

***Souten—The Other Woman* v/s *The Other Woman*: A Comparative Study of Twin Psychological Thrillers**

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Abstract

The paper depends on how the two things selected to compare actually relate to each other. It reviews twin psychological thrillers. The first one is a Hindi film titled *Souten—The Other Woman*, produced in 2006 by Naveen Tak, written and directed by Karan Razdan. Both of them happen to be Indians. The other is an English debut novel titled *The Other Woman* by British author Sandie Jones which was published in 2018, a very recent attempt. Both the works are based on a love triangle and have some similarities, yet they are not so similar after all. Psychological thrillers often incorporate elements of mystery, drama, action and horror, particularly psychological horror. They are usually books or films and have gained popularity in recent times. Common usage of ‘other woman’ is a woman who is having a relationship with a married man or in a serious relationship with someone else. First known use of ‘other woman’ was in 1855, in the meaning defined here.

There is a twist towards the end in both the works being discussed here and an attempt has been done to unfold a mystery: Can this ‘other woman’ be someone else, not falling into the usual category?

Keywords: ‘other woman’, psychological thrillers, mystery, comparative, love triangle, mother, neglect, emotional states, evil, tension, conflict, addiction, twist

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According to Cambridge English Dictionary, ‘other woman’ means “a woman who is having a sexual relationship with someone who is married or in a serious relationship with someone else.”¹

Synonyms for other woman are concubine, doxy, mistress etc.

First known use of ‘other woman’ (1855), in the meaning defined above is also “a woman with whom a married man has an affair.”²

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After the accidental death of her lover in *Souten—The Other Woman*, Mitali marries Ranbeer Singh, a millionaire widower from a royal family in Rajasthan, India. He has a daughter called Sapna. At the outset, three of them share a harmonious bond. Later on, when the daughter returns from abroad, she falls in love with Rajvir Singh who also belongs to a royal clan. His brother Sumer and sister-in-law Smita give their consent to this relationship. Mitali, on the other hand, has a bitter truth to share with Sapna—that she and Rajvir were involved in a passionate affair recently. The jealous stepmother is unable to come to terms with the fact that her stepdaughter is seeking attention from a young guy, whereas her own partner is a middle-aged man. Discontented and envious, Mitali creates problems for the girl by seducing Rajvir.

The story rests on a stepmother and a beautiful daughter who share a special friendly bond and are at harmony with each other. They like each other and share things. The problem arises when it comes to sharing the man too. What is to be done in this case?

“*The Other Woman* is an addictive, fast-paced psychological thriller about the destructive relationship between Emily, her boyfriend Adam, and his manipulative mother Pammie.”³

Emily Havistock has come across the handsome Adam Banks who happens to be her dream boy. She is a top consultant in a London firm. Her colleagues are gathered at a networking event where she first falls for Adam, though she is not looking for a boyfriend. She is quite satisfied with her life. Very soon, they start seeing each other every night. Her friends feel she is not taking out time for them. She has a special place in her heart for Adam and feels quite secured. He has not introduced her to his mother Pammie yet.

When he eventually plans to let her meet his mother, Emily is too nervous. She leaves no stone unturned to have the best appearance. “I’d done less preparation for a good friend’s wedding.” Adam highly appreciates his mother. He convinces Emily saying that his mother will love her. On the way, he gets so upset at just a mild joke about his mother’s liking for particular music. Emily could have sensed Adam’s nature then only, but she is so attracted to him that she desires to let the relationship go. “What follows is a hellish sequence of passive aggressive nastiness on the part of Pammie that would bring any woman to her knees, begging for mercy.”⁴

Emily goes through a great shock and that shock is Pammie. What is she supposed to do when the ‘other woman’ is the mother of her better half who is immensely attached to her?

“Monster-in-law! The love triangle in this twisted psychological thriller is between Emily, her new boyfriend Adam and Adam’s mother, Pammie, who refuses to let her son go and wants Emily out of his life!”⁵

A mother can do almost everything for her child, and now Emily is going to discover what limits can Pammie cross to achieve what she desires: eternal disappearance of Emily. There’s space only for one woman in Adam’s life.... But who is she going to be?

At the beginning of the first chapter, in Emily’s view: “There weren’t many things that I didn’t like about Adam when I first saw him across the crowded bar at the Grosvenor Hotel in London, aside from his lack of empathy. I’d just come out of an incredibly dull ‘Future of Recruitment’ conference and needed a drink far more than he or the barman realized.”⁶

Emily’s point of view takes over the rest of the novel.

“*Psychological thriller* is often told through the viewpoint of psychologically stressed characters, revealing their distorted mental perceptions and focusing on the complex and often tortured relationships between obsessive and pathological characters.”⁷

Psychological thrillers have gained popularity in recent times.

“*Psychological thriller* is a thriller story which emphasizes the psychology of its characters and their unstable emotional states.... *Psychological thrillers* often incorporate elements of mystery, drama, action, and horror, particularly psychological horror. They are usually books or films.”⁸

Emily has had one devastating past relationship before Adam. Similarly, Mitali in *Souten—The Other Woman* gets married after the accidental death of her lover. Her husband doesn’t pay heed to her needs and desires, somewhat like Adam neglecting Emily.

The novel as well as the film under discussion focuses on a love triangle. The triangle in the novel involves Emily, her boyfriend Adam and his manipulative mother Pammie, whereas the triangle in the film involves mother Mitali, stepdaughter Sapna and Rajvir Singh. Both the mother and the daughter are in relation with the same guy. This is unlike anything else with respect to the storyline. In the novel, the mother is the villain, whereas in the film, the stepmother plays the role. What a combination! An evil mother and an evil stepmother. The basis of mother’s relation is lust, whereas the daughter’s is love.

The themes of both the works are a little strayed. Keeping the Indian context in mind, the subject of the film is somewhat bold. “*Souten* is the story of a woman who’s fast approaching middle age and seems desperate to live life to the fullest for perhaps one last time.”⁹

“*Souten* means ‘second wife’. In British culture, traditionally second wife is not allowed. Hence, second relation is called or addressed as ‘keep’. However, practically it does not have any exact term translation. ‘Step wife’ may explain it correctly.”¹⁰

The title of the film and the novel under discussion bear resemblance and are symbolic. The names of the characters are symbolic too.

Mitali is a name of Indian origin. It means *a beloved friend, a friendly and sweet woman*. It is a bond between friendship and love. The mother in the film is quite friendly with her stepdaughter.

Emily is a name of English origin and a variant of the Latin name *Aemilia*, derived from the Latin *Aemilius*, this being an old Roman surname which itself is derived from *Aemilius* meaning *rival, trying to equal or excel, emulating*. Emily, in the novel is a rival to Pammie. Adam is a character in the Bible who was the first man created by God. Emily feels that Adam is the first right man for her.

Following are the characteristics of the girls having the name *Emily* according to Urban Dictionary. "This girl is usually romantic and falls in love easily. *Emilys* are very soft on the inside, but they don't let their emotions show to just anybody. They usually hide their emotions for fear of affecting other people's happiness. *Emilys* are great and loyal friends and they can cheer anybody up.... She will keep all secrets you share private, and she will never let you down.... She has been through many hard times.... She is very insecure."

All these traits seem to apply on Emily Havistock.

Names of both the heroines Mitali and Emily rhyme.

In the film, Sapna's father asks her to follow her dreams and live her life as she desires. *Sapna* itself means *dream* in Hindi. The step mother is bent upon separating Raj, the dream boy from her by any means. In ***The Other Woman***, Pammie tries everything possible on this earth to let Emily's dream boy go away from her.

The secret of Raj is shared by both and Mitali tells Sapna that when they are not step, why *souten?* *Raj*, in Hindi, means *rule*. Here, Raj seems to rule over both women. *Rajvir*, an Indian originated name means *Hero of the Land*. In the film, he is the hero of both women. With a slight deviation from the word *Raj*, *Raaz* means *secret*. Sapna tells Raj that whenever she is with Mitali, instead of love, a feeling of hate for him overcomes her.

Mitali even brings another boy Samir to be introduced to Sapna. In Indian languages, the name means *gust of wind* or *gentle breeze*. But the daughter is not swept away by him.

When Raj's sister-in-law tries to bring Mitali on the moral track, she retorts saying that she wants to live at the present and any punishment is acceptable to her after death. She also tells her husband that he has already murdered her and she is bored to death. When Raj tries to break away from her, she tells him that he will not find anyone who so desperately loves him. Also, she says that she is aware of the reality that he will go far from her. At this, the boy says that he doesn't want to inflict any pain upon her and she responds saying that she is accustomed to tolerate pain. The daughter's name is Sapna, and the mother wants to be the reality, not *Sapna (the dream)*. The daughter pleads her to forget all that had happened, but she says that Raj is related to their present.

Sapna blames Raj saying that they were just 'step', it is he who went to the extent of making them *souten*.

Pammie is originally Greek. It is a version of Pamela. "The Elizabethan poet Sir Philip Sidney, thought it to be based on the Greek *meli*, meaning *honey* or *honeyed*."¹¹

The mother-in-law in the novel stings like the bee who produces honey. She seems to be an evil mother, whereas Mitali is an evil step mother. The choice of names seems to be deliberate and meaningful in both the works, not random.

James means *supplanter*, one who follows. A supplanter takes the place of someone that was there first. In the novel, James pursues Emily and tries to be in Adam's place.

One of the meanings of Rebecca is *binding* (of an agreement or promise) involving an obligation that cannot be broken. Rebecca, here, must be binding. On the contrary, Adam not only breaks the bond, but also kills her.

The name *Poppy* has a Latin origin meaning *red flower*, symbol of hope, including hope for a positive future and a peaceful world. It is also a symbol of remembrance for those who have died in conflict. In the novel, Emily's daughter Poppy is the only hope for her future. Towards the conclusion also, she lets Adam return thinking that her daughter needs a father, though he doesn't deserve any place in her life. Emily, too, seems to be dead in the conflict, and her daughter is a symbol of remembrance for her. Many poppies contain alkaloids and are a source of drugs. To Adam, his daughter may be just the result of his addiction.

Both the novel and the film rest on the 'twist' more than the matter.

The twist is different than the expected and surely places things in an altogether different scenario. An essential scene immediately after the intermission when Mitali tells Sapna about the passionate relation she had with Raj, is a turning point in the story.

Towards the end, the mother feels guilty and gets the daughter united with Raj. This is like giving a new birth to the stepdaughter. The film concludes with Mitali's death at the hands of her own husband. The 'evil' woman has to be punished. May be it's the beginning of a new life for her too.

"A woman's experiences of life as a member of a gender-biased society formulate her psyche. Moreover, she is circumferenced by certain other factors such as her individual circumstances and society's expectation related to age, creed, class and race."¹²

'One is not born, but becomes a woman.' This excellent line appears in Simone de Beavoir's book *The SecondSex*(1949) which is of major importance.

Adam treats Emily like filth. The mother-in-law's attitude is even worse. Emily feels that she is a psycho. She wants to stop their wedding by any means and screams at Emily to just leave Adam. She warns her about his behavior before the wedding and says that no man is worth that. Also, she questions if she can imagine his behavior after their union.

The novel is full of suspense with characters that are to be despised by the readers. Emily has a strong temptation for Adam's very charming younger brother James. She makes an effort to discuss things with him. When she asks him what can be done about his mother, he comments: "Her bark's worse than her bite. She'll come around."

According to Beth Kanell, "This is much more aggressive than even the darkest Agatha Christie. And *The Other Woman* proves conclusively that Hitchcock's talent for threat and horror in the unfolding of each scene can just as well emerge in this up-to-date and clever London author."¹³

Throughout the novel, Emily is living under a threat as Pammie is so horrific to her. She seems to descend from Hell. But anyway, it must be genuine feeling as she is going to marry Adam, overlooking 'the otherwoman' in his life, as well as his attractive brother. The tension is built up in both the novel and the film to the breaking point. There is an omnipresent sense of intrigue throughout the works and a gradual realization. Emily starts realizing that Adam may not be as perfect as she believed, whereas Mitali also has a self realization towards the conclusion and steps on the moral track.

"The morality of novel stirs the inner emotions of man: Novels, on the contrary, can portray personalities and feelings with such intensity and detail that no other kind of literature can produce so profound an aversion to vice and love of virtue. The morality of novels dependsmore upon the unfolding of the inner emotions of the heart than upon the events they relate."¹⁴

"The novel must deal with aspects of reality that many may not consider to be morally good."¹⁵

What happens as *The Other Woman* progresses is quite shocking and unbelievable. It is really so hard to detect the ending.

Emily's wedding plans are shattered due to Pammie's claim of suffering from cancer which is unbelievable. She finds out that Pammie is actually not undergoing any treatment. Upon seeing an inhaler and Adam's ex girlfriend Rebecca's picture, Emily believes that the woman is suffering from chronic mental disorder and has murdered Rebecca. When she enquires Pammie about her fake disease, she blackmails her saying that if her son comes to know about it, she will expose her crush on James.

Then Emily gets pregnant. Both Adam and his mother are not happy with the news. He does not even pay too much attention when she delivers the baby, Poppy. All the time he is drinking and freaking out with his companions. During James's wedding ceremony, Emily finds Adam with another woman. Instead of feeling guilty, his words imply that he has been in relation with others too.

"Having an affair, for some men, causes an addiction to 'the other woman'. The same kind of addiction that some have for alcohol or opioids. And, once the addiction takes hold most men find it almost impossible to extract themselves from the affair."¹⁶

The word *addiction* has many synonyms such as craving, habit, weakness, compulsion, fixation etc. On the day of her daughter's baptism, she is taken aback by Pammie's appearance, and now her claims about the disease are true. At this point, Pammie wants to apologize, but Emily turns a deaf ear to her.

After this, while in bed, she is disturbed by terrible noise. So, she climbs down the stairs and receives a call from Pammie. She tells her not to let Adam enter as he has come to know about her and James. She retaliates angrily and opens the door. He starts hitting her badly till they hear the daughter crying. Then Pammie enters with James, informing them that the police are heading towards their place.

To an utter dismay, Pammie justifies her actions throughout by telling Emily that whatever she did to her was for letting her go away from her son, but not for any evil intention. She also discloses that Adam killed his ex girlfriend by keeping the inhaler from her, and she herself is a witness to it. She was scared that he would repeat the same with her as he is an evil, abusive man, flirting around. He was trying to scare her away. Pammie didn't tell Emily anything as she assumed that Adam had witnessed how she had killed his father. Adam had also revealed to Emily on the same day that his father used to abuse his mother all the time. Pammie tells Emily that after a terrible physical abuse, she pushed Adam's father and he hit his head. She was scared as she believed that Adam had witnessed the scene and would disclose everything if she opened her mouth about Rebecca. But actually, not Adam, his younger brother was present there.

The epilogue shows that Adam goes to prison for murder and Emily becomes his mother's friend. Pammie doesn't think she has to live for too long.

In *Souten*, Mitali's husband Ranbeer ends her life. *Ranbeer*, in Hindi, means *a person of authority*. Finally, the husband here seems to make use of his authority over her. As it is, he spends more time in hunting than taking care of his wife. In *The Other Woman*, Adam not only murders his ex girlfriend, but also ruins Emily's life completely which is no better than death. Conflict in relationships has been portrayed in both the works.

"God created the world and He also created men and women. And thus perhaps might have started numberless series of stories. These stories handed down from one generation to the other also contributed to the enrichment of literature. Literature, as the exponents believe is the record of lived and unlived experiences shaping, soaking and satiating mankind in all ages. What makes literature more vibrant is the delineation of women in it. The depiction of women in art, literature and cinema from time to time exhibits their responses to the upcoming challenges and also sheds light on their longing and wishes which could not get their outlets sometimes because of the limitations of the system and sometimes also because of too much rigidity and resistance."¹⁷

Addressing woman from the East or the West as *the other* is no more a trend, but complete submission from her is expected in almost every society. I shall conclude with the hope that *she* has an identity of her own in the modern and the post modern era.

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