

Women and Media: An Analysis of Indian films

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Abstract: Media plays a very significant role in our daily life. Gender issues are very much prevalent in media. Media has proven to be an effective tool for bringing women's issues to general public and trying to encourage policymakers to increase their responsibilities and commitments to gender equality. Today media influences people's perception about girls and women in the society. Media can play a transformative role in achieving gender equality in society by creating content that will help to break gender stereotypical thoughts in the society. By portraying women in roles which are more empowered can be beneficial for the general audience and society in general. The present paper has attempted to analyze role of women in Indian films and how portrayal of women in Indian films is breaking gender stereotypes in society.

Key Words: Gender, Media, Films, Portrayal, Women.

1. INTRODUCTION :

There are many levels of influence in our society and media plays a major role in providing important images to us. Media as an important pillar in modern times plays a crucial role in influencing the behaviour of people. Image building and the way society sees various phenomenon are influenced by media in the present times. The media is entangled in our lives that we do not truly understand on a conscious level how much influence it really has over us. Some of the images and messages we see and hear can be both positive and negative. Media play a significant role in disseminating information, educating and contributing to socio-economic development. Effective mass communication is a two –way process. It influences social behaviour and after some time gets influenced by society itself. Media, in India, like the other countries deals with press, radio, television, films, publication, advertising etc. it has become part and parcel of human life. It has become so important. It affects many human, social, economic and cultural factors. It plays a key role in the life of Indian women.

The media shows us situations and relationships from other people's point of view- indeed, it is part of the eternal fascination of drama that we can see "how the world works" in lives other than our own. Media is like the 'mirror reality' which shows the various characters of the society. What is happening in the society has always been the first priority of media and media tries to bring these things to the society in the positive as well as in the negative ways which directly influence the thought of the viewers.

To convey a message one needs a medium. The media have been interested in conveying to public a particular kind of message about women. One need only flip through the pages of popular magazines and newspapers, watch television programs and commercial films to get the content of them loud and clear. The mass media perform a number of quite different functions and serve numerous personal needs in society (Herman & Mc Chesney, 1998). We live in an era saturated by media which pervades our lives. Bhasin and Agarwal (1994) argued that media interacts with cultural images of gender and with individual identities in three ways.

- First, media reflects cultural values and ideals about gender. They describe women, men and gender relations in a way that reflects a largely shared understanding and ideals.
- Secondly, the media reproduce the cultural perspectives of the individual. By defining 'normal' women, men and relationships, media suggest how we should be as women and men.
- Third, media are gatekeepers of information and images. They control what we see and know by deciding what programs to air, what news to feature, how to represent issues and events and how to depict women and men.

In the society whatever is happening has always been the main concern of mass media and media always tries to convey these things to the society in the optimistic as well as in the pessimistic ways which has direct influence on the thought of the viewers. A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political view and social behaviour and providing the materials out of which people forged their identities. Media texts are perceived to be one of the prime cultural sites through which it is possible to study the position of women/ mother in society.

Fiske and Hartely (1978) have argued that of all the popular means of mass media, movies have the greatest mass appeal and acceptance. Talking of movies particularly has becoming a powerful medium to communicate with the public. The sudden growth of cinema over the last two decades has made it the most influential medium of mass communication in India. Though the medium is comparatively recent in our society we have experienced its powerful effect. Since gender roles are socially constructed, most gender behaviors are learned rather than innate. People learn and experience which behaviors and which personalities in their cultural context are considered appropriate for men or women. It is common practise to divide the human population into men and women groups based on sex. They have a lot of differences because of the biological fact of sex. Men and women have different goals and objectives, desires and aspirations, duties and responsibilities, dress styles and behavioural patterns, roles and statuses. Nowhere in human history have men and women been treated equally or given the same status. Despite their desire for equality, women have never been able to live lives on par with men. Movies can be considered as human construct and the job that it does is the result of human choice, cultural decisions and social pressures. The medium responds to the conditions within which it exists. The media also reinforces the patriarchal ideology of restricting women to the household chores, domesticity and childcare.

Varsha Gosavi (2013) has argued that media plays a vital role in depiction of women, in presentation of women, in portrayal of women. It decides her position in today's world. Now a days the portrayal of women in Indian advertisements has become of great concern for the people and researchers. Media texts are perceived to be one of the prime cultural sites through which it is possible to study the position of women/ mother in society.

Chauhan (2010) has analyzed that from the early days of television the industry has kept women within the confines of limited gender roles. Portraying women as housewives and mothers to sell household goods has reinforced the view that domesticity is women's primary role. All cleaning, cooking and other activities of the house are her domain. The effectiveness of communication depends upon to what extent the advertising message is received and accepted by the target audience. Men in caring or domestic roles are less seen in media. The way men and women are portrayed in media such portrayals have the potential to influence not only what society expects of men and women, but also what they expect of themselves. They promote an unbalanced view of women's and men's roles in society.

Women and gender related issues have provided subject matter for many movies. Not surprisingly movie directors usually prefer dramatic stories with a lot of conflict and tales of illegitimacy, abandonment, maternal cruelty, and the like provide more exciting material than happy families living ordinary lives. In today's age films have really become a power medium to share information. Women becoming popular as a subject in films are not very surprising. This is not happening in the present days but women were part of the films from the time when the films started becoming in India. Cinema plays an essential role in shaping views about gender roles and gender identities within the Indian context where women are viewed as playing subordinate roles to men (Bagchi, 1996 and Ram, 2002).

2. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION:

The task of data collection begins after the definition of a research problem and the establishment of the research plan / model. When deciding on the data collection method to be used for the study, the researcher should consider two types of data, namely primary and secondary data. The researcher would have to decide which sort of data to be collected for the study and accordingly have to select one or the other method of data collection. For data collection secondary sources were used.

Written communications have increased the importance of print media because it is through writing that people are convinced, motivated and manipulated. But, besides the print media, television, radio, movies also communicate ideas, beliefs and values. The analysis of communication content-written and pictorial- how now become a methodological procedure for extracting data from a wide range of communications. The content analysis method therefore needs to be assessed as a research technique for objective and systematic description of that content of communication which is manifest. According to Berelson (1952), content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communications. The word 'communication' here refers available written material or print media. Thus content analysis consists of analyzing the contents of documentary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and the content of all other verbal materials which can be either spoken or printed. For the present paper the content analysis method has been used so as to analyze the films in which women has played a strong role. Thus, it becomes important to take into account the roles of women played in media especially films.

3. WOMEN AND MEDIA :

From the beginning of media especially films women have always been the central part of attraction. Earlier women character shown in Indian films was depicted as self sacrificing, loving, caring, submissive, obedient kind of character like in movies (Mother India, Karan Arjun). Now Indian films have started portraying lead female protagonist in strong roles than male lead protagonist. Earlier times very few films were there in which lead female actor was shown as a strong character. Today we have so many films in which not only lead female actors are shown as strong character but these films are also breaking stereotypical images and thoughts in the society. For far too long, women in mainstream Indian cinema have been stereotypical portrayed now it is critical to question, challenge, and break stereotypes in films as well as in society.

With the advent of technology, the power of mass media has grown. Despite the fact that the form, content and subject matter of mass media has changed and altered significantly in the past years, the media has played a critical role in reinforcing and strengthening gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture by creating new meanings and images and by setting social attitudes, ideologies and agendas through specific topics and concepts. Some Indian films assist the audience in seeing beyond the obvious and stereotype. Indian films that challenge stereotypes by posing questions and exposing differentiation in the society have been discussed in this paper. In order to examine the portrayal of women roles in media, this paper has attempted to examine some of the Indian films in which women have played a strong role and has created an example for breaking stereotypical thoughts in the society. Some of the Indian films are discussed below:

English Vinglish (2012): One of the Bollywood Hindi movies – *English Vinglish*, where the portrayal of mother is shown as very challenging and how the whole struggle of a mother ultimately makes her bond stronger with her daughter. In the film it was shown that the lead female actor played the role of mother, who was not good in speaking English and that caused the strained relationship with her daughter. Many a times, during the Parents Teacher Meet (PTM) her daughter feels inferior as her mother is not good in English. When the lead female character finds the cause of the strain in the relationship, she without thinking much joins the English learning classes when she gets a chance. She does not tell her daughter of the reason as her daughter feels ashamed of her. The movie has clearly depicted that the role of a mother in the society is a challenging one wherein she has to sacrifice so many things for her children. Even she has to struggle for her children to be at the mark of an ideal mother. In the film there is a dialogue ‘mother is always ready to make sacrifices or take up any challenge when it comes to her children, for a mother children are the most important and nothing else can take their place in a mother’s life’. This film is a great example to show audience that it is never too late for a woman to learn something new. Every woman in the society has complete control over her life and she can achieve anything she desires.

Mary Kom (2014): The film is about a woman who desires to become a professional boxer. In the society there is clear demarcation of men’s and women’s duties and responsibilities. Earlier boxing was considered as men’s domain but now we have ample of real examples which have proven this statement wrong. In the traditional patriarchal society, the film has emphasised on a woman's determination and dedication towards her dream and the degree of achievement and success she fulfilled with her husband's help. The film became the inspiration for girls and women that if they have potential they can do anything in their lives to complete their desire. The film is again a best example for mothers who after giving birth forget about their dreams and desires. The film has broken all the stereotypes which are considered innate in the society.

Nil Battey Sannata (2015): This movie is a journey of a mother who works as a domestic help and wishes to see her daughter to be successful in her life. As a single mother she takes up all the responsibility of her daughter. As her daughter is not interested in studies so to make her realize the importance of studies the main lead female character enrolls herself in her daughter’s school. This creates differences in the relation of mother and daughter duo. But still being a mother she studies with her daughter in the school and even encourages her to secure good marks. Later on with passage of time both are able to clear their exam. In the last it is shown that the lead female character motivates her daughter to always follow her dreams as they are dependent on the efforts of a person not on the circumstances. In this movie the portrayal of female protagonist has been shown as a strong character that can defeat any challenging situation in the society.

Piku (2015): In this film female protagonist has played the character of a modern woman who is financially independent. The movie is the about woman's relationship with her elderly father. In a country which is biased towards the male child

and considers that the boy will grow up and take care of his parents, the film is breaking all such kind of stereotypical thoughts. The female protagonist is not only the housekeeper, but also the owner of her own company.

Ki and Ka (2016): This film has portrayed female protagonist as business woman and male protagonist portrayed as stay at home husband who takes care of the family. Society has given a different set of qualities and characteristics to men and women. Men should have qualities like strength, bravery, fearlessness, dominance, competitiveness and women should have qualities like caring, nurturing, love, timidity, and obedience. Thus because of these qualities, men are considered to be the heads of households, breadwinners, owners and managers of property and active in politics. Women, on the other hand, are expected and trained to bear and look after children, to nurse the infirm and old, do all the household work and so on. These different sets of qualities are acquired by the men and women through socialization. The film is the great attempt which goes beyond traditional gender division of labour and breaking all the gender stereotypes that society has put forward for men and women in the society. The film is unquestionably impactful in portraying and updating the viewer's mindset and perspective, as it helped to break numerous different societal stereotypes.

Mom (2017): This film conveys the message that it is not only the biological mother who is upfront for the sacrifices for her child but as in the case of this movie it was shown that how a step-mother puts efforts to seek justice for her step daughter, who is raped by some men. She fights not only against the culprits but also against the society to get her daughter the justice. From the movie it is clearly seen that, media has always differentiated between the good mother and bad mother and has always defined the boundaries for step mother. But in this film there is different aspect of a step mother who can do anything for her children.

Madam Geeta Rani (2019): The film is a story of a woman who becomes the principal of an indisciplined government school. The female protagonist with her strong willpower starts reforming the condition of the school, students and teachers by introducing new and innovative methods of teaching. However she faces different challenges in her way. The movie on whole portrays a woman with all strength who can stand against all odds. The journey of the lead female protagonist is quite inspiring for those women who aspire to make position in the male dominated society.

Miss India (2020): This film is a journey of a girl from an Indian middle class family who dreams of becoming an entrepreneur by establishing her *chai* (tea) business in US. In a conventional mainstream film, such kind of female character has never been portrayed. This film is unique in itself as it has shown a female protagonist who dreams of building a business empire on her own terms and conditions and to beat all odds so as to emerge successful in a man's world. Patriarchal society is a hegemonic system which is based on power relations based on gender norms established and expected from men and women. The movie focuses on the journey of women who forgoes the established gender norms and rejects the idea that entrepreneurship is not women's cup of tea. The female protagonist rejects all such kind of stereotypes and move towards her dreams and goals independently. The movie has a very strong concept and is best example to break all stereotypical thoughts regarding women who aspire to establish their own empire.

4. CONCLUSION:

Thus media as an entertainment arena plays a large role in all of our lives, whether we know it or not it influences us in both positive as well as in negative way. Media is present all around us in the form of films, posters, T.V serials, commercials etc. Historically women have struggled to gain equal status in a male-dominated society. The films are a reflection of the culture in which we live. What are shown in the media are the expectations that society expects from the people and glorifies the same. It serves as a mirror to how we consider and treat women in real as well as reel life for entertaining audience. Despite the fact that so many Indian films are there which clearly reflects that film industry is undergoing a massive change in terms of writing, narrative and storytelling, there is still a long way to go in terms of giving females a respectable place in the Indian film industry so that it reflects our society equally. Thus mass media like TV and films are cultural forces which do not simply reflect, but subtly and indirectly help in shaping social reality.

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