

## Prominent Women Directors of Hindi Cinema

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**Abstract:** *Film director may remain behind the curtain but he is the person responsible for the end product of the film. He may easily be regarded as the be all and end all as well as the alpha and omega of the film. All the assistant directors and other film crew work under his direction and supervision. A film director controls the artistic and dramatic aspects and visualizes the screenplay while guiding the technical crew and actors in the fulfilment of that vision. Film direction has often been termed as a task of the males but of late many females have taken up film direction and made a niche for themselves. Sai Paranjpye, Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta, Gauri Shinde, Gurinder Chadha and Farah Khan may be counted among those women directors who have got international acclamation. Some of these film directors have made bold films on forbidden topics and made the society to think about the issues raised in them. Films directed by women film directors of Indian cinema are often found to be thought provoking. This chapter endeavors to discuss the life and careers of prominent women film directors of Hindi Cinema.*

**Key Words:** *Women, Director, Direction, Crew, International, Actors, Bold, Forbidden.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Women of today have not only conquered the outside world but have broken the patriarchy of male dominated society. From the heart of hers like that of a mother, the women have created films which are much more meaningful and depict a mirror of present day society. Her vision has outshone many films which relied more on male protagonist. The essence of her sweet innocence to delicate smile of hers like that of morning dew on the grass, the women have envisaged stories that are not in the vicinity of any male filmmaker. Reeling the reality of naked truth happening inside the veils of a covertly framed society to narrating the rhythmical rhymes of an old age customs repressing her rights, women filmmakers have made everlasting movies. Taking the films to an edge above other films, Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta and Gurwinder Chadha have not left any stone unturned. Recreating the films that consist of real-life contempt, lessons and directs the society to whole new world where age-old customs are answered with rationality rather than inborn prejudices. Relapsed social syndrome which affected the lives of many females is exhibited through a better medium of kaleidoscope by these women of hope. Reviving each character's resemblance to real life characters, these women's imagination has carved some of the most amazing stories that have huge significance. Inducing the audiences through the emotionally strong and hopeful stanzas in the narratives, the pinkish gender specific films making women directors of Indian origin have earned respect from across the globe. Self-belief, encouraging repressed souls to relive and withdrawing the curtains over the narrow minded perception of society, the films of women have acted as salvation for all the people who shunned their inner voices.

There are scores of Women directors who have tried to depict the pinkish gender in different hues. Here is brief depiction of the life and careers of prominent women directors of Hindi Cinema:

#### **Fatima Begum**

The first female director of Indian cinema was also an actress, screenwriter and producer. Her first fantasy movie was 'Bulbul-e-Paristan'. She was born in an Urdu Muslim family in India. Her first debut film was silent movie 'Veer Abhimanyu' and it was directed by Ardeshir Irani. In 1926, she formed her own production house known by the name of Fatima Films and later it got changed to Victoria Fatima Films. It is said that she was of the innovator of propagating cinema with fantasy imagination. She had also acted in Kohinoor and Imperial Studios. Apart from acting in the films, she also wrote several screen plays and even produced them. The work yielded by Late Mrs Fatima in portraying fantasy cinema is also comparable with known cinematic legend like George Melies. Her last film 'Duniya Kya hai?' appeared in 1938. The late legendary filmmaker of Bollywood cinema had directed movie 'Goddess of Luck' which received commendable appreciation from the audience.

#### **Sai Paranjpye**

The filmmaker of many great films like Sparsh, Chasme Buddoor, Katha and Disha had shown remarkable progress in the art of narrating stories. She had written and directed several Marathi plays like Jaswandi, Sakkhe Shejari and Albel. She was born to Russian Youra Sleptzoff and Shakuntala Paranjpye. Mrs Paranjpye graduated from National School of Drama and she was influenced by her own mother who was also an actress in Hindi and Marathi films. She

started her own career as an announcer in All India Radio in Pune, Maharashtra and later on she also got engaged in AIR's Children's Program. The filmmaker has worked as producer with Doordarshan in Delhi for many years. Her first debut T.V. movie 'The Little Tea Shop' in 1972 won the Asian Broadcasting Union Award at Teheran, Iran. Her first feature film 'Sparsh' released on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1980 and won five Filmfare awards. In 1980's her two other comic films 'Chashme Buddoor' and 'Katha' were liked by the audience and earned huge box office collection. Her movies like 'Angootha Chaap', 'Disha', 'Papeeha', 'Saz' and 'Chak-Chak' are one of the most incredible movies of Hindi cinema. The speciality about all of her films was that they demonstrated social concerns and alarming situation in the country.

### **Mira Nair**

Mira Nair is an Indian born filmmaker who resides in New York (U.S.A.) and her films are critically appraised by several noted film critics. Some of her documentary and films like 'Indian Cabaret', 'Mississippi Masala' and 'Monsoon Wedding' endear hope and reveal the hidden darkened miseries of women and encircles the lifestyle of social elites. Giving few facts of her film naming Indian Cabaret, she courageously filmed the humiliated and exploited life of female strippers in Bombay and showcased the life of a disloyal husband who cheated his own wife by making an illicit intimate relationship with one of the strippers. However, this film of hers was impudently criticized by many film editors and critics, but after many years later people came to realize the devastating and shambling images of girls trapped in unclean business. Mrs. Nair has been awarded several prestigious awards which include Golden Lion Award for her best film "Monsoon Wedding" at Venice Film Festival. In 2012, she was also honoured with nationally prestigious award known as Padma Bhushan by Government of India.

### **Deepa Mehta**

Deepa Mehta was born on 15th September 1950 and is a renowned Indo-Canadian film director and screenwriter. She has been highly recognized for Elements of Trilogy, Fire (1996), Earth (1998) and Water (2005). She was born in Amritsar (Punjab) but later on her family moved to Delhi and her father worked as the film distributor. Her documentaries include At 99: A Portrait of Louise Tandy March (1975). In 1991, her film "Sam and Me" won Honourable Mention in the Camera d'Or category of the 1991 Cannes Film Festival. This Indian origin born director also directed two episodes of George Lucas television series The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles. Most of the Mehta's movies are directed in contrast with Canadian lifestyle like The Republic of Love (2003) and Heaven on Earth (2008) which specified the prevailing domestic violence and showcased Preity Zinta as a leading protagonist. She has been honoured with The Excellence in the Arts Award from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and with the Women of Distinction, President's Award from the YMCA. In 2013, Mehta was also selected as an officer to the Order of Canada (Canada's Highest Civilian Honour) because of her exceptionally skilled artwork which resembled the uneasiness in social lives and sufferable sufferings of women and also gives the glimpse of resilience to the people caught in wretched clutches of stress.

### **Gurinder Chadha**

Highly renowned for making a class apart films like Bride and Prejudice, Bhaji on the Beach and many more. Since her early childhood, she saw the racism her father faced because of tying a turban over his head and for keeping a beard. This has been the foremost reason that many of her films are a contrast to her personal experiences. Chadha also works as screenplay writer and has appeared on the BBC show 'Your London' (2005) in which she narrated the ecstatic tale of a Sikh Prince who lived in London. One year later, she participated in the BBC genealogy series who do you think you are? And at this show, she outlined her Sikh family roots back at Kenya. Chadha's much-celebrated film 'Bend it Like Beckham' was the biggest grossing figure at the box offices chart in the U.S.A. and in many parts of the world. The film went for the Golden Globe Nomination for Best Picture, a BAFTA Nomination for Best British Film and a European Film Academy Nomination for Best Film and even went for the nomination at Writers Guild of America Nomination for Best Original Screenplay. Quite strikingly her film, 'Bhaji on the Beach' speaks more about the differences and opinions in modern women to that of traditional women, the oppressiveness approach of society towards women and enabled the people to glance at the rising dominance of male mammoths' insanity in preying their wives to be the victim of domestic abuse.

### **Reema Kagti**

She has worked as an assistant director for many big time films including Dil Chahta Hai, Lakshya, Lagaan and in Mira Nair's Vanity Fair. The writer works in close collaboration with Excel Entertainment and has helped Farhan and his sister Zoya Akhtar in all of their films till date. Mrs Reema's directorial debut finally happened when her first movie 'Honey Moon Travels Pvt Ltd' was exclusively launched and its box office figures were amusingly large. Then in 2012, she partnered with Aamir Khan (actor) and Rani Mukerji (actress) for a psychologically thrilling and deeply wakening movie 'Talaash' which showcased the present time scenario of gender insensitivity in Indian society.

Understanding the phenomenal aspects of society by integrating numerous aspects affecting the lives of women, she has made her presence feel more imperative in concurrent times.

### **Leena Yadav**

The filmmaker of Bollywood industry was born on 6th January 1971 and she is also a scriptwriter, editor and producer. Her filmy career began after she worked for many years in television industry and after then she shifted to make some extraordinary films. Her film 'Parched' was also featured at Toronto International Film Festival in 2015. She was born in the family of an Indian Army General in Madhya Pradesh. She graduated in Economics honours from Lady Shri-Ram College of Women, Delhi. After then, she also persuaded a course in Mass Communications from Sophia College, Mumbai. In 2005, she made her debut as director by the film 'Shabd' and after a gap of five years, she also directed another movie 'Teen Patti'. Her latest movie is 'Parched' which has gained immense popularity not only in Indian box office figures but in many parts of the world too.

### **Gauri Shinde**

Gauri Shinde is a modern day young director who has been accredited with successful films like 'English Vinglish' (2012) and 'Dear Zindagi' (2016). This talented filmmaker has been raised and brought up in Pune and she studied in St Joseph High School. In Mumbai, she completed her internship with the documentary director Siddharth Kak. In the year 2012, she made directorial venture with the film 'English Vinglish' in which she casted Sridevi. Her film 'English Vinglish' was based on her personal experience and showcased the relationship of a woman who didn't know English but still thrives for the best in life. Her first film was also acclaimed at Toronto International Film Festival and hit the international screens followed by commercial success in India. She has been presented with two prestigious awards such as Filmfare Award for Best Debut Director and with 'Laadli National Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity'. In 2007, Shinde got married to R.Balki.

### **Farah Khan**

Farah Khan better known as a choreographer, directed her first film 'Main Hoon Na' in which she casted Shah Rukh Khan as the protagonist. Her first film engrossed the highest success at box office figures. Farah also directed her second movie 'Om Shanti Om' and cast Shah Rukh Khan in the lead role was the huge success at box office. She has set a quintessential example for every woman that the dreams which they see can be accomplished if they put their hard core efforts. The lady has been honoured with several prestigious awards.

### **Pooja Bhatt**

Born to father Mahesh Bhatt who himself is a renowned filmmaker, this lady actress of 1990's has given extraordinary performances from 'Junoon' (1992) to 'Border' (1997). Many of her films have roared successfully at box office. The lady of boldness was born on 24th February 1972 and is the eldest child of Mahesh Bhatt and Kirran Bhatt. In the year 2004, she made her directorial debut with 'Paap' in which she casted John Abraham and Udit Goswami. Till now she has directed four films such as Holiday (2006), Dhoka (2007), Kajraare (2010) and Jism 2(2012). She has given a perfect example that the consistency and willingness to do the work shapes one career and has put aside the pressure of social forces and that is the main reasons that many of her films deal with socially oppressed lives and dilemma.

### **Zoya Akhtar**

It is not known to many that she has co-written Talaash (2012) together with Mrs Reema Kagti. Before taking the seat of film director, she has also assisted Mrs Mira Nair, Mr Tony Gerber and Dev Benegal. The filmmaker of naturally cult movies like 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara' (2011) and 'Dil Dhadakne Do' (2015) possess versatility in bringing out stories that have different genres but portrays day to day like stories which connects youth more often. In 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara', she elucidated the expression of love and the importance of living the life to fullest and her highly acclaimed movie revolved around three long-time friends. Zoya made her directorial debut through 'Luck by Chance' (2009), a film which showcases the struggling journey of an actor and how fate changed his life in film industry. Although, her first movie didn't do well at the box office. She worked as a casting director for the films like 'Dil Chahta Hai' and 'Split Wide Open'. The scriptwriter of such worthy and lifelong movies has also co-directed his brother's film like Lakshya. She has also worked as an executive producer for her long-time friend and colleague Reema Kagti's Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd. The filmmaker has also been the recipient of many prestigious awards which includes a FilmFare Award for Best Director (2011). In 2013, she also collaborated with Mr Anurag Kashyap, Mr Dibakar Banerjee and Mr Karan Johar for making the film 'Bombay Talkies' which showcased the hundred years of Hindi cinema. In 'Dil Dhadakne Do', she cast Mr Anil Kapoor and Mrs Shefali Shah as the pairs of rich industrialists for whom the importance of life is set at different angles.

### Tanuja Chandra

In 1995 Tanuja Chandra made her directorial debut television series 'Zameen Aasmaan' which starred Mrs Tanvi Azmi. Just after one year, she directed another television serial 'Mumkin' which had Mrs Shabnam Sakhdev in the leading role. In the year 1998, she also cooperated with Mr Mahesh Bhatt and wrote the screenplay for his movie 'Zakhm'.

### Meghna Gulzaar

She is daughter of veteran actress Rakhi and famous lyricist Gulzaar. She directed movies having bold theme like surrogacy in *Filhaal* (2000). She is credited with direction of the movie *Talwaar* based on the high profile double murder of daughter and servant of Dr Talvars. The story of this movie is based on the murder of Aarushi Talwar and Hemraj.

### Alankrita Shrivastav

Movie like 'Turning 30' (2011) and 'Lipstick Under My Burkha' (2017) are credited to her direction. Her upcoming movie 'Dolly Kitty Aur Wo Chamakte Sitare' (2020) is produced by Ekta and Shobha Kapoor. Her film *Lipstick under My Burkha* was not welcomed by the critics due to sexually communicable content and audio pornography.

### Nandita Dass

A filmmaker Nandita Dass directed her first Hindi film 'Firaq' in 2008 and *Manto* in 2018. *Firaq* is based on the consequences of Gujrat riots and *Manto* is a biography of an Urdu author Saadat hasan Manto. She is not only a renowned actor but director too. She acted very well in a controversial film *Fire*.

### Divya Kumar Kholsa

The director of film 'Yaariyan' and 'Sanam Re' has filmed various commercial advertisements and has also been featured in some music videos. Despite of coming from middle class family, she never loses hope and persuaded her passion for filmmaking. She did cinematography from a reputed institute of Mumbai. In 2004, she made her debut with the film 'Ab Tumhare Hawale Watan Saathiyo'. In her first directorial debut 'Yaariyan', she also choreographed all the songs of the film. In few songs of 'Sanam Re', she also made her appearance in the song 'Humne Pee Rakhi Hai' and 'Akkad Bakkad'. She is also the co-producer of Ranbir Kapoor's film 'Roy'.

## 2. CONCLUSION:

Thus it can be said that leading women directors of Indian cinema have broken the patriarchal image of the male-dominated industry. With the majority of films being produced on socialism and prejudiced opinions which needs to get curb in coming times, the cinema makers have initiated a trend of raising the unheard voices through the medium of films. Swara Bhaskar's "Anarkali Ka Aarah" was the much-hyped film of 2017 as it broke the stereotypical thinking of a certain section of the society. The consent of a woman is as necessary and it depends upon her with whom she thinks to create a bond of a certain relationship. Thus these films have discretely penetrated their own space at a time where male's macho and testosterone driven films were considered best to gain commercial success.

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