand is a widower who is charged with the crime of killing his wife and therefore is barred from returning home to his kids in U.S. A Japanese businessman named Saito offers Cobb with a new mission of an impossible task in “inception” with his rival in energy conglomerate, Maurice Fischer and his son Robert Fischer. Cobb has to plant the idea of dissolving his father’s company in the subconscious of Fisher. The entire movie is about implanting this idea in the mind of young Fischer and the team uses layers of dream strategies to complete the function. Cobb makes use of the talent of a young architect named Ariadne to build the dream world while his subconscious projection of his own wife Mal, keeps sabotaging his dream world.

Nolan helms the storyline with two women characters, namely Ariadne and Mal. A superficial reading of Nolan’s *Inception* can make the viewers exponentially praise one of the female characters in the movie, Ariadne. But a crystalline re-reading will pull forth the methods by which her character has been ambushed. A brilliant student of Architecture and a confidante for the protagonist Cobb, she is present till the last sequence of the movie. Cobb who visits his father-in-law, Miles, asks him for a brilliant architect from his college. “I need an architect who is as good

as I was”, says Cobb. And the Professor answers, “I have got somebody better” (*Inception* 00:24:40-44).

Ariadne is named after the Cretan princess in Greek mythology who is associated with mazes and labyrinths. Though mythological versions assert her death through murder and suicide, Nolan has not gone to the extent of killing Ariadne in his movie. It is quite surprising to note that Nolan keeps her alive when compared to the previous sketches he has made in his earlier movies. However, she is obviously blighted before her male protagonist Dominic Cobb. Cobb conducts an interview to judge her capacities and she fails miserably initially.

Cobb : I have a test for you.

Ariadne : You’re not gonna tell me anything first ?

Cobb : Before I describe the job, I have to know you can do it.

Ariadne : Why ?

Cobb : It’s not strictly speaking, legal. You have two minutes to design a maze that it takes one minute to solve.

(*Inception* 00:25:20-27)

Without doubt, Cobb underestimates Ariadne’s skill when he interviews her but finally accepts it when she overrides his expectation with her labyrinths.

Ariadne, played by the famous actress Ellen Page is presented as a bold and beautiful girl. Being a student at the Ecole d’ Architecture in Paris, she finally agrees to join Cobb’s mission to design the dream structures within. She is the only woman

who is part of the team with five men comprising of Cobb, Arthur, Eames, Yusuf and Saito.

Despite her intense role in framing the structures and designing the shared dream, Nolan has introduced her as a surrogate to the audience to provide with answers to areas that they wanted to know. Ariadne being a total stranger to the crazy world of dream sharing is as unaware about things as each spectator watching the movie is. Thus, by teaching Ariadne what it is all about, the movie actually teaches the audience the methods and mechanisms behind the bizarre strategy. Ariadne is a first-time dreamer and like any ordinary spectator, she is also intrigued, confused and scared by the underlying possibilities in the world of dreams. Ariadne's innocence and her inquisitive nature provides us with most of the answers and she truly serves the role of being a proxy to the audience quenching their thirst for the knowledge of the dream-world.

Apart from being a keen observer and a curious learner, she is a subordinate to Cobb and a confidante of his subconscious. She shares his dream world and realises the failure Cobb faces with, as his guilt always makes him view his own subconscious projection in the shape of Mal. She becomes a real healer to Cobb after knowing his predicament. Ariadne resembles Ellie Burr in *Insomnia* in her admiration towards her superior officer. Cobb constantly fails amidst the dream layers and Ariadne keeps track of him with her full potentials to make him succeed.

Cobb : You shouldn't be here

Ariadne : Just wanted to see what kind of tests you are doing on your own every night.

Cobb : This has nothing to do with you.

Ariadne : This has everything to do with me. You have asked me to share dreams with you.

Cobb : Not these. These are my dreams. (*"Inception"*
00:55:55-62)

She aids and supports him and becomes a true counsellor for his tormented mind. She comprehends the catastrophe that Mal can infuse in his subconscious and decides to join the team during the mission. She urges the crippled mind of Cobb to take action and to shoot Mal- his subconscious projection. As an important part of the plot construction, she helps Cobb to kill his memory of Mal and soothes him by helping him to cast off the void left by Mal's memories. Cobb is in no way different from *Memento's* hero Shelby. They both swim in their guilt and loss, raging through the memories of their dead wives. Tammy Clewell notes about Freud's representation of the work of Mourning in *Mourning and Melancholia* thus: "It entails a kind of hyper-remembering, a process of obsessive recollection during which the survivor resuscitates the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual absence with an imaginary presence" (44).

Thus, the agony of his dead wife's presence and imaginary existence is curbed by the strong intervention of Ariadne. Ariadne is a natural healer, a complete foil to Mal and a redeemer for Cobb's entangled psyche. Thus, Ariadne becomes instrumental for his final catharsis to let go Mal.

A redeemer woman is always a projection of the dominant ideology prevailing in society. She consoles, heals, and nurtures a man. She brings solace and

peace to his life even by sacrificing herself. She represents Burr in *Insomnia*, Dawes in *Batman Series* and Sarah in *The Prestige*.

Quite contrary to the tenderness of Ariadne, Nolan has presented Mal with her obnoxious, self-centred nature. Being a genuine replica of the Noir women, she fills terror within her visual imagery as well as her dialogues.

Inception's story unfolds years after Mal's death. Mal is the deceased wife of Cobb and his only love interest. Her death and the guilt surrounding her death engulfs Cobb into an ocean of trauma. Her name itself is indicative of the hellishness she is able to create. Mal could mean anything negative. The French name "Malorie" signifies something unlucky, unhappy or unfortunate. "Mal" is also a prefix attached to denote the negativity of something as in Mal-function, Mal-evolent, Mal-icious, Mal-practice, Mal-adaptive, Mal-apropism and many more. Her very presence in the movie is agonising not just for Cobb, but even for a spectator.

Mal represents all necessary qualities of a Noir woman. Her physical representation as well as her psychic vibrations kick parallels to the character of a noir female figure or a Femme Fatale. Though Nolan has conceptualised her through Noir traits, he has also made her slightly different from the usual gimmicks of a Noir. Nolan's Neo-Noir Mal is a representation of both dread and fear. She stands for the unknowable as Richard Dyer states:

Women in film noir are above all else unknowable. It is not so much their evil as their unknowability (and attractiveness) that makes them fatal for the hero. To the degree that culture is defined by men,

what is, and is known, is male. Film noir thus starkly divides the world into that which is unknown and unknowable (female) and, again by inference only, that which is known (male). (116)

Mal played by the Academy Award winning actress, Marion Cotillard, is perfectly a contradiction to Ariadne. She comes as traces through the memories of Cobb. She is presented with blonde hair, painted lips and with moistened eyes. She is seen wearing low-cut sleeveless silky attires quite different from Ariadne. She is visually appealing to the audience with her wide cleavage and her bare neck.

The iconography is explicitly sexual, and often explicitly violent as well: long hair (blond or dark), make-up, and jewellery. Cigarettes with their wispy trails of smoke can become cues of dark and immoral sensuality, and the iconography of violence (primarily guns) is a specific symbol (as is perhaps the cigarette) of her unnatural phallic power. (Place 54)

Apart from her high visual imagery, she has an equal role in sabotaging Cobb's dreams as well as infiltrating through the unconscious minds of the audience through her high sex appeal. She drinks, she smokes and targets on Cobb, her husband. She is also seen in a diabolical phase with revolvers targeting her enemies. Her motives are unidentifiable, and none can read her future actions. Place describes a Femme Fatale's image thus. "The complete meaning of any single image is complex and multi-dimensional, but we can identify motifs whose meaning proceeds initially from common origins" (53).

One major difference here with Nolan's portrayal of Mal is that she remains a revenant throughout the movie. The Mal seen throughout the movie is either Cobb's subconscious projection or a part of the shared dreams or as being a part of the long Limbo (An endless long shared dream). A Noir Film often portrays a woman who is conceptually monstrous and evil in her nature and usually extends her diabolic tentacles over the innocent man. A Noir woman is often presented as a monster manifested through her venomous nature. Similar to Medusa's gaze which can turn men to stones, a noir woman has the capacity to influence the dilapidated man and to spread her noxious tentacles over his subdued psyche. In most Noirs, the wife is never made to be evil and it is always the woman outside the family who tries to explode the man's family. However, it is Cobb's dead wife who becomes this Femme Fatale in the movie and she remains as a projection always. It is this dissonance and disequilibrium that makes up the totality of a Noir woman.

Mal is described by Arthur thus when Ariadne questions. Ariadne asks "What was she like in real life?" and Arthur replies, "She was lovely" ("*Inception*" 00:41:24-27).

The common conditioning of women through terms like "cute", "lovely", "babe", "sexy" etc, concentrating on their physical aspects rather than their abstract capabilities is only to diminish their power for the sake of the men around them. The real power quite often relegates them to the back door while men overtake them towards the roads to success.

Mal appears for the first time on screen during one of the dreams. Cobb meets her and talks and the initial conversation that she indulges in conjures into

death. Mal asks Cobb, "If I jump, would I survive?" to which Cobb replies, "With a clean dive, perhaps" ("*Inception*" 00:05:50-53).

As a result, the audience often get confused between the real Mal and the Mal in dreams. Whichever may be the scene, she is disastrous in her nature and habitually works out to extinguish the plans of Cobb. She tries possessing Cobb in all these situations repeatedly. Her sexually active nature as well as her disoriented and vindictive development throughout the movie makes her more vulnerable to death.

Myth not only expresses dominant ideologies, it is also responsive to the repressed needs of the culture. It gives voice to the unacceptable archetypes as well, the myths of the sexually aggressive woman (or criminal man) first allows sensuous expression of that idea and then destroys it. And by its limited expression, ending in defeat, that unacceptable element is controlled. For example, we can see pornography as expressing unacceptable needs which are created by the culture itself and allowed limited (degraded) expression to prevent these socially induced tensions from erupting in a more dangerous form. (Place 48)

It is quite disappointing to note that Mal would be the only female character, maybe in the whole history of films, who gets killed repetitively over four times within the same movie. While there is only one real death which is explained, the other three are induced and happens during different dream layers. In reality Mal

commits suicide and the reason behind her death is relatable to Cobb, her husband. Cobb confesses to Ariadne, “We were working together. We were exploring the concept of dreaming within a dream” (“*Inception*” 01:16:06-11).

During the exploration of one lucid dream sharing process, Mal becomes so obsessed with the dream life within the Limbo that Cobb incepts her with the idea that this is a dream. Unfortunately, as they wake up from the dream layers, Mal still believes that she is in her dream. Thus her reality becomes a dream and Cobb becomes incapable in convincing her about this reality. In one of the dream sequences, Mal accuses Cobb:

Mal : You infected my mind

Cobb : I was trying to save you.

Mal : You betrayed me. but you can make amends. You can still keep your promises. We can still be together, right here in the world we built together. (“*Inception*” 02:05:20-29)

In order to escape from a dream or a Limbo, one has to kill oneself. Believing that she is in a dream, Mal commits suicide to get back to the real life. Thus, the real death happens only once when she commits suicide. However, Mal is seen getting killed thrice in other dream layers. Initially, she is killed by Cobb during one of the layers of dream when she shoots Fischer before the extraction happens. She is killed in the climax of the movie by Ariadne to rescue Cobb from her clutches. While in real Limbo, Cobb and Mal are found committing suicide on a

rail track. Thus, she would be the singular character in the pages of history to meet with death four times within one movie frame.

As the movie ends, it is found that Mal dies in the hands of Cobb. Though this happens in one of the dream sequences, Cobb is seen getting liberated through this as he utters: “I can’t imagine you with all your complexity, perfection, all your imperfection. Look at you. You are just a shade. You are just a shade of my real life. And you were the best I could do, but I’m sorry, you are just not good enough” (“*Inception*” 02:08:30-36).

Cobb’s description of Mal is a window to an endless discussion for women’s standpoints as it is represented in movies. Though Mal and Ariadne define themselves at two varied extremes, they converge at one point where they become equally subservient towards their male counterparts. Cobb, though not a superhero, is given the upper hand as in incepting Mal with his idea which disrupts her gradually and eventually. Ariadne, in spite of her professional excellence and composure, is showcased multiple steps beneath Cobb during the mission.

The dwindling female representations and the eternal masculine magnification can trigger nothing but a sexist society. If prolonged female presence can bring changes, *Inception* could have possibly brought a radical change in the existing codes of the society. *Inception* definitely promises an equal share of presence with both Ariadne and Mal. But the magnitude through which the male characters are defined confirms the perpetual difference in male-female representations.

The female predicament does not alter much with his next movie as well. The underlying structures hardly change as with Nolan's journey through films. Written by his brother Jonathan Nolan and directed by himself, *Interstellar* is the last movie to be discussed in this chapter. Released in the year 2014, *Interstellar*, a science fiction thriller is a dystopian multi-dimensional movie exposing the temporalities of time and space. Shot with impressive visuals and stunning thematic exhibitions, *Interstellar* hit the box offices with its lengthier running time of two hours and forty minutes. A futuristic world which turns out to be uninhabitable and the obligatory actions required to save the human race becomes the main nucleus of the plot.

Affected by an uncontrollable blight and dust storms, the human race is at a crisis on earth as the movie begins. The crops are completely destroyed, and the chances of survival becomes critical. The scenario compels NASA to conduct a secret expedition to a wormhole to investigate on the sustenance of life and the protagonist Cooper is chosen for this mission during a very strange phenomenon. Cooper's daughter Murph persistently feels the presence of a ghost in her room and the books placed on her shelf keeps falling down until a binary code appears through dust in her room. Decoding the binary code and deriving at a particular geographical location, Cooper and Murph identify the place where the secret meeting of NASA takes place. The story unfolds as Cooper sets on his travel expedition along with his mentor Brand's daughter, Amelia Brand and a few scientists together. The second half of the story turns completely complex as Cooper communicates with his daughter, Murph, in a 5D temporal space (a gigantic tesseract which is five-

dimensional, displacing time and space) and eventually evolving out to be the ghost his daughter had always been talking about. Cooper passes the remaining data in Morse code through the watch he had gifted her before leaving and helps her to solve the gravitational propulsion code through which a mass exodus of humankind to another inhabitable planet becomes possible. The story ends on a positive note though the complexity of the time and space displacement keeps the audience baffled even after leaving the theatrical space.

Being the last movie to be discussed within the fabric of this thesis, a dilution of Nolan's inclination helps the spectators to think progressively about the movie regarding his take on the female characters. He mainly represents two female characters Murph and Amelia Brand and they do become an inevitable part of the whole movie structure. Distinct from his initial female representations, both Murph and Brand are highly intellectual, and both are acclaimed scientists though they contribute in two different ways to the movie's plot. Though their importance has not been completely negated, the prominence of the male figure John Cooper - the engineer cum pilot - never diminishes. As the story culminates, it is again the male protagonist who paves the concrete way for the success of these women and an onlooker still admires and applauds for Cooper before leaving the theatre.

Cooper, played by Mathew McConaughey is an aspiring Pilot and the father of two children. Unfortunately, Nolan fixes him as a widowed middle-aged man struggling to bring up his kids in the midst of a survival crisis. Nolan's comfort in separating the female figures through death propels in the initial segment of the movie. Unlike *Memento* or *Inception*, the audience never get a chance to know about

Cooper's wife. Though she swings at times in the jigsawed memories of Cooper, she hardly takes a shape in the movie. However, Cooper's first reference to his wife comes during a teacher's meet at Murph's school. Cooper tells "she was always the calmer one" (*Interstellar* 00:12:27-28). His wife's calmness can easily be equated with his aggressiveness. The gender trouble which thrusts calmness and weakness as the strength of a woman is not ignored in the slightest way in the movie. Through this description, the license of being aggressive and violent is automatically disbursed to a man.

Murph, Cooper's daughter is the most prominent character of the movie. She is initially presented as a ten-year-old schoolgirl who pines for her father's affection. She is shown as an intelligent girl whose main interest lies in Science and Maths. The senior Professor Brand realises this as soon as he understands that it was Murph who co-ordinated the binary code with her father to find the geographical location of the place where the secret NASA meeting was being held. A conversation between Professor Brand and Murph's grandfather Donald reiterates this. Professor Brand says "Murph is a bright spark. Maybe I should fan the flame" (*Interstellar* 00:54:37-40) and Donald replies "She is already making fool of her teachers. So, may be she should come and make a fool out of you" (*Interstellar* 00:54:41-43).

Murph is seen as a well disciplined and organised girl. Her keen observations make her believe that there is a poltergeist in her room. When Cooper continually denies the chance of such a ghost, she firmly sticks to her conclusions. Cooper advises her thus. "You got to record the facts, analyse, get to the how and why, then present your conclusions" (*Interstellar* 00:04:20-22). Murph takes this hypothesis

to her heart and solves the gravitational equation years later in the absence of her father. Thus her father is portrayed as a source of inspiration to the young girl just like Bruce Wayne in the *Batman Series*.

More than Tom, her brother, Nolan has immersed Murph with an abundance of emotions. She is the one who is greatly affected when her father leaves for the NASA mission and she never forgives her father and never even appears before him for around 23 years on screen to message or text him. Though she finally appears on screen, she accuses Cooper and Amelia Brand for knowing that the entire plan A of a mass exodus to another planet was a sham.

The young Murph is played by Mackenzie Foy and the adult role is handled by Jessica Chastain. Murph's intelligence meets with her impulsiveness and she is seen setting fire to the entire crop in order to relocate her brother's ailing family. She feels betrayed knowing from Professor Brand that they were sure that they could never complete the gravitational equation and the whole thing was a make-belief.

Nolan has been poured with accolades over his strong representation of female figures in his *Interstellar*. However, a deep-seated study of them will not transcend the inclination he has settled upon in all of his movies. Murph has been portrayed through three different characters - as a young girl, a young lady and a very old woman awaiting death. Though she is termed to be an intelligent student, she is helped and assisted by her father, Cooper, in finding the geographical location through the binary coordinates. The first sequence in which her father helps her out is purely understandable with her dearth of experience as a school girl. But the real credit for solving the gravitational equation is not given to Murph. It is still

questionable as to why Nolan makes a 33-year-old independent scientist like Murph depend on her father's clues sent through the identical watch to crack the equation. It is Cooper who transmits the data through Morse code to the second hand of the wrist watch. It is Cooper who glides in the five-dimensional tesseract and sends the details of the quantum mechanics. The plot of the story could have been reversed in any way as to give importance to Murph's discovery of the equation. But Nolan hesitates in doing so and bestows Cooper with all the appreciations. The dependence of Murph on her father is eternal as Nolan sketches it. It is this dependence that Janey Place firmly attacks in her essay.

The expression of the myth of man's 'right' or need to control women sexually is in contrast to the dominant version of it in 'A' films of the 30s, 40s and 50s, which held that women are so weak and incapable that they need men's protection to survive. In these films, it is the woman who is portrayed benefitting from her dependence on men. (Place 49)

Murph represents this dependable frame of a woman who lives up to the expectation of a family and becomes a redeemer throughout the movie. She fills the space of her lost mother and is the only woman character remaining in her family. She is a nurturer not just for her father who is away, but even for her brother Tom who leans on her.

During an interview with Chastain, Sam Ashurst records her response thus:

Question : It's a really positive move by Nolan to create a female character in this way. Do you think Hollywood is getting better in terms of roles for women?

Chatain : Realistically, no. If you look at all the films that people are talking about this year in terms of best Picture, there's not one film that has a female protagonist. If you look at that, it's pretty obvious. I think people are talking about it a lot, so I know people want change – they are acknowledging that there isn't equality in terms of female directors, writers and cinematographers. (Ashurst)

The death of Murph is not shown in the movie. However, she is seen in the last scene on her deathbed awaiting for her young father to pay a visit to her. Though she was the one responsible for bringing the entire mankind to a new habitat of theirs, she herself gives the total credit for her father for the clues. Though Nolan substantiates it in the name of the *Theory of Relativity*, the concept of ageing and withering which is mostly applied to a woman rather than a man stabilises again with Cooper's looks which keeps him young even after 74 years of space journey. However, Nolan makes the gravitational pull and the *Theory of Relativity* as the real culprits which slows down the process of ageing in Cooper while in space journey. Cooper is seen as in his forties meeting his daughter who is in her late eighties. The unswerving charm that rests with men and the visual appeal that withers in

association with a woman has not been challenged at all even in today's Hollywood industry.

Murph, though depicted as independent and educated, is completely navigated through the space of patriarchal codes. Her success story is seen to happen only because of the support she gets from her father.

In so many of the major and so-called 'non-political' American Films, it is the family which has served a crucial function in inserting within the film narrative the established values of competitive, repressive and hierarchical relationships. The presence of the family has served to legitimate and naturalise these values: that is, to present them as normal, natural and unthought premise for conducting one's life. (Harvey 36)

Thus, the real triumph of Murph is indirectly bestowed upon Cooper, the father, rather than the daughter. A Family is a true channel manifesting a set of ideological customs and beliefs. It encompasses a range of traditional values like love of family, love of father and love of one's country thereby making itself a microcosm of the characteristics of a larger society. Thus, Murph is placed in the context of this family so that she can easily transfer the credit of her success story to the male figure - her father.

Though there is no sexual objectification in *Interstellar*, the second half of Mulvey's essay where she discusses the function of a hero on screen is directly

applicable here with Cooper's character. The identification with the male image on screen is one major reason behind the success stories of male-led star cast.

This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (Mulvey 20)

Thus, Cooper, though not a superhero, is looked at with great awe and wonder from the perspective of the audience. He is seen as a saviour of the dying world and re-echoes the iconic image of a man in the mind of the spectator.

Apart from Murph, Amelia Brand, the daughter of Professor Brand plays a significant role in the movie. *Interstellar* has been proclaimed by many critics as Nolan's pro-feminist work which has enormously bestowed the audience with inspiring women characters. But the real truth is not in affirmative. Though there is no objectification that is accountable through female bodies, the true grit with which they have been constructed is far beneath the fibre of the male protagonists.

Amelia Brand, one of the most distinguished scientists in the NASA team is a strong-willed woman who is bold enough to join the team in the "Endurance" spaceship. She is dedicated in her nature and hardworking just like her father and is willing to sacrifice her own life to save the entire species of mankind.

The first time she is presented in the movie, she comes from a dark shadowy chamber and appears before Cooper. As she introduces herself as ‘Scientist Brand’, Cooper mocks at her in a rather lighter tone.

Cooper : Who are you ?

Brand : Dr. Brand

Cooper : And I knew a Dr. Brand once. He was a professor.

Brand : What makes you think I’m not ?

Cooper : Oh, he wasn’t near as cute, either (“*Interstellar*”

00:26:01-06)

The jovial method through which Cooper diminishes her importance is the chain that sustains even after filtering the keys of patriarchy through a mesh. The andro-centred world has often identified women through the adjectives like ‘sweet’, ‘cute’ and ‘beautiful’. The Blonde in the first movie was called a ‘babe’ and Rachael Dawes as a ‘cute little thing’. The indiscrepancy between what a woman can be and what a woman has to be can only widen within the prevailing gender disparity.

Professor Brand, Amelia’s father keeps open two options to save the human race. The first one is to decode a gravitational propulsion theory which can propel a mass exodus to another planet to save the entire humanity. If this option cannot triumph, he settles for a second option, Plan B, which involves transporting 5000 frozen human embryos which can make a colony of humankind in any inhabitable planet other than earth so that mankind never becomes extinct. To corroborate the efficiency of Plan B, he entrusts the sole responsibility of these embryos to Amelia Brand. In short, Amelia’s role of nurturing and raising up the embryos into a colony

is to be reflected here for a second reading. A metaphorical reading will put her back to a symbolic profusion of maternal plenitude. The question remains as to why the other three men in the mission, namely, Cooper, Romily and Doyle were exempted from this role and why Brand was placed in charge of this. The dichotomy between being a bold scientist and being in charge of 5000 embryos nourishing her own maternal instinct has to be assessed with a grave concern. The burden of reproduction and motherhood had always been the most intimidating reasons behind the exploitation of women.

The journey with the other three scientists in the spaceship reveals more about Brand. Brand is literally presented as a storehouse of lacrimal glands - shedding tears all through the movie. The first expedition that they undertake is in visiting Miller's planet where the gravitational pull is very high since it is more closer to the gargantua. The more the gravitation pull, the more the time it would consume from earth's time share. Spending one hour in Miller's planet would cost seven years on earth as per the theory and the team plan things in such a way as they spend the least amount of time at Miller's planet. Miller's planet which turns out to be unsuitable for human inhabitation is a tidal zone where the tides can create havoc. However, Brand goes in search of Miller's data contrary to Cooper's suggestions and wrecks the whole plan.

Brand : We are not leaving without her data.

Cooper : Get back here soon. Yeah, we do not have time.

The second wave is coming !

We're in the middle of a sea.

Get your ass back to the Ranger now.

(*“Interstellar”* 01:10:47-52)

Brand’s stubbornness in collecting the data consumes more than two hours and kills one of their team mates, Doyle, who gets devoured by the gigantic tide. The wave delays their departure and time gets enormously dilated and causes an elapse of 23 years on earth. This grave mistake is embedded into the character of Brand while Cooper, the man, is shown as being right in asking her to get back soon. Had she obeyed Cooper, they would not have lost Doyle nor 23 years. It is likely that Nolan wanted to exhibit the sharpness of a man’s brain and the recklessness with which a woman approaches a situation. Later, Brand is seen shedding tears over her mistake and apologising to Cooper, “Look Cooper, I screwed up. I’m sorry. But you knew about relativity. I thought I was prepared. I knew the theory. I.. Reality is different” (*“Interstellar”* 01:18:07-16).

Brand’s dialogues throw light to universal signification where she stands as a representative to the entire women around the world. She agrees with her mistake and realises that reality is far away from the theories whereas Cooper who is not an expert in the field of relativity anticipates the situation and warns her beforehand. This is a testimony of a woman’s intelligence being belittled as compared to a man. Cooper’s proficiency in deterring things is contrasted with Brand’s lack of insight.

Brand’s mistakes never comes to a halt. When the discussion goes on whether to visit Edmund’s planet or Mann’s planet, she stands adamant in visiting Edmund’s planet. Nevertheless, she makes clear the reason for this. Cooper reveals, “She’s in love with Wolf Edmunds” to which Romily asks, “Is that true ?” and

Brand responds, “Yes. And that makes me follow my heart” (“*Interstellar*” 01:27:34-38).

To further magnify her less sagacious approach, she talks immensely about relationships, love and affection with tears in her eyes. “The tiniest possibility of seeing Wolf again excites me. That doesn’t mean I’m wrong” (“*Interstellar*” 01:15:12-16). She adds, “Love is the one thing we are capable of perceiving that transcends dimensions of time and space” (“*Interstellar*” 01:28:32-36). Cooper reminds her occasionally that she is a scientist and reminds her of her greater mission and responsibilities. She does not appear prudent in many circumstances and her disposition is sketched in such a way as she tends to forget her higher mission of saving the mankind.

To supplement Cooper’s stance in a better way, he is made to be the saviour of Brand in the final scene where he goes in search of her to Edmund’s planet. As a standard cliché in any literary piece, the role of a man as the saviour and the woman as the victim is saddled to the plot of the movie.

With all the concrete slackening off that happens with Murph and Brand, the chapter strongly argues that the women have not been portrayed with their full capabilities. Though *Interstellar* has created an impression that it slowly evolved to the emergence of idealistic gender equality, the scene is still beyond our grasp. The most disappointing of all is Brand’s dialogue when she says, “I’m not gonna make it” (“*Interstellar*” 01:11:21-22) in a futurist world where we hope more determination and strength with womanhood. Murph and Brand are not completely redeemers nor Femme Fatales. They are not sexually objectified too. Still, their

manifestations have been of lesser importance compared to the male figures. To read with the undertones of Janey Place's essay, Murph closely comes in alley with the characteristics of a Redeemer or a nurturer to her father. Her filial affection comes in the way of completing her father's mission by decoding the gravitational equation. As long as the male glorification tends to hold on, female suppression becomes a necessity rather than an imperative component.

Nolan's male protagonists in all these three movies are well-shaped. Bordon and Angier in *The Prestige* are well defined and their psychological apprehensions as well as internal motives are completely defined through the exposition of their personal diaries. *Inception* on the other hand discusses at length on Cobb's inner conscious through his dream layers and subconscious projections. Cooper in *Interstellar* vents out his inconveniences through the unimaginable depths of a five-dimensional tesseract. All these male protagonists, thus, fill themselves through multiple methods to release their agony. And in due course of these agonising experiences, a woman in the form of a lover, an assistant or a daughter appears to absorb his conscience. Thus, she becomes a redeemer, a performer or at times a perfect sexual object.

Nolan's interest in using repetitive strategies had been authenticated as with the analysis of his female characters. The death of female figures obviously is an obsession which repeats as a cycle in all of his movies. Though unimportant to the storyline, Maurice Fischer's wife (Robert Fischer's mother) in *Inception* is seen nowhere in the picture and the spectators are forced to assume that she is dead. In a similar way Professor Brand is also placed in the same context as a widower in

Interstellar. Mr. Miles, the father in law of Cobb is seen all through the movie *Inception*, but unfortunately his wife never ever gets mentioned at all within the movie plot.

One pivotal aspect that could be noted with these three films particularly is the presence of a “male mentor figure” and it happens to be the very same actor who plays the key roles in all these three movies. One of Nolan’s favourite actors, Michael Caine plays these foster roles in all the three movies. While he is Mr. Cutter who helps the budding magicians in *The Prestige* to prosper, he is an eminent scientist in *Interstellar* providing guidance to Cooper. He comes in the form of Mr. Miles, the mentor and father-in-law of Cobb in *Inception*. The role of this “male-mentor” is prominent in all these movies and it exemplifies the wisdom and experience that can be offered by a veteran of life, a senior adult. The concept of the introduction of such a figure in these three movies in a cyclical pattern makes us probe more into the question of a sexist society. Nolan never did fill this role with a female senior who could have possibly handled this. Consequently, the questions pertaining to such a dearth in the sphere of Christopher Nolan’s movies have never been put to deliberation till date.

Apart from the freedom that a movie provides in with, it is equally inextricable in the way in which it deceives its audience. The magic, the subconscious infiltration as well as the multi-dimensional spaces respectively in *The Prestige*, *Inception* and *Interstellar* are narrated through the technique of deception and the role of female presentations too get submerged in its journey towards the climax.

Nolan's puzzle movies had been put to question a number of times regarding the deception it empowers and the multiple interpretations that it possibly arrives at. However, it is equally important to note that his art of deviousness through the plot construction has gravely affected his female representations. Somehow, they dissolve into eternity and does not stay equivalent with the male characters.

The realistic scope of looking at women in the most pleasurable visual form through a film is what a film ultimately offers to its spectators. The three angles as mentioned by Mulvey is true to the core as and when the female characters are assessed. The camera angle, the angle through which the male heroes look at her and finally the angle through which she is seen by the spectators. Thus the female is instrumental to the development of the plot and aids the audience with visual pleasure which is inevitable for a cinema.

This complex interaction of looks is specific to film. The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical film-makers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment. There is no doubt that this destroys the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the "invisible guest", and highlights the way film has depended on voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms. Women, whose image has continually been stolen and used for this end, cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything much more than sentimental regret. (Mulvey 26)

Unless the reformers of the society put an end to this, this phenomena of one sex being misrepresented continuously, the dream of a shared co-existence with both the sexes in one society will never touch reality. For the society to indulge itself in a sweeping change, the change initially has to evolve psychologically through the existing mankind. Cinema, being one of the most powerful tools with a lot of impact, can definitely bring about solid reformations in the prevailing social order. The movie, which is manufactured within the master brain of a director relentlessly displays the tendencies of his inner conscience. Thus, the explicit change has to be born in the conscience of the contemporary directors so that the seeds of change are planted visually through their movies, creating a gradual change in the hegemonic order of the society.

Conclusion

She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her. From a man's mouth, the epithet "female" sounds like an insult; but he, not ashamed of his animality, is proud to hear: "He's a male!" The term "female" is pejorative not because it roots women in nature but because it confines her in her sex, and if this sex, even in an innocent animal, seems despicable and an enemy to man, it is obviously because of the disquieting hostility woman triggers in him. (Beauvoir 41)

Gender divisions had always bifurcated the harmony of humanity since the dawn of civilisation. The social reality of gender disparity and the ontological positioning of women as secondary to men had become an inextricable part of the prevailing society. This ostensible lack of representation of women and her strategical marginalisation as the second sex has galvanised various concerns in the cultural fabric of a society. The heterogeneity of culture and the innovations arising in discursive patterns could only further enhance the masculine assumptions and have failed immensely in the social constructive sketch as well as interpretive approaches in building a new canvas with more women inclusions.

Visual culture, being an emerging academic discipline, has encompassed the entire vivacity of the present cultural milieu. Though it evades the questions of specificity and uniqueness with respect to gender denominations, the plausible multifaceted portrayal of women has been more or less of the same shades and same

grades. The limited understanding regarding gender inequality and the hyper glorification of Hollywood male representation should essentially be re-read to gauge the experience of women across the diversity of class and culture. As long as the gendered power struggle exists, the stance of women would be ignored in social, political, economic and cultural sphere of life.

To look at all areas of gender inequality would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the thesis has foregrounded its study on the most renowned director Christopher Nolan and his blockbuster movies in analysing and furnishing a microcosm of the entire Hollywood depiction of women. A filmic representation is something which can effortlessly conquer the minds of its audience and can carve an unconscious landscape of social life in the depth of their minds. Christopher Nolan, being one of the most recognised faces in the backdrop of Hollywood would indeed be a yardstick in the exploration of Hollywood as a whole. Nolan's movies would thus act as a glimpse considering the larger picture of Hollywood and its female representations. The thesis has thus mirrored how these movies shape and ignite the roots towards a phallogentric society as well as manipulate women empowerment to a much derogatory facade while they look quite progressive on the surface levels.

Despite the various feminist approaches and critical aplomb, women inclusions have never been unconditionally inclusive in any field, especially in the filmic world. Films, being the mass medium for the transmission of visual images have never ever illustrated women in the true light. With the advent of theories, sexism is merely masked in modern masculinities and femininities where they retell the same age-old stories of patriarchy.

In this perceived era of gender equality, there is a new articulation of male social power and privilege. There is no evolutionary trek toward equality, peace and prosperity. The new world order is neither neutral nor innocent about sexism: it modernises it.

Masculinities and femininities are being made and remade as polarised species. (Campbell)

However, multiple theoretical frameworks ensued gradually in reading and re-reading the contemporary movies of the time and assessing the role of women in these movies. These theoretical approaches, however, assisted in retelling the stories of women representations in a more vivid terrain. The thesis has analysed in detail the movies of Christopher Nolan in the light of the theoretical framework constructed by Laura Mulvey through her gaze theory. The research is also supplemented by how women representations borders its contours in Noir substructure as discussed by Janey Place. The study had further corroborated its way through women's lived experience through the empirical mechanisms of Fredrickson and Roberts.

As Mulvey opines, Films are the creative products of patriarchy and a woman on screen is observed only as a contrivance in the hands of the male protagonists. The fundamental aim of any theory is to allocate a fresh background either by revising, supporting or entirely overthrowing the established set theories. Though major debates in the field of Film Theory had been explicated and had become familiarised among people, the real seeds of change remained untouched in the major realms of social life.

This thesis began with the impeccable influence that a director has in his audience and how well he can shape up the society around him. However, a reformation in its absolute sense is unfeasible within a limited time. Nevertheless, constant attempts can indeed trigger the buttons of change in a society though gradually. The studies on Nolan's movies have further crystallised the traits of sheer masculinity and a complete negation of women presence. Nolan's movies which spans from the 90s to the present era showcase the quintessential male-dominated social canvas which could not break off from the patriarchal presence. A period of twenty years is definitely a vast span which could have stirred up the grains for a gradual change in the characterisations of a director's filmic canvas.

Despite the recurrent subsidiary image given to the female characters, Nolan's movies spill the grandeur of its narration with an outstanding technique in film production and camera mechanisms. It is this radical style that makes Nolan distinct among the other directors and the question as to why such a revolutionary director turns a blind eye in representing his female characters in the same archetypal format for an uninterrupted period of twenty years becomes the underlying core of discussion throughout the project.

The flesh and blood of any movie lies in its narrative structure. Nolan has time and again made use of diverse potentials in his narrations. It is his narratology that makes him more popular and compels his audience to watch his movies. The enigma of his movies arises from his constructive narratology. The embedded structure of Nolan's narration like boxes within boxes or rooms within rooms is what is termed as *Matryoshka* in Russian terminology (meaning nesting dolls). Held

within its tricky strategies, it is this narrative hook that encapsulates the audience and pulls them again and again towards Nolan's movies. His exemplary narratological skill is evident since his first movie *Following* in 1998. The non-linear story line of *Following* was one of the hallmarks of the movie which enthralled the audience and made them watch the movie for a second time. Nolan's *Memento* (2000) too is not different when it comes to its narration. The reverse order of the sequences and the multi-coloured dimensions of scenes had given a further impact for the movie. The movie shifts back and forth in colour as well as black and white sequences until they merge at the apex effectuating a unified moment. Though *Memento* was a risky move since it completely dilapidated a spectator's cognitive strategy, the movie roped itself into the box office as a healthy hit and came up with fatty reviews as being the most original and fresh films of the year.

Insomnia released in 2002 was Nolan's initial deal with the Warner Brothers and indeed Nolan's first studio film. *Insomnia* would be Nolan's first movie which unspools the linear story telling, considering his usual trend. Though not tricky to its filmic expanse, time still plays a decisive role where days and nights commingle as to confuse the protagonist as well as the viewer. While Nolan toys with the embedded horizontal epistolary features in *The Prestige* (2006), his dreams within dreams and the nesting narration in *Inception* (2010) has shattered the hitherto innovations in narrative techniques. Nolan's *Interstellar* released in 2014 also dives its trajectory through the displacement of time and space and beguiles his spectators on a conceptual proportion. Though the story takes a linear path, the contradictions that arise among the different spheres and the dimensions of time and space that

interact and integrate baffles the audience to an ethereal level. The five-dimensional tesseract and the integration of multiple time spans in various spheres contribute to the hefty narratology. However, his Batman trilogy does not lurk much in these intrigues or puzzles. Nevertheless, there is a feeling of puzzle incorporated in the final scene at the cafe at Florence where Wayne exchanges a nod with his housekeeper Alfred.

The cultural desire to be fooled by a film through its deceptiveness is an inclination of today's society. But Nolan has pushed the limits of this deception and trickery, and this has even put the cognitive abilities of the spectators to question. The key features that maximise the box office grosses are definitely formidable tricks and hybridisation of form and content which works in equilibrium with Nolan's movies. Implementing trick is indeed a strategy to engage viewer participation and the more challenging the trick is, the more the viewer engagement. "Nolan's entire film catalogue hinges upon various modes of deception, but it is unusual in the case of puzzle films to have one director become celebrated for this repeated mode overall" (Joy 10).

2010 had been one of the most phenomenal years in the History of Hollywood with two great films released - Cameron's *Avatar* and Nolan's *Inception*. More than Nolan and Cameron, it was a box office contest between 20th century Fox and Warner Bros. While Nolan's *Inception* was visually conventional, its narrative intricacy was something extraordinary. While *Avatar* was a 3D cinema with a visual spectacle, Nolan's *Inception* wrecked millions of brains with its embedded multifaceted convolutedness. Though successful in disparate ways,

Nolan's narrative trickery paid off by guaranteeing a positive experience for the audience when distinctive challenges finally integrated and unrelenting ambiguity faded, and the wrinkled twists finally got ironed out.

Nolan's mastery in storytelling is unbeatable and his narrative dimensions glide incessantly. Nolan has refined the art of storytelling and has distilled it to the finest of the forms where narration becomes an art in the history of filmmaking. Nolan's movies could never be deciphered in a single watch and the challenge that the plot puts forward is what makes his movies unusual.

Nolan's entertainments, the best ones, anyway, are games. I don't mean that they resemble puzzles or tricks (though they do that, too), I mean that they are most satisfying when understood as games, not as novelistic narratives. They are contests with rules and phases, gambits and defences, many losers and the occasional victor, usually a Pyrrhus type. (Fhlainn 160)

It is essentially the colossal diversity in the themes and its unprecedented visual presentation that makes Nolan the greatest filmmaker of the era. From *Following* (1998) to *Dunkirk* (2017), Nolan has boomed his artistic valour gliding through various subjects pertaining to our quotidian life as well as the metaphysics. As most of his movies are deceptive in nature, his creation of the female characters are also considerably deceptive as they make the spectators surmise that they are beyond the chains of domination when in reality they slide through the same rigid shackles. Nolan's movies are in fact a reflection of Nolan's subconscious where his inner whims and fancies take form into visual images.

While the end result may not represent the pinnacle of Nolan's extraordinary career, it nevertheless reaffirms him as cinema's leading blockbuster auteur, a director who can stamp his singular vision on to every frame of a gargantuan team effort in the manner of Spielberg, Cameron and Kubrick. 'Whose subconscious are we in?' asked Ellen Page in *Inception*. The answer here, as always, is unmistakably Nolan's. (Joy 5)

The style and technique that Nolan uses is vividly different from many other directors of the era. Nolan's movies are classic marriages of its emotional significance and visual pageantry. The strategy of falsity which comes at times in the form of truth and deceives the viewers is one recurring style initiated by Nolan. The structural perspective of Nolan's movies are in fact unfathomable. Nolan is one director who prefers original locations to studio locations. His aesthetic sense is invincible and as an auteur he has invented his own signature style in filmmaking. He prefers modern settings with pale colours overshadowing blended palettes with minimal dialogues but with strong visual imagery.

Most of his masculine characters are shot in close-up instigating a depth of their innate nature as presented in the movies. He makes use of documentary lighting and subtle shadows in most of his films. With his strong belief in the concept of authentic cinema, he prefers hand-held camera work and original locations. Nolan has also made use of Noir traits in most of his works thereby tilting the concept of Noir and reinventing it with his own stylistic flair. His continuous experiments with non-linear narration, solipsistic standpoints and the blend of style

and form has marked him with his own approach towards films. His editing style with analytical editing and cross cutting also has helped him to build up the climax in the most legitimate manner. His collaboration with Hans Zimmer who is known for integrating music with the traditional and electronic had provided new textures in the landscape of sound too. His themes had often found its root in the construction of one's identity, displacement of time and space and circumstances pertaining to existential and ethical questions. He is also popularly known for shooting on 70 mm film and is also credited for popularising the use of IMAX 70 mm cameras in the current film world.

Despite Nolan's extraordinary skill in monopolising the Hollywood industry with his artistic flamboyance, his innate message to the society had always been one reechoing the hegemonic structure of the society predominating it with male centred components. A profound study of his female characterisations has thrown light into this very fact.

This thesis is an attempt to fill the critical void in analysing Nolan's female characters and in illustrating how threatening these presentations can be to the current society. There are four chapters and each chapter conducts an exhaustive exegesis of the female characters within the hypothetical framework in which they are moulded up and are examined in the chronological order of the films.

The first chapter *Splintering the Antiquated Myths: The Advent of the Feminist Perspective in Films* has been an exploration of the Film Theories which turns out to be a fertile ground in evaluating the movies of Christopher Nolan. The chapter looks into what Feminism is and how Feminism has evolved through ages.

As a theoretical approach, the chapter has looked into the major Feminist Film Theories including those of Mulvey, Place, Fredrickson and Roberts which forms the basis for further evaluation of the movies. Mulvey's theory has bound the investigations on these women characters to a more subtle level of inquiry signifying how puny the strategies are, through which women are organised on screen. The tilted substructure of Noir traits in which most women characters are coloured with, has been unmasked completely in the light of Place's substantiations. Far from on screen manifestations, the wide-reaching repercussions of these portrayals are also unearthed through the theory put forward by Fredrickson and Roberts.

The second chapter *Resuscitating the Archetypes: The Femme Fatale, the Redeemer and the Insignificant* has been a linear study of Nolan's initial movies namely *Following*, *Memento* and *Insomnia*. The chapter studies in detail how noir elements embrace the women characters of Nolan and how women get confined within the portrayal levels as Redeemers and Insignificant characters. The unnamed Blonde is bludgeoned to death in *Following*. Shelby's wife is killed in *Memento* and Natalie vanishes to nothingness though she survives. *Insomnia* begins with Connell's death and Ellie Burr is portrayed just as a mere shadow of Will Dormer. The dynamic interplay of sexism and how gender-divides turn into a collective unconsciousness in the psyche of the spectator has been dealt with in this chapter. The key female figures of the three movies are analysed in depth and are validated in relation to the feminist empowerment.

The third chapter *The Fortified Masculinity: The Dwindling Females in Superhero Films* is a detailed discussion on the female characters of the Batman

trilogy. *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* more or less portray women on a marginalised basis while emphasising its strengths on the hero. The heroine of the story Rachael Dawes meets with a brutal end in the second part while Miranda Tate kills herself in an explosion in the last part. Though the Catwoman survives, she shrinks herself to the domesticated role of an ordinary woman. While Batman continues his success stories in Gotham with all impediments removed one after another, the females are portrayed as powerless and inefficient in the absence of this superhero. Women tend to get more isolated and relegated in superhero films and these movies are a testimony of how superheroes can intelligently tarnish women images to margins.

The fourth chapter *The Subservient Counterparts: The Distortion of Truth in Filmic Representation* deals with Nolan's later three movies *The Prestige*, *Inception* and *Interstellar*. While Julia meets with an accidental death, Sarah commits suicide in *The Prestige*. Mal is already a dead character as the story begins in *Inception*. Though Olivia (*The Prestige*) and Ariadne (*Inception*) survive through the plot, they are completely subordinated by the male characters. The remaining characters and the females in *Interstellar* are completely subsidiary to the role of the masculine heroes irrespective of their talent, skill and education. Despite being an intelligent scientist, Brand (*Interstellar*) is shown as a strategic piece of emotional bundle, wailing and apologising all through the movie. The chapter has engaged in its revelation of how women can remain secondary irrespective of their educational and social status when their roles are designed by male writers.

Thus, the thesis *From the Nameless Blonde to Brand: Defrosting the Refrigerated Females in the Movies of Christopher Nolan* is an attempt to explore the female characters and has validated the fact that they have not transformed much within a phallogentric society where male domination still exists in its most horrendous forms. This research is an attempt in studying Nolan's female characters ranging from the Blonde in *Following* to Brand in *Interstellar*. Despite Nolan's innovations in his cinematic style and technique, his women characters are one-dimensional and undergo no change. The Blonde depicted in the year 1998 as well as Brand portrayed in the year 2014 do not signify a strong distance between their characterisations and they stay glued to the prevailing hegemonic structure of the society. Brand in *Interstellar* is just a new version of the Blonde, signalling the same concepts that the masculine orb wants to believe and make others believe in.

The work has excluded a deep analysis of Nolan's latest film *Dunkirk* (2017) as it is a completely masculine movie that eludes the categorisation that this project has been working with. However, this man-centred war movie has completely negated feminine presence. The thesis has examined as to what extent women have been neglected in the films of Nolan and how ignominiously is a woman portrayed through the lens of a great director. The project summarises and synthesises the key arguments as to how far a woman is trivialised despite her educational status in all these movies.

The greatest strength of any theory lies in its testability through concrete examples and the movies read and studied under the theoretical frameworks demonstrate how each theory illuminates the individual films with the theoretical

backdrop. Nolan's films being a prototypical case study, a profound analysis will serve to estimate how far filmic representations of women have progressed so far on screen. The Nolanesque trend of freezing the females and wrapping them in death is one intimidating feature which has been discussed thoroughly within the thesis. Most of the women characters that Nolan portrays are very powerful in fact, though in various ways. The Blonde, Natalie, Kay Connell, Ellie Burr, Martha Wayne, Rachael Dawes, Julia, Olivia, Sarah, Ariadne, Mal and Brand are powerful in their own way until they get swaddled in the clutches of death or get trivialised within the cinematic plot. This disappearance or marginalisation which surfaces underneath every movie is what the thesis had dealt with. An abiding objective here is to testify the fact that today's filmic representation, though modern in their techniques and medium, has by far regressed in its female presentations. Nolan becomes the most compelling case study as he is one of the most admired and adored directors of the era who has cast a dynamic influence on the spectators on a global level. The project brings into sharper focus the need for a progressive representation of women in films so that a subtle change can be imbued into the psyche of the audience gradually.

Inequality is an urgent and complex problem. It is deeply entrenched in all areas of life. It is pervasively defended and supported, even by those who it damages. To my mind inequality is the main roadblock in our journey toward social justice, and we need an innovative approach to uprooting it that won't produce the same negligible incremental change we've seen in recent years.

(Willis)

It is beyond speculation that Nolan had hyper glorified his male characters and had encased them in virtues and powers that signify sheer masculinity. The female characters, though powerful in their own ways are either pushed to death or survive as mere dependents of these protagonists. Despite the discursive explosion of theories favouring women empowerment, a delicate resistance has formed simultaneously beneath those theories by portraying women through the same archetypes showing them as meek and weak. Nolan's mastery, however, is different as he showcases them in utmost powerful roles but drags them out of the plot so vivaciously that the audience do not even comprehend the truth that they disappeared while men overpower them in due course. Nolan's movies even fail the Bechdel test, a test conducted to determine how active and present women are in films. The criteria to pass the test includes the presence of at least two women in speaking roles, having their own names and identities, who should be talking to each other about something other than that of a man. As an insightful metric assessing the powerful inclusion of women on screen, not a single movie of Nolan passes the test in its rightful sense. *Interstellar* barely passes the test at the brink though there is no substantial validity for the movie in association with a reading regarding women inclusion.

Most often, the strength of women are comparatively subdued in creations which come from a male. "The representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (Beauvoir 161). A powerful female creation is hardly visible when not penned or sketched by a female. As Elaine Showalter says, "if we study

stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be" (Showalter 220).

A personal interview with the British Feminist Film Theorist Laura Mulvey on the 8th of May, 2019 at Birkbeck College, University of London, Bloomsbury, U.K. has greatly helped in incorporating more insights to the study of these women characters. Considering the presumptive notion about women empowerment that people talk about and the guaranteed belief that change is happening around on enhancing women representations on screen, a study on these movies will direct towards the retrogressing state of affairs in current Hollywood. When Hollywood cinema becomes a model to be copied, this particular trend can only dehumanise women power rather than creating a push to its further development. As Naomi Wolf posits,

To live in a culture in which women are routinely naked where men aren't is to learn inequality in little ways all daylong. So even if we agree that sexual imagery is in fact a language, it is clearly one that is already heavily edited to protect men's sexual – and hence social- confidence while undermining that of woman. (Wolf 139)

The scope of this thesis in fact extends beyond the movie frames of Christopher Nolan and helps in re-reading the female characters on screen within the backdrop of visual media as a whole, through the lens of multiple perspectives. This thesis entails itself in exercising women independence through realistic female representations in a manner of conscious discernment. This will indeed help to break

free from the continued resilience that women manifestations go through in cinematic culture. A substantial digestion of this work will aid in determining and extending the further levels through which women representations can seek better pedestals irrespective of the ephemeral glory of sexual objectification and trivialisation persistently displayed in the current scenario. The interplay of all the factors considered and demonstrated here will serve for the posterity in contributing to the different facades of women representations in Hollywood. This research stands as a first step in providing a framework to help research and elucidate the importance of the functions of female portrayals and also in examining the concrete ideologies in supplementing a complete understanding of how more strengthened women characters should turn inclusive in the cinematic landscape. This thesis indeed permeates the vision to delve more profoundly into the associated discourses and further discursive patterns leading to more on screen women representations.

Based on the evidence put forward, the concluding contention is that women inclusions on screen are almost negligible and those presented are manifested in the most insignificant way. Hollywood has witnessed only a handful of women even within the technical side of cinema and this dearth can be improved only when the doors of equality will be laid wide open. With a history to be claimed for multiple decades, it is quite disheartening to notice that there was only a single woman named Kathryn Bigelow to win an Academy Award for the best director. According to the latest statistical documentation on Hollywood female representation, only 35% of films featured women in prominent speaking roles. Los Angeles Times has stated that “96% of TV programs had no women directors of photography; 79% had no

women directors; 77% had no women editors; and 77% had no women creators” (Villarreal).

The broader significance of the thesis lies in the fact that Hollywood cinema often stands as a dynamic model for global cinema made all over the world and its influence is unending, considering its impact and its all-pervasive nature. Hollywood’s influence has systematically governed even the Malayalam Movie Industry and it becomes evident through the recent Hema Commission report. “There is a huge difference in the remuneration offered to men and women. A man and a woman with the same number of years of experience, the same amount of hard work and excellence, would still be paid differently. Women are paid one-tenth to one-third of the remuneration offered to their male counterparts. And one-third is very rare, it is often much less” (Cris). The unexceptional conviction that western society is far ahead in revolutionary shifts, especially through visual media, sets off to be a hoax while deliberating on the analysis of these Hollywood movies. A great director is a radical social reformer who can inculcate values in the most effective manner to a society. When a great auteur like Nolan fails to manifest the true power of women on screen, where lies the seeds of change in society is a question put forward throughout the thesis. Movies indeed perpetuate a paradigmatic shift in ideologies and only continuous deconstructions and revamping can make solid change in the attitude of the society in perceiving womanhood through an unbiased lens. The thesis aims to serve as an eyeopener to many forthcoming movies to embed in itself the answers to this discrimination against women and aspires to provoke people to contemplate on a deeper level the pluralistic aspects through digestible definitions that permeate inequality in a society.

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APPENDIX

List of Published Research Articles

No.	Authors	Title of Publication	Journal/Anthology Name, Vol No. & Year	National/International	Publisher with ISSN/ISBN	Impact Factor
1	A.Krishna Sunder & Dr. Nila N.	The Regressing Female Representations: An Analysis of the Character of Rachael Dawes in Christopher Nolan's Batman Series	Research Journal of English Vol 4 Issue 4 2019	International	Oray's Publication Edited by Prof. Ratna Shiela, AP ISSN - 2456-2696	4.845
2	A.Krishna Sunder & Dr. Nila N.	The Unending Surge of Women Sexuality on Screen: An Analysis of Christopher Nolan's 'Nameless Blonde' in "Following"	Langlit Volume 6 Issue 2 Dec 2019	International	Edited by Dr. Prashant Mothe, Dept of English, Adarsh Mahavidyalaya, Maharashtra ISSN 2349-5189	5.61
3	A.Krishna Sunder & Dr. Nila N.	The Frozen Manifestations: An Analysis of Christopher Nolan's Women Characters in "Interstellar"	Smart Moves Journal IJELLH Vol 7 Issue 11 2019	International	Edited by Dr. Sapna Tiwari, Barkatullah University, Bhopal. ISSN 2582-3574	

No.	Authors	Title of Publication	Journal/Anthology Name, Vol No. & Year	National/International	Publisher with ISSN/ISBN	Impact Factor
4	A.Krishna Sunder & Dr. Nila N.	Blending the Performer, Redeemer and the Femme Fatale: A Structural Analysis of the Three Women in Christopher Nolan's "The Prestige"	Phenomenal Literature Vol 4 Issue 1 2019	International	Published by AuthorPress, New Delhi ISBN-13 2347-5951	
5	A. Krishna Sunder	Decoding the Power of the Solipsistic Heroes of Nolan: An Analysis of "Memento" and "Insomnia"	Singularities Vol 3 Issue 2 July 2016	National	Post Graduate Department of English, Unity Women's College, Manjeri ISSN 2348 - 3369	