



PATH BREAKING WOMEN ORIENTED FILMS OF BOLLYWOOD: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FOUR HINDI CINEMAS

Dr. Bharati Bala Patnaik

Head, Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communication, S.M.I.T, Hillpatna, Berhampur University, Berhampur, Ganjam, Odisha.

Abstract

The picture of women presented by the Hindi cinema is changing in more than one sense. Women still play the same role as wife, mother, beloved or vamp but the presentation has changed a lot. With the change of time, women in Hindi Cinema too face new challenges. The content analysis of four Hindi cinema- Mother India, Mirch Masala, Mardaani and Akira are selected to study the changing role of women. Strong female character in cinema still chooses to let them be in the larger societal frame work. How they have faced problems to save other. They have changed their path to fight against the injustice, women harassment, crime, corruption in the society. At last the role of struggling sacrificing and unifying character proves that a real human being.

During its awesome journey of 100 years, the Indian cinema has been a witness to a sea-change in the presentation of the female protagonists. The picture of women presented by the Hindi cinema is changing in more than one sense. Women still play the same role as wife, mother, beloved or vamp, but the presentation has changed a lot. With the change of time, women of Hindi cinema too face new challenges. Directors like Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair and Meghna Gulzar are bold enough to depict “taboo topics” like lesbianism, polygamy and even surrogate motherhood.

Women have played a number of roles in Hindi movies: the mythical, the Sati Savitri, the rebel, the victim and victimizer, the avant-garde and the contemporary. The new woman was always portrayed as a rebel. There are some positive portrayals of rebels in the Hindi movies like Mirch Masala, Damini, Pratighat, Zakhm, Zubeida, Mrityudand and several others. The definition of an ideal Indian woman is changing in Hindi cinema, and it has to change in order to suit into changing society. Dr. Shoma A. Chatterji is a freelance journalist, film scholar and National Award Winner for the Best writing on cinema started “in film where women had important roles, they are more victims and martyrs or victimizers of other women. Rarely have films like *Kunku* presented women as strong women who can raise their voice against injustice, who can rebel in their own way and make their own political statement”. Madhur Bhandakar’s film females are usually shown as bold and empowered women who lead life on their own terms, take their decisions are rebels, who don’t conform to social norms and excel in their respective professions. His films he still chooses to let them be in the larger societal frame work.

Thus, films have to be responsive towards the context in which they locate characters. Women characters should possess agency to dismantle the existing power structures as well as be able to negotiate their own position within the structure. It is a time that cinema seek a redefinition of women as objects of male gaze.

Review of Literature

A number of studies have addressed this issue from different perspectives. Amitabha Bagchi (1996) defined Hindi cinema has influenced the way in which people perceive various aspects of their own lives. To some extent they identify areas where “modern feminism” comes into contact with “traditional” values. Ruche Agarwal (2014) examined to link the changing character played by women in films with emerging status of women in India as films are a reflection of changes in the social structure. Pratima Mistry (2014) has defined “Today woman is not making a martyrdom of virtues. She wants to be heard, wants to express herself. With the change of time, women of Hindi cinema too face new challenges.

Objectives of the Study

The followings are considered as main objectives for the study.

1. Strong female character in cinema still chooses to let them be in the larger societal frame work.
2. Female character pulling with an expression of pain and concentration is an image which is burned in the mind of people.

Hypothesis

1. Women have dignified character to fight against the bad practices in the society.
2. They have justified themselves as a real as well as equally powerful human being.

Methodology

The study is based on the content analysis of four Hindi cinemas (Mother India, Mirchi Masala, Mardaani and recently released Akira). Secondary data also collected to support the study. I have chosen an old film Mother India, Mirch Masala in



middle stage, Mardaani in 2014 and Akira in 2016. The analysis which follows tries to decipher and articulate these points of view. But before the analysis, I summarize the plots of these films.

Mother India

Mother India made in 1957 by Mehboob. The film was made ten years after India gained independence from the British rule. In this film the director, Mehboob, attempts to combine socialistic ideals with traditional values. This is story of Radha (Nargis Dutt) who marries Shamoo (Rajkumar) and came to his village. There she discovers that Shamoo's mother, Sundar Chachi, has pawned their family land to pay for the wedding. The village Usurer, Sukhilala takes three-fourth of their produce as interest on the loan of 500 rupees that gave her. Every year they give most of their produce to Sukhilala but they are unable to pay off the loan because all they give to him is counted as interest. In an effort to clear an arid piece of land which they own, Radha and Shamoo try to move some big boulders. In this process one of the boulders rolls on to Shamoo's arms and he has to have them amputated. He is unable to come to terms with his helpless condition and runs away leaving Radha alone. Soon after this Sundar Chachi dies. This is followed by a flood in which two of Radha's four sons die. Sukhilala offers her food in return for sexual favors. She resists for a long time but is unable to bear the fact that her children are starving. So she goes to his place. Just as she is about to submit to him she gets a divine signal that her husband is still alive. She leaves Sukhilala's house and confronts her problems with new hope. Next we see her as an old woman and her two sons Birjoo (Sunil Dutt) and Ramoo (Rajendra Kumar) as grown men. Ramoo is a responsible type but Birjoo is never do-well who resents the fact that Suskhilala continue to take three-fourths of their produce. Birjoo's inability to control his aggression makes him a nuisance to the villagers and finally, despite Radha's pleas, he is thrown out of the village becomes a dacoit. When Sukhilala's daughter is getting married he threatens to come and abduct her. Radha assures Sukhilala that she will protect his daughter's honour and, when Birjoo comes and tries to abduct her, Radha shoots him dead.

Mirch Masala

Mirch Masala, is produced in 1989 by Ketan Mehta. It is the story of Sonbai (Smita Patil) who works in Chilli factory somewhere in the Western part of pre-independence India. Her husband gets a job in the railways and leaves for the city. In the meantime the Subedar (or tax collector, played by Naseeruddin Shah) arrives to collect taxes and he sees Sonbai. He is attracted to her and asks the village headman, the Mukhi, to send her to him. He sends the wrong women. The next day she is passing by the place where the Subedar has his camp. He stops her and grabs hold of her. She frees herself and slaps him. He asks his soldiers to catch her. She runs into Chilli factory where she works. The old Muslim watchman Abu Miyan (Om Puri) takes her in and closes the gates. A parallel thread is that of the Mukhi's wife, the Mukhiain, who is not treated well by her husband. She tries to drum up support for Sonbai when she gets to know that her husband and all the men of the village have capitulated to the Subedar and have agreed to hand Sonbai over to him. But her protest is rudely crushed by the men, and the Subedar, accompanied by all the men of the village, reaches the factory. Abu Miyan refuses to open the doors and the Subedar's men break it down and kill him. In the final scene of the film the Subedar approaches Sonbai when suddenly the other women in the factory take bags of Chilli powder and throw them in his face.

Mardaani

Mardaani is a 2014 Indian crime thriller films that deals with the problem of human-trafficking in India. Directed by Pradeep Sarkar and produced by Aditya Chopra. Shivani Shivaji Roy (Rani Mukherji), a dedicated and brave police officer with Mumbai police, chases a Delhi-based kingpin, Karan Rastogi (Tahir Raj Bhasin), who runs an organized crime cartel involving child trafficking and drugs. Her aim is to hunt him down and rescue a teenage girl, Pyaari. Pyaari is an Orphan who is kidnapped by Karan's men. Shivani had saved Pyaari from being sold by her uncle and started taking care of her and since then Pyaari is like a daughter to her. She takes the more personally and goes beyond her legal rights and duties to nab Karan and save Pyaari. Karan was aware that Shivani is continually monitoring his cartel's activities. Phones her, suggesting she not interrupt his business. Determined to catch him, Shivani uses intelligence inputs to track down his associate in Mumbai, who leads her to Karan's close aide, wakeel in Delhi. Karan, as a warning to Shivani, dismembers one of Pyaari's fingers and sends it to Shivani's house wrapped in a gift box, and gets Shivani's husband abused and thrashed.

Shivani travels to Delhi and sets up trap involving decoy drug dealers from Nigeria, who pretend to offer very expensive rare South American Cocaine to Karan and wakeel. As the decoy drug dealers are negotiating the deal with wakeel, Shivani barges in with other police officers and intercept the area. While Karan escapes wakeel realizes he will get arrested, which means the police would interrogate him and eventually capture Karan. He therefore, tries to erase evidence by destroying his mobile phone's SIM card, and then shoots himself.

Shivani's continued investigation and the information from her sources leads her to Karan's house, where Karan's mother sedates her. Shivani is abducted and brought to a party organized by Karan. There, she meets Pyaari; Pyaari and the other



girls are forced to work as prostitutes. Shivani single handedly confronts the situation, forcing Karan into a small room and rescuing and taking the girls with her. She challenges Karan to fight her when he teases her for being a woman and beats him badly. Sensing that he might escape the law, given the corruption in the police and judicial system, she hands Karan over to the girls, who beat him to death. His other gang members are arrested and prosecuted.

Akira

Akira is a 2016 Indian action drama film co-written, directed and produced by AR Murugadoss. It is a remake of the 2011 Tamil film Mouna Guru and features Sonakshi Sinha in the titular role.

Akira Sharma is a little girl in a small town who lives happily with her father and mother. One day, she witnesses to a crime involving a group of unruly men ruthlessly, throwing acid on a young women's face. Akira helps police to catch the criminal but the accomplices of the criminal swear vengeance. Akira's father realizes the importance of self defense and enrolls her in a self defense class. One day on her way to home, Akira notices one of the gang members on the street that scared her trying to tease another girl. She beats them up but one of them takes out a bottle of acid to throw acid on Akira, but it backfires on him. Akira was accused of throwing acid on his face and was sent to juvenile Jail.

The movie moves in time and fourteen years later, Akira is shown to have grown in to a brave and head strong young woman but unfortunately her father has passed away Akira and her mom move in with her brother who she hates for the fact that he left them to marry. Akira joins Holy Cross College and lives in hostel, as her mom decides to stay back with her brother, while taking care of his child. A couple of students tries to bully her but ends up learning the hard way to not mess with her. One night, an inspector runs into one of the college professors with his car and even beats him up because the professor is upset about the policeman's behavior. On account of this the students of college decide to reach out to the commissioner with the aid of a strike. The police brutally beat them up and try to move all of the students away but only Akira remains and hands over the signed petition sheet and the information to the commissioner when he came.

Couple of days later, we see the same police man who hit the professor who killed a man to rob his money. And he admitted on the phone at his girlfriends place but she recorded and decided to show it to her friends. At the last moment, her camera with all the information got stolen and someone called him to blackmail him with the information that they found. All this is making this inspector nervous and he ends up killing his girlfriend and began his search of who's behind this. This case was being handled by ACP Rabiya due to fact that she knows it was a murder and not a suicide. One day Akira found a bag filled with stuff right in front of her dorm and opens to only see many stolen items, including the camera. The policemen saw her and take her away and decided to kill her. She saw three of the policemen kill two other men but suddenly the main ACP calls them and tell them they have the wrong girls but because she saw everything to just shoot her. Somehow she managed to escape and was able to go to her principal and tell him everything that had happened. He would be loved to help her but can only in the morning.

Suddenly, the cops take her away and with the help of a doctor they give her shocks and injection in order to prove to the world that she mentally unstable. She managed to somehow flee from the hospital with the help of another patient. Rani, she decided to prove her innocent but can only do so if one of the policemen speak up and she kidnapped one but she got caught by ACP himself. They tried to kill her but ACP Rabiya came and saved her but was immediately stopped by the commissioner due to the fact that ACP can help them in the future. She has to let the case go and leave but told Akira that everything will be ok but she can't save her to too many problems. Akira manages to kill of those corrupt inspectors but then still goes with the mental hospital to be proven mentally unstable when it occurred. She was released three months later.

Discussion and conclusion

The portrayal of women in these movies presents a real experience to the audience. These films have dealt with bold and unconventional themes like exploitation of women, organized crime, police corruption and many social dominancy. These films have been disparaged for being too judgmental by giving lessons on morality to the viewer.

Female Character in Societal Framework

Women in India are not a homogenous group-they belong to different religions, castes, class, and socio-economic status and have different kinds of ambitions and desires as a result of which they lead different-lives. The portrayal of course has to be sensitive to the category to which they belong. For e.g. an urban middle class women's story would be entirely different from that of a woman in a village.

The term "Bharata Mata" (literally meaning Mother India) is a part of the Indian Psyche. Mother India starting the way it does may make it seem like another feel good melodrama about invincible motherhood with its inevitably reproductive



reading of women. These films and her subsequent submissive behavior towards her husband and mother-in-law serve an important function in Mehboob's scheme of things. She takes on to herself the responsibility for raising her children. In *Mirch Masala*, when the Sonbai (Smita Patil) stopped and grabbed by the Subedar, she frees herself and runs into the Chilli factory. An old Muslim watchman Abu Miyan (Om Puri) provides her with the protection. A parallel track is of mukhi's wife, the Mukhiain, tries to get support for Sonbai after learning that the males of the village including her own husband have allied with the Subedar to handover Sonbai to him. The film *Mardaani* tells the story of a police woman whose interest in the case of a kidnapped teenage girl leads her to uncover secret of human trafficking by the Indian Mafia. The film *Akira*, she shows her self-defence role shown to have grown in to a brave and head strong young woman fighting for the college professor. *Akira* decided to follow her dad's footsteps by helping other kids.

The image of pain and concentration of female character

In *Mother India*, the role of Sundar Chachi, Radha's mother in law, is a strong woman who is good to her daughter in law and handles household matters and agriculture with equal competence. It is significant that Radha comes in to her own only after the old woman finally passes away. There is no contradiction between this role and the traditional wife's role. The effective interleaving of the shoulder to shoulder images with the silent housewife images makes their existence credible. When Shamoo leaves her and goes away because of this inability to deal with his own inadequacy he stage is set for her to come into her own. The real break with the melodramatic is the fact that Shamoo never comes back this hope is shown to be the source of her strength as things go bad to worse. She takes her responsibility for raising her children. Since her bullocks have been taken by Sukhilal, she has to pull the plow herself. The close up of Nargis Datt as Radha with a plow on her shoulder pulling at it with an expression of pain and concentration.

Linda Lopez Mc Alistar "Feminist film makers who want to take on the subject of violence against women in their films need to find cinematic strategies to depict the violence in ways which don't incite the audience members who might be so inclined to identify with the perpetrators". Not only does *Mirch Masala* bears out Mc Alistar's claim and prevent this identification. But *Mirch masala* sees looking, which is one of the major "psychical obsessions" of popular film, as something bigger than popular film. The larger scheme of the film is to attack the look, not only in cinema, but in the real world. When the Subedar's men are chasing Sonbai she is shown running into a field where mounds of red chillis are drying. But before the end of the movie it will be these same chillis in the form of powder, that the women throw in to the Subedar's eyes.

The Analysis of these four films proved that the changing role of women character has to create the separate and independent space for Indian cinema. *Mother India's* Radha's role is extremely believable. Yet she provides an empowering example. The film, as self-conscious of its role is shaping the discourse as the most blatantly propagandist film. The final scene of *Mirch Masala* is an empowering one and it is only fitting that the tableau invokes an image of kali. Abu Miyan refers to Sonbai as Kali because she is dark and as the blood like haze of chili power clears and Subedar falls in agony to the ground, Smita Patil herself an icon of the women's movement. Shivani roles a dedicated brave police officer and her role to uncover secrets of human trafficking by the India Mafia. *Akira's* role proves in cinema to fight against injustice, women harassment in her surroundings.

In contemporary context each of these four films have their own importance, *Mother India's* message of progressiveness and the subtle and effective way it propagates this message is a plus for it which neither of the other films can claim. *Mirch Masala* which has to bear the cross of being is an *art film*. Its militant feminism and empowering messages are far more acceptable in light of the contemporary feminist debate. The new films *Mardaani* and *Akira* both have self defensive and challenging role of women was presented the progressive character to fight against the bad practices and corruption in society.

References

1. Agarwal Ruchi (2014) *silpakorn University Journal of Social Science, Humanities and Arts*, Vol.14(2), Thailand.
2. Gokul Sing, K.M., & Dissanayake, W. (1998). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*, Trentham Books Limited, U.K. .
3. Jain, j. Rai, S. (2009). *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian cinema*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.
4. Joseph, A. Sharma, K (1994). *Whose News? The Media and Women's issues*, sage publication, New Delhi.
5. Laura Mulvey (1988), *Visual Pleasure and Narrative cinema*. In Constance Penley (ed), *Feminism and Film theory*, Routledge, Newyork.
6. Misra, Vijay (2006). *Bollywood Cinema: A Critical Genealogy*, Asian Studies Institute, Victoria University of Wellington.
7. Mistry Pratima (July, 2014). *The Changing Role of Women in Hindi Cinema*, *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, Vol-4, issue-7,ISSN-2249-555x
8. Singh, Indubala (2007). *Gender Relations and Cultural ideology in Indian Cinema: A study of select Adaptations of Literary Texts*, Deep and Deep Publications.