

Down to the Image: Fiction as Feminist Critique in the Arena of Reproductive Autonomy

by nadi

“Don’t kill me” the foetus calls out from inside the uterus. This plea for life is directed to the mother, the monster who alone seems to hold the decision power. This is one strategy of pro-life anti-abortionists that feminists have not been able to counter.

The problem of decreasing sex-ratio is as if used as an excuse to deprive women of the right to abortion, the right over her own body. Some of the narratives of campaigns like the ‘Beti Bachao’ seem to put the blame on the mother. As a doctor who has worked with women patients, listened to them, I find this blame unfair, unjust, untrue.

Anti-abortion groups have benefitted from the rule that ‘A picture is worth a thousand words.’ To that we can add ‘A fetal picture is worth ten thousand sniffles’. While feminists, prochoice activists can put up valid and serious arguments to fight for the right of a woman to access an abortion facility, this is one aspect which we are not equipped to counter. What image is one going to combat a picture of a ‘vulnerable’ foetus?

Vulnerable on one hand and on the other, Powerful.

There are posters everywhere-hospitals, courtrooms, schools.

Foetus is not just a person. Foetus is a public figure!

The movement against abortion rights has extended from the academic discourse, from the political arena to the arena of mass culture.

Feminist movement is able in discourse and has its own political voice, but somehow cannot seem to be able to stoop so low as to counteract this atrocious visual tactic.

Rosalind Pollack Petchesky points out that we have ‘ceded the visual image’. Why should we give up just because someone uses shocking, manipulative tactics?

I propose that we counteract this “Mother, save me.” Image and script.

The talking foetus has been in an accusing, blaming, sentimental monologue for too long.

I suggest that the mother now talk back.

Why fiction? What reality?

Why do I choose to attach an original script to this paper? Would it not be easier to discuss a film? Yes, it would be. But I believe in the power of the script. Maybe because of my love for Screenplay. OSSIP Brik while reviewing Dziga Vertov’s *The Eleventh Round* (which spoke for socialism) has emphasized that **it is the script rather than the visuals that has the potential for resistance.** A ‘precise, strictly worked out thematic script’ is, Brik says, what gives the meaning to visuals, even in documentary. What I wanted to do, is write a short fiction script. For **fiction is an ideal site for subversion**, and as I read through literature for the project, I recalled that abortion, the foetus and even if whether it is a living entity, had already occurred to me in the fiction part of my mind. Yes, the mind in parts, which may seem like a problem, but could be turned into an asset when it came to

writing, as Margaret Atwood says in *Duplicity*: The jekyll hand and the hyde hand, and the slippery double: *Why there are always two.*

The experience as a doctor and fiction from the writer could well serve the present purpose. The ‘double mind’? “..Or rather the double process” says Nadine Gordimer (Introduction, *Selected Stories*). The “excessive preoccupation and identification with the lives of others” (of the writer) and “a monstrous detachment” (which doctors need to develop if we are to practice our profession without being completely drained of all emotions)... “The tension between standing apart and being fully involved: that is what makes a writer.”, says Gordimer.

In my 2014 novel *Sutak*, I referred to cures while speaking of mining, of red soil. The foetus seems to have been on my mind too. I wrote a scene in which my protagonist, in her childhood is watching a woman burying a foetus.

The servant has dug a hole under the tree. She mutters to herself. Lalita watches.

The child looks at the open enamel bowl kept on the ground next to the hole.

I must not look at it again, Lalita decides then: she wants to erase it from her mind right away.

But the hurting thing in the enamel bowl has felt the anguish in the child's mind.

And like all beings who are themselves hurting, it settles in; content in the thought that long after it has been buried, has rotted in earth, it—the Hurt—will always be alive in Lalita's mind.

The seven-year-old girl has not lost someone she was waiting for; someone who was waiting for her has found her.

Lalita cries loudly, her hair all over her face.

'Stop that noise. Let me bury this properly. If the dogs catch the smell they will dig it up and eat it.'

The child cries even more loudly.

She puts her hands on Umabai's shoulders and shakes her.

'It It It It, what do you mean It?'

Thinking of it as It helps take harsh life-saving decisions.

Umabai hopes that Lalita will never know those.

Reality however, unlike fiction, mandates that harsh decisions be taken. The decision to go to a place where one hoped to be anonymous. It was not to the operation theatre in which I had assisted my mother that I went when I needed an abortion. It was in a Government hospital that I underwent it. The anesthetic was, as was common in those days and in a primary kind of set-up- IV Ketamine. Known to most of us from its notoriety as a recreational drug and its reputation as part of the Rodent's cocktail in veterinary anesthesia. I have forgotten the pain, but clearly remember the hallucination images. The problem with ketamine, the main side-effect is the hallucinations it induces. Looking back, I know that the fearful hallucinations I experienced were also informed by the general image of the woman seeking abortion and the guilt she is supposed to feel.

So, coming to the real reason for being so angry about this. Not that other reasons are inferior, unreal. The reason closest to the self- is that the most real? In the fashion of second-grade action films, where the audience discovers to their surprise that the protagonist had a personal stake in the plot. That he went through the second-act of trials and tribulations because he was seeking revenge, redemption or as it has to suffice for many of us non-hero types, Solace.

But why is this discovery such a surprise? The real reason for doing anything- Is it personal? Isn't it always?

On the 4th of August 1993, I underwent a medical termination of pregnancy. First, the numbers. Gestation -6 weeks. My age-24 years. My older daughter – 4 months old. I mean of course, to write “My daughter – 4 months old.” But I do not erase the typo. The typo is a repressed feeling. Of course, she is my only daughter; I have never used the word older – why would I? She is my one and only child. In August 1993, I was breastfeeding her, and there was no question of going through with another pregnancy. What was terminated was an accidental pregnancy of 6 weeks, probably less.

Do I feel guilty about it now? No.

Did I feel sad about it then? Yes.

Do I want to sentimentalise the present discussion by describing the feelings of sadness, the articulation of the word ‘baby’, the self-blaming that I underwent during the decision? No.

Do I think that it is important to share that the woman seeking an abortion is far from a “selfish woman avoiding maternal calling” (As the pro-lifers would have us believe) and that it is worth the sharing of this extremely personal memory? Yes.

I have myself felt what Robin West calls **“Interlocking connecting and often irreconcilable responsibilities and commitments”**.

I want to take my own word for it, so to speak, to emphasise that the choice to abort is a painful one. Instead of rushing in to save a life that has not yet begun, we need to give a thought to the

complications in the life of the woman, and also, as in my case to another life that was dependent on her; a life she had given birth to.

Do I regret undergoing the procedure? No.

Why do I remember the date? Each of the 23 times, the date has since shown up on the calendar, has the thought of how old my second child would have been if I had let the pregnancy continue, passed my mind? Yes.

Did I ask to see the tissue that was curetted out of my body that day? No.

Did I go back to my medical textbooks and look at pictures of 6 week fetuses and cry alone? Yes.

Did I resent my husband with regards to irresponsibility about contraception etc.? No.

Did I feel alone on the 14 hour bus journey on the second day after the procedure even though he was on the seat next to mine? Yes.

The child suckling at my breast on one hand and the heavy bleeding from the previous day's procedure were draining my body. Yes, My body and mine alone, in pain.

For however much we modern couples use expressions like 'our' pregnancy etc., the pain part is borne by the woman alone.

The blood, milk and tears that flowed from my body that night, were mine alone. I claim them. And through that pain which is mine alone, I claim the Right for all women. The Right is ours alone. **The right over our bodies.** The right over what is produced in our bodies. The right to make the choice.

As a doctor, I demand, as a feminist, I demand, as a woman, I demand, and as a woman who underwent an abortion by choice, I demand, I demand that women always have the right.

The right to make the difficult, responsible, painful choice.

A right that is deemed necessary by the WHO to prevent deaths and injuries that occur due to the 25 million 'illegal, therefore unsafe abortions that are conducted each year.

A right to protect women from unsafe procedures, imprisonment, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and discrimination in, and exclusion from, vital post-abortion health care.

The right to access to safe abortion, is first and foremost, a **Human Right**.

UN Human Rights Committee made recommendations to the countries that had stringent laws leading to deaths during procedure, and in some cases, deaths due to suicide.

Reproductive health is defined by the CEDAW's Programme of Action" as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being ... in all matters related to the reproductive system", which

"implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so."

How abortion rights came to be included under Human Rights, the various issues that were involved is very accessibly and clearly stated in a paper by [Dr. Carmel Shalev](#), who was at the time of writing,

an expert member of CEDAW

The feminist movement aims to see a world where sexual and reproductive rights, which have been officially declared to be Human Rights of women, are respected, protected and fulfilled.

If our aim is to contribute to the feminist struggle for rights of women over their bodies, it is

very important to understand what the stand of the movement is.

Against Sex Selection. For Right to Abortion.

Even while fighting against sex-selection, the movement has taken care not to collapse it into female –foetus-abortion, and to avoid the term ‘female foeticide’, always keeping in mind that any struggle to revert the sex ratio to normal should not be at the cost of the right over ones own body.

Nivedita Menon reiterates this basic stand of the movement [Menon N. (2004). *Recovering subversion: feminist politics beyond the law*. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.]

: Abortion is a “fundamental and non-negotiable choice”, always **emphasising autonomous decision making rather than abortion itself**. She sees how the campaigns against abortion, at one point shifted emphasis from ‘selfish women avoiding maternal calling’ to ‘rights and personhood of foetus’ . This, I found a cleverly manipulative move on part of the anti-abortion people as this was seemingly compatible with women’s rights. They were not criticising feminists , but only expressing love for this baby-person!

This love of course does not extend beyond ‘anti-abortion’ slogans. Nivedita Menon points out how foetal rights arguments are merely another attempt to “**regulate the bodies of women**, for they are not concerned with poverty, large-scale pollution by large-scale industries and such other factors which can equally affect the birth and quality of life of the foetus.

Menon argues that foetal rights and fathers’ rights get more sympathy (and vote) than women’s rights. Medical technology shows foetus as separate from mother- so a separate being to save !

Even while fighting for the right to abortion, we should be careful in seeing to it that these rights are got in the right way and not as in the case of Roe v/s Wade as ‘right to privacy’ which Catherine

Mackinnon had opposed expressing concern that domestic violence too could be relegated to the 'private' and therefore not be punished.

“Instead of privacy, we should emphasise responsibility” says Robin West. “ Whatever the reason, the decision to abort is almost invariably made within a web of interlocking connecting and often irreconcilable responsibilities and commitments”

Drawing from this, I seek to note that the choice to abort is a painful one. Instead of pitying a foetus that has not yet lived, it would help if some compassion was shown for a woman with a real life full of struggles and choices. From Lacan we know that having a sense of bodily integrity is vital for selfhood.

Menon sates that “ Denial of abortion is a serious assault on women’s sense of self because it thwarts the sense of bodily integrity and places her body under the control of the imagination of others who deny her coherence by deparating the womb from the rest of her self.”

Women struggled for the legal rights to procreative choices regarding conception, contraception and abortion , to have independent control over reproductive capacity, choice and spacing of pregnancies. This was, of course sex-unknown termination.

Kumkum Sangari [Sangari, K. (2015). *Solid : liquid: a transnational reproductive formation*. New Delhi: Tulika Press.]distinguishes between this and sex-selective abortion. This distinction helps us understand why it is important to resist the blame that the PCPNDT act 1994 seems to imply when it put the legal onus on the pregnant woman if she went for the sex determination test willingly and said that she was considered responsible and punishable for the decision.

The revised PCPNDT Preconception, prenatal diagnostic technique (regulation and prevention of misuse, 2002) has since set out to write domestic violence into the law. Seeking or encouraging prenatal diagnosis and sex selection by any person including the husband or relatives of the pregnant women is now a punishable offence. It however excludes a woman who was compelled to undergo said test.

Sangari expresses uncertainty whether the term 'any person' will de facto maintain onus on the woman even as de jure acknowledgement of family pressure shifts the onus. She points out that since the burden of proving that the woman was not compelled falls on husband or family, they could attribute agency or consent to her. She goes on to list the various factors that could be part of the nature of familial coercion and "the conflicted yet undeniable" complicity of woman.

Sangari recognises pregnancy as a point of 'heightened vulnerability' – foetal safety or emotional trauma caused by hostility the forms of violence that she is now susceptible to.

Women's consent can be generated through Domestic Violence.

"... appear to take the decision 'themselves' especially when pressure and incitement" come into play. This decision traverses the whole gamut from Choice to Attribution; from Consent to Coercion.

Class-lowering mechanisms of domestic violence like social boycott, eviction, dertion and divorce can force women to take a decision that ensures birth of a son.

(There is of course the threat of actual bodily harm. Does this threat extend to the female child if she *so one wonders whether it is not birth of a son that she chooses, but birth of a child who will not suffer violence ...*)

Reading Sangari also reveals the depth at which the connections between domestic violence and son-preference lie. Domestic violence creates a body/self not allowed to mark its boundaries . To give birth to a girl – give birth to a child of same sex as its own – *to Reproduce itself*, becomes for this body, a transgressive act.

Sangari argues that pregnant women are not seen as individuals, but are fragmented as natal (daughters with mothers), and marital(wives). These fragmented subjects, she says, have to comply with familial economy of sex selection and are reconstituted as helpless subjects with no power over their own or prospective daughter's life.

Prospective daughters are constituted as a stagnant category of replication/repitition of a “fixed female life-narrative”. This repitition is read as ‘tradition’ says Sangari. The ‘tradition’ framework makes sure that even the possibility of a different future which she might enjoy by her own actions/choices is not ‘allowed’ to her.

It is these connections of Sex selection to tradition, to globalisation and to capitalism that are very important to make one realise that sex selection and even ‘pro-life’stands cannot be seen in isolation.

Technology is also implicated and discussed. Is this a ‘misuse’of technology, asks Sangari.

In my practice however, I have seen that women ask for tests, trust machines, in general, find **technology a liberating experience**.(The kindness you receive at the hospital might depend on your caste, but machines at least, are democratic?)

Seemingly disparate fertility regimes- sex selection and commercial surrogacy , Sangari sees in the same analytical frame. Sangari argues that commercial surrogacy is a vehicle for sex selection and that sex selection and commercial surrogacy together “presage a shift into disturbing combinations of familial, state and market-led patriarchal regimes that produce subjects and agents of self-directed violence who absorb, rather than externalise, the social costs and contradictions of contemporary capitalism.”

In comparing both practices in what she calls ‘a reproductive formation’, Sangari points out how both practices are instrumental, imply ownership and or rental of fungible womb, a place of production of wanted (in case of surrogacy-a wanted boy), or unwanted(in case of sex selective abortion- an unwanted girl) ‘goods’.

Just as the worker is alienated from what she produces, here the pregnant woman who is forced to undergo sex-selective abortion cannot claim a right (and therefore a right to decide) and the surrogate mother contractually surrenders the right.

Sex selection *expels* prospective daughters;commercial surrogacy *encloses* reproductive bodies.

In what context and what are the reasons for feminists choosing to critique Sex-selective Abortions in a theoretical, analytical manner? Sangari tells us how this is not a personal response, how the political anger and analytical distance are part of the feminist ethic in which “political anger against that which may not be personally suffered and the analytic distancing of violent acts or practices create a shared public space of recognition and consequently social transformation.”

This is as it should be, or rather should have been, if the ‘pro-life’, anti-abortion had not used melodramatic, manipulative imagery to tug at the heart strings or whatever of the general public and to ultimately take away the right to abortion from women.

And so, to look at the details of this manipulation. So, to the image:

Studying the powerful manipulative image with a view to counter it.

In [Petchesky, R. P. (1987, Summer). Fetal images: the power of visual culture in the politics of reproduction. *Feminist Studies*, 13(2), 263-292.], I have found such an image.

The protagonist, but **unlike its popular image of a victim-in-danger**. And to use this character as a partner in dialogue with another whose voice has hitherto been unheard. I read their paper to understand about visual images in reproductive health, the way they are generated, but more importantly, the way in which they are imagined in the first place. Also how the ‘murderer’ mom is imagined- she is invisible but characterized- for Dr. Nathanson tells us in *The Silent Scream* that the mother is a “Feminist.”!

Not just the 'alive' foetus but also bits and pieces of what the author calls its 'necrophiliac remains' evoke pity.

The Silent Scream- Images of foetus turned into a moving video.

Bringing foetus 'to life'.

Extending the anti-abortion discussion from mystical/ religious to (pseudo) scientific/technological.

Typical of 'politics of style' of late capitalism where **Superficial impression is made to pass off as entire image.**

The makers of the Silent Scream got the idea from a New England Journal of Medicine by an ethicist who said that seeing USG images brought about 'bonding' between mother and child and therefore fewer abortions.

The film in short –

Two simultaneous texts –

The medical event – a real-time USG imaging of an abortion. – Medical text – Visual – **“From the victim’s vantage point”.**

The narrator – the 'good' doctor. – Moral text – Verbal.

Music – Ominous, 'impending doom'.

Pointer drags along the screen 'Explaining' the otherwise **inscrutable** movement on screen.

Commentary- 'living unborn child', 'another human being indistinguishable from us', 'afraid', the

cannula 'moving towards child' to 'shatter dismember, crush, destroy' 'to tear the **child** apart'. 'The foetus senses aggression in its **sanctuary**' 'senses pain' 'attempts to escape' and finally

'Rears back its head' 'in a silent scream'. Not so silent for us though as we are listening to some music which is horrifying. Pollack rightly calls this verbal rhetoric not of science but of Miami Vice!

There is no woman on the screen but we are told that she is a feminist!

Also that she "will never do it again" after seeing the video
(Do you think, Dr. Nathanson that usually, after abortion, we women say – "Ah that was naaice. Should do it again. Maybe fix up the next appointment right now?")

The film is presented as document/medical evidence.

Enlisting medical imagery to present mythic-patriarchal message, says Pollock.

Some doctors opposed this video. Proof like 1. At that age the foetus has **no cerebral cortex** and therefore no pain. 2. There can be no scream **without air in the lungs**, falls on deaf ears. Now that we know that this video is in the realm of cultural representation, rather than medical evidence, the author discusses how it works. (I think the more perplexing question is – WHY?) Pollock argues that the film gains credibility in spite of its absurdity because we are used to this image all around us. She says it condenses losses – she mentions examples from the western world- the American imperialism and also what could be a common loss- the loss of innocence. **(For us the little helpless thing might signify the loss of citizenship, food, dignity.)**

Pollock is surprised that **feminists too have never questioned the authenticity of this homunculus- little man.**

Beyond 'already a baby' to 'almost a man', says Pollack. And the way the image is presented –
Foetus at centre.

Mother at periphery (if not absent).

(The 'baby' (!) is just hanging in there- suspended in space without blood stream from mother.). The
Hobbesian view of 'disconnected', 'solitary' man is here extended to foetus.

The author draws on the work of Zoe Sofia who talks of **lone survivor**. This **lone survivor** foetus
takes our attention away from the fact that we are all at risk, because the very same people who are
fighting for this one little life are making plans for nuclear war!

Sofia Zoe says "The foetal images represents not life, but death".

Appearance of objectivity/ Literal reality.

Pollock draws from Barthes – Photographic image appears be without code – a mechanical
representation of reality. This video is an example of it being presented so as to hide the fact that **in**
fact, the image is constructed using cultural reality and meanings.

**So the vantage point of the foetus and all that is false. The only POV here, is that of the camera
and editor – we see what we are manipulated into seeing.**

The other camera in the film is of course the USG itself. Is it to blame?

Pollock has addressed this. She says technologies have done good to individual women, and they
themselves do not play a part in this kind of cultural representations.

Which in turn are due to the cultural climate. Even while doing this, she does not fail to critique reproductive health practices themselves, particularly about this tendency to treat the foetus as an individual 'patient' and then become hostile to its mother if this patient is at risk of abortion. (Foetal identity as separate and autonomous blurs line between baby and foetus and further lower the viability age.)

Pollack criticizes the routinization of USG imaging for all pregnant mothers despite there being differences within the medical community about it. (The first picture in the baby album- this also equated foetus image and baby photo. Pollock looks at it in terms of fetichisation.)

Too much surveillance, leads to too much caution and therefore too many caesarian sections, some health advocates rightly argue (however, one does tend to feel that caution is better than regret)

Back to Image

Keller and Grontkowski have studied the philosophical traditions behind the 'prevalence of gaze' or **'privileging the visual'**.

Paradoxical function.

Sight, unlike other senses can maintain distance between knower and known. Modern optics sees eye as camera obscura.

Vision distances us from the corporeal. In simple words, it **Objectifies**. (Objectification, as the author tells us, is the masculine way.)

(One can't help wondering whether this means that the masculine gaze has gone beyond her body parts and is on the woman's insides now)

The paper quotes from A Sonar Look at an Unborn Baby, and likens USG examination of pregnant women to naval surveillance of enemy ships!

Surveillance is attack. So to 'correct for defect' or more commonly caesarian section. (The section is not an attack on the foetus but on mother?)

The caesarian section is also getting the foetus OUT of the womb. The author discusses why there might be this need to 'look into' the foetus in utero. Mary O' Brien has suggested that maybe due to alienation of male seed from reproduction, men feel envy, fear, and inadequacy and therefore seek to misappropriate children by inheritance laws. Mary O Brien calls this the '**core impotency of the potency principle**'.

Now by technology, men are looking into, misappropriating the pregnancy in other ways. Are these **real power relations** or just **masculine fantasies** asks Pollock. To avoid **reductionism** which sees only these and ignores female response (or condenses all responses into Everywoman's Consciousness), the author proposes to look at how women look at these fetal images.

Many women found this a pleasant experience, were delighted to see the foetus, and made their pregnancy a reality and so on. Pollack adds of course that these were 'wanted' pregnancies. Also, we have to see that women are seeing what their cultural, historical, lived experience tells them. So we have to bear in mind the differences along various axes and how these differences will inform this pleasure.

Gena Corea's Mother Machine and most pieces in Test Tube women shown women to be victims of male technological intervention. However the author is pointing out that women like the predictability that USG gives.

Also, she adds -sometimes women themselves have generated demand for some procedures. “Which is not to say that the technologies made have always met their needs” adds Pollack. (Or made with their well-being in mind.)

One more question she raises –

We know that foetal movement (‘quickening’) leads to bonding. Then why is USG image different? To call it artificial as opposed to ‘natural’ quickening is to ignore historic journey of the woman. .

It is very important to make the distinction between **“my baby” – woman viewing – USG of own foetus. And “the foetus” – public viewing – USG of an antiabortion film.**

Pollack looks at another set of women viewing foetus as public- for example right-wing women who are spreading bits and pieces of fetuses and harming the dignity of women who chose abortion, and by turn, Pollack emphasizes, their own dignity.

Also, for them the foetus is representing their conservative views – teenage pregnancy, unmarried pregnancy, abortion etc.

(I think they make the foetus ‘speaking’ so that foetus can become their spokesperson)

A fiction in image.

Can fiction images offer some resistance to (manipulated) real images?

Speaking of technologies, one I test I definitely oppose is Sex-selection. And yet, wish to reiterate the stand for right to abortion. Reading that **Abortion is a “fundamental and non-negotiable choice”,**

I wish to add that **Abortion is a difficult and painful choice.**

Even the choice when the abortion is sex-determined, the choice and consent are often manufactured and due to threat of violence towards herself or her baby. **I see a mother's consent to a sex-selection as not her choice to give birth to a foetus of a particular gender , but her choice to give birth to a child who will be allowed to live.**

Foetal rights arguments are merely another attempt to “regulate the bodies of women, for they are not concerned with poverty, large-scale pollution by large-scale industries and such other factors which can equally affect the foetus.

These arguments are moving from area of theory to the area of image.

We need to understand visual images in reproductive health, the way they are generated, but more importantly, the way in which they are imagined in the first place.

USG imagery is being used to present a mythic-patriarchal message. Proof that the age of the depicted foetus has no cerebral cortex and therefore no pain. Or that nobody can talk without air in the lungs, and the foetus is inside the uterus is brushed off in the emotional hold that foetal images have on audiences.

Any rational argument falls on deaf ears.

(“Deaf ears which can hear only silent scream?” I ask.).

About the Script, Briefly

This script is only a single scene in that it takes place in just one location, in one continuous time. In that single location, it travels to a different room and also, to the womb. Yes, the foetus is speaking to its mother, however, after critiquing the image of the 'baby' in pro-life propaganda, I do not choose a similar representation. The nurse and the professor speak out the foetus' lines. Characters that the protagonist is familiar with, characters that we are used to seeing on stage. Characters that are plausible in that location. Not a created, made up form. No manipulation by image. No manipulation by Emotion. I do not counteract the awful pity that is sought to be evoked by the "*maa mujhe bachao*" by inducing pity for the mother. There are no explanations, no excuses. "I could have allowed you to live, but... I have the following problems."! Or even one woman representing one particular 'problem' – writing multiple characters, and then, making up excuses suitable to type. However, as I have said before here, the process of decision to abort is very complex and cannot be compartmentalized. I do not want to write a film that lists out points to resist the manipulations that are inflicted. The writing of such a script would be a manipulation in its own way. So the script decided that to not be a counter propaganda, but instead be independent, be stand-alone; to not be a representation, but to be itself. To be a small piece of fiction that will be interpreted differently by different people depending on their background, their experiences and their state of mind. In most of our films, depicting mother-child relationship, there is too much love. We know now that the family power structures are far from being so cozy. Films have largely ignored this and focused on love. The script here turns this focus around to focus Only on hatred. When we watch a film, we identify with the protagonist whose interest is the greater good and whose actions take the plot further. In such complete identification comfort,

where is the space to question? It was imperative therefore, that I write characters that we do not want to identify with, or even want to empathize with.

Varkha and her future child are cruel people who want to destroy each other. Focus on hatred.

Yes. And yet, Oscar Wilde tells us how we destroy the thing we love the most. Well, the fun part in a good film script, as in real life, is the Subtext.

