

## **An Analysis of The Depiction of Prostitutes in Bollywood Film.**

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### ***Abstract***

Decades Of Male-Dominated Stories Now Seem To Be Making Way For Women To Play Pivotal Roles In Hindi Cinema. The Foci Of Bollywood Films Have Definitely Changed Especially In The Last Few Years. More And More Movies Are Now Showing Stronger Women, Who Want To Run Shoulders With The World, Who Know What They Want And How To Achieve Their Dreams. These Changes Need To Be Appreciated But Yet It Is Important To Look At These Movies More Keenly For A Better Understanding Of The Subject. There Are Many Issues And Subjects Related To Women And Their Depiction That Have Not Been Dealt With Justice Yet And Are Lagging Behind. One Of Such Is The Portrayal Of Prostitutes And Prostitution In Hindi Cinema. Bollywood Has A Significant Number Of Films That Have Portrayed Prostitution. But The Problem Lies In The Way Prostitutes Are Portrayed. Through A Discourse Analysis Of Some Randomly Selected Bollywood Films, This Paper Investigates Bollywood's Fairmindedness In The Portrayal Of The Business And Those Within.

***Keyword: Bollywood, Gender Hierarchy, Patriarchy, Prostitution.***

### **Introduction**

As We Raise A Toast To Indian Cinema That's More Than 100 Years Old, It Is Important For Us To Analyze The Gains And Losses During Its Journey. Mainstream Indian Cinema Has Restricted Itself To Defined Sketches Of Gender Mostly Dominated By Patriarchy. Men Are In The Center Of The Stories, Be It The Hero Or The Villain. We See That In Most Of The Movies, Women Are Cast Just To Add Glamour To The Film And Play The Arm Candy Of The Hero. But Now More And More Bollywood Movies Are Breaking The Stereotypes Of Indian Women And Are Doing Quite Well At The Box Office As Well. A Decade Back, The Indian Audience Probably Was Not Ready To See Progressive Women In Bollywood Films. That Was Also The Reason That Most Filmmakers Shied Away From Such Topics. However, Things Have Changed A Lot In The Last Few Years. The Repeated Box Office Disasters Of Big-Budget Movies In The Recent Past And The Continuous Emergence Of Unlikely Winners Herald A Paradigm Shift Happening In Contemporary Cinema.

Decades Of Male-Dominated Stories Also Seem To Be Making Way For Women To Play Pivotal Roles Once Again. The Foci Of Bollywood Films Have Definitely Changed Especially In The Last Few Years. More And More Movies Are Now Showing Stronger Women, Who Want To Run Shoulders With The World, Who Know What They Want And How To Achieve Their Dreams. These Changes Need To Be Appreciated But Yet It Is Important To Look At These Movies More Keenly For A Better Understanding Of The Subject. There Still Are Many Aspects Of Representation Of Women Which Have Not Been Dealt With Justice Yet. One Of Such Is Prostitutes And Prostitution In Hindi Cinema. Bollywood Has A Significant Number Of Films That Have Portrayed Prostitution. But The Problem Lies In The Way Prostitutes Or Sex Workers Are Portrayed. As Shabana Azmi Explains, 'Women Are Either Wronged Or Revered In Bollywood Cinema'<sup>1</sup>. Ironically The Portrayal Of Sex Workers Or Prostitutes Has The Biggest Overlapping Area In These Two kinds. Some Of The Films That

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/17/movies/film-in-bollywood-women-are-wronged-or-revered.html>

Have Projected Women In Sex Work Are Pyaasa(1957), Pakeeza(1972), Amar Prem(1972), Muqaddar Ka Sikander (1978), Suhaag (1979), Ram Teri Ganga Maili (1985), Baaghi (1990), Awaargi (1990), Sadak (1991), Julie (2004), Laga Chunari Mein Daag (2007), Talaash (2012)Etc. Through A Discourse Analysis Of Some Randomly Selected Bollywood Films, This Paper Investigates Bollywood's Role In The Creation Of Hierarchical Identities In The Indian Society Wherein Women Occupy The Position Of The Inferior 'Other' To The Superior Men 'Self' Especiallylooking At How A Woman Involved In Sex Work Or Prostitution Is Seen Through The Lenses Of Cinema.

### **Material And Literature**

If Looked At More Keenly, Cinema, As An Industry And Product Both, Is A Perfect Case Study To Understand The Imbalanced Gender Positions In Our Society. Cinema Caters To A Huge Mass. But The Makers And The Receivers Of It Are More Men Than Women. As A Platter, Cinema In India Serves More To Its Male Audiences Than Female. Most Of The Films Are Made With A Majority Male Population In Mind. Although Women Make Half The Population Of This Country, They Play The Second Fiddle Even As The Audiences. But As Far As Women's Images Are Concerned, These Are Used In Films To Attract More Audiences. As Laura Mulvey (1975) Argues,"The Controlling Gaze In Cinema Is Male. Spectators Are Encouraged To Identify With The Look Of The Male Hero And Make The Heroine A Passive Object Of Erotic Spectacle." Although, As Mentioned Earlier, Women-Centric Cinema Is Also Coming Up, Most Of The Time Women Are Used As Glam Factors In Hindi Films. They Are Also Used As An Ideal Mother Or Wife Or Daughter. Their Identity As Women Is Marginalized. The Primacy Of A Woman's Traditional Role As Wife And Mother Is Reiterated. The Women Are Shown In Subordinate Roles, Upholding Traditional Values. They Represent The Community And Are Seen As Repositories Of Community Values. Women Authenticate A National/Cultural Identity. The Body Of The Woman Is The Carrier Of Cultural Signs; Symbols Of Marriage Like The *Mangalsutra* And *Sindoor* Are Fetishized.<sup>2</sup>

Simone De Beauvoir (1949) Asserts, "Men Have Claimed This Subject Position For Themselves And In Order To Ratify Themselves In It,They Have Reduced Women To The Position Of Objectified 'Other', Denying Women Existence For Themselves, 'Woman', Appears To Man Solely As A Sexual Being, Not As An Autonomous Entity. He Is Subject,He Is Absolute And She Is Other." The Influence Of Historical And Socio-Cultural Factors On The Growth Of Women's Roles In Commercial Indian Films Suggests The Stereotypical Portrayal Of Women Elucidates Nandkumar (2011). Nandkumar Suggests That The Portrayal Of Women In The History Of Indian Films From The Era Of Silent Films To The Present Has Undergone Numerous Changes. Despite The Changes, Women Are Still Portrayed As Secondary Characters In Most Commercial Films Even Today. 'This Stereotypical Portrayal Of Women In Indian Cinema Is Mainly Due To Historical And Cultural Reasons'write Gokulsing &Dissanayake (2004). Initially, Society Stigmatized Women From Acting In Films Adds Ganti (2004). So, When Women Started Acting, The Directors Had To Comply With The Social Norms In The Portrayal Of Women.

Women Mostly Played The Roles Of A Daughter (Taking Care Of Her Brothers, Helping The Mother In The Kitchen, And Marrying The Man Of Her Father's Choice), A Great Wife (Who Was Responsible For All Household Chores, Taking Great Care Of Her Husband, Children, And Would Lead The Rest Of Her Life By Embracing Her Husband's Memories, Once She Became A Widow), And Of A Great Mother (Who Is Self-Sacrificing) Explicates Gokulsing & Dissanayake. A Woman Was Never Given Independence, And She Was Expected To Obey And Have A Subordinate Status To Her Father Before Marriage, Her Husband After Marriage, And Finally, Her Son After She Became A Widow. The Ideal Wife Depicted In These Movies Was Like A Few

Mythological Characters Such As 'Savitri', 'Sita' (The Immortalized Image Of An Ideal Woman, Wife, Of Indian Epics, Who Sacrificed Everything For Her Husband). Thus, The Wife Was Expected To Be Immensely Devoted To Her Husband At The Cost Of Her Own Pleasures, Desires, And Ambitions. This Ideal Wife Had To Be Sexually Pure And Epitomize Sexual Fidelity.

Another Popular Portrayal Of Women In Indian Movies Is The Character Of A Vamp, Which Is Exactly The Opposite Of The Role Of An Ideal Wife Or Mother. The Vamps Were Characterized As Women Who Showed Disrespect For Traditional Values By Emulating Western Women. Furthermore, They Were Shown Drinking, Smoking, Partying, Visiting Nightclubs, And Being Promiscuous. Thus, They Portrayed The Characteristic Traits Of An Immoral Person, With Unacceptable And Offensive Behavior That Was Punishable Explains Gokulsing & Dissanayake. Nandkumar States That The Basic Difference Between The Heroine And The Vamp Demonstrates How The 'Madonna' And The 'Whore Complex' Functions In The Indian Community. Madonna, Symbolizes The Girlfriend, Wife/Mother, And, Therefore, Has To Perform All The Rules Associated With Sacred Traits In Contrast With The Vamp, Who Is A Whore, And As Usual, Is Expected To Be Unchaste And Impure.

In A Celluloid World That Only Occasionally Bears Any Resemblance To Indian Life, Hindi Films Have Constructed An Image Of Indian Women As Unchanging Stereotypes: Women Who Are Innocent And Marry; Women Who Sin And Repent (Or Die); The Women Betrayed Yet Who Forgive; The Mother Who Suffers And Understands. Women In Hindi Films Are Portraits Of What Indian Filmgoers Expect Women To Be. The Images Confirm Their Belief In The Weakness And Pliability Of Their Wives, In A Mother's Virtue, And In The Use Of Violence.

"We've Had A Peculiar Dichotomy In Our Films," Said Shyam Benegal<sup>3</sup>, Who Has Directed Popular Movies But Has More Recently Gravitated Toward Serious Films. "There Is, On The One Hand, The Woman As The Universal Mother, As A Goddess On A Pedestal. On The Other Hand, We Have The Temptress, The Woman Who Will Take You Away From Your Chosen Path, A Woman Who Is Destructive But Attractive. This Is The Traditional Dichotomy.

Talking About The Dichotomy Of Representation Of Women In Hindi Cinema, Nandkumar Used The Terms Madonna-Whore Complex, Madonna Being The Good Woman And Whore As Self-Explanatory. Here We Would Talk About How A Whore Or Prostitute Or Sex Worker Is Represented In Hindi Cinema.

## Discussion

Here Are Some Examples To Show How Linear The Representation Of Women In Sex Work Or Prostitution Is Represented In Mainstream Hindi Cinema. With The Representation Of Women As A Whole, The Depiction Of Sex Workers In Hindi Cinema Is Also Very Limited And Dichotomous In Nature. Women In Sex Work Are Shown As Either The Ones Who Are Greedy For Money, Have No Self-Respect, The Vamps, Or The Ones Who Are Though In The Business But Are Chaste At Heart. These Are Fallen Women Yet Not Fallen. This Paper Looks At The Second Kind Of Depiction.

*Pyasaa* (1957) Is One Such Example. Vijay (Guru Dutt) Who Is A Struggling Poet Whose Works Aren't Taken Seriously By Publishers Or Even By His Family. His Brothers Even Sell His Poems To A Newspaper And Waste Dealer. He Eventually Meets And Falls In Love With A Prostitute With A Heart Of Gold Named Gulabo (Waheeda Rahman). Vijay Is Betrayed And Ridiculed By All But Gulabo. Finally, Gulabo And He Settle For A Journey Called Life.

Second Is *Pakeeza* (1972) Where The Story Begins With The Elopement Of A Tawaif, Nargis Played By Meena Kumari With Her Lover, The Nawab Shahabuddin, Ashok Kumar. Shahabuddin Takes Nargis To His Household,

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/17/movies/film-in-bollywood-women-are-wronged-or-revered.html>

Where She Is Rejected By His Very Honorable Family. Nargis Flees And Goes To A Graveyard, Where She Spends The Next 10 Months Of Her Life, And Gives Birth To A Daughter. Nargis, Heartbroken And Alone, Dies In The Graveyard, And Her Older Sister Nawabjaan (Veena), On Receiving News Of Nargis, Reaches There And Takes The Baby Away To Bring Up By Herself. The Baby Is Named Sahibjaan(Meena Kumari). Days That Are A Continuation Of Sahibjaan's Life As A Tawaif, Things Change And She Escapes Her Life To Be With The Person She Loves, Ahmed Khan(Raaj Kumar).

In *Suhaag*(1979), Basanti(Rekha) Is A Prostitute Or *Tawaif* Who Pleases Men To Earn Money So That She Can Educate Her Younger Sister And Give Her Sister A Life Basanti Could Not Live, In The End, Basanti Is Rescued By The Man Who Loves Her And Starts A Decent Life.

In *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*(1985), Ganga (Mandakini), An Innocent Village Girl Falls In Love With A Rich City Guy. The Boy Leaves With A Promise Of Coming Back. Ganga Gives Birth To Their Child. She, In Search Of The Guy, Comes To The Town Where She Is Forced Into The Profession. With Resentment, She Accepts Her Fate But At Last, She Meets The Man And They Live Happily Ever After.

In *Julie*(2006), Julie (Neha Dhupia), Is Heartbroken Twice, Once In Goa And Then In Mumbai When Her Boyfriend Wants Her To Succumb To A Big Client's Undue Demands Just To Crack A Big Deal. Left In A Hand To Mouth Situation, She Takes Up Prostitution To Fulfill Her Needs

In *No Entry*(2005), Throughout The Film, Bobby(Bipasha Basu) Is Shown As A Shroud Money-Minded High Society Call Girl Who Sleeps With Different Men To Earn Money, But In The End, It Is Been Made Clear That She Works As A Call Girl To Buy Medicines For Her Dying Husband.

In *Lagaa Chunari Mein Daag*(2007), Badki (Rani Mukherjee), A Girl From Varanasi, Comes To Mumbai In Search Of A Job So That She Can Survive Her Family, Tries Many Odd Jobs But Succeeds Nowhere. Gets Trapped And Becomes A High Society Escort. Although Not Happy With What She Does, The Money She Earns Has Uplifted Her Family's Financial Condition.

It Is Interesting To Note That In Most Of The Hindi Films On Prostitution, The Women As Prostitutes Are Shown As A Leftover Of The Men. Either They Are Betrayed Or Misled Or Widowed. Like For Example, Gulabo In *Pyaasa* Was Betrayed By Her Boyfriend And She Became Unacceptable To Society. In *Pakeeza*, Nargis Was A *Tawaif* Who Fell In Love With A Man Who Left Her For The Honour Of His Family. Since She Had Seen Dreams Of A Decent Life, She Did Not Go Back To Prostitution And Because She Was Unmarried And Pregnant, She Remained Unacceptable To Society. Her Daughter, But, Was Rescued On Time By The Man Who Loved Her And Who She Loved. She Left Behind The Dark Days. Ganga, In *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, Also Faced The Rant Of The Society For Her Deeds. Getting Pregnant Before Marriage Is Taboo In Our Society And Thus Ganga, Pregnant Out Of Wedlock, Had To Leave. She Came To The City In Search Of Her Boyfriend. In The End, She Finds Her Man And They Reunite. *Julie* Took Up Prostitution As She Understood That Men Wanted Women's Body And So Why Not Provide It To Them At Exorbitant Charges. But Once She Met The Ideal Man Who Was Not Interested In Her Body But Had Seen Her Pure Soul, She Decided To Leave Her Past Behind For A Better Future. In *Lagaa Chunari Mein Daag*, Badki Came To Mumbai City In Search Of A Job So As To Support Her Financially Very Weak Family. She Got Molested By A Rich Man Who Promised Her A Job. This Was When She Decided to Become A High-Level Escort Who Served Men In High-End Hotels At A Very High Charge. She Sent Money Back Home Which Improved The Family's Condition. But Then She Encountered A Guy Who Was Ready To Accept Her Even After Knowing Everything About Her Business.

As With Many Issues Within Any Movement, There Exists A Diversity Of Viewson Prostitution. The Anti-Prostitution Standpoint Holds That Prostitution Is A Form Of Exploitation Of Women And Male Dominance Over Women And A Practice That Is The Result Of The Existing Patriarchal Societal Order. These Argue That Prostitution Has A Very Negative Effect, Both On The Prostitutes Themselves And On Society As A Whole, As

It Reinforces Stereotypical Views About Women, Who Are Seen As Sex Objects Which Can Be Used And Abused By Men. Thus, Taking This Standpoint Under Consideration, We Understand That Patriarchal Underpinning Is One Of The Major Reasons For Prostitution Explainsmaggie O'neil(2001).

Even In Hindi Cinema, It Is Quite Evidently Shown That Prostitution Has Patriarchal Underpinnings. A Woman Takes Up Prostitution Because Of The Men She Is Surrounded By. Some Case Scenarios Are A. When A Man Leaves A Woman, She Is Left With No Other Option But Prostitution,

B. The Protagonist Is Either Trapped In Or Sold To A Brothel,

C. The Father Or The Husband, Being The Only Earning Member Of The Familyfails To Bear His Responsibilities, The Woman Ends Up Being A Sex Worker. And As Usual, The Scenario Has Not Changed For Quite A Number Of Years. Adding To It We See, That The Girl Who Lands Up Into Prostitution Is Always Rescued By A Man, The Hero. There Has To Be A Man Who Believes That The Woman Is A Victim Of Her Circumstances. Unless And Until He Gives Her Respect And Recognition, She Is An Outcast By The Whole Society. We Again Take A Trip To The Above-Mentioned Movies To Clarify This Point.

In *Pyaasa*, Gulabo Is A Sex Worker Because She Was Disserted By Her Boyfriend And As Norms Say, She Has No Other Option Than Prostitution. This Is Her Recognition Throughout But Then Vijay Enters The Scene And Falls In Love With Gulabo. Her Unconditional Love And Sacrifices For Vijay Make Us Accept Her As The Heroine, A Prostitute With The Heart Of Gold. In The End, Gulabo Settles For A New Life With Vijay.

*Pakeeza* Traces The Same Path As *Pyaasa*, Where Sahibjaan Is Rescued By Ahmad Khan And She Elopes With Him And Starts Living A Respectable Life. Since Ahmad Khan Accepts Her Even After Knowing The Fact That She Is A *Tawaif*, A Prostitute, Makes Him The Hero Of The Story.

In *Suhaag*, Basanti Is A Tawaif, Who Sings And Dances Infront Of Men To Give A Good Standard Of Living And Education To Her Younger Sister Which She Could Not Get. Amit, Her Regular Visitor, Wants To Marry Her Although He Knows Her Dark Realities. In The End, She Goes To Amit Who Accepts Her With Open Arms. Here Again, Amit Becomes The Show-Stealer.

*Raam Teri Ganga Maili* Is No Different From The Above Two As Ganga, With Her Illicit Baby, Has No Other Option But Prostitution, Lands Up Performing At Her Husband's (Not Legally Married) Wedding Where She Is Eyed Upon By Some Lecherous Men. But Finally, The Boy Fights With His Family And Society And Rescues Ganga And They Live Happily Ever After.

In *Julie*, The Girl Gets Into Prostitution As She Realizes That It's The Female Body That Is Loved And Not The Soul. But Finally, She Meets A Man Who Does Not Commodify Her And Falls In Love With Her Genuinely. In The End, Julie Also Needs To Be Accepted By A Man.

*No Entry*, Supposedlya Comedy Film, Has Shown A Lusty And Greedy Bobby Who Has Taken Up Sex Work To Fulfill Her Needs. In The Climax Of The Movie, It Is Revealed That Bobby Had No Other Choice But To Become A Sex Worker To Continue The Treatment Of Her Terminally Ill Husband. As An Ideal Wife, She Sacrificed Everything For Her Husband. Finally,Prem (Salman Khan), One Of Her Clients, After Knowing This Truth, Promises To Support Her Financially.

*Lagaa Chunari Mein Daag* Starts With Showing A Family Of Four, Father, Mother, And Two Flamboyant Daughters. Father, The Sole Earning Member Has Retired And Awaits His Long-Due Pension. It's A Hand-To-Mouth Situation For All Of Them. The Elder Daughter, Realizing The Dilapidated Condition Of Her Family, Comes To Mumbai In Search Of A Job. Because Of Lack Of Education, She Lands Up Doing Odd Jobs. She Meets A Man Who Promises Her A Good Salary But In Return Wants Some Sexualfavours. She Succumbs To Her Circumstances And Accepts The Offer. Although She Does Not Get A Job But She Realizes That In This Men's World Her Body Has High Demands. She Becomes A High-Level Prostitute, An Escort. This Brings Money And Her Family Starts To Live A Decent Life. But It's The End Of The Story, Where Rohan (Abhishek

Bacchan) Comes Up To Her And Proposes To Her For Marriage. She Refuses To Marry Him Thinking He Does Not Know Her Reality. But Rohan Reveals That He Knew About It From Their First Meeting And That This Could Not Change His Feelings Towards Her. He Loved The Person She Was, Her Soul. They Get Married And Live A Happy Married Life.

### Conclusion

Going Through These Movies, It Seems Women Are Pushed Into Prostitution Because Of Men, And Then, Only Men Can Rescue Them From This Darkness. This Scenario Can Be Called Negative Patriarchy V/S Positive Patriarchy. Negative Patriarchy Forces A Woman To Sell Her Body, Surrender All Her Agencies To Her Own Body. Men Commodify Women And Sell Their Bodies As Mere Objects For Sexual Pleasure. At The Same Time, Men Again Commodify Women And Buy Their Bodies For Sexual Pleasure. This Happens In The Society As Well As In Cinema While Depicting Prostitutes. But Here The Add-On Being, These Women, Who Are Shown As Ill-Fated, Weak, And As Ones Who Succumb To The Circumstances Can Only Be Rescued By A Man. Men With A Golden Heart Accept These Women And Bring Them To Light From Their Dark Pasts. These Men Are The Knights In Shining Armour. When A Man Accepts A Woman In Prostitution Or Sex Work, Her Past Is Washed Away. This Acceptance Can Be Termed As Positive Patriarchy. The Points The Article Tries To Make Here Are:

1. The Way The Body Of A Woman Is Considered In Society And Thus In Cinema Is Faulty. A Woman Who Is Deserted By A Man Has No Other Option But To Take Up Prostitution. Even In The Movies, She Is Not Accepted By Society But Her Male Counterpart Is Shown Getting Married To Some Other Girl. A Man, Who Has Been In A Relationship With Physical Intimacy, Has The Right To Settle Down, His Number Of Options Is Not Lessened By This Certain Fact, So Should Be With A Woman. A Man's Life Remains Undisturbed And Socially Absolutely Normal. Why Are We Trained In A Way Where A Woman's Body Becomes A Carrier Of The Prestige Of The Family Whereas Her Views And Thoughts Do Not Matter? A Woman Is Not Allowed To Hold Agency Of Her Own Body.
2. Secondly, It Is Interesting To Note That From The 1950s To The 2000s, The Graph Has Been More Or Less Steady. We Hardly See A Difference In The Depiction Of Prostitutes In Hindi Cinema, Be It In *Pyaasa* Or A Post-2000, *Ishaqzaade*. In All These Movies, These Socially Fallen Women Are Restricted To A Certain Area In Movies But Are Not Shown As Really Fallen. They Are Always Morally High, Helpful, And Honest. Although A Progressive Thinker Must Not Have A Problem With This, It Is Important To Point Out The Monolithic Way Of Representation Of Women And Prostitutes In Particular. Why Has This Depiction Not Changed With Years?

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