The Portrayal Of Women In Bollywood Films

ASHIMA AHMED SAIKIA

Research Scholar, Discipline of Political Science Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University Guwahati. Assam.

Abstract:

In India, Film is one of the most powerful tools to create and influence the citizens. To influence the common people is one of the most critical functions to perform in the film. The film reflects the customs, tradition and culture of a society. It also reflects the patriarchal nature of a society where gender-based violence is very common. It not only reflects society but also shapes it because it influences and module public opinion. In the second-largest democratic country of the world i.e. India, films have already proven as an effective means to reach to the citizen. It has the responsibility to sensitize the gender issues for the empowerment of women. The representation of women in films is a matter of concern to every feminist researcher because it is an appropriate platform where they can raise voices on the issues of women.

Keywords: Film, Women, Entertainment, Empowerment

INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary times films are considered as one of the most important visual mediums of entertainment. The film portrays both men and women within a limit. Typically men are portrayed as active, adventurous, confident, rational and strong. On the other hand, women are portrayed as emotional, thin beautiful, dependent on the hero and happy housewives. The main reason for this subordinate portrayal of women is the socialisation process where the societal norms encourage gender-based violence. Simon de Beauvoir in her writing "The Second Sex" analysed how society produce women through its so-called socialisation process. She claimed that no features can determine a perfect woman. It only creates gender inequality and sexual hierarchy. The cultivation theory propounded by Prof Gerbner and Larry Gross examined the long-term effects of media primarily television. The theory argues that the more time people spend living in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality aligns with portrayed on television. (Brown 42). It viewed women as a marginalised social group and tends to traditionalist women roles.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To critically analyse the role of film in constructing the images of women in India.
2. To explore women's position in the Indian film industry.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The analytical methodology has been adopted in the study. The secondary data including books, magazines, journals, and websites are used and analysed for the evaluation of the study.

DISCUSSION:

According to the Indian feminist Urvashi Butalia, Indian cinema is the single largest medium of communication, which is directly in touch with the masses and close to 12 million people watch films every week in cinema and theatres.

The Indian film industry is criticised as a male-dominated industry. Though women are working in the industry, their number is very smaller compared to the males. Being the socio-cultural influencer of society, films are responsible for reflecting and creating the image of women in society. The 'good' and 'bad' images of women are also created by the film. The good women are depicted as home-maker, pretty, subordinate to make loyal wives. On the contrary, the bad women are hard, cold aggressive. American feminist Betty Friedan's work "The Feminine Mystique" where she argued in the 2nd chapter named 'The Happy Housewife Heroine' that the image of happy housewives is created by the magazines, television, advertising and other parts of media as women is either happy as a housewife or unhappy careerists. By creating the idea that the women were naturally fulfilled by devoting their lives to being a housewife and mothers. The Indian film industry is exploitative because it confines the role of female characters from being human to objects. That's why society assumes that to be a real or ideal woman she must have the qualities which are shown as 'good' qualities in the films.

The commercial film industry which is a purely profit-based industry cares little about the image of women they portray to the public. In the films of Bollywood some dialogue gain landmark status such as- ja choodiyan pehen ke baith ja' (go wear bangles and sit down). The socialisation process does not allow the males to wear bangles and to resonate with the message that females who wear bangles are incapable, useless intellectually as well as socially inferior to men. 'Ladki ki naa me hi haa chupa hota hai' (The girl's no means yes), which reflects that women are either hesitant to express their views or there is no value in their opinion. Even if they are not approving, then also one should be guaranteed that they are approving. Another example is Boodhi ho ya jawan, melodrama to is duniya ki sari auraton ke khoon main hai (Old or young melodrama is in the blood of all the women of this world) which implies that connection between women and melodrama. The discriminating patriarchal society harasses women every day. The society does not allow men to be emotional and if women express their emotions it is considered melodrama. Akeli ladki khuli tijori ki tarah hoti hai (A lonely girl like an open vault) indicates that women

should always be surrounded by their fathers, husbands, brothers or sons otherwise any kind of negative incident can happen with them.

Another very common women's stereotype in Bollywood is the item songs where the actresses dance to the tune of vulgar and these actresses are classified as item girls, as the term item is a disrespectful slang referring to a vulgar woman. Such as Munni Badnam hui, Sheila ki jawanni, chikni chameli, pink lips etc. and these items songs celebrates the sexuality of women. In this regard, the feminist writers and worldwide feminist movement have pointed out that the portrayal and employment of women in films are in a most derogatory position.

In an interview the renowned actress and activist Shabana Azmi said, "A matter of grave concern is that when it comes to films, women are shown to be completely dormant, totally subservient persons. It reinforces the notion that Indian women are supposed to be that. I think the only way in which we can counter these images is to portray a woman not just as a body but also an intelligent being". (Azmi)

According to Raja Rao (as mentioned in Patowary) the Indian writer of the English language, one of the biggest obstacles to women's access and participation in the film industry of India is the patriarchal structure of societies where men continue to see women as subordinate to them. Gender biases and gender-based discrimination, therefore, result in stereotyped attitudes, sexual harassment, pay inequalities, discriminatory treatment in assignments and promotions. Traditional gender hierarchies, including a premium on family responsibilities, lack of support mechanisms for working women and low education that deter women from joining the media.

In the Indian film industry women very rarely get the leading role, even if they leading role they are always depicted as victims or as oppressed. The number of female filmmakers is also very less in the Indian film industry. The male producers, directors always confine the picture of women characters into two sides. On one side women are always portrayed only as the mothers, sisters and wives of the hero and on another side, they are objected of entertainment and seductive rather than intelligent, strong and confident. All these reflect the truth that the film industry is not free from the patriarchal nature of society. According to the report of 'O Womaniya' in 2019 and 2020, only 8% of women held the Head Of the Department (H.O.D) roles in Indian films and these HOD position includes- production, writing, cinematography, direction and editing. (O Womaniya). The Joshi Committee Report 1984 found that women are represented only as wives and mothers in most of the media programmes. Although 36% of them are agricultural workers, women are predominantly projected as non-producers, being marginal growth and development (Joshi committee 3).

SUGGESTIONS:

- The government must formulate clear guidelines regarding the depictions of women in a media house.

- More emphasis should be given to covering women's success stories and their worth to society. Films should encourage to provide space to the issues of women so that they glamorise objection of women can be removed.
- The film industry of India should play an active role to support women and encouraging them to achieve gender equalities by eradicating sexual hierarchy.

CONCLUSION:

The depiction of women in the film industry of India has been noted for at least a century and a half now even if they have only been sporadically visible and insufficiently acknowledged. The Indian film-makers have not made adequate efforts to depict the real issues associated with women and prepare them to achieve their equal and efficient role in society.

Earlier the film-makers focused on the negative portrayal of women in films but now things have improved. Of late, the Indian film industry has realised that women are the most humble and respectful persons in India than any other country on the globe. The way of women's projection in films has been positively changed and becoming healthier over the years.

The projection of women in films has always been controversial and a matter of debate. Now a days due to the technical advancement and professionalism women are seen occupying jobs in films but lack of effective female representation sexual division of labour is another contradictory picture of the Indian film industry. The projection of women should not be vulgar rather than she should be shown as positive, confident, independent and empowered. The portrayal of women in media led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1986 to prohibit any representation of women indecently via advertisements, paintings, figures or publications or in any other manner and for such related matters. Though the parliament enacted the act, unless the film-makers, production houses, advertising company and the women who represent themselves in the film industry will not practise the provisions of the law in the real field the issues regarding women's portrayal will not end.

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