

# Portrayal of Women in Media

## Portrayal of Women in Mainstream Hindi Films

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### Abstract

*Media frames the vision of a society; it is responsible to an extent for the state of the society people live in. The power of media is undeniable since it helps to mature the society. In this society both man and woman are given so-called equal status by the law but till date this law has not been enforced in real means since the society till date did not give both man and woman equal status. Media can be regarded as one of the reason for such discrimination. The portrayal of women in media (films) is objectionable from a varied point of view. In most of the mainstream films women are treated as an eyeball catcher. With the coming of the private players and the shifting motives from welfare to profit maximization the vulgarity in the way women are portrayed has increased to an objectionable level. The idea that has been transmitted from the media to the people is that men are confident, independent and aggressive protectors while woman are vulnerable, helpless and dependent sex symbols. This paper is an attempt to interrogate and discuss the objectionable portrayal of women in media with special reference to films.*

*Keywords: representation objectionable vulgarity dependent women portrayal.*

### 1.01 Introduction:

Hindi Films are most popular part of Indian media today .The power of films is undeniable since it helps to mature the society and also brings forth the scenario of the society. Films are important art forms, a source of popular entertainment. At times it also generates views that are adopted by the people. This is the influencing power of films and the characters that are played by extremely talented men and women. India is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> year in cinema, a journey par excellence in which it has itself matured and gained popularity to such an extent that people not only relate to the stories shown by them but even imitate the characters.

The first women to act in Indian films in the 1920s were women of mixed British, European and Indian origins referred to as the “Anglo-Indians”. Since they had hybrid origins, they were deemed separate from the women of pure Indian origin (Ganti, 2004, p. 13). Probably due to this when actually Indian women started to act in films the directors thought it would be save to cast them in roles that are within the so-called stigma of the society.

In trying to portray characters in these “stereotypical” socially acceptable roles, Richards (1995) observes, “The Hindi film upholds the traditional patriarchal views of society which, fearful of female sexuality, demands of the woman, a subjugation of her desires” (p. 3).

## 1.02 Evaluation and Discussion

The work of media is to educate inform and upgrade the society but in the process of entertaining and earning it has somehow forgotten its commitments towards the society. The idea that has been transmitted from the films to the people is that men are confident, independent and aggressive protectors while women are vulnerable, helpless and dependent sex symbols. Majority mainstream films use women as mere eyeball catchers who live at the mercy of their counterparts to save and protect them. Since the society religiously follows whatever it is shown that too in a regular basis thus this has become the trend of the generation. Patriarchal Indian society views young women as being sensuous and sexually appealing and older women as being less attractive. This is the male fantasy in operation which expects the female lead has to be young, while the male lead can be in his early fifties and yet pass for a young hero/protagonist in his late twenties and early thirties. This indicates the male centralism and bias not only in the minds of those who make films but also the viewers who have been conditioned over years to view characters in films from this point of view. In the film industry the genuinely talented women find it tough to make an entry. While few glamour dolls, land up bagging roles on their face value. But even these roles, based on the glamour image do not last long. Actresses lose their position as soon as they start aging while the actors even at the age of forty dance around the trees and valley with a new glamour doll of the age of his daughter. Even the media which created this notion is affected by it to such an extent that the reporting on serious issues is left with the man. While the women are found either reporting entertainment news or sit between two sportsperson wearing a glamorous sari to make the frame look attractive. The trend of item girls seems to have reached its heights in the recent times when ‘Munni dances being badnaam’ and ‘Sheela ki jawani’ is discussed when there is no requirement to make these women dress in blouses revealing their cleavage and dance in an erotic way.

Women in the patriarchal society in India has somehow inherited specific social and cultural roles, which are carried into the mainstream film industry and they end up creating roles following this notion forgetting that they have capacity to challenge this notion which is a violation of not only the right to equality laid down in the constitution of India but also morally unacceptable. The films on one-hand portray that widows raising a child single headedly is brave and better than getting married to someone who is willing to take the responsibility. The family and the society opposes to it but in the same situation man needs to get married and is advised to do so at least for the sake of his child e.g. In the film *Hum Apke Hain Kaun*. The portrayal of women in Hindi films in terms of skin show is justified if the role demands it but is completely unethical and unjustified if it is only to attract the man and cater to their sexual needs. Apart from some women-centric films, in most of the mainstream Hindi films the view point of the hero is shown. If a women character is seducing the lead and he doesn't like it then the women is a vamp but if the women is made to wear a seducing cloth gifted by the man or if the man likes it then she is a heroine. Hindi movies also regard watching a woman when she is taking a bath or even undressing justified.

It cannot be said that till date there were no women-centric films made in Hindi movies since some directors like Madhur Bhandarkar and Deepa Mehta are known for making films on women and earning a lot of money as well but even in those films the male counter-parts are not shown as wrong. They portray characters which are in a situation that compels them to exploit the woman justifying that as well. Even if a woman is cheated by the husband in our films the woman is responsible since she wasn't giving enough attention to her husband. The husband can return at any point of time whenever he feels like e.g. Gharana (1961). The so-called blockbuster Kuch Kuch Hota hain also glorifies the fact that the man can return whenever he wants to. The work of the female lead in most films is to play the love interest of the hero and add to the glamour of the film. The contemporary masala mainstream Hindi movies are biased towards the male lead but the movies that are made with a different and not so usual subject also is not free from such biases.

### 1.03 Case study on the film INKAAR (2013)

Lead (male)-Arjun Rampal as Rahul Verma

Lead (female)-Chitrangda Singh as Maya Luthra

Director-Sudhir Mishra

The film revolves round the two leads one a well-settled and reputed CEO (Rahul) of an advertising agency and the other a small town struggler (Maya) who has raw talent that needs to be shown right track. In an award ceremony the two meet and Rahul offers Maya a job in his agency. The girl readily accepts the offer and they start working together. Rahul becomes Maya's mentor and teaches her everything starting from how to dress, be confident, read the mind of clients and present an idea. In this process both of them get attracted towards each other and end up in bed. While the guy is casual about it and flirts around with models the girl falls in love and demands explanation for the indifference. However, the guy is reluctant to give any explanation, heartbroken the girl leaves for another branch of the agency in a different city (Delhi). She returns after 7 years to the same branch of the agency (Mumbai) and is made the NCD (National Creative Director). Here, comes the turning point of the movie where there starts a power play between the two Rahul as the CEO and Maya as the NCD. Later Maya files a case of sexual harassment against Rahul. The film is a flashback of the view point of the two leads who give their version on the incidents that leads to the case in front of a board and a social activist in an attempt to find out whether Rahul is guilty or not.

The film is on a much debated issue of sexual harassment that is very common in work places however the case has been dealt from a male point of view wherein the women if not openly but in some way or the other is blamed for being ambitious and demanding. On the other hand it is justified to act flirtatious in offices to make the work environment funny by the man. The fact that the female lead was taught everything and was done a favour by the male lead was highlighted several times but the question is why does this point need to be raised at all everybody has a mentor be it a boy or girl when they are new, then why does a girl need to be reminded about it whenever she achieves a milestone in her life. The girl had talent she could generate

ideas even when she was tensed and was having a heated conversation with her boss ( the scene in which KK was asking Maya to make things work with Rahul ) but that point was not brought forth only the fact that she was gorgeous and was favoured was highlighted. In the film it is shown that it is okay to treat a girl like a doormat, the guy is free to break a girls heart since he isn't ready for commitment even after wooing her for days and months and ending in bed with her. He has also reasons for being completely unsupportive when she gets a high post since he brought her to it initially. Most astonishingly being violent and catching her by the neck is also justified because he was willing to slap her several times but he was great enough not to do that at least . The notion that women cannot deal management position was considered to be a general notion but till date the notion regarding women and management was women make better managers because they can handle things related from salt to software. However, coming back to the story, at the end the hero as usual scores the deal by telling her he loves her which is kept for the second last scene of the film because it is a great honour to know that the hero loves the woman and she is not merely his lustful desire which makes her the heroine and not a vamp. The question is was it necessary to give a romantic end and make it a typical Hindi film which has to end with the two leads loving each other. In the last shot the film showed its biggest Hindi movie trait by portraying the hero to be a sacrificing sage who leaves the job with his ailing father whose presence had very little to do with anything in the film. The female lead also does that the same but only after the departure and understanding of the hero's love for which she completely misunderstood him. All is well if it ends with portraying the woman to misunderstand the man and returning to him. Even in films like Inkaar with a serious social issue where the point of view of both the man and woman should be highlighted the man is given the benefit of doubt and regarded as superior both in terms of work and desires regardless to say about the ones which deal with romantic masala movies which are the speciality of Hindi films.

#### 1.04 Conclusion

Hindi films have generated women in an indifferent way to some extent and it can be due to the fact that women in India have been underestimated or not understood at all. Her powers and willingness to sacrifice has been misinterpreted to be her weakness and vulnerability. It is true that the amount of violence on women cannot be regarded as a result of the popular mass media (here films) but the lack of education and poor mind-set of the people. Still the fact that the mind-set of the people are mobilised and gains momentum from the constant viewing of such portrayal of unacceptable stuff by the so-called intellectual section of the society remains undeniable. Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi said that 57 cases were reported at office premises and 469 cases were registered at other places related to work during 2014 on office harassment of women and all we do is make one film on it that too from a male perspective.