

**“Is Love Enough?” A Critical Analysis of Triple
Marginalization, Class Performativity, and the Myth of
Transcendence in Rohena Gera’s *Sir***

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Abstract

Indian cinema has historically utilized the domestic worker as a static narrative device, often relegated to the background to facilitate the emotional arcs of upper-class protagonists. Rohena Gera’s *Sir* (2018) radically subverts this trope by positioning the “subaltern”—the domestic help—as the central consciousness of the film. The narrative traces the burgeoning relationship between Ratna, a resilient young widow working as a live-in maid, and her employer Ashwin, a wealthy architect grappling with his own sense of disillusionment. The opening frames of the film do not present the vibrant, chaotic energy of Mumbai, but rather the ‘shabby, congested’ stillness of a rural one-room home—a space where the protagonist, Ratna, prepares to pack her life into a single bag and embark on a journey that is more social than it is geographic. The narrative arc is fundamentally rooted in a transition of space that mirrors a transition of social status. The film’s preamble avoids the anticipated verticality of the Mumbai skyline, opting instead for a grounded view of a “shabby, congested,” one-room rural home. As she boards a local bus, she transitions from a space of surveillance—where her identity as a widow is a “bad omen” that excludes

her from the family's photographic history—to a space of anonymity. By focusing on such shifts, this paper examines the “Triple Marginalization” of a woman who must navigate the luxury high-rises of Mumbai while remaining anchored to the restrictive social codes of the village. Central to this navigation are the material realities of her world; numerous objects in the film serve as ‘platforms for empowerment’, and others act as ‘agents of oppression’. By analysing such symbolic markers alongside the “unaffordable” nature of love, this paper also argues that the margins drawn by society are so deeply internalised that true transcendence requires a price higher than the marginalized can often pay.

Introduction

Rohena Gera's *Sir* (2018) doesn't shout about class or gender. It just lets the weight settle in slowly, scene by scene. At its centre is Ratna, a young widow who arrives in Mumbai as a live-in maid, carrying nothing but a small bag and years of village rules that are still relevant. She meets Ashwin, her employer, an architect who's quietly trying to reclaim his emotional equilibrium.

But the film never pretends those silences can erase the divide. Ratna lives with what feels like three strikes against her—woman, domestic worker, widow—and each one makes the others heavier. Everyday things become loaded symbols: the lone bag she brings from the village versus the pile she leaves with; bangles she dares to wear only in the city; the sewing machine Ashwin gives her that literally opens a path forward. Gifts in the film go both ways, though not evenly. His practical, almost mentor-like offerings versus her handmade shirt carries all her unspoken dreams but still looks out of place next to his wardrobe.

Gera (2018) lingers on the tiny, painful mechanics of inequality: how “*Sir*” begins as a reflex of deference, softens

into something almost affectionate, then suddenly feels like a slap after their one impulsive kiss. How his encouragement can land like unintentional pity. How the village's old judgments follow her even into a high-rise, ready to pull her back if she steps too far out of line. In the end, *Sir* refuses the tidy romantic payoff. The connection between them is real, tender even, but the film insists on showing what that tenderness costs and who usually ends up paying the steeper price. It leaves you with this lingering sting: sometimes the most honest feeling in the world still isn't enough to cross a line society drew long before either of them was born.

Contrasts

Bus/train to cab rides:

The film explores the concept of marginalization through the stark, well depicted contrasts. The geographical change, from the rural to the urban, highlights the socio-cultural and economic change as well. Additionally, the shift of Ratna's mode of transport from the initial scenes, where she takes a bus or a local train, to the scene towards the end of the movie, when she hires a taxi after securing the job at the boutique, depicts the shift from choicelessness of the servant class to the freedom and affordability of choices of the working class. The newly discovered economic independence and changing social status have empowered her to hire a cab.

Bags:

At the beginning of the film, Ratna's exit from the rural landscape is distinguished by a single bag, carrying only essentials, a marker of her economic instability. However, towards the end of the movie, we see a stark contrast as she departs from Ashwin's apartment with a significant accumulation of luggage. The increase in the number of

bags suggests that she has collected professional skills, financial stability, and emotional maturity, gained from her urban experience, which is reflected through her shift from dependency to autonomy. These belongings represent the purchasing power she earned through her tailoring.

Boundaries / The Margins:

In a scene, Ashwin comes back from office at an unexpected hour and goes into his room. He finds Ratna, in front of his full-length mirror, trying out a dress that she has made for her sister Chhoti. This key moment reveals a lot about their class spatial precincts. She vehemently apologizes for crossing her boundary and rushes to her dingy quarters. Overwhelmed with guilt, she tells Ashwin that she has never been to his room, other than to clean, unlike other maids from other households, who avail the AC and TV privileges without the knowledge of their employers. More than convincing Ashwin of her innocence, she seems to reinforce self-imposed barriers that protect her reputation. In her world, the master's room is a site of labour, and to see it as a space for personal aspiration but inviting unaffordable social risk.

The symbolic full-length mirror momentarily allows Ratna to see herself not as a servant, but as a creator. Ratna's momentary claim in Ashwin's room was the result of the blurring lines between them. However, the intensity of her apology and her guilt suggests that for the subaltern, even the act of 'seeing oneself' in the master's space threatens the fragile equilibrium of her employment, not to mention the socio-economic order. Ratna insists that she is 'not like other maids', distinguishing herself through a rigid adherence to limits. She attempts to preserve her only remaining capital: her integrity. Her 'choicelessness' forces her to build a moral wall so high that even a moment of innocent curiosity feels like a criminal trespass.

The invisible margins and boundaries constructed by societal hierarchies render certain domestic spaces off-limits for the help. When other domestic workers consciously choose to transcend these lines in their employers' absence, it is the awareness of their own financial marginalization. This pretence roots from a desire to experience comfort and privilege, as a way of reclaiming the power and agency which is otherwise denied.

Ironically, when Ratna goes to her village for Chhoti's marriage, Ashwin is not hesitant to explore her room with entitlement, to quench his curiosity for certain questions which neither he will be able to ask nor will she be able to answer. At his leisure, he takes a look at how simple her life is without fearing consequence. His exploration is more of an intellectual and emotional enquiry than an intrusion, reinforcing the power dynamic and disparity in privacy. The marginalized life is a book forced open for the privileged to read, whereas the privileged life remains a guarded fortress for the marginalized to maintain. As Karmakar (2021) says "Ratna is pragmatic and aware of her social location. As a result, she is stoic and tentative with regard to her interactions with Ashwin: limiting it to her professional labour, while intermittently providing personal advice and moral support. Yet, Ratna can only enter the space of a casteless, classless world if Ashwin allows it. On the other hand, Ashwin's breaches of hierarchy are comparatively smooth: he enters her space seamlessly, going into her room with a noble curiosity, which Ratna cannot. Constantly walking on eggshells and trying to strike the right balance between being a 'person' while also being a 'servant' (which Shome achieves with brilliance), there are larger bridges to cross which 'love' cannot deliver."

Gifting:

Ashwin's gifts are empowering. The fashion magazines equip her with the cultural capital, and the sewing machine, which moves her to tears, propels her towards her career goals. They are practical, thoughtful, motivational gifts that help her bridge the chasm between her reality and aspirations. Hazra (2021) comments "For a long time, cinema in India has shown women getting behind their sewing machines when the going got rough and tough, be it in *Sir*, *Sui-Dhaaga* or when matinee mothers were shown stitching to overcome financial struggles."

Conversely, Ratna gifts him a shirt designed and tailored by her, on his birthday. He is visibly elated to have received a handmade gift from Ratna and wears it to work validating her presence in his life regardless of her class. Its monetary worth might not match up to Ashwin's but it is a tangible manifestation of her own dream. The shirt itself is floral printed, which is in stark contrast to the branded solids that he wears regularly, wrapped in glossy gift wrapping paper. It highlights the difference in taste and culture of both the protagonists, and the lack of agency for the financially marginalised and their exposure to them. This lack of exposure is the genesis for a deprived taste of the subaltern.

Master Ji and The Paid Course:

Master Ji embodies the old feudal system, where knowledge is treated as a favour granted in exchange for loyalty and servitude. However, the Paid Course represents the modern world of capitalism, where money becomes an equaliser that strips away traditional social identities and replaces them with the simple identity of a "customer." Master Ji weaponises teaching to extract unpaid labour from Ratna, treating her time as something endless and worthless. By

gate-keeping knowledge, he keeps her firmly on the other side of a symbolic, invisible wall.

On the other hand, the paid course turns education into a commodity. It allows Ratna to move from being a subaltern figure to becoming a paying consumer. Through her money, she gains access to skills and learning that were previously denied to her. She effectively buys her way into a curriculum of skill, proving that in a rigid social structure, capital is often the only agency capable of shattering the margins of class.

Other Contrasts:

A cinematic split-screen highlights the dichotomy of the protagonists' exposure and consumption of media. While Ashwin prefers global news in English, Ratna remains fastened to local Marathi dramas. Even the high-end boutiques' display windows symbolise a transparent yet impenetrable barrier between her subaltern reality and her designer aspirations. Ultimately, Ratna's agency is still tethered to traditional hierarchies as she still needs Ashwin's permission to pursue her tailoring course. This highlights the central problem of the film - the affordability of indifference towards societal norms.

Communication

A key ingredient to the poetic genius of the movie is the portrayal of communication between the protagonists. Both Ratna and Ashwin are emotionally quiet but not inexpressive. They read each other's subtle change in mood fairly well aided by an acute sense of understanding. It is evident when Ratna senses Ashwin's reluctance to take a phone call, or when he recognizes her distress regarding Masterji. They silently support each other, even without exchanging words or encroaching in each other's personal space. As the narrative progresses, their conversations evolve synchronously. For

instance Ratna asking if Ashwin misses life in America is reflective of how free flowing their conversation has become, yet they restrain from overindulging.

Ratna misreads Ashwin's disillusionment on the balcony as contemplation of suicide. She attempts to console and empathize with him by sharing her life's narrative. Ratna was thrust into an arranged marriage at the age of 19 as a result of prioritising the 'unburdening' of the daughter of the house. Her father chose to bypass her desire for studies and ignored a thorough background check of the husband's family, simply because they waived off dowry. Consequently, she lost her husband after four months of marriage to a pre-existing illness, and became a widow. From the rural perspective her life is considered 'over'. However, she moves to the city, builds a life of her own, and supports her family by remitting Rs. 4000 to them and pays for Chhoti's education. She tries motivating Ashwin by exemplifying her anecdote.

Gradually, the power dynamic levels out between them. It is evident in the conversations between Ratna and Ashwin. Both the protagonists are survivors of forced migration and their aspirations are stolen by circumstances, coincidentally triggered by death in the family. When Ratna says that "If you have to write, you can write from anywhere," it asserts that displacement doesn't necessarily mean creative death. Similarly, Ashwin doesn't shy away from speaking in English in front of Ratna, unlike others who stoop to their help's level of language to convey instructions but abuse in English. Ratna, simultaneously, upon being complimented by Ashwin, overcomes her insecurities and goes to the driver asking the meaning of the word 'brave'.

Post Ashwin's party, their mutual apologies display a poignant role reversal. Ashwin regrets the social mistreatment

Ratna endured, while Ratna laments putting him in a position that required him defending a subaltern.

Ashwin increasingly becomes more comfortable in Ratna's presence as he seats himself in the kitchen and uncharacteristically says "please" to his employee. His gestures are aimed towards bridging the social chasm. However, Ratna remains distant, her silence a defensive response to a recent boutique experience that reinforced her 'place' in the social hierarchy. While Ashwin prefers Ratna's companionship over the pretension of his own class, her internalised restrictions, honed by external discrimination, prevent her from reciprocating.

During Ratna's absence, Ashwin calls her and attempts small talk over the phone. Their shared telephonic silence is disrupted by Ratna's "koi kaam thaa?" to which Ashwin replies, "nahi". This highlights their maturing bond. In a stratified society, such a connection is viewed as a form of social suicide. Their employer-employee relationship can be seen melting in Ratna's swift return, their mutual elation, Ashwin's genuine interest in her family photographs, and the exchange of personal history.

In the pre-culmination scene, when Ratna has packed her bags and is moving out, Ashwin holds on to one of her bags and doesn't let go, neither her bag nor her, for a considerably long time. Both stand and stare at each other, silence consuming their unspoken words.

Sabina

The movie begins with a strong tension between characters which is later revealed to have been caused by Ashwin and Sabina's wedding being called off. A lot of elements, such as Sabina's support during the loss of his brother,

the social pressure of marrying her in spite of the lack of love, her infidelity, and the cancellation of the wedding, provides considerable insight into his emotional state. Ratna understandably meets these needs. Ashwin's marriage was going to be the only socially acceptable gratitude rather than one ensuing from genuine affection. He confessed that he wasn't in love with her 'enough' and that she felt it too somehow, which resulted in her meeting her emotional needs somewhere else.

Bangles

In the rural landscape a simple pair of bangles acts as a poignant symbol for a woman's social inclusion as well as forbidden luxury, the absence of which is indicative of the erasure of her femininity with the death of her husband. "Sir further hammers home this specious argument by focusing on the ill-treatment of women and widows that seems to be restricted to villages only; in cities, widows have the privilege of wearing bangles – a ludicrous indicator of 'progress'" (Dasgupta, 2021)

Ratna's perception of Sabina is intriguingly shaped entirely by this symbol. While one might judge Sabina for her infidelity, Ratna views her with gratitude as she was the one to encourage her, during a function, to wear bangles. It wasn't just a fashion suggestion but an act of validation, her right to live a life on her own terms. This kindness acts as a seed of motivation that germinates throughout the film, taking strong roots within her, making her embrace her individuality. When Ratna travels toward Mumbai, she claims her identity as an autonomous working woman by putting them on. Conversely, when she returns to the village, the bangles go back into the bag. This illustrates this 'city versus village' divide well. The city provides a platform for liberation but the

village remains a space of performance where she still needs to be accepted in order to survive.

Nandita

When Ashwin's sister, Nandita, discusses the fallout of his cancelled wedding, Ratna, a simple, innocent participant in a domestic routine, enters the room with a simple, professional inquiry about serving lunch. Because the conversation is in English, Ratna is unaware of the gravity of their topic. However, Nandita's sharp rebuke turns this into her vulnerability. Nandita projects her own frustrations with her 'bloody maid' onto Ratna, effectively reducing her to an interchangeable commodity. When Ashwin tries to console her afterward, she protectively retreats into the professional distance that must be maintained for her survival in such a society.

Laxmi

In *Sir*, Ratna quietly tells Laxmi Tai she hid being vegetarian, just so she could land the job in Mumbai. It's heartbreaking to see her erase who she is, piece by piece, out of pure fear of losing everything.

The incident with another maid, Laxmi Tai, in another household, and her employer's son is a brutal example of how strong our social conditioning is. Having watched his mother and society treat domestic help as sub-human, he couples physical and verbal violence as he kicks her and weaponises the English language to tell her to "Get out!" She slaps him back instinctively, and the mother explodes at her. Despite Laxmi having raised the boy like her own, he falls victim to the lessons of his social class. When Laxmi responds with the maternal discipline she would give her own son, she is rebuked by the lady of the house. It's raw proof of how early kids learn to treat the help as less than human.

In this world, servants become the receivers of all frustrations. The child's actions are unpunished and thus the abuse of the marginalized is normalized, reinforcing the idea that basic humanity is a luxury for the house help. Ratna's fear that Laxmi will be fired for doing the right thing, highlights the instability of their lives, that even a lifetime of care can be erased by a single moment of class-based ego.

The Dream

The moment Ratna's dreams meet the reality of her social standing, is central to her evolution. Ratna stands outside a high-end Mumbai boutique, ogling at the mannequin in silent longing. The shop's display window glass is a symbolic barrier of money, language, class, gender, and her married status, separating her from a world that is clearly in front of her, but out of reach. Despite financial hardship, she firmly refuses Laxmi Tai's ₹5,500 loan for a tailoring course, clinging to her fierce self-respect, wanting to build her success on her own labour. When Ashwin encourages her, saying it's all about willpower, his well-meant words, though unintentional, feel like patronising mockery. To him, dreams are simple choices but to Ratna, every step forward fights a system designed to keep her kind confined to the kitchen. It highlights that even encouragement from a person of privilege can feel like a reminder of one's own limitations and the struggles "women like her" face in the path of achieving their aspirations. Her lashing out at him is a sign that their relationship is finally growing towards equality and emotional honesty.

Her dream is finally realised in Ankita Madam's boutique. Her labours came to fruition but she needed Ashwin's "invisible hands" to hold the door open for her. This highlights that for the marginalized, merit alone is often not enough; one still requires a "favour" to bridge the gap between the terrace and the studio.

Chhoti

Like every other care giver, Ratna pours everything into her little sister Chhoti as she wants the cycle to end with her. She wants her sister to live with autonomy by transcending the class barrier, making education the step ladder to success that she never had herself. She dreams of a sister-led independent business where Ratna provides the craft and Chhoti provides financial literacy.

The conflict between the sisters arises from their differing perceptions of Mumbai. Chhoti is charmed by the city's glamour. The city's immediate, skin-deep rewards are more tempting than a long-term academic goal. Whereas, Ratna has been disillusioned, seeing through its surface-level gloss to the rigid class structures beneath. To Ratna, education is the only defence against the "Masterjis" of the world.

When Chhoti decides to abandon her studies for marriage, Ratna feels betrayed and bankrupt, both emotionally and financially. The four years of labour, the 5,500-rupee fees, and the emotional restraint required to handle everything are suddenly rendered fruitless. In the village, they only value marriage, not the certificate. Ratna's justified grief arises from regret, realizing that you can pay for someone's education, but you cannot force them to be free.

Sir – A Social Symbol

One of the strongest symbols in the film is the titular word, 'Sir'. It separates Ratna and Ashwin throughout the film as a rigid linguistic demarcation. There are three phases to 'Sir'. Initially, the conversations between them are very limited and "Sir" is always followed by a request for permission or a question, underscoring a social order, a formal requirement. By the middle of the film, the weight of the word shifts. It

softens, almost, into a title of endearment, allowing Ratna to share observations, personal anecdotes, and suggestions. The word remains and she is still Ashwin's maid, but now has become his confidante. The final phase of the film is triggered by the kiss, which makes the word "Sir" unbearable for Ashwin. He sees it as a designation that prevents them from being equals. However, for Ratna, shedding the word is socially dangerous. The climax on the terrace is where the 'autonomous working woman' finally emerges. When she receives Ashwin's call, she struggles internally and fights to shed years of social conditioning. Saying "Ashwin" instead of "Sir," isn't just saying a name, but declaring her professional and emotional equality. Having secured a job at a design house, she no longer needs to protect the servant-master hierarchy. They are now two individuals, finally speaking the same emotional language.

The Kiss

While coming up by the lift, there is a silent tension between Ashwin and Ratna. This leads them to share a kiss at the apartment. The moment is abruptly shattered by a phone call from Ashwin's mother (Mummy Ji) asking her to cook fish curry at a party at her house. It is a brutal reminder of her categorization. In a single second, Ratna is pulled out of a romantic trance and dropped back into her role as a servant. She is traumatised and apologises for things that are not her fault, almost as if for being a human and having feelings. The backlash from her own community which is rooted in jealousy that is faced by the subaltern is stronger than any other.

Ashwin wants to take her out but her primary concern is people will make fun of them. For Ratna, the people Ashwin dismisses, like the watchman, the driver, the other maids, are her entire social-survival network. The subaltern silently

internalises the margins that they have drawn around themselves, confusing it for an armour. To transcend her class through a relationship would be seen as a betrayal or a calculated move, leaving her vulnerable to labels that would make her unhirable and social outcast.

On the terrace, Ratna shares her realisation that Ashwin's wealth hasn't made him free. He is just trapped in a more expensive cage. Her answer to his question about whether she believed in God is one of the most poignant lines in the movie. She says "I have to", revealing that for the disempowered, faith isn't nothing but a survival mechanism. When the littlest luxuries are unaffordable, hope is the only fuel for life. Despite their genuine connection, their stakes for survival aren't equal. For Ashwin, the fallout of crossing the boundary is affordable, for Ratna it would be nothing but regret.

The Social Panopticon

"*Sir* does not list any last names of the characters; their caste locations have been left ambiguous. Excluding surnames is a very important directorial decision... This deliberate myth of 'castelessness' in *Sir* turns our attention away from caste to only focus on class barriers and in that, reveals the caste privilege of those who made this film, because only those with caste privilege can afford to be 'casteless'." (Dasgupta, 2021)

The moment Ashwin's wedding is cancelled, his driver suggests that Ratna find a new employment. It's an act of social policing. The trifactor marginalization comes into play. She is being judged by her profession/ class as a servant and for her gender and proximity to a single man. In the eyes of the domestic community, her presence in the house is seen as a potential scandal. Here is a reiteration of "Log kya bolenge?" (What will people say?), in an attempt to pull

Ratna back into the margins of fear. However, she draws a direct line between the city and the village when she says, "If I had listened to people, I would still be in the village, blamed for my husband's death." Ratna explains that she has already survived the community blaming her for a tragedy she couldn't control. By moving to Mumbai, she escaped a verdict and found herself a job. She refuses to move houses based on gossip and pay further attention to people whom she no longer recognise as an authority over her life.

While attending to Ashwin's guests at his party, Ratna spills wine on Ankita's dress. When Ankita hurls the word "moron" at her, she doesn't need a dictionary to comprehend the dehumanizing intent. The vitriol is transpired through to her via linguistic violence of the elite. Her apology is an instinctive survival reflex, a silent acceptance of her role as a communal punching bag. Ashwin's curt defence, "Fortunately, she doesn't work for you", shatters the social script.

Encouraged by Ashwin's compliments on the dress designed for Chhoti, Ratna attempts to cross the threshold of Sonya Dev's boutique. However, the boutique assistant frantically runs to the watchman to rebuke him for letting just 'anyone' in. The assistant effectively labels Ratna as a "security breach". Her simple attire signals that she is a non-consumer, a trespasser, an 'anyone' from the margins who need a 'social pass' to become 'someone'.

Despite Ratna's years of gruelling labour in Mumbai to fund Chhoti's education, dowry and the wedding ceremony, she is physically absent from the photographs of the event. This is not a choice, but a sentence dictated by a village mind-set that a widow's gaze is ominous or bad luck for a bride. She is allowed to provide the means for happiness, but is forbidden from witnessing or participating in the

result. Here, it can be observed that Ratna is trapped at the intersection of three powerful layers of marginality: she is a woman, a domestic servant, and a widow. These three aspects of her identity - her gender, her subaltern profession, and the stigma of widowhood create a unique form of social invisibility. These three contribute to her exclusion trifold. This Triple Marginalization means that even when she succeeds financially, she is still 'lesser' in the society.

Vicky, Ashwin's friend, serves as the voice of social realism, articulating the invisible impenetrable barriers that define class in urban India. "Another strong indicator of the caste positions of the central characters in *Sir* is when Vicky, Ashwin's friend, says "Your mom wouldn't even sit at the same table as her" when he suspects that something is going on between Ashwin and Ratna; this points to rituals of purity and pollution that oppressive-caste members observe when dining with people from castes they claim to be superior to. Forget being at the same table, Ratna and Ashwin are never even shown to eat in the same scene" (Dasgupta, 2021). Vicky blatantly tells Ashwin that he "can't date his maid". Ashwin's pleas to disregard Ratna's profession and to "put that aside" is met with Vicky's chillingly pragmatic question: "How does one put 'that' aside?" Vicky deals with Ashwin logistically, focusing on the practical impossibility of class transcendence. He probes the repercussions of their union, in business meetings, family dinners, and elite gatherings. This puts forth the profound question: if you take away the margins from the marginalized, the 'sub' from the subaltern, what remains? His assertion that "people will never let her forget she is a maid" is the most loaded statement in the film. If soul and talent were enough to transcend classes, then the very foundations of the class system would crumble. He argues that Ashwin's is being selfish because Ratna would face a loss of livelihood

and social standing as a consequence of their relationship. Pulling someone out of their social margin exposes them to a world designed to reject them. By asking Ashwin to “leave her alone,” Vicky maintains a boundary that keeps Ratna safe from losing battle.

While Ratna serves guests at Ashwin’s mother’s house and eventually eats with the other domestic staff on the kitchen floor, the designated geography of the apartment comes to surface. For Ashwin, the internal barriers have dissolved and he instinctively and foolishly questions if he should wait for her to finish eating. Ashwin brings a westernized, egalitarian mind-set where such boundaries are fluid. His simple gesture of love becomes a source of mockery and humiliation for Ratna. She knows that in the eyes of the servant-class (watchmen, the drivers, and the other maids), she will be the one blamed for any transgression. She would lose a job, become a laughing stock/spectacle, be labelled as the seductress, a mistress, and lose her social standing in her own community. Ashwin feels guilty over her normalised mistreatment. Ratna says that she might be a simpleton/ illiterate, but she isn’t a ‘kept’.

When she sees that Ashwin is adamant on being together with her, she bluntly puts forth the mirror of society at his face and ours too. She says that she was only ‘allowed’ to work in Mumbai by her in-laws as a house-help because there would be one less mouth to feed. The monthly remittance of Rs 4,000 is an added bonus. Additionally, if word goes out about any affair in the city, her brother-in-law would drag her by the hair and take her back to the village. As a widow, she is a burden, whose husband is no longer there to take her liability, both financially and physically. Her presence in the city is a favour and a temporary privilege. Her autonomy is on a leash which is as long as her service to her family. As her final act of agency she pragmatically chooses to prioritise survival and

walks away. As she packs her bag and cries, her tears are not of fear for the future, but of grief for a loss of a truly cherished connection.

If society cannot understand or explain a subaltern's choice, it attaches a negative connotation to destroy it. When Ratna quits, Jeethu fabricates a rumour of theft which leads to her immediate criminalization. Because a subaltern woman leaving a comfortable life of her own volition is unthinkable. As a maid and a widow, she is the default scapegoat for the rumour of theft, ensuring that even as she moves on, she remains branded by her class.

Helpless, Ashwin decides to move back to The States and pursue his passion for writing. Upon hearing this, his father bluntly asks, "Have you been sleeping with your maid?" It is worse with Ashwin's father as unlike Vicky who questioned if Ashwin was "dating" her, his father immediately assumes it to be a transactional, sexual encounter. He even goes on to say that "it's a good thing" Ashwin is leaving only because he is in love. It implies that if Ashwin were merely using Ratna, he would have found a way for him to stay, as a mistress can be managed, hidden, or discarded. For the elite, using the house-help for physical or emotional labour is an acceptable, almost normal transgression. However, love is a threat because it demands equality. In the father's eyes, having feelings for someone from the subaltern class is so unfathomable that it becomes a social emergency, making Ashwin's exile the only way to protect him from the "margins". "Perhaps, that's what the additional title, 'Is Love Enough?' is trying to convey. But the film doesn't let us engage concretely with that question. If only Ashwin could stay back and break those caste-class divisions using his social position" (Karmakar, 2021). In a way it is both good and bad. Good in the sense that Ashwin empowers Ratna to overcome the barriers of a class and bad

because Ashwin himself doesn't do anything to remove the boundaries that demarcate their separate classes.

Conclusion

Rohena Gera's *Sir* lingers long after the screen fades, not because it hands us a neat happily-ever-after, but because it refuses to. Ratna walks away with her bags, content, carrying the weight of her earned skills, savings scraped together, and a hard-won sense of self keeping a piece of herself intact. Ashwin heads toward the airport, chasing the writing he once abandoned, perhaps freer in some ways, still tangled in others.

What stays, is the ache of what might have been.

In the end, when she finally says his name instead of "Sir" over the phone, it's a small but enormous act of claiming equality, even if only for a moment. The question still looms: is love enough? Even when the world keeps drawing lines around who gets to cross them? *Sir* doesn't answer it. It just asks us to sit with the truth that sometimes the deepest bonds ask the most from the ones who have the least to give. And that, quietly, is devastatingly beautiful.

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Pallabi Nandy

Pallabi Nandy is a dedicated teacher at Aditya Academy, where she finds deep joy in shaping young minds. Passionate about teaching, she is equally devoted to the art of writing. A poet at heart, Pallabi has had her verses featured in several collections and dreams of creating much more. She is endlessly inspired by the beautiful writings of her peers and she embraces every form of expression with enthusiasm and humility.