

INDIAN CINEMA: PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S VOICE IN SELECT MOVIES

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Abstract:

Women have a crucial role to play in every sphere of life, be it household, economic contribution, child rearing or societal development. To play these roles effectively women should be conscious of their optimum potential. Women's status in India has greatly improved from being doubly marginalized to being revered for their achievements. The mass media have long been welcomed as the watch dog of society and this tradition bestows upon them the social responsibility to mirror and guide the process of social change. Movies are the most influencing medium by which the audience in all strata of society often gets carried away and any interpretation can have tremendous impact on the society.

The paper deals with portrayal of women and women's voice in recent cinemas. Though Movies remain male-dominated terrain, in recent years a few women-centric movies are produced and appreciated which portray women as a social member who can shoulder great responsibility with dignity unlike their counterpart from earlier years. The female characters from select movies are analyzed in the light of Standpoint Theory and Gender Empowerment Theory. Standpoint Theory affirms that an individual's own perspectives are shaped by his or her social and political experiences. It is a postmodern method for analyzing Inter-subjective discourses. Gender empowerment Theory helps one to assess by figuring out from four criteria; they are socioeconomic development, rising gender egalitarian process, historical legacies and institutional design factors.

Key Words: Women, Hero, Movies, *Mary Kom*, *Dangal*, *Pink*, *Ki and Ka*, *Parched* and *Udta Punjab*.

—I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men. They are far superior and

always have been. Whatever you give a woman, she will make it greater...she multiplies and enlarges what is given to her! - Willaim Golding

The status of Indian women has seen ups and downs throughout the centuries. The low tide or nadir was the situation when she was considered a mere child bearing machine and maid to the family. Women had to face double marginalization. Coventry Patmore in his poem —Angel of the House explains the aspects of a perfect woman, which later on went on to become the stereotype. She is a wonderful being who sacrifices her pleasure, leisure and choices for the wellbeing of her family, no matter what they do to her in return. A wonder woman should be an epitome of patience, forbearance and forgiveness. Cinema played an active role in cementing this image. Movies of the earlier times portrayed woman as gentle, mild, submissive and selfless, somebody who never rebels against any injustices done to her. Even the headstrong women who play the negative role is also shown to have passions spent and calm down in the course of life

As the time went on, women gained access to education. She realized her folly and her fight resulted in the raising of various feministic theories around the globe, thereby mass emancipation of women folk. With the first wave of feminism her voice was heard reminding male chauvinist of her existence. With the second wave of feminism she wanted her rightful place in the male dominated world. With the passing of the third wave she came to an enlightened situation from where she understood she needn't compete with men but could express the experience of being a woman. In the recent times women have empowered themselves and achieved a stand where even men revere and respect her. Mass media helps in the dissemination of information. With the advancement of technology, the world has shrunk into a global village. One of the most effective media is cinema. Movies with its audio-video aids captivate audience and leaves everlasting message in the hearts of the audience. Movies can be called agents of change as the primal stereotypes of mild submissive woman is created through movies.

The paper aims to analyse the pattern and themes of portraying women's characteristics through the select movies in the light of Standpoint Theory and Gender Empowerment theory. The select movies are *Mary Kom*, *Dangal*, *Pink*, *Ki and Ka*, *Parched* and *Udta Punjab*.

Standpoint theory's concept is that an individual's own perspectives are shaped by his or her social and political experiences. According to this approach, a standpoint is a place from which a person views the world. A standpoint influences how the people adopting it socially construct the world. Michael Ryan says, —The idea of collective standpoint does not imply an essential overarching characteristic but rather a sense of belonging to a group bounded by a shared experience. Standpoint theory emphasizes the utility of a naturalistic, or everyday experimental, concept of knowing ones standpoint shapes which concepts are intelligible, which claims are heard and understood by whom, which features of the world are perceptually salient, which reasons are understood to be relevant and forceful, and which conclusions credible.

Female empowerment theory focuses on the socioeconomic development, rising gender-egalitarian attitudes that transform economic development into a cultural process of human development, historical legacies stemming from a society's cultural and political traditions and institutional design factors (Alexander and Welzel). The four aspects of gender equality are basic living condition, participation in civic actions, positional empowerment and political representation.

Mary Kom depicts Kom's journey of becoming a boxer to her victory at 2008 world boxing championship in Ningbo. It was directed by Omung Kumar and produced by Sanjay Leela Bansali. The biopic portrays the difficulties which resulted in triumph of the boxing star. Her father asks her to choose between him and boxing, from which she chooses the latter. Narjit Singh coaches her and she wins 2006 Women's World Amateur boxing Championships. She also chooses to make way for matters of the heart, marriage and kids before coming back to winning global recognition again in 2008, 2010 and 2012. She is nicknamed Magnificent Mary. She is the renowned example of the multitasking woman who maintains perfect balance between work and family.

Dangal is a 2016 biographical sports drama film directed by Nitesh Tiwari. Mahavir Singh Phogat is an amateur wrestler who trains his daughters Geeta Phogat and Babita Kumari to win Gold and silver medal respectively in Commonwealth Games. The movie initially begins with the father wishing for a male heir who later on realizes the potential of his daughters. In the society where female infanticide is a common, where considering girls as

burden is the custom, in that particular society (Haryana), training women in the male dominated field is unique.

Ki and Ka is a romantic film written directed and produced by R. Balki. The lead contradicts the gender roles placed upon women and men of Indian society. Kia wishes to become successful business woman whereas Kabir wants to become —house husband. The conflict comes when Kabir gets fame for his interview stating that it doesn't matter if ki (girl) takes up the role of Ka(boy) and ka takes up the role of Ki. In the movie in the cameo role, Jaya Bachan advises Kia that Kabir's decision of breaking the stereotype is great choice but being wife to such a person is even greater task. The age old taboo is broken through Kabir's character, thus emphasizing gender equality.

Parched is directed by Leena Yadav. The story revolves around four women residents of a desert village of Rajasthan. Rani is a widow who supports her mother-in-law and son Gulab who is rebellious and spoilt. Rani was widowed earlier in life and has led a life of suffering and struggle adhering to the traditions and culture which imposes torture on widows. Gulab, who is violent and wayward, is married to Janki who is a child bride, she tries to avoid marriage by chopping off her hair. Janaki also becomes victim to Gulab's atrocities but later on is relieved from marriage and joins her childhood lover. Lajjo struggles with her alcoholic husband who beats her and calls her Barren woman but in reality her husband is impotent. And Bijli is an erotic woman sort of sex worker. The women join hands to and relieve each other's misery, they are good at embroidery and handicrafts, and they show courage to take a bold step to leave their native village which is rebellious. And finally refuse to subdue to all customs, traditions and patriarchy.

Uda Punjab is an Indian Crime Drama Film directed by Abhishek Chaubey. It is based on drug abuse by youth population of Punjab. The women characters of Bauria, a farm worker also hockey player and Preet Sahni, a doctor-cum-activist, are remarkable. One stands for the victim and other as a savior. Bauria finds a small bundle of drugs, she tries to sell it to earn quick money, but she is trapped. In spite of all her troubles during repeated rapes she says —Good days are yet to come. Bauria inspires the pop singer to believe that there is another side to desperation. In fact she is the person who transforms him. She wanted to play Hockey at the national level, but unfortunate events like her father's demise shatters her

dreams. She is a bold girl who never complains but welcomes good or bad turns of events cheerfully. Whereas Preet runs rehabilitation centre and tries to create awareness about harms of drugs. She collects evidences of drug trade and hopes that someday the state would be free from drugs. Preet becomes martyr in the process of abolishing drugs from the state. Yet it was her initiative which resulted in the abolition of drug abuse. Preet stands tall as a modern empowered woman who can initiate change.

Pink is a courtroom drama film produced by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhry. The movie revolves around three girls Meenal Arora, Falak Ali and Andrea Tariang, being trapped in false accusations from some rich, politically influential boys, whom an eminent lawyer Deepak Sehgal saves thereby giving a strong social message of being sensible to women's rights. The closing remarks are, Deepak mentions that his client said NO, which is not a word but a statement and implies a woman's right. NO simply means No and doesn't require further explanation. It can come from anyone, a girlfriend, a sex worker, or even your wife. The film depicts the matter of fact that, in spite of being educated women are not aware of their rights. The movie ends with a poem by Amitabh Bachchan which can be translated as —when character is pure why are you worried? Sinners don't have any right to question you!

The characters in the movie form their standpoint based on the circumstances they live. The characters from the above mentioned movies have fought with the circumstances to win in the struggle. Here are examples of people who have discovered themselves at the crossroad. Proper channelisation of energy with right direction of path makes an effort fruitful and the sense of direction is given by education. The heroines know to differentiate right from wrong and are in a position to alleviate the pain. Geeta and Babita are pushed on to become Wrestlers being inspired by their legend father. Kia, being educated and empowered aspires to become business magnet and adopts road not travelled, Bauria and Preet are brave enough to fight against drug because they have witnessed what drug can do to fellow humans. Rani, Bijli, Lajjo, and Janaki being subjected to male chauvinism, oppressions and are chained to age old customs. Having reached the saturation point they revolt. The characters fight their fears and chains that keep them down, finally breaking bonds. Meenal, Falak and Andrea's story creates an awareness about women's rights.

The trend of Indian cinema is changing and nowadays women centric movies are being

produced. The stereotype of woman as a docile creature who suffers in silence is changed to somebody who fights for her rights with dignity. Like Literature even cinema imitates life. The positive trends are the indicators of the positive change in the society. The select movies present the iron willed women who empower themselves and emerge victorious thereby becoming role models for others to follow.

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