



# **Title- Gangubai Kathiawadi: A Journey from being a Victim to be a Victorious.**

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## **Abstract**

Popular Culture is the most widely celebrated form of literature in modern time as it has the access to each and every class of the society. Among various forms of popular culture, cinema plays the most vibrant role in affecting the society. As far as Indian cinema is concerned, a number of movies come every year and inspire almost every kind of emotion in people. Among these movies Gangubai Kathiawadi claims a remarkable place for its grip over the age long issue of the male dominated society. The movie came in Feb 2022 and gained a worldwide fame to the director Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The present research paper attempts to bring out the struggle of a deprived woman with the formula victim to victory.

**Keywords:** Popular Culture, Indian Cinema, Prostitution, Brothel of Kamathipura, Legalization

Popular culture is the most prominent area of research in the present scenario. However, before going through the research related to popular culture, it is must to know what the word popular culture stands for. 'Popular culture is the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that embody the most broadly shared meanings of a social system. It includes media objects, entertainment and leisure, fashion and trends, and linguistic conventions, among other things.'

To make it clearer, it also can be said that 'Popular culture is essentially a set of beliefs, values, actions, objects, or goods and practices that are popular at any given time and space in society. It can refer to things like art, literature, fashion, dance, film, television, magazines and ways of living to name a few.'

Among these various forms of popular culture, films or cinema are the most widely known and celebrated form of enjoyment which has the immensity of acceptance, experiment, criticism, exemplification and the capacity of convincing at each level, from surface to depth, from lower to high, from literate to illiterate, from rural to urban, from sports to politics, from household to common mass, from religion to caste, from theist to atheist, from love to hate, including each and every emotion of human life.

As far as Indian cinema is concerned, a number of movies come every year and inspire almost every kind of emotion in people. However, some of them are made purely with the purpose of entertainment and some are made to give valuable lessons to people as a mass. On seeing the infinite popularity of this form of popular culture, cinema or movies share the social responsibility at a larger scale and we come across a few remarkable movies which give meaningful messages related to the conscious and ways of the society. Among such movies, one is Gangubai Kathiawadi which came in February 2022. This film was directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and is based on the novel Mafia Queens of Mumbai: Stories of the women from the ganglands (2011) by Hussain Zaidi with original research by reporter Jane Borges. The present research paper talks about the development of the character of Ganga bai, who plays the key role in the movie. The paper describes her struggle to rise from the cursed situation of a deprived girl to a respected leader of the unprivileged women of Kamathipura.

The film starts with a scene where a 13–14-year-old girl is kept as a prisoner in a brothel of Kamathipura. Here Gangubai comes to rescue the girl and tells her own story to the minor. By this story we come to know that when she was brought there in Kamathipura, she was Ganga Jagjivandas Kadhiwadi, instead of Gangubai and was sixteen-year-old girl who wanted to make a career in Hindi cinema (Bollywood). In the pursuit of her dream, Ganga is trapped in a love affair with Ramnik Lal (28-year-old). Ganga elopes with Ramnik for Bombay (now Mumbai), taking the valuable things from her house, but she is sold by Ramnik to Leila Masi who runs a brothel in Kamathipura, the oldest red-light area of Mumbai. A lively description of Kamathipura is given here in the movie.

Once Ganga understands that now she is stamped with the name of Kamathipura and now there is no space for her in the world outside of Kamathipura, she accepts her destiny and embraces her new identity as Gangubai, given to her by her first client. Though she starts living as a whore but still have the spark of life in her conscious which is visible time to time. This spark can be seen clearly in her demand of a holiday for the women in brothel and in challenging the

authority of Sheila Masi, against her inhuman behaviour towards the women in brothel. Being a whore, Gangubai has to bear the cruelty of her clients in form of physical violence, but she does not surrender before this cruelty and fights for her rights as a whore fearlessly. For this purpose, she asks for the help from Karim Lala which reveals her unprejudiced mind for the male community of the society. She is the character who is free from the shadow of male members of the society. As Sakshi Sharda says in her review:

“Nowhere in the duration of the two hours does the focus of the storyline shift from the woman. No single male character becomes central or essential to the plot. There is the presence of both the scorned and the supportive lover, the protecting and benevolent brother, and a guiding male friend. But unlike previous mass productions, these presences don’t overpower the woman’s narrative.”

It is the courage and leadership qualities of Gangubai which inspire the other women of brothel to make her the new Madam of the brother just at the age of 27, after the death of Sheila Masi. On getting this position, Gangubai becomes more active and concerned for the women of her brothel and of the whole Kamathipura. Out of this concern, Gangubai decides to participate in the election as a leader and get victory over Razia in election.

As a good leader, she understands the tricks and ways of politics and implies them in order to control her opponents, whether it is about to bribe the police, win the election, rescuing the new girls in Kamathipura or getting the power as a Mafia Queen. Holding political, financial, and physical power is necessary in order to change the miserable condition of the women in Kamathipura and this fact is well understood by Gangubai.

Along with all these oddities, Gangubai experiences herself the problems associated with Whore Stigma and continues to fight against this in the form of fight against

1. Social exclusion.
2. The shame experienced by the families.
3. The limited opportunities and education for prostitutes’ children.
4. The restricted access to healthcare.

In her speech at Azad Maidan, she speaks against this social exclusion.

“You lose your dignity once, it’s gone forever. We sell our dignity every night, yet it doesn’t seem to run out ... No matter what you think, we’re women in integrity ... No matter who turns up at our doorstep, you don’t judge them. It’s our principle. We don’t ask your religion or caste.

Dark-skinned, light-skinned, rich or poor, everyone pays the same rate. When we don't discriminate among people ... Why do you discriminate against us? Why are we excluded from your society?" (Bhansali, 2022, 2:09:10)

In her speech she attacks on the hypocrisy of the society and asks the audience about the need of brothel and simply explains the rule of demand and supply. 'Until the demand is there, the supply will be there.' She raises the voice for the women in the prostitution not to be dealt as a mere commodity.

Once Gangubai connects with her family over phone and tries to talk to her mother, but her mother denies talking to her and disconnects the phone without showing any concern for Gangubai. This is the moment when Gangu feels herself completely excluded from the society when her own mother denies identifying her because of the fear of shame in the society.

As a true leader of the deprived women of Kamathipura, Gangubai develops herself as a moral being. She lives her life for a purpose, which is the betterment of the women of Kamathipura and becomes an embodiment of sacrifice. Gangubai sacrifices her love for Afsaan, to save Roshni from the world of prostitution. She becomes a living example of empathy and friendship. She cares for the women of her brothel and gets the bank accounts opened for them. She takes the children of her brothel to school to get admission for them in school and gives her own name as the mother of all the children. She fights for the education of these children. As she herself lives her life as a part of the prostitution industry, she experiences all the problems of this profession and seeks for the solutions of them which she finds in the legalization of prostitution. In her meeting with the Prime Minister of India she tries to convince Prime Minister and asks for the same:

"Legalize prostitution! ... But as long as society exists, so will prostitution. As we speak, some girl is being sold off or someone is buying her. The seller and buyer should be punished, but who gets the punishment? That innocent girl." (Bhansali, 2022, 2:20:28)

Gangubai is the one who takes the responsibility of her friend Kamli's newborn daughter after her death because of the restricted access to healthcare during Kamli's complicated situation after giving birth to a girl child and Gangubai assumes herself as the mother of the newborn. Not only this, when Gangubai was brutally injured because of the physical violence of one of her clients, she was not treated well by the nurses and her bed was shifted into a dark area of the hospital just because of being a whore. These experiences leave a life long bitter impressions on the conscious of Gangubai and she continues to fight for the rights of prostitutes

on various fronts including the fight for the residence of the women of Kamathipura. Her communication with Prime Minister reveals the extreme hardships of the lives of these women where she says to Prime Minister:

“No one can understand what we go through. Not even God himself. All our rights have been taken away from us. Be it a school or a hospital, bank or queue at a grocery store .... A mother’s love, a father’s protection, we are deprived of it all. Now even our home is being taken away from us. They want us to vacate Kamathipura/ They have even dragged us to court!” (Bhansali, 2022, 2:21:00)

She wins the case in court and gets the houses of the 4000 women of Kamathipura secured for the years to come.

To conclude, it can be said that the character of Gangubai is enlightened with high moral consciousness. She has the world in her eyes and the depth and quietness of sky in her thoughts which is visible in her conversation with Afsaan:

“Which white should I choose? As white as the moon? Or as white as the clouds? As white as paper? Or as white as a white rose? As white as snow, or as white as salt? As white as milk? Or as white as seashells? As white as the streams, or as white as sand? Or as white as smoke?” (Bhansali, 2022, 53:40)

Afsaan’s reply reveals the heights of Gangubai’s character when he says, “As white as swan.” This answer supports Gangubai’s virtuousness and integrity towards the purpose of her life. The time when she, as an adolescent, stepped out of her house with Ramnik, she had a dream in her eyes to be a heroine in the Bollywood films, however by the age of maturity, she has secured a place of heroine in the hearts of people, by her struggle, determination, sacrifice, motherly affection, success, and achievements in her life. She is the one who proves the formula of victim to victory through the path of life. First, she fights for her own existence in a brothel with a certain acceptance for the reality, secondly, she demands to be treated as the other human beings, along with other women of brothel, thirdly she accepts the responsibility of taking care of the women of her brothel and agrees to be Madam at the age of twenty-seven. Fourthly, she wins the election and fights for the power to do better for the women prostitute of the whole Kamathipura. Lastly, she goes to the Prime Minister even to ask for the rights of women

prostitutes and secures the house for these women for the years to come. She is remarkable in getting the image of an ideal in the hearts of her opponents even. She loves the Jasmine flowers, and she is welcomed by the Jasmine flowers by a huge crowd when she comes back from Delhi. She has developed herself as a highly moral character who can be an inspiration and a guiding light during the struggle of any woman.

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