

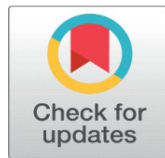
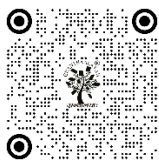
# CINEMATIC ACTS OF RESISTANCE: FEMINIST RE-IMAGININGS OF CARE WORK IN GULZAR'S AANDHI AND IJAAZAT

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## ABSTRACT

This paper conducts a scene-by-scene qualitative study of two films by Gulzar, *Aandhi* (1975) and *Ijaazat* (1987), and explores the transformation of the emotional and care labour of women into patriarchal resistance acts. Based on feminist film theory (Mulvey and Smelik) and emotional labour framework by Hochschild, this paper discusses how the characters, Aarti Devi and Sudha, utilise caregiving, silence, presence and withdrawal to assert their agency in environments which devalue the emotional and relational labour of women.

The findings of the close textual analysis and coding of themes testify that care work in these films is not blind obedience but deliberate feminist actions. The two characters convert domestic and emotional labour to self-preservation and dignity as they negotiate their visibility and withdrawal as means of managing patriarchal control and male gaze. The paper also demonstrates how the use of emotional labour can be politically significant when executed consciously and reflectively so that apparently accommodative gestures can serve as instances of ethical and narrative power. By extending Mulvey's concept of the gaze beyond scopophilia and Hochschild's emotional labour theory within South Asian cinematic contexts, this research positions care and emotional labour as culturally specific forms of feminist agency. Thus, it contributes to transnational feminist film studies by foregrounding "quiet feminism" as an important form of resistance beyond Western models that privilege vocal or spectacular opposition.

**Keywords:** Feminist Film Theory, Emotional Labour, Care Labour, South Asian Cinema, Gulzar

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema not only reflects but actively constructs gendered norms, shaping how power, identity, and emotional value are made visible through narrative and visual form [Xu et al. \(2019\)](#). South Asian cinema, particularly Hindi parallel cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, offers more than a regional application of Western feminist film theory. It produces

culturally specific cinematic languages that complicate dominant feminist understandings of agency, domesticity, and resistance [Dudrah \(2012\)](#). Within feminist film studies, women's domestic, emotional, and care labour has emerged as a critical yet underexplored terrain, especially in non-Western cinematic contexts [Graham \(1991\)](#).

This gap reaches greater urgency within the modern context as digital platforms bring into the global focus regional cinemas, and the recent resurgence of feminist movements emphasises the persistence of inequalities in unpaid care and emotional labour [Duffy \(2005\)](#), [Capalbi et al. \(2021\)](#). Women around the world still do more than three-quarters of unpaid domestic and care labour, which is worth trillions of dollars in annual unpaid labour [United Nations Development Programme \(2024\)](#). Although cinema can potentially make such inequalities visible, the role of care labour as a platform for feminist resistance in cinematic discourses and imagery has not been systematically studied in scholarly research [Askins and Blazek \(2016\)](#).

The South Asian gender scholarship of Hindi cinema has largely adhered to the narrative structures, genre conventions, and ideological critique [Viridi \(2003\)](#), [Vasudevan \(2000\)](#), and sociological analysis has been conducted to study emotional labour and gendered affective work in everyday life [Phadke et al. \(2011\)](#), [Chakravarti \(2018\)](#). These insights have, however, seldom been applied to the textual analysis of cinema. So far, no research has made use of systematic scene-by-scene coding to understand the functioning of domestic, emotional, and care labour as a feminist resistance in the films of Gulzar.

The paper relies on feminist film theory (Mulvey; Smelik) and the emotional labour theory by Hochschild, tailoring them to the culturally and narratively specific aspects of South Asian cinema. Instead of forcing the Western theory, the analysis deploys these frameworks as a method of analysis, which is used to explore representation, and domestic, care and emotional labour, an area where indigenous feminist film theory remains comparatively underdeveloped.

This article explores the role of cinematic portrayals of care work, domestic chores, and emotional labour as sites for feminist action using [Gulzar \(1975\)](#) and [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#) as case studies. The movies in Gulzar's filmography do not follow the prevailing commercial trends, but rather provide subtle depictions of women who negotiate dignity, independence, and relational ethics within male-dominated worlds. [Chamola \(2019\)](#).

This study addresses three guiding questions:

- 1) How do Aarti Devi and Sudha deploy unpaid domestic work and care labour as forms of feminist resistance?
- 2) In what ways do these films subvert conventional cinematic representations of domesticity through visual and narrative strategies?
- 3) How does Gulzar's direction transform private acts of care into political commentary on the value of women's labour?

Thus, this article extends feminist film theory, reframes emotional labour as a culturally situated feminist political practice, and develops a replicable methodological model for analysing women's undervalued labour in cinema.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

Feminist scholarship has long established how women's domestic, emotional, and care labour are structurally undervalued, often rendered invisible by naturalising and glamourising them within gendered social roles [Oakley \(1974\)](#), [Hochschild \(1983\)](#), [Folbre \(2001\)](#). While these debates have proliferated extensively within sociology and feminist political economy, their application to cinematic representation remains comparatively limited, especially in non-Western cultures. In this regard, cinema occupies a crucial position, as it reflects social relations and also potentially shapes how care, emotion, and labour are seen, felt, and valued within everyday life.

Within feminist film studies, questions of women's visibility, subjectivity, and agency have been addressed through analyses of gaze, narrative structure, and genre [Mulvey \(1975\)](#), [Smelik \(1999\)](#). However, the specific representational work performed by care and emotional labour, especially when articulated through silence, restraint, and relational negotiation, has received far less attention. This review, therefore, brings together feminist film theory and emotional labour scholarship, informed by South Asian feminist studies, to establish a focused theoretical model to analyse how care work functions as a site of feminist resistance in cinema.

## 2.2. FOUNDATIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN SOUTH ASIAN FEMINIST STUDIES

South Asian feminist scholarship has critically examined how gender, caste, and colonial histories shape women's access to agency, particularly through everyday practices. Uma Chakravarti's work on "everyday resistance" demonstrates how women negotiate dignity and selfhood within patriarchal structures through endurance, restraint, and selective assertion, where compliance and resistance often coexist [Chakravarti \(2018\)](#).

Similarly, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India* foregrounds how marginalised women's narratives challenge dominant cultural forms through interiority, silence, and non-spectacular modes of [resistance Tharu and Lalita \(1993\)](#), [Tharu and Niranjana \(1994\)](#). These observations help to form a very important basis of reading South Asian cinema, in which feminist agency is frequently concealed in nuanced narrative gestures and emotive labour, as opposed to conflict. Combined, these interventions authorise the quiet forms of resistance as culturally-based feminist practices.

## 2.3. CINEMATIC INSIGHTS

Gender representation in Indian cinema has been studied in terms of narrative structure, ideology and spectatorship, yet care and emotional labour have frequently been marginalised in these studies. Yet the portrayal of women as unpaid domestic labour in Indian cinema has increasingly become the subject of recent scholarship, and this marks the development of a shift in the direction of treating care work as a location of gendered inequality, rather than naturalised femininity [Kishwar and Vanita \(1987\)](#), [Singh et al. \(2025\)](#). Studies addressing caste and gender have highlighted how dominant cinematic forms marginalise Dalit women and silence subaltern female subjectivities [Gopal and Moort \(2008\)](#).

Feminist scholars also attest to the frequent failure of Western frameworks to account for the intersections of gender, caste, location, and voice in South Asian contexts [Velaskar \(2016\)](#). These interventions underscore the need for culturally grounded approaches to cinematic analysis that explore everyday labour, silence, and relational work as sites of resistance, a gap this study seeks to address through focused textual analysis of Gulzar's two films.

## 2.4. FEMINIST FILM THEORY

Feminist film theory focuses on the ways in which cinema structures gendered subjectivity, visibility and power. The male gaze, as formulated by [Mulvey \(1975\)](#), is still considered fundamental in showing how classical cinema constructs visual pleasure by using patriarchal systems that locate women as objects and not agents. Later feminist criticism was oriented to other cinematic practices that destabilise scopophilic power.

[Smelik \(1999\)](#) advances this shift by emphasising emotional addressing, narrative pacing, and sensory framing as means through which women's interiority and agency can be articulated beyond visual objectification. Moving beyond spectacle and overt defiance, Smelik's work enables analysis of silence, restraint, and emotional modulation as meaningful cinematic practices.

## 2.5. EMOTIONAL LABOUR THEORY

[Hochschild \(1983\)](#) *The Managed Heart* defined emotional labour as managing one's feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display to "produce the proper state of mind in others" [Hochschild \(1983\)](#). She distinguished between surface acting (faking emotions) and deep acting (genuinely inducing the required emotions). Her framework revealed how "feeling rules", i.e. socially specific emotional scripts operate as invisible social control mechanisms, differentially distributed by gender, class, and status.

Feminist scholars have gradually broadened the scope of emotional labour theory beyond the workplace to households [James \(1989\)](#), [Steinberg and Figart \(1999\)](#). [Folbre \(2001\)](#) argued that women's unpaid emotional, care, and domestic labour sustains the economic cycle but never receives its due value. Gilligan's ethics of care defines care as a fundamental human capacity rather than a gendered obligation [Gilligan \(2014\)](#).

Despite these theoretical expansions, existing scholarship has focused chiefly on labour conditions, social interactions, or institutional contexts, leaving unexplored how films visually and narratively encode women's emotional management, restraint, and affective negotiation. This absence is particularly evident in studies of South Asian cinema,

where women's emotional labour is frequently naturalised. Addressing this gap, the present study applies emotional labour theory to scene-based film analysis, examining how *Aandhi* and *Ijaazat* render women's emotional labour as a site of feminist agency rather than passive endurance.

## 2.6. FILM STUDIES ON CARE WORK

When care and domestic labour are included in film scholarship, they are most often analysed through realist depiction, thematic analysis, or sociological critique rather than as formally constructed cinematic practices. Recent studies of Indian cinema, particularly regional cinemas such as Malayalam film, have foregrounded domestic space as a site of gendered labour and inequality, challenging earlier naturalised depictions of housework [Krishna and Sivakumar \(2024\)](#), [Nagarajan et al. \(2023\)](#).

However, these analyses largely remain thematic, focusing on what care work represents rather than how cinema organises care, emotion, silence, and withdrawal through narrative structure, framing, pacing, and performance. As a result, care labour is still rarely theorised as a deliberate feminist strategy embedded in cinematic form. It is within this methodological and analytical gap that the present study situates [Gulzar \(1975\)](#) and [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#).

## 2.7. IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH GAP

Euro-American frameworks continue to dominate Indian feminist film analysis, prompting scholars to call for culturally grounded and decolonised methodological approaches attentive to local narrative traditions, histories, and social hierarchies [Vasudevan \(2000\)](#), [Dudrah \(2012\)](#). Bibliometric analyses reveal that feminist film scholarship remains geographically concentrated in "persistent Eurocentric bias" [Surwati et al. \(2025\)](#). Insufficient attention has been paid to the gendered nature of film work itself [Mannil \(2020\)](#) and to the heterogeneous experiences of South Asian women shaped by caste, class, region, and labour location [Chakravarti \(2018\)](#), [Tharu and Lalita \(1993\)](#).

Based on the review conducted for this study, feminist film studies appear to have been slow to adopt innovations in qualitative methodology, limiting capacity to capture the complex interplay between visual, auditory, and performative elements constructing gendered meanings. The lack of systematic cross-film comparative methodologies [Biltreyst and Meers \(2016\)](#) means broader patterns in care work representation across filmmakers, periods, and regions remain unexplored.

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND POSITIONALITY

This paper uses a qualitative research design to discuss how unpaid domestic work, care labour, and emotional management are represented in *Aandhi* (1975) and *Ijaazat* (1987) by Gulzar. The study combines feminist film theory (such as Mulvey and Smelik) and the emotional labour model of Hochschild, but it is also based on South Asian feminist literature to maintain cultural and interpretive specificity. Qualitative inquiry allows a deeper understanding of gendered representations but is also mindful of power relations inherent in both texts and analytical procedures of cinema [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#).

### 3.2. RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The analysis has been carried out in the context of the cultural familiarity with the Hindi films and South Asian background, which allows for interpreting the cinematic codes and feminist discussions with subtlety. The researchers admit that positionality (class, caste, educational, and institutional location) can enrich as well as restrict the interpretation, especially when it comes to experiences in various social locations [Olmos et al. \(2018\)](#), [Subramani \(2019\)](#). In line with the contextual reflexivity framework by [Walsh \(2003\)](#), this paper acknowledges that the cultural immersion of South Asian cinematic codes can be biased towards certain interpretations, and there is a need to continually question the role of researcher positionality in the construction of findings [Deblasio \(2022\)](#). Thus, while the study adapted Western theoretical frameworks, it also documents interpretive uncertainties and cross-checks conclusions against South Asian feminist scholarship to enhance contextual clarity.

### 3.3. SAMPLING STRATEGY IN FILM SELECTION

The films were selected through purposive sampling. *Aandhi* and *Ijaazat* were chosen because (1) each centres a female protagonist who negotiates caregiving and domestic roles with complex agency; (2) both films contain explicit representations of emotional regulation, household management, and relationship maintenance; (3) each has sustained critical and scholarly interest, including dedicated monographs in the Three Classic Films by Gulzar series—Gulzar’s *Aandhi* [Bashir \(2019\)](#) and Gulzar’s *Ijaazat* [Hashmi \(2019\)](#), and (4) the films span twelve years (1975–1987), enabling examination of representational continuities and shifts within Gulzar’s oeuvre across changing socio-cultural contexts in Hindi cinema.

### 3.4. SCENE CORPUS AND CODING FRAMEWORK

The scene corpus includes all scenes in which the female protagonists appear directly, as well as scenes where they are physically absent but narratively present. In total, 69 scenes were analysed: 44 scenes from *Aandhi* and 25 scenes from *Ijaazat*. Some primary scenes were subdivided into smaller units to support analytic clarity and accuracy during coding. This comprehensive inclusion strategy was used to minimise selection bias and to capture the protagonists’ representational arc across each film.

Coding proceeded across four analytic dimensions:

- 1) **Direct Care Work:** household chores and domestic management (e.g., cooking, serving, household organisation).
- 2) **Emotional Labour:** feeling management, emotional regulation, and strategic emotional performance.
- 3) **Relational Work:** boundary-setting, conflict mediation, and relationship maintenance.
- 4) **Symbolic Care:** objects, rituals, and domestic practices carrying gendered meanings.

### 3.5. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis adapts [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) six-phase thematic analysis for cross-cultural feminist film analysis:

- 1) **Cultural immersion:** narrative comprehension and cultural contextualisation.
- 2) **Systematic scene description:** detailed description of visual, performative, and narrative elements, with attention to cultural concepts that do not translate easily.
- 3) **Multi-framework coding:** coding scenes using Hochschild’s categories of emotional labour and feminist film theory, including gaze analysis.
- 4) **Cross-cultural validation:** interrogation of themes for cultural specificity and interpretive fit within South Asian contexts.
- 5) **Comparative analysis:** synthesis across *Aandhi* and *Ijaazat* to identify convergences and divergences in representations of care and emotional labour.
- 6) **Reflexive integration:** assessment of how researcher positioning may shape analytic emphasis, supported by documented analytic memos.

### 3.6. DATA HANDLING AND DIALOGUE PROTOCOL

The films were analysed through a structured protocol: narrative understanding and contextualisation; temporal coding of scenes; systematic description of visual and performative elements; and detailed engagement with dialogue, with attention to Hindi linguistic particularities. Where dialogue contained culturally specific conceptions of emotional labour, passages were retained in the original language with contextual commentary to preserve meaning while enabling careful theoretical interpretation.

### 3.7. VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND LIMITATIONS

In order to enhance interpretive rigour, the coding scheme and representative coded scenes were discussed with five feminist film scholars who specialised in South Asian cinema. Their feedback indicated the suitability of the four coding dimensions and led to additional coding definition refinement. This procedure is in compliance with qualitative principles of credibility and professional authentication [Lincoln and Guba \(1985\)](#).

The scope of the study is necessarily limited. Since the analysis is based on two films of a single filmmaker, the results should not be generalised to Indian cinema in general. Moreover, the two main characters are positioned as educated, urban, upper-middle-class women, which informs the nature of agency they have onscreen and constrains the assertions made about women who are placed in different caste, class, region, and material restrictions. Lastly, films of the 1970s-80s must be carefully contextualised historically to prevent anachronistic inference; hence, the analysis is sensitive to the socio-cultural norms of the period when dealing with the films as a representation of undervalued labour and gendered agency.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. FILM I ANALYSIS: CARE LABOUR AS DOMESTIC AND POLITICAL AGENCY IN AANDHI

#### 4.1.1. THEMATIC OVERVIEW

[Aandhi \(1975\)](#) reveals how women's care labour is differentially valued across private and public domains, becoming suspect once it acquires political visibility. Across the film, Aarti's engagement with care labour unfolds as a series of conscious choices rather than inherited obligations. Domestic attentiveness, emotional mediation, and relational repair are not presented as instinctive feminine traits but as practices she actively claims, reshapes, and later rearticulates in public life. Through cinematic strategies that foreground her perspective and decision-making, *Aandhi* positions care labour as a mode of agency, one that becomes politically contentious precisely when it is made visible.

Aarti's ability to publicly negotiate care labour is shaped by her elite education, class position, her father's support for her career and his political networks. These are forms of privilege that expand the range of resistance strategies available to her in ways not accessible to women across different caste and class locations.

#### 4.1.2. THE POLITICAL MALE GAZE AND FEMINIST CINEMATIC RHETORIC

The very first scene of the film does not feature Aarti Devi at all. Instead, Chandrasen, her opponent, gives a rally speech trying to discredit her care labour as a way of political gimmick [Aandhi \(1975\)](#), 00:03:12-00:05:02) and presents her food distribution to the poor as bribery: "ek dibba mitti ka tel dekar ya ek mutthi jholi mein anaaj daal dene se janta bik jayegi, woh bhool kar rahe hain... yeh sab dhakosla hai! dikhawa hai!" ("...that by giving a tin of kerosene or pouring a handful of grain, the public will be sold, they are mistaken... This is all a sham! A pretence!"). Chandrasen feels the need to discredit her as he perceives Aarti's influence as a threat. The scene reveals how women's care labour is made suspect when it is performed in the public domain.

In the telegram scene (00:37:12-00:39:47), the camera frames Aarti in a two-shot with Brinda Kaka with a slightly upward angle, positioning her as the authority persuading him to send her pregnancy announcement to J.K.'s office. The folded telegram, repeated visually as it travels from the kitchen to the hotel reception, encodes her authorship: she directs his emotional reality from afar. In the naming scene (00:39:48-00:40:31), medium shots and shot-reverse-shot editing show Aarti's indignation and dissatisfaction, as she rejects J.K.'s name suggestions. The camera puts the viewer in line with her verdict as the determiner of the acceptable. Together, these scenes foreshadow her later political authority through narrative control and boundary-setting.

#### 4.1.3. CRITICAL FINDING: THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY AND CARE LABOUR AS POLITICAL LIABILITY

Aarti visits J.K. after several years of separation [Aandhi \(1975\)](#), 00:26:56-00:33:03). Her ageing appearance, wistful gaze, and remark "Kitne dher sare baras beet gaye beech mein..." ("So many years have gone by in between..."), register the emotional cost of prolonged absence. When Aarti discovers that their daughter Mannu has spent three years in a

hostel and regularly writes letters to her father, she does not react with an emotional breakdown but with a restrained silence, marking an acknowledgement of the familial moments lost in the pursuit of a political career.

The scene represents the motherhood penalty not as personal failure, but as the price a woman is forced to pay for trying to have a career. As Indian scholarship notes, women who pursue professional careers face persistent structural difficulties in balancing domestic roles and their careers [Ali et al. \(2025\)](#). Here, care labour emerges as a liability: to safeguard her public image during the election, Aarti refuses J.K.'s offer to take her home, stating, "Mai nahin chaahti log jaane humare baare mein" ("I do not want people to know about us").

The scene presents the motherhood penalty as not the failure of a person, but rather as the cost a woman has to pay in an attempt to pursue a career. According to Indian scholarship, women pursuing professional careers continue to experience structural obstacles in their attempt to balance their home and their careers [Ali et al. \(2025\)](#). In this case, care labour turns out to be a burden: in order to protect her social reputation in the election, Aarti declines J.K.'s proposal to drop her, saying, "Mai nahin chaahti log jaane humare baare mein" (I do not want people to know about us). Her attempt to revive the marital relationship thus remains deliberately concealed, revealing how women's private acts of care labour must be carefully managed to avoid political scandal.

#### 4.1.4. EMOTIONAL LABOUR DYNAMICS

The coding reveals Aarti's emotional labour operating across three distinct developmental phases:

##### **Phase 1: Domestic Emotional Mastery**

Flashback scenes show how Aarti Devi uses emotional management to encourage family harmony through deep acting, combining emotional involvement with conscious boundary-setting [Hochschild \(1983\)](#). In one scene, she manages her sulking spouse [J.K.] [Aandhi \(1975\)](#), 00:34:39-00:36:38). While applying ointment to his burned skin, she engages with his political cynicism. Then she sweetly convinces him: "Thoda sa pitaji ka kaam hai, khatam karke aa jaungi" ("Father has a little work, I will finish it and come back"). When J.K. comments, "Ek beta ho jaye tumhara. Phir dekhta hoon tumhare liye kounsi council badi hai" ("When you have a son, then we will see which council is bigger for you"), Aarti replies with humour, affection, and physical rebuff, to the effect that ideological struggle is diminished without her obligations being affected. Her emotional labour in this case stabilises the domestic space while maintaining her economy.

##### **Phase 2: Emotional Discipline in Politics**

Aarti Devi's public image requires a stern emotional restraint when dealing with a political crisis. She sits in a confident posture and has a composed demeanour as she listens to the fears and anxieties of her political associates during a meeting [Aandhi \(1975\)](#), 00:05:03-00:07:03). Instead of reflecting their fear, she combines wisdom and clarity in her answers: "Jahan paisa na ho kharch karne ke liye, wahan akal chahiye kharch karne ke liye" ("Where there is a shortage of money, intelligence must be spent instead").

##### **Phase 3: Integrated Emotional Authorship**

The film foreshadows Aarti's climactic response through a seemingly minor exchange earlier in the film [Aandhi \(1975\)](#), 01:34:18-01:36:10). When Chandrasen's newspaper publishes scandalous photographs of Aarti with J.K., one of Aarti's party workers remarks: "Aurat bade se bada gham seh leti hai, lekin character pe daag lage woh kabhi bardaasht nahin kar sakti" ("A woman can endure the greatest of sorrows, but she can never tolerate a stain on her character"). This remark anticipates Aarti's response in the climax to her character assassination.

When Chandrasen publicly accuses her of an illicit affair with the "hotel manager," Aarti Devi replies to her allegations with unguarded honesty. She addresses the crowd not as a politician but as a woman claiming justice: "Maafi maangne nahin aayi hoon. Nyaay maangne aayi hoon!" ("I have not come to apologise. I have come to ask for justice!"). She publicly claims J.K. as her husband, and confesses that she stole the time that belonged to her family and distributed it amongst the people. Her emotional collapse marks the release of years of suppression, while her declaration of withdrawal from politics signals a refusal to perform dignity on patriarchal terms. Paradoxically, this act of courageous humaneness secures her public recognition, including an electoral victory and J.K.'s support. Having publicly integrated her roles as politician, wife, and mother, she is no longer required to fragment her identity.

#### 4.1.5. CARE LABOUR AS POLITICAL STRATEGY AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

The section traces how care labour in *Aandhi* transforms across three distinct phases: from conscious domestic choice, to a political liability, and eventually to a deliberate act of resistance and reconnection.

##### Part 1: Care Labour as a Deliberate, Autonomous Choice in the Domestic Sphere

The flashback sequences establish that Aarti's care labour is neither passive nor obligatory. In one scene, she declares her desire to marry and build a domestic life *Aandhi* (1975), 01:16:33-01:17:17). When J.K. questions the fate of her political ambitions, she enthusiastically lists the care labour she would perform: "... kitchen mein pyaas kaatungi... Kapde siyungi, aata goondhungi, daal chhaunkungi..." ("...I will cut onions in the kitchen, ... I will sew clothes, knead flour, temper lentils"). She appears happy, eager and decisive. Her tone signals choice rather than submission.

This choice is reinforced when Aarti tells her father she is leaving politics to marry J.K. and build her own home *Aandhi* (1975), 01:17:18-01:18:17). Despite his objections, she asserts with quiet firmness: "Daddy, meri zindagi ko apna business mat banayiye. Mai rajneeti mein ja rahi thi toh desh ki seva ke liye, aapki dukaan chalane ke liye nahin. Aur chhod rahi hoon toh apna ghar basane ke liye" ("Daddy, do not make my life your business. I wanted to go into politics to serve the country, not to run your shop. And I am leaving to build my own home"). She frames domestic life as a self-determined commitment.

Within the marriage, her care is inventive and self-authored *Aandhi* (1975), 00:33:04-00:33:59). While making tea, she playfully wakes J.K. by dipping his finger into the hot cup. When he protests, she responds with pragmatic wit. She refuses J.K.'s suggestion to use a radio, dismissing it as cinematic fantasy: "Woh filmon mein hota hai, ghar mein nahin" ("That happens in movies, not at home"). Instead, she governs the rhythms, rituals, and logic of the household.

##### Part 2: Care Labour as Political Liability: Weaponised and Attacked

When the care labour of Aarti extends to the sphere of the masses, it is exposed to misrepresentation and violence. Aarti becomes the target of a mocking song when she walks to a political meeting: a group of men sing that her charitable work of giving out grain is actually a manipulation: "Hamaare vote khareedenge, humko ann de kar" ("She buys our votes by giving us grain") *Aandhi* (1975), 00:46:09-00:50:40). The song ends with stone pelting, one striking her forehead. Her body, the site of her care labour, becomes the target of violence.

The opposition reframes her attempt at relationship repair as a moral scandal by publishing photographs of her private reunion with J.K. *Aandhi* (1975), 01:34:18-01:36:10). It shows how the lives of women in politics can be easily subjected to public scrutiny and debate and how often their acts directed at personal care labour can be misunderstood.

##### Part 3: Care as Conscious Reclamation and Resistance

Aarti uses care labour, attempts at domestic chores and emotional management to revive her relationship with JK. When J.K. asks her whether she would come home to dine, she makes a conscious offer: Haan, jaldi free ho gayi, toh khana aake pakaungi bhi (Yes, in case I am free early enough, then I will cook dinner too) *Aandhi* (1975), 00:59:14-01:00:41). Her offer to cook is a conscious decision out of free will. She seeks her husband's support and mutual understanding as she navigates her political life.

In a subsequent sequence, J.K. remembers how Aarti promised to cook *Aandhi* (1975), 01:18:18-01:20:53). She acknowledges the challenge. She tries to prepare lentil soup, and her lack of practice in the matter is obvious. Yet she persists. When she has to call J.K. to eat dinner, she is hesitant: "Kaise bulau?" ("How do I call him?"). After hesitating a little, she invites him to dinner herself, claiming back the role she had to abandon years ago.

The final reclamation occurs in Aarti's climactic speech *Aandhi* (1975), 01:59:15-02:06:34). She makes her marriage public and makes the truth of its sacrifice, and turns the scandal against her into a political assertion: "Jis samay par mere parivaar ka haq tha, mere pati, meri bachhi ka haq tha, woh unse chheen kar maine aap mein baant diya" ("The time that belonged to my family: my husband and my daughter, I took it from them and distributed it among you"). In doing so, care labour is repositioned as a legitimate political act rather than a source of shame.

#### 4.1.6. CONCLUSION: CARE AS INTENTIONAL AGENCY

The depiction of Aarti Devi is a defiance of the patriarchal system that requires women to decide between work and family. She publicly reclaims her relationship with her husband and also comfortably wins the election by redefining

care as an instrument of empowerment, rather than a liability. The [Aandhi \(1975\)](#) study testifies that care is a firm feminist act, which is manifested in mindfulness and intention and whose visibility is central to its political significance.

## 4.1. FILM ANALYSIS II: IJAAZAT – DOMESTIC RESISTANCE THROUGH STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL

### 4.1.7. THEMATIC OVERVIEW

While Aarti and her care labour are subject to a double standard, i.e. valorised when restricted to the domestic sphere and devalued when expanded into the public sphere, the care labour Sudha puts in her marriage fails to displace Mahender's unresolved attachment to his ex-lover. This leads to her quiet departure and subsequent remarriage, whereby she finds appreciation and acknowledgement of herself and her care labour.

Sudha gets into her marriage well knowing that her husband still has unresolved feelings towards his ex-lover. In the relationship, she engages in the process of sustained emotional labour; she accommodates his process of letting go, and at intervals, expresses her pain and feeling of being excluded in her own marriage. This balancing act fails miserably when she finds her husband having a secret rendezvous with his former lover, and when she confronts him, she is told to accommodate her permanently in their marital home. This is the limit where endurance would have meant the eradication of her dignity; Sudha thus silently resolves to leave the marriage.

The power to step out of the marriage is made possible through her class position: her premarital work as a schoolteacher, her education and economic autonomy of life. Women who lacked these resources, especially in 1980s India, had many more structural and social obstacles to leaving unhappy marriages. Sudha's agency and her decisions thus should not be seen as common to all Indian or South Asian women. It is limited to women of specific socio-economic classes.

### 4.1.8. FEMINIST FILM THEORY ANALYSIS

Sudha has been depicted in *Ijaazat* in such a way that subverts the suffering wife archetype through visual control rather than confrontation. According to Laura Mulvey, male gaze presents women as passive objects of visual pleasure [Mulvey \(1975\)](#); *Ijaazat* destabilises this order in the railway waiting room encounter, where Sudha sees Mahender before he sees her [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 00:02:58-00:05:39). The camera is in line with the view of Sudha as she gradually slows down her movement and gazes at him before intentionally covering her face with a magazine. Her motionlessness is both withheld from the conversational pacing, and this makes her an observer, not a spectacle, and gives her and the viewer narrative knowledge.

This visual strategy recurs throughout the film, where silence functions as regulation rather than submission. Sudha withholds speech at moments when dialogue would normally occur, controlling the emotional access available to Mahender. As Anneke Smelik argues, feminist cinema often renders women's interiority visible through affective framing rather than verbal expression [Smelik \(1999\)](#). Repeated medium close-ups linger on Sudha's pauses and restrained expressions, centring her internal negotiation.

This visual technique is repeated across the film, and silence acts as a form of control and not subordination. Sudha refuses to speak when a conversation is expected to take place and determines the emotional accessibility to Mahender. Feminist cinema, as Anneke Smelik suggests, tends to make the interiority of women visible in terms of affective framing as opposed to verbal expression [Smelik \(1999\)](#). Medium close-ups are frequently repeated as Sudha pauses and holds back the expression, making her internal negotiation the centre of attention.

Visual markers further reinforce this autonomy. As they take tea in the railway waiting room, Mahender comments on the glasses that Sudha wears, saying that she seems more "samajhdaar" [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 00:11:20-00:15:28). Staged in the alternating medium close-ups, the dialogue substitutes romantic relaxedness with a slower relational distance, and indicates a re-evaluation of intimacy. The glasses, which are recognised in the scene, indicate a reconfigured identity that is formed outside the marriage.

Sudha's withdrawal is articulated through absence rather than spectacle. As Mahender goes back to a home that has been emptied, the camera captures her choice by what has been taken away: domestic items, ritual space, and relational access, and stays with his shock and fall [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 01:39:53-01:42:10). This intention is explained in the postbox sequence, where Sudha explains her departure using a controlled voice-over and clearly denies any further contact or

follow-up [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 01:45:02-01:46:01). Together, these scenes frame withdrawal not as endurance or defeat, but as an ethical refusal to continue emotional and relational labour within an untenable marital structure.

#### 4.1.9. EMOTIONAL LABOUR DYNAMICS

Sudha executes emotional management in three different modes, all of which illustrate how the invisible emotional labour of women acts as a constraint as well as a strategy in a patriarchal setting.

##### 1) Surface Acting as Self-Preservation

Sudha finds a photograph of Maya in Mahender's wallet as she begins to take out money to pay the washerman [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#). This is an abrupt emotional upheaval: the playful conversation between the spouses in the darkroom is replaced by Sudha's silence, indicating her indignation when the photograph is seen in the frame. Instead of being reactive, Sudha demonstrates her control of emotions. She tells Mahender to draw the money himself, turns her head away, and fiddles with the hem of her saree, which is an indicator of distress. Her tone is controlled and contemplative when she talks. She expresses her pain in an analytical way, speaking of how nothing in the house seems like hers, and it appears as if she is living in someone else's house, before abandoning the space. This restraint exemplifies what [Hochschild \(1983\)](#) terms surface acting: the management of outward emotional expression to preserve composure and dignity while inner hurt remains unresolved. Her emotional labour is in maintaining dialogue without emotional outbursts, turning her personal shock into regulated speech to accomplish two things: one, to demarcate her boundaries and two, to convey her feelings in an attempt to make Mahender empathise with her [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 00:26:55-00:28:46).

##### 2) Deep Acting as Moral Authority

A good example of deep acting is seen when Sudha reacts to Mahender confessing to her that he had fallen in love with Maya during their period of engagement. Instead of reacting with socially accepted responses, such as anger, grief, or emotional outburst, she remains calm throughout, hearing his story and giving him advice regarding his plight [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 00:19:36-00:22:21). This emotional labour is not suppression but conscious transformation: she converts devastation into pragmatic problem-solving, asserting moral authority through restraint.

##### 3) Strategic Choreography of Memory

The tea-making ritual demonstrates emotional labour's relational dimension. Sudha's question: "Wohi ek chammach na?" ("One spoon, right?") reveals the strenuous work of reconciling past intimacy with present estrangement [Ijaazat \(1987\)](#), 00:11:20-00:15:28). She uses familiar gestures to bridge the gap between them while ensuring detachment on her part.

In these scenes, care labour is not service or accommodation, but rather a boundary work, which is controlled by ritual, restraint and, eventually, withdrawal.

## 4.2. COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

### 4.2.1. CONVERGING THEMES: AGENCY THROUGH CARE LABOUR

Both protagonists demonstrate care labour as a feminist agency site rather than patriarchal compliance, though the strategies differ. Aarti employs projective agency, through strategic visibility, while Sudha demonstrates receptive agency, through witnessing and selective engagement.

### 4.2.2. KEY CONVERGENT FINDINGS

- Both transform intimate care into tools for self-preservation and dignity maintenance.
- Domestic routines (tea, letters, household chores) emerge as political interventions
- They do not act with compliance but strategic emotional management.

### 4.2.3. DIVERGENT STRATEGIES: INTEGRATION VERSUS WITHDRAWAL

The reactions of the lead characters prove different but equally valid feminist actions:

- Aarti: Public integration, in which she claims the different identities attached to her.

- Sudha: Discreet but resolute withdrawal: reclaiming autonomous selfhood
- Temporal Dimensions: Aarti enacts agency through immediate political engagement, whereas Sudha's agency takes shape through memory-driven reflection and post-relational withdrawal.

While this analysis positions care labour as feminist resistance, alternative readings suggest caution. Johnston (1973) counter-cinema framework warns that films operating within conventional narrative structures may inadvertently reproduce patriarchal ideology, even when talking about female agency Johnston (1973), Gürkan (2015). Similarly, Chaudhuri (2005) notes that representations of strong female protagonists can continue to naturalise women's association with caregiving, requiring careful distinction between subversion and repetition. In *Aandhi*, this tension surfaces when Aarti Devi reaches for domestic reconciliation alongside political success, while in *Ijaazat*, it emerges through the aestheticisation of feminine restraint and sacrifice.

#### 4.2.4. KEY INTERSECTIONAL FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The discussion expands the notion of the male gaze to include aspects of political and relational gaze. It thus sheds light on the existence of patriarchal visual dominance in various domains of social life. Both Aarti Devi and Sudha consciously employ the power of observation and the selective absence of visual perception as feminist resistance. The effectiveness of these strategies, however, is made possible due to their socio-economic privileges and education. The interpretations point out that women placed in different caste and class positions face and experience care work and resistance differently. The readings contribute to discourses related to feminist film theory.

By systematically analysing Hochschild's emotional labour theory through South Asian cinematic texts, this study finds how emotional labour can be a distinctly feminist political practice specific to postcolonial contexts. The research reveals how emotional management extends beyond the workplace and private spheres, as seen in Aarti's emotional discipline within public leadership and Sudha's emotional restraint in her marriage. This application demonstrates how South Asian cinema generates new theoretical insights, showing how emotional labour operates within patriarchal-caste structures and how women's conscious emotional management constitutes feminist resistance adapted to specific cultural and historical conditions.

The focus of the alternative cinematic address introduced by Smelik is validated, in very concrete and culturally-based terms, by textual evidence. Gulzar uses metaphor, ritual, and editing to make the interiority of women visible and ethically loaded, which shows how South Asian filmmakers form unique filmic languages to capture care work: languages that challenge and build on Western feminist film theory, yet are still based on regional cultural codes and narrative traditions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1. QUIET FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF CARE

Thus, the results show how Gulzar in *Aandhi* and *Ijaazat* presents care and emotional labour as a culturally created expression of feminist agency in South Asian film. The two movies add to the prevailing feminist paradigms in the West that value vocal assertion and spectacular resistance by highlighting instances of quiet feminism that function by restraint, relational negotiation and selective visibility. In both the plots, the female leads actively negotiate with care labour to achieve their dignity, agency and ethical self in a patriarchal society.

By closely reading two important South Asian films, this analysis contributes to transnational feminist scholarship by validating the otherwise undervalued non-Western forms of resistance. The relevance of these strategies persists in contemporary contexts, where women navigate intensified regimes of surveillance and visibility; With the male gaze becoming increasingly algorithmic and digital, selective exposure, emotional regulation, and withdrawal, reminiscent of public containment of Aarti and receptive agency of Sudha, become vital tools of feminist opposition.

### 5.2. INTERSECTIONAL FINDINGS AND SCOPE

Two female characters, who's urban, educated, upper-middle-class positioning enables their agency within patriarchal structures, have been examined in this study. Thus, these findings must be understood as intersectionally specific, not universally applicable. Women from lower-caste or economically marginalised backgrounds face

intersecting constraints, such as limited financial autonomy, restricted mobility, social surveillance, and structural violence, that profoundly reshape experiences of care and emotional labour.

The forms of "quiet resistance" available to Aarti and Sudha may thus be inaccessible, insufficient, or inappropriate for women negotiating poverty, caste-based exclusion, or systemic precarity. Acknowledging this scope is important to avoid romanticising withdrawal or restraint as universally viable. Future research should extend this framework by examining how care labour and resistance operate across diverse caste, class, and regional locations, and whether alternative cinematic representations articulate collective, material, or survival-based forms of feminist agency beyond the individualised modes presented in *Aandhi* and *Ijaazat*.

### 5.3. METHODOLOGICAL AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This paper combines feminist film theory and the emotional labour framework through a scene-based coding methodology that shows how care, relational, and emotional labour work as analytically legible practices in cinema. The methodology offers a replicable method for analysing women's affective labour across culturally specific cinematic contexts.

Future studies can apply this model to other forms of media, like digital and documentary films and web series, where personal feeling and social performance become more and more intertwined. Comparative analysis of South Asian regional cinemas, filmmakers, and historical events may further explore how "quiet feminism" changes forms depending on caste, class, and institutional state, and push the limits and flexibility of care labour as a feminist tactic beyond the films examined in this paper.

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