

# WALKING TOUGH

Despite the controversial Slutwalk, the gender scene remained a grey area



**DEMANDING DIGNITY:** Cutting across age and gender, more than 200 protesters took part in the 'Slutwalk Arthaat Besharmi Morcha'

By Nonika Singh

**S**TREET was the new stage not only for the Anna Hazare team but also for feminists of varying hues, shapes and sizes. So as the off-the-cuff remark of Canadian police officer: "Women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised," sparked off a series of protests worldwide, what came to be known as SlutWalks, India, too, picked up a cue.

While the first such protest was held in Bhopal, in Delhi close to Jantar Mantar the Besharmi morcha (so rechristened in India) even included a street play to draw attention of the people to sexual violence. But did India care? If it had, two young boys Keenan Santos and Reuben Fernandes wouldn't have lost their lives in an eve-teasing brawl in Mumbai. As the bravehearts, who were trying to take on eve-teasers were stabbed to death, murmurs of protests were heard. A Facebook campaign was also launched. But India, which was adjudged the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women by a poll survey of Reuters Thompson Foundation on the 'state of affairs of women in the country,' didn't become any safer for the fairer sex by the close of the year. A court in Uttar Pradesh may have sentenced eight men in Mathura for "honour killings", but the barbaric practice continued with alarming regularity throughout the year.

On gender issues, society retained its classic stance of one step forward and two backwards. So while the overall sex ratio may have picked up, the child sex ratio registered the worst-ever figures since Independence, that of 914 girls to 1000 boys. Blame it on ultrasound machines, unscrupulous doctors or obsessive preference for sons, daughters were nobody's babies. Yet the same India from where millions of girls have simply vanished before they could see the light of the day, rejoiced at the birth of Aishwarya and Abhishek Bachchan's baby girl. Yet another girl who brought cheer was Shonan Kothari, who made Mumbai-kars, my Indians, dance to her tunes. The 23-year-old was behind Mumbai's flash mob, a phenomenon in which a group of people assemble suddenly at a public place, perform an unusual act for a brief time, often for the purpose of entertainment. That her impromptu dance performance came a day after the anniversary of 26/11, perhaps, wasn't lost on many. Among others, she won the admiration of Abhishek Bachchan, who tweeted—"I wish I could shake a leg too." While other Bollywood celebrities like Vidya Balan were busy shaking off the dust raised by controversies, once again, Aamir Khan emerged as the real icon. This time not of filmhood but of surrogacy. As he and his wife Kiran openly and candidly admitted to have parented a baby boy through a surrogate, the world gaped in awe. Experts believe that he could give big push to surrogacy laws in India which, though intensely debated in Parliament, continue to be in the grey area.

A draft Bill on fixing 16 years as the age of consent for sex was prepared. Yet when Indo-Canadian porn star Sunny Leone made her entry on *Big Boss Season 5*, moralists were outraged and accused her and the channel of pushing youth on to pornographic sites. 'No sex please, we are Indians' remained the public face of the country, which otherwise celebrated the birth of world's seven billionth baby, and where 42,000 babies are born every day. Nevertheless, India, the land of contradictions, remained the toast of international celebrities as Lady Gaga and Tom Cruise came, railed and craved through the parties of the rich and the famous.



**SEX SELLS:** Playing the character of Silk Smitha in *The Dirty Picture*, Vidya Balan mouths slang with much ease

# (NOT) FIT TO PRINT

The liberal use of profanities and cuss words in many films topped the charts. Interestingly, these were mouthed more by the women characters, which surprisingly found a tacit approval

By Vandana Shukla

**T**HE sex quotient of the urban society grew exponentially by 'e\*\*s' and 'g\*\*s'. Expletives could never have received such cultural acceptance in the middle-class urban India, had it not been for a few cult movies released this year, whose sole claim to fame was a liberal use of the profane. And, for a change, these were uttered by pretty damsels in Hindi.

A young widow of desirable dreams, played to perfection by Vidya Balan in *Ishqiya* uttered "e\*\* #%" sulphate to put both her good-for-nothing suitors in their place. She cussed in such sexy disdain of the male world that it gave the women of the patriarchal land a kind of cuss anthem. Whatever "e\*\* #%" sulphate meant, the sheer contemptuousness of the sound of it filled damsels mouthing it with a sense of liberation.

Not that women had not uttered expletives before, they were used to cussing under their breath fearing social ostracism. Now when they utter "e\*\*%", they make sure they are heard in its complete phonetic and semantic glory. This is unusual, because using profanities has been a male prerogative, since all profanities are aimed at women.

Last, when a woman was heard cussing openly was in Gulzar's *Mausam*, released in 1975. But the character of Chandni played by Sharmila Tagore was that of a prostitute, and even she could not go beyond *sule* and *haramkade*, which are rather inoffensive, compared to what the women want the world to hear from them, now.

In *No One Killed Jessica*, a petite, pretty anchor, piqued by a fan's irritat-

ing praise of the Kargil war coverage, feels pushed to her limits when the fan gushes how he 'enjoyed' watching the coverage. Rani Mukerji, who played the anchor, retorts, "*sule to wahan hoto to teri e\*\*% e\*\*% leath me an jiti.*" It makes her co-passengers gape in disbelief, while she asks the airhostess for a copy of a newspaper, nonplussed. This was neither a woman from a *chavli* nor a hooker, but a sophisticated, educated woman using such slang, which was not considered 'propah' a few years back. But women in stressful situations have found legitimacy in cussing. It works as a kind of stress buster. It also reflects heightened assertion of their confidence — they care too hoos for what the world thinks of them!

In *The Dirty Picture*, once again Vidya Balan, in her unapologetic avatar of a southern sex siren of the 1980s, mouths slang with a great ease. Essaying the role of Silk Smitha, a woman who knew her sexuality was desired by men and would pave her way for success, utters, "*mere maathe par e\*\*% likha hai?*" to the man she loves and knows is exploiting her. The dilemma of the daring character on a fast track seeking both success and love, and her lingo of frustration finds an echo among the urban classes of 2011.

But, the film that topped the liberal use of profanities was *Delhi Belly*, with its deceptively sleek title. Since it was a guys' movie that revolved around the anxiety of getting laid, it was littered with dirty talk. The movie's songs "*Bhag bhag DK Bose*" and "*Ja chudai!*" courted



**PROFANITY PAYS:** With more cuss words than dialogues, *Delhi Belly*, a guys' movie that revolves around the anxiety of having sex, topped the list of films littered with expletives

controversy, and the film opened the ears of the Indian society, and helped it hear the way it speaks in crowded lanes, traffic jams and in bedrooms, removing cobwebs of imposed decency.

The expletives carried more shock value for the language they were uttered in. It hurts less if you use the f... word, in English, the moment you translate it to the vernacular, for some strange reason, it acquires higher decibels of profanity for the urban sensibility.

Perhaps, it was a deliberate attempt on the part of the film makers, so obsessed with everything English — from the

locales to the costumes, to their perpetual 'I love you' and 'I hate you' leitmotif, which never gets translated into the vernacular. But, the expletives do.

As though, dialogues littered with cuss words could not reflect enough realism of our times, Kausik Chatterjee's Bengali film "e\*\*% — *The Lover* has an unprintable title. The film with the unprintable title has been making rounds in the major film festivals. Though, at Berlin Film Festival, some people walked out in protest. After all, there is a difference between a nude painting and a porn film. And, between the printable and the f\*\*###.

**WHEN EVERYBODY WENT GAGA**

Many A-list celebrities from the West made a beeline for India, which despite a limping economy, remains a toast for Hollywood. The guest list included Lady Gaga, Shakira, Tom Cruise, Akon, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie and Paris Hilton.

**EVE-TEASING GETS FATAL**

Two young boys Keenan Santos and Reuben Fernandes lost their lives in an eve-teasing brawl in Mumbai. The bravehearts were stabbed to death, while trying to take on the eve-teasers.

**A SALUTE TO SURROGACY**

More power to Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao for candidly admitting to having a baby through a surrogate. Unlike celebrities for whom usually the image is supreme, this power couple proved that being truthful always scores.

**GRANDDAUGHTER'S DAY OUT**

Despite the skewed sex ratio, the whole nation celebrated the birth of Ashwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachchan's baby girl.