Objectifying Women through the Prism of Cinema- comparing 1980’s and 2000

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ABSTRACT: Relegating women to margins as a result of a structural and systemic discrimination has been witnessed by all societies from the very dawn of mankind. Irrespective of her hierarchal ranking or status she is the one who has been subjected to discrimination, oppressed and dominated by the male members of our patriarchal society. With the concept of capitalism and globalization commoditization and objectification of women has emerged out as a novel way of derogating women and labeling her as a sheer object of sexual or physical abuse. A concept of marginalized women which generally includes widows, tribal, refugee and dalit women is spreading its arms by inculcating the whole female species after declaring her as an object. Indian cinema has been one of the most dominant and distinguishing features of the subcontinent’s popular culture for the last sixty years. The Indian cinema industry, also called Bollywood, is the world’s largest film industry in terms of the number of films produced (Dwyer, 2006). According to Tom Sherak, President Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, films are reflections of society, both past and present. According to him Film and its innovation have to catch up to the society but sometimes it leads to a society too. The recent trend followed by Bollywood of using women as a symbol of fulfilling sexual desires or to titillate, to be in stress or rescued or simply to prove heterosexuality of a hero has made women appear as a group, category or a class which is in all ways inferior to men. Objectification of women in Bollywood has made women a nigger in the same world she belongs to where she has to stand out and fight for her rights, dignity and equality.

Key Words: Bollywood, Cinema, Women Characters

INTRODUCTION

Bollywood has become a very important medium of mass communication especially in India where it also plays a very pertinent role in opinion forming and providing an impetus to most dominant cultural values and images in the society. With cinema completing more than 100 years of its journey a long way for women character has carved its niche. Bollywood has shown a wide variety of women characters in films. Innumerable laws and efforts have been passed and tried in order to make the world a better place for women. Women being biologically designed and created in such a manner that she is the one who can accomplish the tasks of bearing a child, nursing a child and also unleashing the fantasizing beauty by upholding the tenderness and delicacy of her existence. The patriarchal style of the contemporary society has its roots in the same biological difference between the two sexes. Poets, painters, lyricists, filmmakers and writers have tried to re carve this marvelously patient creation of almighty in their own unique fashions. Some of these intellectual people claim the rights of women and some merely exploit them to decorate their literary or artistic piece of works. Attribution of women by different scholars has emerged out women as a nigger in the same world she belongs to where she has to stand out and fight for her rights, dignity and equality. Women empowerment has been discussed worldwide with suggestions, ideas and efforts coming from every corner of the world. Still there is a long way for a country like India as could be supported with phrases from many ancient scriptures. According to one of the phrases in Manusamriti, “Na StreeSwathantryamArhati” means that women do not deserve independence. The Scripture also hints at woman being an embodiment of the worst desires, hatred, deceit, jealous and bad character. Thus a woman doesn’t deserve freedom. Birth of a girl child is also considered to be a source of sorrow as she may bring disgrace to the family by committing mistakes in her youth. Weeping of the family including mother at the time of the birth of a baby girl is a not a rare thing in India. If escapes from the clutches of her so called fatal youth the family fears from dowry, an ancient practice in India where the girl is given a lots and loads of cash, gold and other things at the time of her wedding. Women in India is owned by a father before her marriage, by a husband in her youth and when her peer of the realm is dead she is owned by her sons thus a woman can never achieve
independence. She is the one who is expected to be loyal even to a disloyal husband, obedient, submissive, deaf, dumb and even blind! Bollywood has always been successful in portraying women as a protagonist in the male-dominated petriacle society. According to Lakshmi (1991),” From the passive wife of Dada Saheb Phalke Raja Harishchandra to the long suffering but heroic mother figure of mother India to the liberated single parent of Mother ‘98’ it has been a rather long and challenging journey for women for Bollywood. Thus Lakshmi traces the history of Bollywood from Raja Harishchandra in 1913 to Mother India in 1957 in a single phrase and also touching the characters of women. It is a common observation in Bollywood for a female actress to start her carrier at an early age as compared to the male actors. Indian actress is considered to be an old face as soon as she reaches her 30s and the film makers as well as the audience start hunting for a new and a fresh face in order to win laurels in the press, industry as well as an added charm of youth. Audiences always prefer to see young women in the lead that is considered to be more attractive and sensuous. This shows that the Bollywood act on male-centralism and the incline towards sensuousness is not only in the minds of film-makers but also in the minds of the viewers.

Indian women in a typical Indian society are regarded as epitomes of respect, honor, household and prestige. Thus in the Bollywood women are expected to remain secluded and confined to a domestic domain where they are dependent on the male characters for their emotional, physical, financial and moral needs. According to Davidson (1981) some directors have owned enough ethical values so that they treat centrally the sexually dynamic female without resorting to caricature or to a kind of implicitly self-pitying mentality. The flat characterizations and mawkish moral slants make the central females appear like puppets to stir up a sufficient melodrama according to a moralistic point. But over the years the role of women in Bollywood has emerged out to be a very important role which provides women with sufficient screen time in order to prove their presence on screen. The question which arises here is the effect of these roles played by women on the minds of audience and their attribution towards the women. Indian women are usually not autonomous and self-defined in real life as well as on-screen. On the same side the 90% producers of films are men who may not be able to understand self-sacrificing mothers, obedient daughters and sub servant wives. The sensuous dance sequences and the daring wardrobes by women in the movies haveled to carve out the image of women as mere objects.

**HYPOTHESES**

- Bollywood is objectifying women by showcasing her as a symbol of sex.
- Representation of women in Bollywood as a sex symbol is portraying her as inferior to men.
- Women stand as an “Abla” in Bollywood.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Women, the fairer sex has been discussed, attributed and remarked by the opposite sex and even the same sex. Biological difference among men and women could be counted as one of the reasons for the typical style of societal responsibilities and division of labor among men and women. Women being biologically designed and created in such a manner that she is the one who can accomplish the tasks of bearing a child, nursing a child and also unleashing the fantasizing beauty by upholding the tenderness and delicacy of her existence. The patriarchal style of the contemporary society has its roots in the same biological difference between the two sexes. Poets, painters, lyricists, filmmakers and writers have tried to re carve this marvelously patient creation of almighty in their own unique fashions. Some of these intellectual people claim the rights of women and some merely exploit them to decorate their literary or artistic piece of works. Attribution of women by different scholars has emerged out women as a nigger in the same world she belongs to where she has to stand out and fight for her rights, dignity and equality. In the vogue of modernization some of the authors as well as film makers have attributed women with some of the characters like nudity, vulgarity and crude language. The change in depiction of women in such characters has resulted in objectifying women in the reel as well as the real world.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To study the status of women as portrayed in Bollywood.
- To study the depiction of women characters as compared to men in Bollywood.
- To analyze the caliber of women as depicted in Bollywood.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Present study is a focus group study where two groups of samples were carefully selected on the basis of age, gender, occupation and qualification. Movies for the focus group were carefully selected on the basis of box office rating. The selected sample was shown two movies each from the decade of 1980’s and 2000 after which they were asked a series of carefully designed structured and unstructured questions. Movies selected for the focus group are as follows-

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<th>1980’s</th>
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<td>1. Aandhi</td>
<td>1. Dirty picture</td>
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<td>2. Mausam</td>
<td>2. Aitraaz</td>
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DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

72% of the respondents are of opinion that there is a shift in the array of characters played in Bollywood films of 1980’s and 2000.

90% of the respondents are of opinion that female characters in the films of 1980’s are more homely than those in 2000.

43% are of opinion that women are treated as sex symbols in the decade of 2000, 11% are against the motion while about 46% stand strongly in favor of the motion.

87% of the respondents are of opinion that there has been a wide usage of item songs in the movies of the decade of 2000 as compared to those in 80’s.

66% of respondents are of opinion that strong women characters in films build up the morale of women in general and 10% are of negative opinion.
20% of respondents are of opinion that 1980s decade is responsible for portraying women as competent to men. Whereas 36% of respondents are of opinion that 2000 era contributed more to it.

80% are opinion that bold image of the women characters in films is supporting women at moral front while 4% deny the fact.

39% of respondents are of opinion that films in 1980’s help acting by emotional backup for women, 40% agree to 2000 while 21% do not favor any of the decades.

47% of respondents are of opinion that 1980’s movies are leading to objectification of women while 49% are of opinion that 2000 decade is responsible for objectification of women.

CONCLUSION:
It is very difficult to come to a deciding conclusion about the objectification of women in Bollywood but it could be said that portrayal of women in Bollywood is gradually becoming sensual, crude and away too much real. The portrayal of women in Bollywood films has been seen as a change in the image of women which though no longer succumb to playing shallow characters but is exploited as an object of fulfilling sexual desires for the male dominated society. There has been a great shift in Bollywood which can be seen in terms of characters. A contrast among the movies of 1980’s and 2000 decade brings about a certain contrast in the portrayal of women characters. Movies in the 1980’s showed a lesser level of objectification of women characters as compared those in 2000. The decade of 2000 also shows unnecessary item songs and a show of skin which deteriorates the caliber of women to a mere object as compared to 1980’s decade.
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DVD of Aandhi, Mausam, Dirty Picture, and Aitraaz