

A STUDY ON FEMINISM IN INDIAN-HINDI CINEMA

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Abstract:

Indian- Hindi Cinema plays a significant role in constructing the image of women in today's India. Women's participation, performance and portrayal in Hindi cinema are the three important dimensions of study of today's. Over past decades Bollywood-Indian cinema has witnessed a major transformation in the way women are portrayed through films. Because for the empowerment and development of the women section, it is very important to give them proper environment where they can raise their voices against the inequalities and the gender-gap they are experiencing in male dominated or patriarchal societies. This study focuses on the construction of women characters in popular Hindi language cinema and considers the changes in these constructions over time & deals with representations of women characters in Bollywood -Indian cinema. It is appropriate to examine this issue because women are a major chunk of the country's population and hence their portrayal on screen is crucial in determining the furtherance of already existing stereotypes in the society. In conclusion, it will find whether mainstream Hindi cinema has been successful in portraying Indian women in different shades in a society dominated by patriarchal values. Improving the status of women, in every aspect, is regarded as the only way to eradicate this gender gap and achieving a better quality of life for the women.

Keywords:

Hindi Cinema, Bollywood, Feminism

Introduction

In Indian- Hindi cinema there is the need to look at the construction of women characters, because it is the construction that perpetuates Indian society and creates a following. Construction of women characters not always clearly study changes over a period of time. With the turn of the century, new global challenges & global markets opening to the Hindi-cinema. Bollywood is a term associated with the prolific Hindi-language film Industry centred in

Bombay. The term Bollywood is however, often incorrectly used to refer to the whole of Indian cinema. It is only one of several Indian film industries and more specifically refers to Hindi-language cinema (Ali, 2017).

The issues of sex and gender are the common suppositions of postmodern, which are very much realistic and practical in their respective approaches. The Feminist approach of interpreting the text started as the post-modern responses of all these things and dealt with all these issues in the form of art and architecture. Feminist anthropologists Francis, Mascia, Lees, Patricia Sharpe and Colleene Cohen (1989) attacked these studies for centring for the sexiest nature for the pretentious search of 'truth'. The concept that women have been created and defined as 'other' by men has long been argued and explored by the criticism of this kind. However, this concept of 'otherness' came basically by the writings of the middleclass white women from Europe and North America. Thus, the theory propounded by these scholars 'explained' women on the grounds of reality from all classes, races and cultures. The gender became a major division between man and women as the two different biological individuals, who became two social categories of men and women having the different social-psychological behaviour of their inherited genders. Thus, gradually gender became a cultural construct, instead of a biological distinction of men and women. And thus the characteristic features of behaviour are absolutely responsible for the creation of an art. Thus, an artist is a person, who can be judged on different grounds of these realities Both Pink-a recent Hindi movie and Adalat O Ekti Meye- a Bengali movie made in early 1980's has very carefully pictured the deliberate demeaning of woman as mere object of desire. This research makes a comparative study between the pre-liberalisation and post-liberalisation era on the portrayal of women in celluloid with reference to the role of cine-star, who otherwise helps in the branding of a movie. These visual texts under study have critiqued the patriarchal systems as being perpetrators of crime against women and the

complicity that consolidates women's peripheral status as secondary sex. However, due to differences in context, audience, advertisement strategies, cast and most importantly people's level of acceptability between the two movies, they were acknowledged differently (1Bonhomie India, 2020)

Notably the growth of Bollywood cinema over time, genres, films as cultural products, the negotiating forces between Indian government and film makers, the challenges of a global market, and the role of the Indian diaspora- these aspects were regarded as important for studying the construction of women characters in Hindi language cinema. Bollywood and other major cinematic hubs such as Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Oriya, Malayalam and Assamese constitute the broader Indian film industry, and have the largest output in the world in number of tickets sold. Hindi film industry has to cater for a vast, heterogeneous, cross-cultural audience that is not always entirely familiar with the hindi language or Indian culture.

In addressing multiple audiences locally and around the world, the bulk of Hindi-Masala films are constructed with frequent exhibition of colourful choreographed dances, daring flights, sumptuous sets, extravagant décor, dazzling costumes and iconic representation of dramatic tensions as a means of catering to diverse audience around the world (Ali, 2017).

Statement of the Problem:

Hindi cinema has long been welcomed as the watch dog of society and this tradition bestows upon them the social responsibility to mirror and guide the process of social change. But in contemporary India, Bollywood under various pressures have become the commercial channels only and failed to reflect the social problems or aspirations of the entire population, especially the problems faced by women. So, the portrayal of women in Indian-Hindi cinema, television programmes, visual advertisements or newspaper and magazines is becoming an area of great concern to the people having interest in social research and studies. There is an ongoing trend to portray women as commodity, sex objects and sometimes as victims.

Objectives

The paper aims to study the feminism of women characters as portray in popular Hindi language cinema, women in advertisement.

Review of related literature

The literature review examines scholarship on some of the key elements of Indian culture, politics and the socio-economy that had a bearing on this study. The study has drawn on the work of various scholars Gopalan (1997), Dasgupta (1988), Datta (2000), Ram (2002), Virdi (2003) and Dudrah (2006) who have examined the various aspects of the portrayal of women characters in Bollywood cinema.

In his study Ali stated that in Feminism in Indian cinema women characters in film such as Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, the manner in which the camera focuses on the body of newcomer Tina is explicitly demeaning for the female spectators. There is no logic in a woman who returns from abroad being dressed with such minimal clothing. This representation of women is becoming a norm in films of the new millennium. Even though women spectators 'cringe' when witnessing this portrayal of their gender, representations of women in this sordid manner are increasing and viewers are being allowed to use the cinematic space an acceptable space in which to 'gawk'. If one is to examine the changes in the construction of women characters from the voyeuristic perspective, then it is evident that there is still a strong reliance on the aspect of pleasing male viewers. In 70's and 80's, women were preservers of tradition, although not always willingly, the camera lens still panned over their bodies.

Amby from Salaam Namaste makes a conscious decision to pursue her own career path and then takes her decision a step further by settling down in a foreign country where she fend for herself, both socially and financially. Of note in this particular film is the depiction of the live-in-relationship and her conscious decision to engage in premarital sex. In contrast to the depiction of Amby is the depiction of Manorama from Prem Rog, who is portrayed as a victim of circumstance. In keeping with the ideologies of the nation and the perception of the traditional Indian woman, her fate is dictated by the patriarch of the family and she is bound to adhere to the customs and rituals that are imposed upon her.

Of particular interest, and worth mentioning are the similarities in the way that film-makers portray the male characters to 'rescue' the women from a number of different scenarios. Far back as 1971, the affluent Shahabuddin from the film Pakeezah rescues the love of his life Nargis from a brothel.

His nephew, almost two decades later, within the narrative of the same film, rescues Sahibjaan. Significantly both women yearn to be rescued and their spare time is pre-occupied with dreams of being rescued by their 'knights in shining armour'. In 1981, the character 'Umrao Jaan' filters and examines a string of lovers whom she hopes will rescue her from her dreary life at the brothel. Both Nargis and 'Umrao Jaan' do not find amity, but Sahibjaan is united with her lover. The film-makers of Umrao Jaan are bold in their depiction of the courtesan, whom they construct as having enough self-esteem to consider herself worthy of a life beyond the brothel. In the end the narrative of the film also gives in to the patriarchal societies and an ideology of the times and as a result, 'Umrao Jaan' is forced to suffer defeat at the end. In 2007, Jazz from Namaste London is portrayed as the 'liberated' new women. Jazz is insolent to the point that she candidly tells her father that her life is none of his business, and admits that she consumes alcohol. She is depicted as an individual without common courtesy and judgement. The film-makers then depict the hero as the man who must save her from herself. Despite the international locations away from India, representations of 'modern' are often depicted as being 'out of hand and the 'Western Way' as a result symbolises bad, while 'traditional' is the ultimate embodiment of good values.

Ta Ra Rum Pum, however, presents a distinctly different narrative. Ehen Radhika falls in love with RV and decides to marry him, she makes a conscious decision to leave her studies to become a full-time mother and wife. Of note is the fact that this decision is not imposed upon her by society or family within the narrative structure. Radhika is constructed as a pillar of strength, for her children as well as her husband and dies but ever doubt her life choices, even in the face of adversity.

Mother India (1957, Mehboob Khan), which was the first Hindi-language film ever to be nominated in the best foreign language film category at the Academy Awards in 1957. Mother India is considered by many as the cornerstone of Indian commercial cinema because of the way in which the glorified strength of a woman is commended. The film presents Radha as a woman who survives flood, famine and desertion by her husband. The film traces the bitter-sweet lives of an Indian peasant family as it struggles to survive in a rural community coming to terms with a country newly freed of British colonial rule. Mother India is the ultimate tribute to Indian womanhood.

Khamoshi (1969, Asit Sen) also deals with a protagonist, Radha, who epitomises the inner strength and resilience of an Indian woman.

In Satyam Shivam Sundaram (1978, Raj Kapoor), the heroine Rupa defines the true concept of beauty, for her husband who believes that beauty is only skin deep.

Rosie in Guide (1965, Vijay Anand and Tad Danielewski) dances like a woman possessed while singing 'Dil who challa' and standing in a cave cries, 'Main jeena chahati hoon', she speaks for millions of women who suppress their talent and languish in bad marriages.

Lajja (2001, Rajkumar Santoshi) raises an angry voice against Indian society's apathy towards dowry, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, male domination and female infanticide. Lajja is the story of tormented women wanting to break free.

The victimised courtesan Anarkali revolts and challenges the might of the Mughal monarchy while singing 'Pyar kiya to darna Kya?' More than the prince Salim, it is the poor tormented maiden who cries against injustice, tyranny and oppression. Prem Rog deals with issues of widow re-marriage and will be discussed in greater detail in comparison to Baabul (2006, Ravi Chopra), a film produced in the 21st century that deals with similar themes. The narratives of the selected films trace the ordeals and tribulations that women of the times faced (Ali, 2017).

In her book, the writer attacks not only the stereotyping but also the unethical and offensive representation of women in advertisement that work to their detriment and perpetuates an undesirable gender hierarchy. The author places her detailed analysis of individual ads---a whopping 2,000---against the backdrop of Indian societal, cultural and religious norms that reinforce patriarchy and the inherent violence in Indian society against women, be it through bride burning, rape, or a number of other ways. The author has reviewed ads over a 12-year period from 1994 to 2005, but she admits that the majority of the ads are from the 1990s, and her critical analysis raises some crucial questions that have troubled not only women but also social scientists cutting across gender. In the concluding chapter, the author presents a new code of ethics, challenging advertisers to re-examine their notions of gender in order to uphold women's inviolable right to be treated with respect and dignity (Schaffer, 2006).

In his article the writer S.S. Roy states that today globalisation has left deep impact upon the Indian nation. Open market system and privatisation have become the mantras behind the development of a

particular country like India. The writer focuses that the state relegates vast power on the hand of the private players. Of this, competitions are going to be usual thing among the producers of different markets. Everyone is trying to sale their products as soon as possible. So, they are busy with various manipulating activities to sale their products. According to the writer the companies busy with competition are using the faces and bodies of beautiful women to popularise their products. Everyday competition to become the best seller, they are using women in a cheap manner whether necessary or not. They are using women in the advertisements of cigarette, man's underwear, man's shaving cream etc. They are portraying women wrongly for their own purpose (S.S.Roy, 2014, June).

Discussion:

Discussion has been established that from as early as the 1960's, filmmakers have challenged the portrayal of women as stereotypes, and the 70's and 80's saw a substantial increase in the type of films with themes that explored the oppression and exploitation of women. In the early 1980's, women characters were portrayed as fending more for themselves and also making independent choices regarding their marital partners and work. The early 1990's saw the middle-aged woman being portrayed as emerging from the drudgery of domesticity with a new dream. She was now ready to express her desires and negotiate space for herself with her partner. The Indian woman of the 1990's took on characteristics that were less traditionally Indian and more associated with the Western world. Film-makers are consciously attempting to break gender stereotypes. This is evident in the narratives and the depiction of women characters in films like *Salaam Namaste* and *Ta Ra Rum Pum*. These films were successful at the box office proves that audiences are not as bound to traditional and cultural ideologies as they were in the past. The talented actresses of the times performed in films that presented power-packed and path-breaking roles that aided in igniting social awareness against the discrimination, injustice and prejudices to which women are subjected. In addition, Bollywood film-makers have had to deal with the inevitability of the association with western feminism as a result of the challenges to Indian feminism posed by globalization. Very often, feminism is wrongly interpreted to be sexual freedom, or to be directly proportional to modernity. It has been noted through studies that women characters are often stripped of all realistic human and social complexities, thus ending up on

screen as stereotypes. The ideal women in Bollywood cinema, as also traditionally been a controlled, chaste, surrendering individual, who is not afraid of making a sacrifice. The 'bad' woman on the other hand, has been depicted as westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. It is also noted that Bollywood film industry has repeatedly reinforced the notion that the glory of ideal Indian womanhood lies in the tolerance shows toward society and men, even when she is unjustly treated and brutally victimised. It has been ascertained that commercial Hindi cinema relies on voyeurism, it creates tension between how women feel and how men react to the way in which women are dressed or presented as sexual objects. In the specific case studies in this report of the 70's and 80's, the camera lens often focused on the bodies of the prostitutes, spotlighting dress, movements, and eyes if the heroines which playfully teased the audience members. Years later and more specifically in new millennium, the same camera lens still focuses on portraying women in part as voyeuristic objects to entertain audiences.

The turn of the century has brought new global challenges together with more global markets opening to the Hindi cinema industry-Bollywood. The Bollywood industry is also influenced by the accelerating flow of people, technologies, images, and ideas across the globe coupled with advances in communication and information technology. Liberalization, as well as the impact of the NRI community, are factors that play a part in the shaping of current Bollywood ideologies. Films of the new millennium deal with the struggles which women characters have to deal with currently. These films suggest that Indian women are not a monolithic and oppressed entity anymore. As a result, the heroines of today are facing new challenges and film-makers are using the realities of their lives to create narratives that attempt to satisfy audiences who are searching for a means to see their own stories of migration and displacement written into these films (Ali, 2017)

In studying these films, a baseline for the study of the changing construction of women character is established so that a comparison can be drawn when examining films of more recent years. In an era of globalisation, the media have taken on new importance as a symbol of the nation and cultural identity in India. The process of globalisation serves as a catalyst for the remaking or reworking of existing gender divisions. However, this transformation process raises questions relating to the capacity and changing role of the woman, both

as audience member and as film character. Bollywood films are made to attract audiences outside India because of the NRI (Non-resident Indian) phenomenon. Hindi-language cinema plays an important role in maintaining continuity for their dislocation.

Clearly, the 'contemporary' women characters depicted in recent films are not bound by ideologies of the nation, nor are they constrained by 'traditional' values and ideals. Instead, the heroines of today are depicted as women for whom the need for distinctive identities, economic self-sufficiency and education are essential components of liberation. The heroines of the new millennium, in direct contrast to the heroines of times before, are depicted as exceptionally vocal in terms of their needs and desires and the choices that they make as to the direction that they envisage their lives moving.

Conclusion

At the conclusion, it is known to everybody that Indian society is a patriarchal society, patriarchy is established in everywhere and every aspects of life, and unfortunately Indian-Hindi cinema is not exception to that. Hindi cinema is still dominated by the male and in all the higher posts men are employed and they by controlling the whole system of media try to depict the picture of women as weak and inferior in front of the whole world.

It is evident that the construction of women characters in Bollywood films has changed over the years driven by the demands of a global market. Women all over the world have become more independent, and less connected to their traditional roles within the household and society. The depiction of women characters has also changed in the sense that they are being increasingly represented as individuals who are not bound by the cultural norms of any specific society or ideology. Since film-makers depict women characters as having choices, many narrative structures incorporated issues of cultural identity into their scripts. As a result, many women characters combine issues of Western and Indian, therefore there is still an element of cultural identity prevalent in the film-maker's agenda. While the Western/Indian binary is constantly being interrogated, and the depiction Feminism in Indian Cinema.

Over the years film-makers, notwithstanding the considerable changes in other domains of women's unchanging exploration of women's bodies, in

examining the portrayal of women from a self-actualisation perspective, women characters are depicted as being more independent and fending for themselves. Following this trend, as delineated in this paper, films of the new millennium increasingly construct women characters as individual carriers of their own destinies. They are portrayed as being self-actualised in terms of tending to their own needs and in relation to external factors; their lives are not subject to being dictated to by cultural norms and traditions. Clearly, Bollywood cinema has made great strides in changing the construction of women characters over the years (Ali, 2017).

While the figure of the courtesan still remains pivotal to the Bollywood conception of the heroine. Over the years, feminism in India has struggled against a patriarchal society in which women have faced oppressive gender restrictions. Women presents a new code of ethics, challenging advertisers to re-examine their notions of gender in order to uphold women's inviolable right to be treated with respect and dignity. Advertising Companies are portraying women wrongly for their own purpose.

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