
Critical Analysis of the Representation of Women in Indian Cinema

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Abstract

Film industry In India has perennially been making cinema on the burning issues of Indian society through various stories. Many of these movies have been such that showcase the strong role of female characters. While on the one hand, the exhibition of films made on women's rights has made a significant effort to change the mindset and thoughts of the public in this direction by attacking the condition of women in Indian culture and social evils related to women such as Johar Pratha, child marriage, widow remarriage etc. On the other side, rape, sex, obscene depiction, violence and exploitation of women onto every field have also done the work of portraying the second class mentality on women's identity. Indian cinema has adopted every scene and material to save its existence competitiveness which it has given the name of modernization. Obscene and indecent portrayal of women in Indian cinema is becoming the cause for increase in crimes against women in Indian society. This is sake of grave concern. The present article is based on a critical analysis of the on- and off-screen representation of women into Indian cinema. In this article, from the initial period of Indian cinema to the current time, both strong and obscene representations of women have been critically considered. At the tail of the article, a distinctive request has been made to the filmmaker, director, audience and censor board to disciplinarily stop the indecent representation of women in Indian cinema.

Key Words: Indian cinema, Indecent, Representation, Women, Mentality

Introduction

Literature has always played the role of a mirror in reflecting the present and changed condition of the society. The work of highlighting the current problems of Indian society through literature and making the public aware has been going since a long time, but after the debut of cinema, it has also taken the responsibility of this work. The initial purpose of Indian cinema was to entertain the public, but with the passage of time, cinema broadened its purpose and got so integrated into the Indian society that it started being used to connect the mass with social and political movements. When this mass media of entertainment ran on social issues, it not only raised the country against social stereotypes, rather it also played a vital role in liberating the country from the shackles of slavery, as well eradicating the disparities of religion, caste, gender and region. Hindi cinema or should we say the whole Indian cinema has been male-oriented, it has always been in search of such a hero who talks about everyone and fights for everyone.

When Dadasaheb Phalke, who known as the father of Indian cinema, made the film Raja Harishchandra in 1913, for female character he had to impersonate a male actor as female, because no woman from any segment of community was ready to act in cinema, But with the changing paradigm of cinema, women also became equally prominent. Since its commencement, Cinema of Indian has been presenting positively position of women in the society and their challenges along with their changing roles over time.

Analysis of the Representation of Women in Indian Cinema

The motive of this article is critically analyzing the on- and off-screen representation of women in Indian cinema. In this article, from the initial period to present times of Indian cinema, both strong and obscene representations of women have been critically considered. In the inception of Indian cinema, female characters remained in historical, mythological, religious and traditional roles. The earliest change in this theme is visible in 1935 when Dadasaheb Phalke produced the film *Hunterwali*. The idea of *Hunterwali* came into his mind when he saw the film "Life of Christ". While watching this movie; he thought whether such an image of a woman would be accepted in the Indian society, where the woman appears in front of the audience in masculine dress and who is completely modern in her thinking. In the form of *Hunterwali*, he did a new experiment and his experiment was not only successful, but the public accepted this film. Nadia, who was the lead actress of the movie, was resident of Australia. This film, breaking the traditional image of the actress and female characters, she was presented in modern tight clothes and gum boots. The image of such a woman was presented in *Hunterwali*, which had not been exhibited even in western films till now. Indian cinema seems to be changing with the changing society. Early years after independence, films like *Patita*, *Ek Hi Raasta* and *Sadhna* etc. depicted the indecisiveness of a woman, her chastity and her position in the hegemonic system of a male-dominated society, but her changed forms come to the fore in the movies made in later years. This was the period in the story of Indian cinema when women were out of the field of producing and directing films and this field was completely in the hands of men.

In the 50's, 60's and 70's actress appeared in strong roles of girlfriend, mother, sister. Vimal Rai's *Bandini* and *Sujata* were strong and realistic female characters. In *Mother India*, Nargis performed a strong woman role, who brings up her children in adverse circumstances in absence of her husband and when her own son behaves unethically with another woman she takes a drastic step and doesn't hesitate to shoot her own son for the protection of the other woman. Similarly, the role played by Waheeda Rehman in *Guide* movie in the early 60s, for the first time depicted a woman character who points out her husband in relation to his character when the husband pointed fingers at the wife's character. When this film came on screen, women considered their husbands as God and accepted their extramarital affairs as their fate. Very few women could oppose this situation. This film gave women a new perspective to think about this matter.

In this journey of Indian cinema, when item numbers were the guarantee of the movies being hit then crowds of audience used to reach the cinema hall to watch the dance performed by the

attractively dressed dancers or item girl. Helen, Bindu, Aruna Irani, Rakhi Sawant and Nora Fatehi have been few of the famous item girls from that era to this era.

After this, the lead actresses of Raj Kapoor's films are looked in a new avatar. Being a widow, the lead actress of Prem Rog is, seen rebelling against the conservative tradition of the entire Indian society. While the actresses of Satyam Shivam Sundaram and Ram Teri Ganga Mailiis shown in glamorous looks opposing the disgusting mentality of society towards women. It was a picture of the changing social environment, which the filmmakers understood very well and depicted in their films. The society was changing rapidly, Western civilization was also making its impact, family equations were changing, and the main theme of films was also changing. The story was becoming female-oriented, along with there were male-oriented films which were affecting the public, but the female-oriented films were attracting the audience in a new style. In 1985, producer-director J. Om Prakash's film "Aakhir Kyun" attacks the traditional mentality of the Indian society in which the wife maintains silence and lives with her husband despite knowing about his husband's relationship with other women. The leading actress Smita Patil of this film, abandonment such a husband to protect her self-respect and maintain her dignity and eventually emerges as a sensitive writer. She creates her own existence in the society as a writer, where she does not need the support of any man. This film is an attack on the patriarchal society where men are considered the protectors of women and women are identified with men.

This was a time of the Indian cinema when the female character was not being portrayed as mere glamor but was being provided with strong roles through female-oriented films and the work of producing, directing and writing films was also being done by women. Whose impact was clearly visible on public opinion towards women and the social status of women. Khoon Bhari Maang, Biwi ho to aisi, Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki, presents examples of some such films in which female characters protest against the atrocities committed against them. There are many films like Arth, Astitva, Kya Kehna, Damini, Dushman, Pinjar, Lajja, Mehndi, Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat, Gulabgang etc. which represent the identity and resistance of the actress who directly question and challenge the power.

Set in the 21st century, "English Vinglish", directed by Gauri Shinde, revolves around women who suffer from inferiority complex due to their poor knowledge of English. Every member of the family even her children make her realize from time to time that she doesn't know English which will cause her to be made fun of everywhere. The husband also feels that making good laddus is his wife's biggest achievement. Low knowledge of language is not the problem here but the real problem is her existence as a woman. She finds her existence through English language coaching. Her character is not characterized by her knowledge of the English language. Despite not knowing English, she proves herself as a mother, a good wife. The 2014 film "Queen" tells the story of a girl named 'Rani' who resides in Delhi's Rajouri Garden. This film of Vikas Bahl breaks the taboos of the society of India. The lead actress and her family are devastated when her fiancé refuses to marry her, but she soon get over from shock and leaves alone for her honeymoon in Paris. How a girl brought up in a middle-class family manages to break down and fulfill her wish on the strength of her self-confidence. Even while living abroad, she does not forget her Indian culture. It is shown at the last half of the film that her fiancé wants to marry her

again as she has changed but then Rani move on. She says thanks to her ex-fiancé, saying "thank you" is symbolic of that if he had married her there have not been so much change in Rani's personality and mindset today. In middle-class families, where the marriage of a girl is the cherished desire of the parents, a queen-like character is exemplary. Examples of many such films like Mary Kom, Kahani, Mission Mangal, Thappad, Mardani, Toilet: Ek Prem Katha, Tumharisulu, Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl, Mrs Chatterjeevs Norway, Tarla etc. can be presented where heroines try to warn the society through their roles.

Films have an impact on the society in every way, where its impact leads the society towards positivity, while some such scenes and language shown in films have a wrong and negative impact on the society. While a film like "Chak De India" creates an atmosphere of enthusiasm across the country, it becomes difficult to sit and watch the film with the family due to obscene scenes, sex, double meaning dialogues etc. shown in other films. According to a research conducted on TV programs and films, obscene scenes have increased by two-thirds in the programs shown in the last years. Due to which not only a serious problem has arisen in the society but a threat has arisen to the moral order.

While one side, Indian cinema is working to endow a new and positive thinking towards women to the society by showcasing the strong roles of women through female-oriented films, on the other side technology and consumerist culture have brought cinema in a new make-up whose nature and style are all visible colored in the color of western culture. At present, the false image of women being presented as independent women in movies is causing increase in crimes against women in the society. Pink Movie presents such attitude of the society towards women. It is believed that films are the mirror of the society and from Indian cinema it can be guessed that in which direction the Indian culture and society is going. Presently, with obscene scenes, vulgar songs and dialogues, excessive sex and violence shown in films, it seems that our society is on the verge of collapse. This portrayal of women in films is a matter of concern. Murder, Hot Story, Jism, Ragini MMS, many such examples can be given which are full of obscene depiction of women. Sequels of such films are also made and in every sequel, obscene scenes are shot in exaggerated form from the first film. The unfortunate thing is that the number of viewers watching such films is also high. Acting by foreign actresses is a new trend in Indian cinema. Porn stars from foreign countries have become the lead actress of Indian movies, the scenes in which Indian actresses feel uncomfortable; these foreign actresses easily shoot those scenes. O.T.T platforms are floated with web series and movies full of violence and obscene content. It seems like every platform is competing to see who can display the most pornographic content.

Bhojpuri cinema is a portion of Indian cinema, if attention is paid to Bhojpuri cinema, it is mostly seen that in the songs of Bhojpuri cinema, women are portrayed with obscenity. Dialogues and titles of the Bhojpuri films are made using vulgar words used in the society for women. Looking at the obscene representation of women in films, it seems that women in cinema have now become mere sex objects. India ranks behind German and Australian films in terms of showing women in sexy clothes, according to the first global study of women characters in the world's popular films conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on

Gender in Media in collaboration with UN Women and the Rockefeller Foundation. India is at the top in terms of portraying women as sexy in its films and about 35 percent of women characters are shown with some degree of nudity on the silver screen. The study reveals deep-rooted discrimination, widespread stereotyping and a tendency to over-represent women in stronger roles in the international film industry. Studies have shown that Indian films have tend to show female characters as sexy and rarely portray outspoken woman, female engineers and scientists. A study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute in 2017 revealed that only one out of ten directors in Bollywood is a woman. Women got only 31.5 percent screen time compared to 68.5 percent screen time for male actors. As a result of centuries-old stereotypes and gender bias prevalent in films, the on-screen representation of women is influenced by the male perspective and off-screen, key processes such as script-writing, film-making and direction are dominated by men as compared to women. A report spearheaded by Ormax Media and Film Companion, and supported by Amazon Prime Video, has revealed an abysmal state of affairs in the on- and off-screen representation of women in Indian film industry. This report points to the fact that women are under-represented behind the camera. Only 10% head of department positions (HODs) across key divisions (production design, writing, editing, direction and cinematography) are held by women. Out of the 56 theatrical films analysed across multiple languages, not one was directed or edited by a woman.

Women make up half of the world's population, but they make up less than a third of the voice roles in films. Films made in collaboration between Britain and America and Indian films are far behind in this regard. Showing women sexy in films has become a standard in the entire Indian film industry. They are shown with fewer clothes than men or completely without clothes and zero figures. The Off-screen representation of women in Indian film industry is still not satisfactory.

Conclusion

Indian cinema has completed 110 years on 3rd May 2023. The progress that films have made pursuantly technical matters and production values in these 110 years cannot be denied, but when it comes to the representation of women, it seems that the changes are mere appearances. Movies still bring forth an image of women that is primarily glamorous and secondary. But today there is no dearth of making such films in Indian cinema which present women strongly. For half of the population, seeing women facing various problems and situations strongly works as an inspiration, but when the same half of the population sees obscene portrayal of women in films, it is again forced to think that are women just a sexy object in society's eye. Through this article, I want to appeal to the producers and directors of Indian industry of cinema to make films keeping healthy entertainment in mind. Produce films that guide and inspire the audience. The audience is also requested to oppose such films which cannot be watched while sitting with the family. I do an appeal to the Censor Board to fulfill the objectives for which the board has been created. The board should fulfill its role with full devotion and honesty. I would also like to a special appeal to the female actresses and women worker in film industry that they should come to stop themselves from being just a sex material and get more and more involved in the production work of films along with acting in films.

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