

Analyzing Portrayal of women in Bollywood Cinema

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyse women's portrayal in Indian cinema by conducting survey in Delhi, Delhi-NCR and Uttar Pradesh. Purpose was to investigate the interrelation of gender, women and cinema from old classical Bollywood to current Bollywood. This is qualitative and quantitative research which took display the change of role of women in Bollywood from 1950s to present. After describing the role of women in Indian society and the evolution of Indian cinema with special attention to emergence of women and representation of women on screen, study showed how women role changes from victimized to empowered ones. From the survey method, it can be concluded that in the early cinema women were portrayed to be well cultured according to Indian custom and if they show a character with modernised get up, the women would be portrayed as rude and arrogant. But in recent years have seen a happier curve for women in Indian cinema, as they no longer need a male superstar to invite audience to theatres. The women and their roles have evolved in Indian cinema.

Keywords: Bollywood • Indian Cinema • Women Character • Indian Society • Modern World •

Introduction

Cinema and Film are most common form of mass communication which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values. Cinema is believed to entertain to the viewer from all over a world and create a different world that is different from the real one, a world which provides escape from the daily grind of life. Cinema changes the mindset of the person and shape new cultural, social and political values.

In India, cinema has always been popular. Movies influences society in different ways and affects individuals' personal lives. Be it the clothes they wear, the way in which they speak, their social behaviour all affected by movies directly or indirectly. Indian cinema has changed from classic mythological blockbusters to "Bollywoodised" remakes of Hollywood's successful films. In the 1970s, Indian Cinema developed a more socially aware and more politically orientated form of cinema.

Women's image, status and role in society are reflected in cinema and have been present in even in popular Indian cinema almost right from the start. Films have been inspired to a large extent from religion and mythology whereby women characters were seen as the epitome of virtue and values, those who could do no wrong, ideas of loyalty and obedience to the husband, Hindi cinema successfully institutionalized patriarchal values. Films like *Dahej* (1950), *Devi* (1970), *Pati Parmeshwar* (1988), *Gauri* (1968) depicted women as passive, submissive wives and martyrs for their families. The study has shown images of women in cinema were a central concern during 1960s and 1970s, criticizing women's image in film and their roles in the film industry.

In films, they were being patronized in a manner that the victim wife refuses to leave her husband's house despite severe physical and emotional violence and rationale of leaving the marital house only at the time of her death. Over the time roles however have changed, from being dependent on their male counterparts to very independently carrying the storyline forward.

Sometime films are made for entertainment but it is often affecting women's intelligence and dignity. The interest in films taken by feminists raised

from the under-representation and misrepresentation of women in cinema.

There is a fundamental transformation in role of women in modern India with the gradual change in the perception of women in society and made great progresses towards equality in role in movies in recent decades. Way of portrait of women in cinema has been a major issue of debate in India. The complex and fascinating relationship between women and cinema has a substantial literature represent different aspects of women in Indian films.

Now modern India asks a few questions like how women are represented on screen, how women's issues are treated in cinema, what does feminism mean to film-makers, what is the role of women film-makers and women writers in depicting women's issues through cinema. Also how are the women portrayed and feminist critique of cinema has helped to view the reality presented by cinema in a different way and thus has contributed significantly to the position of women.

Review of Literature

Datta [1] in her research paper stated the concept of cultural identity and personalized nationality with implications on gender through media and film. She mentioned in the study that in the 1980s with the coming of satellite television, the worldview changed. Narrative cinema was flooded by the overriding image of women as being dominated by masculine ideals of representation such as muscular body and physical aggression and it also presented conservative ideology in valorising the male and objectifying the female. At the end of the 20th century globalization has represented the interests of the free market for all the people. This transition and using of nation as a family paradigm has located women in subordinate positions, confined to domestic and motherly roles. But she believed that women's movement and struggle for an egalitarian society brought women from the margins to the centre of their texts and focused on female subjectivity. In her study she showed filmmakers such as Apama Sen, Vijaya Mehta and Aruna Raje which have shown portraits of protagonist women highlighting their social and sexual identity.

Butalia [2] stated in her research paper that the most powerful medium of communication is commercial Indian cinema. Many directors in India have produced films about women's social issues to raise women's issues such as marriage, widowhood, dowry and rape. These steps allowed women has more visible on the screen and films concerning women's issues were being produced. Earlier we used to see only one film in every 100, shows women as human beings in their own right and continue to portray women as sex objects and unequal partners. She suggested that Indian cinema should focus more on balancing women's image and avoid the stereotypes.

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Anu Celly- cited in Jain and Rai, 2002 [3] in her study has analysed aspects of women's representation in "Indian popular cinema". She used semiotic and psychoanalytical approaches to point out that the image of women that is shown in cinema is not reality in their life. On the contrary, women's functions are factors of myth, custom and ritual. She also stated that the victimization syndrome is a component of women's image and life history in old Indian cinema. Indian cinema usually gazes of the male protagonist control and limit women's subjectivity and sexuality into an object. She mentioned the example of film like Satyajit Ray's "Devi" which is seen as a kind of revolutionary and pioneering attempt to show women's image as a protagonist, there is a use of myth as a normative paradigm for the ideal construct of womanhood.

Supriya Agarwal- cited in Jain and Rai, 2002 [3] has given an analysis of the Muslim women's identity in films in her study of the research paper. She mentioned that in Bollywood Hindi cinema between in the 1970s to 1990s the portrayal of woman was projected through stereotypes and the women's point of view was never included in the role. In her study she analysed four Muslim women centered films – Pakeezah (1971), Nikaah (1982), Bazaar (1982) and UmraoJaan (1982). In these films we can see that a secondary position is imposed on women by strong environmental forces of society and they are shown to be oppressed by various societal pressures. In fact, in these women were presented from the male point of view in that women cannot have a respectable or independent identity without being under the protection and control of men. Men were portrayed as strong, powerful and authorized. On the contrary, women were depicted as weak and powerless and have to submit to male authority. She suggested these problems need to be challenged and discussed.

Uberoi [4] analyzed representation of women in Indian popular art and mentioned in her study that women's representation has two processes. The first is the commoditization of women and second is the troping of the feminine within an overall cultural context that is both homogenizing and hegemonic. She noted that in many genres of presentation in social and cultural activities, women are prominent objects of male desire and potential possessions. She analyzed two main reasons for their invisibility both in society and in media. On the one hand, because of marginalization of women in patriarchal discourse, they have never been allowed to make their full and proper contribution to society and on the other hand society's legitimating myths and authority have been controlled by males, while women have been possessed and exchanged in the social relations among men. She showed different aspects of modification/objectification of women and women's bodies in related media such as advertising, film and etc. She believed that the Indian culture and stereotypes have affected women's role in society. The national culture and modern period have seen 'womanliness' subjected to process of hegemonization and homogenization of its identity.

Objectives

- To identify the portrayal of women in the early 1990s Bollywood cinema.

Hypothesis: In the early 1990s of the Bollywood cinemas the portrayal was as weak and objectified?

- To identify the portrayal of women in the current scenario of the Bollywood.

Hypothesis: In the current Bollywood cinema, portrayal of women is as strong women. Lead characters in the current Bollywood cinema are now portray as independent and move beyond the line of gender stereotypes.

Research Method

Qualitative research method

For the purpose of the data collection, I have chosen the qualitative research method. In this research method I will choose the film to analyze the content.

The choice of the films was based on the fact that these two films are comparable to each other having some similar issues to study.

Films are selected that belong to the cinema that are nationally and internationally acclaimed.

The selected films are women centered and concentrated on women's issues in different situations, especially in the gender relations context. In these films we can see various aspects of women's lives, and the challenges which they have to face in Indian social contexts. These films also show how women can break the social and the cultural boundaries which they were constrained by.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Gender

For this study I choose the survey method in which the survey was sent to both the males and females. This shows 49% male and 51% female filled the survey. So that we can get to know to get to know from both the perspective (Figure 1).

Occupation

From the above graph, its clear that 90% people love to watch the Bollywood movies. Only 10% of the people not interested in watching the Bollywood movies (Figure 2).

From the above graph, it's clear that mostly people loved to watched the comedy, thriller, and horror movies. Some people also loved to watch the action, Biopic, and Romantic movies. People are least interested in watching the Historic movies (Figure 3).

From the above graph, I can get to know about 12% of the people have not watched the classical Bollywood cinema. 88% of the people have watched the classical Bollywood cinema (Figure 4).

Question 5: Name some of the movie which you have watched?

Answer: Ghayal, Raja Hindustani, Mann, Beta, Sadak, Hum, Andaz apna apna, Dulhe Raja, Judwaa, Aakhen, Swarg, Biwi No 1, Chachi 420, Dil to pagal hai, Dil se, Andhi, Raja Babu, Chote Sarkar and so many movies watched by

Gender

51 responses

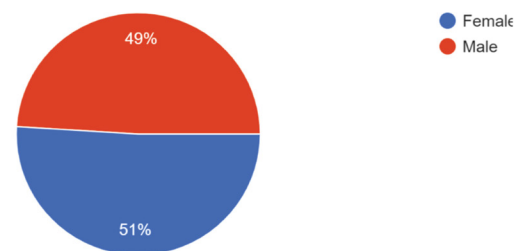


Figure 1: Data Analysis and Interpretation for Gender.

Occupation

1 responses

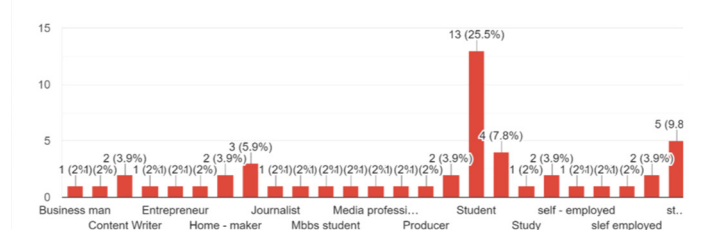


Figure 2: Data Analysis and Interpretation for Occupation.

the respondents.

Question 6: According to you, how the early cinema portray the women?

Answer: According to the respondents, in the early cinema women were depicted as weak and powerless and have to submit to male authority. Women in subordinate positions, confined to domestic and motherly roles, portray women as sex objects and as unequal partners. They were presented from the male point of view in that women cannot have a respectable or independent identity without being under the protection and control of men.

Women portrayed as the secondary position imposed on them by environmental forces of society. They were portrayed to be well cultured according to the Indian custom, and if they shown a character with modernized get up, then women to be portrayed as Rude and Arrogant.

Women's point of view never included in the role. Women as being dominated by masculine ideals of representation such as muscular body and physical aggression and it also presented conservative ideology in valorizing the male and objectifying the female (Figure 5).

From the above Graph, 95% of the people believes that in the contemporary cinema women portrays as Strong, independent, self – independent, successful women, more empowered raising voice against all the odd.

Based on the above research questions and their answer with the sample size of 51 people with all most gender equality, we analyzed that more than 60% people like to watch movie and out of then 50% like to watch Bollywood movies. This infers that people still love Indian cinema and which giving a competition to other movie board. In Bollywood movies people prefer mainly to

watch Comedy, thriller and horror movies and combination with others. While some likes to documentaries, biography and patriotic movies which shows people interest in good script and storyline. People who like to watch Bollywood keep interest in watching old movies as 50% people like to watch 1990's movies. On a opinion taken by people, most of them have a same opinion that in old movies, role woman is just a counter of male and showed as victimized, sex objective, depend on husband, stereotype, weak and side actors. As the modern India develops and people star to question, now in Bollywood movies women are depicted as self-independent, bold, strong and lead actor.

From the classical cinema to current cinema women have come a long way in the Bollywood cinema. The Hindi film actress has come a long way from being portrayed as the 'abala naari' to the woman of strength who stands for her rights, raises her voice against injustice, fights for her dignity and self-respect.

Taken example from some of the classical Indian Cinema movie Mother India, Astitva, Bandit Queen to the Current Bollywood cinema movie Queen, Pink, No one Killed Jessica.

In the commercial bollywood Movie Mother India (1957) and Astitva (2000)

Mother India was a path-breaking film of the early cinema. In this film Nargis as Radha, who is a poor villager, fights against all odds to raise her sons. She is looked upon as the example of justice. Staying true to her principles, she killed her immoral son for justice's sake. Movie Astitva unveils issues that unspoken of in the society like extramarital affairs and spousal abuse. This film speaks about a woman who tries to find her own identity outside her marriage and finally moves away from her husband and son.

In the classical Bollywood only some of the movies based in which women were portrays as strong and empowered.

In early cinema we can see that a secondary position is imposed on women by strong environmental forces of society and they are shown to be oppressed by various societal pressures. In fact, in these women were presented from the male point of view in that women cannot have a respectable or independent identity without being under the protection and control of men. Examples: - Pakeezah (1971), Nikaah (1982), Bazaar (1982) and UmraoJaan (1982).

In the Current Bollywood Cinema Movie Queen (2014), No one Killed Jessica (2011) and Pink (2016)

Queen is a story of simple, small-town girl is shattered but soon she decides to stand for herself and to go on a honeymoon all alone. During her travel, she meets new friends, discovers the world and life and comes back as a changed person, ready to take control of her life. **No One Killed Jessica (2011)** film shows that how a common woman rises above all the odds and fight for justice. **Pink (2016)** told the nation that when a woman says 'No' it means 'No'. No matter what clothes she wears or what lifestyle she leads, he can't be forced into doing anything against her will.

Contemporary cinema has made an attempt to make the films on taboo subjects like sexuality, infidelity, surrogacy, divorce, live-in relations etc. In the Contemporary Bollywood cinema there are so many movies with such stories which are women centred or can say that movies that shows women as a strong person which takes lead of her life own self and getting equal right as male actor.

Significance of the Study

In this research paper I have effectively presented changing times and cultures, be it the massive shift in the professions the women are exposed to or even the household abuses that the women of today have stood against.

Conclusion

With this study, I want to conclude that now woman is more-stronger, self-

Which genre do you prefer to watch?
51 responses

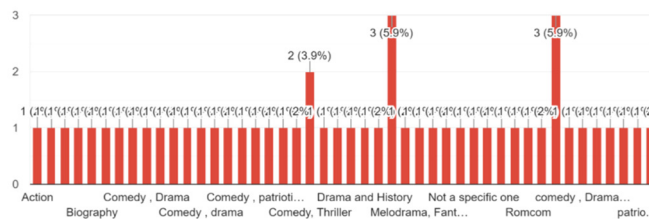


Figure 3: Data Analysis and Interpretation for Genre to watch (Preference).

Have you watched the Bollywood cinema of early 1990's?
51 responses

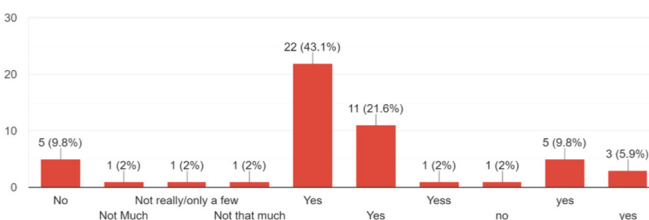


Figure 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation for Bollywood cinema of early 1990's.

According to you how the current Bollywood cinema portrays the women?
51 responses

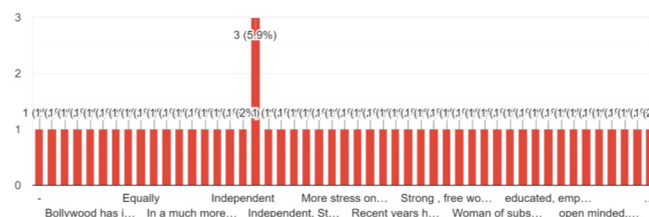


Figure 5: Data Analysis and Interpretation for current Bollywood cinema portrays the women.

independent, open minded, educated and leader. This study will be useful for future studies to depict role of women in 20th century. Now, we can say women are getting equal right as male actors are getting and bolder to keep their demand of role.

The only limitation of this study is that area of the study is limited. For the samples the area taken into consideration are Delhi, Delhi- NCR and Uttar Pradesh. Sample size only limited to 50 people.

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