

## Discrimination of Women Characters in Indian Cinema

Dr.Gousia Sultana

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of M&H, MGIT, Hyderabad, Telangana*

\*\*\*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on how women characters are portrayed in Indian cinema and how it glorifies the patriarchal Indian society. Women are not given significant roles in most of the Indian films. Their portrayal is limited to merely being either good homemakers and care-takers of the family or pretty dolls running around the trees in a couple of songs. This article attempts to show the discrimination of the women in Indian cinema. Cinema has a tremendous impact on the minds of the people as they are considered as the largest medium of communication with the masses and can bring tremendous changes in the society. Hence, it can influence the attitudes of the people enormously. This article concludes with a hope that the Indian film makers would strive hard to make films to create awareness on gender equality in the society and sensitize people to thrive for the emerging status of women in India.

**Key words:** Films, portrayal, women, cinema, discrimination, hero, heroine

### Full Paper

Women are not given significant roles in most of the Indian films. Their portrayal is limited to merely being either good homemakers and care-takers of the family or pretty dolls running around the trees in a couple of songs. It is a known fact that the Indian film industry is the largest film industry in the world screening in more than a hundred countries and watched by approximately four billion people worldwide. According to statistics approximately 1000 films are being produced each year in more than 20 languages. One can imagine what an impact these films can create on the minds of the youth of our country. Ours is a country where people say women must be respected but seldom practised. Indian Cinema mainly portrays the hero as powerful and macho and the heroine as weak and dependant. Male characters (be it a hero or a villain) are shown as the heads of the family, strong and courageous fit enough to beat 50-100 men at a time single-handed whereas female characters are depicted as lovers, sisters, caregivers timid, weak and submissive. So, Women need to be portrayed in the roles which appear to be practical, believable and respectable not as angels or vamps.

If peeped deep into the history of Indian cinema, Raja Harishchandra is the first ever Indian feature film produced in 1913. This first silent feature film is directed and produced by Dadasaheb Phalke. Searching for a woman to enact in this film as a heroine was the biggest challenge for Phalke as no woman came forward to work in the film. Finally, he convinced a male actor, Anna Hari Salunkewasan to play the role of the consort of king Harishchandra, Queen Taramati whose tale is told in Hindu mythology. So, India's first heroine was a man but not a woman.

In most of the Indian Cinema, heroines/women are shown as homely, soft-spoken, timid, responsible, tolerant and sacrificing how much ever educated they are whereas heroes/men are depicted as dominating, protectors, rude, etc. However, there are few bold women who broke this age old stereotype and set a new trend. Here is the list of 5 such women who took the Indian cinema to a brand new direction from the stereotype old conventional path in those days. Fatima Begum was the first female director in Indian cinema. she started as a stage actress and ended up in directing the film. She opened a film company called "Fatma". She wrote, produced and directed the film '*Bulbul Ae Paristaan*' in 1926. Durga Bai Kamat is the first female actor in Indian cinema. She worked in '*Mohini Bhasmasur*', the second film of Dadasaheb Phalke. Jaddan Bai, one of the greatest celebrities of her time was the first music director in Indian cinema. She was close to famous personalities like Moti Lal Nehru and the legendary actress Nargis Dutt was her daughter. The first Stunt woman in Indian cinema was Nadia. Her name is derived from Hunter wali in 1935. It was the period when acting in films was considered as a shameful act. At that time the fearless stunt-queen, Nadia was fighting on the screen and her daring stunts were on par with Tarzan, James Bond and Rambo. Another woman who broke the stereotype is Vijay Lakshmi, the first woman Director of Photography (DoP) in Indian cinema.

There is no doubt to say that it must have been quite difficult for women to start a new beginning in Indian cinema. In 1920s, the early days of silent films, most of the movies focused on the theme of 'sati' (the woman who enters her husband's funeral pyre voluntarily. Woman, with the only goal of her life to look after her husband and family, had no individual identity of her own in those times. These type of themes continued till 1960s and after that conventional sati stories declined but led to the themes that focused on committed wives. Portrayal of women has been a favourite theme in the Indian cinema. In real life, woman becomes indispensable to the family as she plays multiple roles as a mother, a wife, a daughter and a professional, etc. In reel-life also every Bollywood film is incomplete without the presence of woman who

lights up the screens and creates an unmatched atmosphere. It is true that the role of a woman in Indian Cinema from *Mother India* to *Mirch Masala* to *Chandni Bar* cannot be overlooked. Having said that, it is also true that most of the producers have treated female actors as mere objects in their movies which are filled with sex and violence. In Raj Kapoor's classic movie, "Awaara", the scene in which the hero (Raj Kapoor) slaps the heroine (Nargis) persistently is a proof of male chauvinism. And her submissive reaction to his slapping, 'Maarna chahte ho, lo maar lo' is quite distressing and unacceptable.

Later, a few films were made on the themes of women empowerment. It is believed that woman is physically soft and mentally strong. She possesses unimaginable levels of endurance. *Mother India* came with the same theme of unending problems faced by the heroine. It is a remake of *Aurat* (1940), both directed by Mehboob Khan depicting the story of a poor indomitable woman named Radha (Nargis), who struggles to raise her sons and stands against a cunning money-lender. Some authors see Radha as the symbol of women empowerment, but others opine her cast as yet another female stereotype. Till 70s, women were not portrayed as being successful in professional front. In 1970s some bold women roles were introduced - Jaya Bachchan came up with a role of 'knife sharpener' in the movie "Zanjeer" and Hema Malini (Basantini) drives a 'Taanga' (Horse-carriage) to make her living in the world-famous movie, "Sholay".

Further, in 80s and 90s and even in the following decades and in the present time also, women are portrayed as helpless victims of eve-teasing, harassment and domestic violence or male domination which can be seen in the some of the movies mentioned below:

- the incessant stalking of the heroine by the protagonist (Shahrukh Khan) in the movie "Anjaam"
- the heroine (Madhuri Dixit) is frequently whipped by her father (played by Anupam Kher) "Tezaab"
- The character played by Anushka Sharma becomes the victim and experiences the chilling violence after witnessing the atrocities of misogyny and honour killing committed by a powerful gangster in the alarming events of "NH10-Road to Revenge"
- Aishwarya Rai Bachchan plays the role of a married woman who is the victim of her husband's domestic abuse in the movie "Provoked". She sets him on fire after enduring his torture for ten years.
- Raveena Tandon wins a National Award for her role as a victim of domestic violence and marital rape in "Daman". The list goes on...
- Deepika Padukone plays the victim of acid attack in "Chhapak" which is based on a real incident.

Apart from the above mentioned few movies with the theme of violence, there are many movies with the theme of love in which heroines are catcalled, teased, stalked and blackmailed to love the hero or she falls in love with him out of gratitude after he saves her from the goondas or rapists. In the beginning of the movie, the heroine hates the hero and even slaps him for his stalking or eve-teasing or even kissing her. For example, in the song 'ladki hai ya chadi hai pattakhe ki ladi hai', in the Hindi movie "Dil", Amir Khan teases and compares the heroine with a cracker and in the song 'Hello guru prema kosame' in the Telugu movie "Nirnayam", hero Nagarjuna stalks the heroine Amala and demands to accept his love. In "Tezaab", hero threatens the heroine to accept his love otherwise he would jump off from the college building. In a Telugu movie, "Loukyam", the hero slaps the heroine and says "Flowers, glass, dolls and girls look cute when they are fragile and sensitive" (Sexual Harassment,92). In the recent movie "Kabir Singh", the hero does not bother to take heroine's consent and threatens her to love him. In all the movies mentioned here, heroines accept the hero whom they resisted and hated earlier. They do not bother to know their interests. They do not try to know each other before falling in love; there is very little respect for an equal relationship as it is seen in Mary Kom and Onler's story. "Movies should show and inspire the youth that relationship between men and women should be based on trust, warmth, friendship and mutual respect." (Just Relationships, page 212).

To conclude, movies have a broad and wide reach to the public/audience. Fans admire their favourite actors and actresses. Some heroes and heroines become the role models of their Fans. So, it is easy to send the message to the public through movies as Cinema addresses the social issues and impacts attitudes of the people enormously. Hence, the Indian film makers are expected to put their efforts to make films which create awareness on gender equality in the society and sensitize people to thrive for the emerging status of women in India.

**References**

1. Agarwal, Ruchi. "Changing Roles of Women in Indian Cinema". Silpakorn University Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts. Vol.14(2). 2014. (117-132)
2. Towards a World of Equals: A Bilingual Textbook on Gender. Ed. A.Suneetha & Susie Tharu. Telugu Akademi, Hyderabad. 2015. (92). Print.