

GENDER AND MAINSTREAM HINDI CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

Bollywood is one of the biggest film industries in the world. This paper analysis how gender is portrayed in Bollywood. It looks into how women are portrayed in Bollywood and how misogyny and casual sexism is prevalent in the industry. Misogyny is deep rooted in Bollywood. Women are reduced to decorative props. Roles played by women are often hyper-sexualised and objectified. This paper examines the movie *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety* a Bollywood comedy movie directed by Luv Ranjan. This movie is technically the third instalment of *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* a misogynist movie series meant only for a certain type of 'privileged' audience. This film was promoted with the tag Bromance VS Romance. The director uses the most simplistic logic in his films. Women are the enemy. My paper focuses on the female characters of the film and how they are represented as the root cause for all the problems men face. It also aims at exploring other viable alternative cinematic discourses and to provide a positive insight into a changing socio-cultural discourse.

Key words: Cinema, stereotype, women, Bollywood, patriarchal, feminist.

The film industry is one of the biggest industries of India. It is a very interesting area of research to understand the socio- cultural perspectives of today's India. Films are meant to entertain, take the viewer to a world that is harshly different from the real one. It's a world which provides them an escape from their mundane life. Films play a key role in moulding opinions, and reinforcing cultural values. The issue of identity and gender are being discussed all over. This paper is an attempt to understand the relationship between women and the film industry. While the film industry India is diverse, this paper is limited to the mainstream Hindi film industry known as Bollywood. In a way the film industry has influenced the social, cultural and political views of the people. While the other film industries are also very important when it comes to women representation, this paper is restricted to the popular Bollywood cinema. Bollywood has been a major point of reference for the Indian culture in this century. It has shaped and expressed the changed scenarios of modern India. It has influenced the way in which people perceive their own aspects of life. The movie that we discuss here has a specific point of view towards women. The analysis which follows tries to decipher this point of view. It also attempts to determine the way in which this film affects the women representing in Bollywood.

The ban on the documentary *India's Daughter*, based on the dreadful 2012 gang rape in New Delhi, prompted director Leslee Udwin to comment "My documentary is a drop of water on a stone and we should all globally hang our heads in shame if we don't stop the war on women"(Thacker). When the entire nation was caught in the issue of violence against women, Barkha Dutt, one of the leading journalists, discussed the ban of the documentary with Udwin at the Women in the World Summit, 2015 and made remarks regarding the position of women in the post-colonial socio-cultural context. She remarked with an unconventional approach that the repercussions of the incident could be viewed as a "moment of hope for women" (Thacker) Barkha Dutt pointed out that "gender is more complex than that, it cannot be put in a box" (Thacker). Unless Bollywood opens up to directors and filmmakers who portray the hard reality of our country, it'll continue to produce films which continue to feed on patriarchy.

Women in Bollywood are generally given a subordinate position within a rigid structured patriarchal discourse. This representation of women is often used as a selling point in these films. The audience likes to watch women in various songs in stereotypical images, and various costumes. It's true that the changing ideologies of the society have an impact on what is depicted onscreen and how it is depicted but another fact is that the patriarchal notions in our society are still the same. Women are still depicted in a way which satisfies the male gaze. Women are still stereotyped and this is achieved through the objectification of women. This helps them to compartmentalise women, and turn them into a fetish leaving no room to show the real women on screen. A glance on the history of Bollywood and the changing trends and ideologies may show that Bollywood has progressed over time in its representation of women. Western culture and globalization have a strong impact on the content of these films but a closer examination reveals that there is progress but women are still portrayed in the same old moulds. Women are westernised but this has resulted in turning them into a commodity to look at. Characters, situations and plots are largely driven by stereotypes. Bollywood is infamous for portraying women in stereotypical frames. The viewers want a certain stereotype and over the years this has become an easy option for filmmakers to create such characters. Although some filmmakers are trying to break these stereotypes, the process has been slow.

Bollywood, being one of the biggest film industries of India is a very interesting area of research as it not only impacts the trends and changes in filmmaking but also the socio-cultural norms of the society. However, to understand the role of women in this today's world and whether the role of Indian women has changed in the society it is imperative to trace the journey of women in the Indian society from the ancient times. Manusmriti, one of the ancient texts of Hinduism, states that "Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the male (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sexual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age: a woman is never fit for independence." (Manusmriti XI). Manu's portrayal of women is in harmony with the depiction of women characters in epics where they are obedient to their male counterparts, they always have to prove their chastity and purity when the society demands them to do so. Draupadi is forced to marry five husbands while Sita and Ahalya, without any role in the violation of the social codes, are commanded to prove their purity (one by being asked to walk

through fire and the other transforming into a stone). “Gender construction in India has its roots in Sita’s agnipariksha, Draupadi’s chirharan and Damayanti’s adherence to the pativrata code” (Indigenous Roots of Feminism 29) In colonised India women were ignorant because of illiteracy and were denied basic human rights. The social rites prevalent at that times like sati, female-infanticide, child marriage, polygamy was some of the ways in which women were suppressed by patriarchal impositions’ which attempted to deprive women of their basic freedom. The role of the woman was always of ‘sati-Savitri’, she is always seen as a part of ‘home’. The kitchen is her space. Even though in the post-colonial scenario where the Indian constitution assures equality of the sexes, it has still not become a reality. Therefore, the question that arises is what is the social reality regarding women. Has she been liberated or is she tied down by the age-old norms laid down by patriarchy? It this crucial stage when the women have so many layers and perceptions involved this paper is an attempt to look into the position of women through Bollywood.

Cinema is one of the most powerful media. It possesses the potential to combine entertainment with ideas. Bollywood has an enormous possibility and responsibility towards social development. This paper analysis the movie *Sonu ke Titu Ki Sweety*. It is a 2018 Indian Bollywood comedy movie directed by Luv Ranjan. It stars Nurshat Bharucha, Kartik Aaryan and Sunny Singh, it also features Alok Nath and Ishita Raj Sharma in supporting roles. The film is the fourth collab between Ranjan, Aaryan and Bharucha. The film received mixed reviews from critics; while most critics praised the humour, only *some* were critical of the misogynistic plot.

The film was promoted with the tag Bromance VS Romance. Ranjan the film’s director uses the most simplistic logic in his films. Women are the enemy. They are scheming, gold-diggers who get-off on torturing poor innocent men. If it was up to Ranjan he would have found a way to blame women for global warming too. *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*, which is technically the third instalment of *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* is a misogynistic movie meant only for a certain type of ‘privileged’ audience is a perfect example of why Bollywood does not need a director with such sheer ignorance.

Sonu and Titu have been buddies since childhood and almost brothers. The motherless Sonu even addresses Titu’s mom as “Mummy”. Titu is the pretty and gullible one, an innocent baby who keeps falling for manipulative, controlling women. Street-smart, wise Sonu sees these women for the witches that they are and has been saving Titu from the biggest evil in the world(women). The poison of society keeps dictating how the guys should live their lives so Sonu makes sure that his gullible friend is saved from the devil. The opening scene of *this movie* is of Sonu lecturing a man with a monologue that is intended to remind us of the monologues given to Aaryn’s characters in *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* 1&2. Thankfully this one is shorter, but it is a teaser to a standard Ranjan story that follows. The inside joke is also hilariously self-important seeing that while this director has enjoyed some success, he has yet to enter the mainstream consciousness.

When Titu gets desperate to marry Sonu asks why he wants to marry when he could just change his cook and measures could be taken for sex. I guess we have to grant it to Ranjan for frankly

acknowledging what most Indians look for in a wife. These two aren't lovers, Ranjan isn't brave enough to consider that, but they are emotional soul mates. They even get a song of loss and yearning -Tera Yaar Hoon Main meanwhile the women get to shake their butt in an Item number - Bom Diggy Diggy Bom Bom during which Sonu and Titu drum the butts of dozens of women who in turn shake those butts aimed at the camera, each other and the boys.

In the last scene, four men sit together dipping their feet in the pool, having whiskey talking about marriage and women as one of them exclaims: uparwale ne acchi ladki banana hi band kar diya ha. Only the uparwala knows what the ideal ladki is according to the director but none of the women (excluding mothers, ofcourse) are deemed worthy. Ranjan makes no bones about his desire to cash in on the deep-seated resentment towards women among the privileged frat-boy section of the film-viewing audience. He will continue to make such films and the audience will keep flocking to the theatres to watch the same old film with different songs.

This movie is a brilliant example of how women are still portrayed as the evil of the society in mainstream Bollywood movies. The portrayal of the women character as a gold-digger who wants to breakup the duo (Sonu and Titu) for no apparent reason is why Bollywood needs female centric movies. Movies where women are shown as equal counterparts to their male leads and not just mere love interests or gold-diggers.

The audience expect a certain stereotyped female lead, over the years it has become an easy option for filmmakers to make such characters. In a typical Bollywood film, the director relies on the outfit, mannerism and dialogues to differentiate between the sanskari and not so sanskari woman. In the 70's every time a woman pleaded 'bhagwan ke liye mujhe chhod do' to an evil villain, the audience burst into whistles. This sums up the mindset of the audience who loved to see women in subordinate roles. These women are often characterized as a girl who would wake up early, sing bhajans, and cook for her family. This good girl is the one whom the hero ultimately marries. 'Sacrifice' is innately linked with the role model of Indian women. Most of the memorable characters of the industry are submissive. Indian women have understood and "internalized patriarchy so well that she never complains – is further merged with the 'woman in the house' of post-enlightenment bourgeois society. Popular Indian cinema has constantly used the resultant 'ideal Indian woman'- productive, uncomplaining, kind, pragmatic, equally at home with Indian tradition and colonial and postcolonial) modernity – as the ultimate backup, representative of a cultural state of equilibrium that at times could serve as a signifier for entire family, society, or the nation"(Mehta 10 – 11)

The recent increase in female-centric film try to fill up the gap concerning the under-representation and misrepresentation of women in Bollywood. Feminist critique of cinema has helped us view the reality presented by cinema in a very different way thus having contributed significantly to women's studies and film studies. The link between Women's studies and Cinema is evident. The feminist theory took up a unique stance in relation to the objectification, stereotyping, exclusion and silence of women in cinema. Although there exists a good number of filmmakers who try to

break stereotypes' in Bollywood, most female leads play the defined roles which force them to uphold the Indian values. These women are unidimensional. They are good or bad, white or black. There are rarely any shades of grey. As mentioned earlier, films are largely inspired by religion and mythology whereas women are showed as the epitome of virtue and values. Through these ideas of loyalty and obedience to the husband, Bollywood has institutionalized patriarchal values.

In the era of information overload, is it too radical to expect social consciousness from the film industry? Popular culture needs to be challenged and Bollywood can do it effectively if it exhibits some gender sensitivity. Films have to be responsive towards the context in which they locate women characters. They should possess the agency to dismantle the existing patriarchal power structure as well as negotiate their own position. It is time that Bollywood redefines women as objects of male gaze. These stereotypical characters should be replaced by characters who portray the true form of women. Bollywood should create a space for women free of stereotypes.

Conclusion

To conclude the paper, referring to the Indecent Representation of Women Prohibition Bill, 1986 might raise some questions and force us ponder further over the question of women representation in India. "Depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or of being derogatory or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public orality or morals" (Bose 101) is a punishable offence. The Bollywood movie chosen in this paper showcases the stereotypical type of roles women are shown in the main stream industry. Unless there is a significant change in the industry, this pattern will continue.

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