

Shattered Frames: Unveiling the Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema

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Abstract - Indian cinema-the most significant medium of culture-is not only a mirror but also propeller of social norms, constantly feeding and molding the public mind regarding gender roles. The representation of women in Indian cinema has, traditionally, been unbecomingly restricted to reductive stereotypes: self-sacrificing mothers, submissive wives, and hypersexualized "item girls"-all enforcing patriarchal values and wedging open gender inequality. These representations bred immunity to traditional roles for women and fast-weathered a culture that dissipated women's agency and autonomy. Back in the day, some gain is finally made but male narratives still continue as the mainstay at the popular film factories, putting women offstage and into passive roles that lack meaningfulness and individuality. This research attempts to examine the representation of women in Indian cinema more closely, tracing this through the decades and various genres. Instances where women are still held as nothing more than ornamentation or plot devices to bolster the hero's arc in the film are analyzed and reported as regression. There has already been a feet-in-the-door movement, with an umbrella of evolving progressive films starting to overturn such entrenched notions. *Pink*, *Queen*, *Thappad*, and *Kahaani* have successfully engaged discussions championing women in this multidimensional role of struggling and striving amid social constraints and pressures. *Piku* and *the Great Indian Kitchen* are still positively candid in discussing certain basic migratory experiences of women, exposing their mettle and individualism. Nuanced examination depicts a dual reality: even while progressive films put forth empowering narratives, mainstream cinema-those virtually all-powerful in the domain-continuum to uphold patriarchal notions. Films tend to romanticize toxic-stalker-type cúa behavior, layer submissive female characters, and perpetuate unattainable beauty standards. Such an approach not only stifles societal progress but also procedurally diminishes cinema's power as an agent of change. The research notes an enduring impact of the male gaze, in terms of beauty ideals and objectifying women into mere objects of desire and stripping them of their personhood. Throughout the analysis, cinema also possesses the power of nuanced advocacy and empowerment. Depiction of a woman by a filmmaker as complex and multi-faceted challenges stereotypes and inspires social change and promotes gender equity. *Chak De! India* and *Lipstick Under My Burkha* allow a narrative that speaks to women's leadership, individuality, and resistance to societal constraints. Such depiction pushes the audience to reflect upon their own thoughts and behavior and a culture of inclusion and equality can be created. The study posits the critical need for critical reception practices whereby filmmakers, critics, and audiences engage each cinematic narrative through a gender-sensitive lens, raising awareness of gender issues embedded within the film industry. Findings from this study indicate an urgent need for Indian cinema to undergo a paradigm shift. It must now become a culture that embraces stories about women who are free and self-respecting, who enjoy their autonomy and agency, and which break stereotypes and evolve towards gender equity. This requirement calls not just for creative foresight but calls for a paradigm shift in the Indian industry regarding representation both on-screen and behind the camera. This will give Indian cinema a pedestal for being an effective agent of change, changing people's minds, and creating a more egalitarian society. In sum, the portrayal of women is at a juncture. Although regressive stereotypes continue to dominate mainstream narratives, emerging progressive films signal a shift towards more inclusive and empowering representations. Should Indian cinema embrace that change, it would have the potential to confront normative pressures that shape societal attitudes toward women's roles in society and make a substantive contribution to the larger movement for gender equality.

KEYWORDS-*Women, stereotype, Indian cinema, society, male gaze*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema can be called the “mirror of society,” and captures the beat of a country as colorful as its people. With kaleidoscopic storytelling, it captures triumphs, tribulations, and transformations in Indian life. It has spoken to

generations - from classic rural resilience like “Mother India” to sheer exuberance and complexity in urban aspirations, such as seen in “Dil Chahta Hai”. The Indian film vibrantly portrays the tapestry of changing the nation's culture.

That it is not just a form of entertainment; it is a powerful social commentator. Indian cinema, through films like Article 15 and Pink, dares to buck the trend of unpalatable truths, taking complete breaks in the silence above caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, and consent. Regional cinema, then, would add to that repository of these narratives, spotlights the untold stories of marginalized communities and forgotten legacies. At its best, Indian cinema holds up a magnifying glass to societal flaws while inspiring hope and change, challenging audiences to rethink entrenched norms.

Yet, it also speaks of the contradictions of society by perpetuating stereotypes and glorifying regressive ideals in the same breath. That duality, being both a reflection and an influencer, makes Indian cinema uniquely powerful. It does not merely document life; it is the formation of dreams, igniting debates, and sparking revolutions as it grows in tandem with the society that it represents. It will be a story teller, a truth teller, and a dream weaver - true to the heart and soul of the nation. Indian cinema has always been a dynamic and evolving land in fitting manifestations of the diverse and multifaceted character of Indian society at large. The deep history of Indian cinema; its current status as a global cinematic force producing a worldwide audience attracted to Indian films, music, or cultural idiom-the storytelling power of Indian cinema, in short keeps delivering beyond the promise. The industry keeps moving on with bringing the most diverse, exciting stories across the globe. The industry takes it to this place, especially India.

A long time ago, stereotyping women in Indian cinema began with stating the expectations of society and its norms. There are the dutiful wife, damsel in distress, seductress, sacrificial mother that reinforce certain gender roles and values of culture. But what is offset here is probably the impression that these stereotypes have caused in the public psyche, as women in recently made films seem so much more realistic and diversified. This elevates a better tale while making the viewer question and challenge some of the most entrenched notions about gender, showing a positive evolution in the proportion of authentic and balanced female representation in Indian cinema.

The same stereotypes carry vast implications in how society views the females and the roles that exist within the scheme of society. Stereotypes make public opinion and, by extension, the ambiance in which one lives his or her life. For example, there is an image constructed regarding the role of a woman-as for example, submissive or subservient. Hence, such an image regarding a woman may make an act of gender inequality acceptable by making a woman live a life to fit such constructed archetype.

In addition, the portraits in some situations involving women that have been depicted therein have created impossible standards of womanhood that a woman feels below par when one does not live the same role assigned there. The process might even weaken more the momentum going towards gender equality because society sees things as are portrayed by media.

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has long perpetuated gender stereotypes, portraying women in subservient roles secondary to male leads (Prakash, 2020). Women are often depicted as love interests or wives, with limited screen time and lower pay compared to their male counterparts (Prakash, 2020). The industry has historically typecast women into various stereotypes, from the virtuous “Sati Savitri” to the objectified “Item Girl” (Ahluwalia Orora, 2021). However, recent years have seen a shift towards more complex female characters in films like “Piku” and “Nil Batey Sannata,” although the narrative structure often lacks the complexity to make a significant impact (Manzar & Aravind, 2019). Some films, like “The Great Indian Kitchen,” challenge these stereotypes by exploring women's frustrations with traditional patriarchal roles and their journey towards emancipation (Thamanna & Subramani, 2024). Despite these efforts, the Indian film industry continues to grapple with gender bias both on and off-screen (Prakash, 2020). The Bechdel test applied to Hindi cinema reveals an underrepresentation of women, especially in top-grossing films, with male characters discussing a wider range of topics (Kapoor et al., 2017). However, recent years have seen a shift towards women-centric narratives that prioritize female experiences and challenge patriarchal norms (Sharma & Srivastava, 2024). This emerging cinematic feminism has the potential to reshape cultural perceptions and advocate for social change (Sharma & Srivastava, 2024).

This deeply ingrained perception regarding objectification of women in Indian cinema has shaped the concept of gender roles and feminine identity. The representation has gone from the visual to the limited dialogue to justify very harmful forms of stereotypes about women's self-image and societal expectations. On the positive side, there are signs of change that help advance empowering representations. It's also a legacy that continues to signify the

need for further campaigning towards more diverse and realistic depictions of women in film. Indian cinema, therefore, holds promise for the future: with the growing rationality of audiences and their demand for richer narratives, the time will come when women's roles will be redefined in a world where such characters will be given their due place as multicolored characters and not mere objects of desire.

“The Silent Script: The Enduring Depictions of Women in Indian Cinema”

The stereotyping of women in Indian cinema is a complex phenomenon shaped by various cultural, historical, and societal factors that reinforce traditional gender roles.

One of the significant reasons would be the heavy patriarchal socialization in the Indian society has influenced the making of women for films. For example, the quintessential “sacrificial mother” concept, as conceptualized in *Mother India* (1957), epitomizes the cultural expectation of what a woman represents: self-sacrificing nurturer present to serve others. This particular stereotype confines and limits women towards life's domestic roles, without a single level of agency and independence.

The **“Mother India Syndrome”** is a force that has proven to be an enduring factor behind the perpetuation of the images of women in Indian cinema as sacrificial, martyred figures reinforcing the stereotype very deeply ingrained in society- that a woman's worth is in her endurance of suffering on behalf of others. This trope, immortalized first in the iconic *Mother India* (1957), cast women in the role of the ultimate nurturer—endlessly patient, perpetually giving, and unwaveringly devoted to her family, even at the cost of her own identity and happiness. Here, a woman is celebrated not for her individuality or autonomy but for the ability to endure pain and hardships without complaining—the idealized and almost saintly vision of womanhood. This picture has the strength to seep into society to shape how women are perceived as icons of sacrifice and not human beings with their dreams, desires, and rights. Glorification feeds into a patriarchal framework that places women on pedestals only to keep them tethered to roles of submission and servitude. The cinema is offering women up not as forceful, multidimensional individuals but as conduits for suffering and reinforcing old and limiting expectations of them to be confined behind the shadows of men serving them until the “Mother India Syndrome” fades.

“Eye Candy Phenomenon” in Indian cinema is one such glaring example wherein women are nothing but an object for visual delectation. It breeds this stereotype from the female form, and it has gained quite a bit of ground because more and more films cast women as mere bodies rather than giving any importance to intellect, agency, or character.

These characters often exist as mere fillers in a male-centric movie, and whatever screen time is given to them is utilized just to show how beautiful they look, be it through teasing dances, revealing attire, or just sultry stares. The body of the women is held to the camera so that each bend, every motion, becomes more of a product to feed to the male view. This recurring image perpetuates the conceit wherein the merit of a woman is her looks but tends to emphasize the belief that women are a source of pleasure and self-esteem for men. Such a representation of women in the media internalizes for a long time in society and, in the process, turns them into an ideal beauty nobody can attain. Then, men are conditioned to view women through very narrow, surface-level eyes. In a world where women deserve equality, “Eye Candy Phenomenon” is not fair to them because it translates and transforms them into something that fades away and is fantasized about instead of being a full-fledged human being.

The highly prevalent male gaze in Indian cinema reduces women into objects of desire for the male watcher. Indian cinema, on the other hand, instills and fosters stereotypes of women through a patriarchal view induced by the male gaze. Sexual objectification creates a culture, which prescribes women as visual entities only - images that need no life or self-existence at all. This reductionist view is quite strongly reflected in items like “Chikni Chameli” or “Fevicol Se” where imagery happens to be ultra-sexualized and a narrative relevance plays into the backburner. Such representations yet again go along with the very thought that women's value stands in their physiognomic beauty and sensuality; this makes the ornamentation of woman stereotype dig a deeper root while making women be considered an adornment rather than a part and parcel of telling a story.

In male-centric narratives, the male gaze triumphs everything so that women are seen only in the background—merely to serve the purpose or be an embellishment to a male main character. That's why, in movies like Kabir Singh, female actors play passive, subservient roles without any element of agency, feeding the myth that women exist within relationships and nothing else. In addition, the gaze further perpetuates the impossible beauty standard because it exhibits only those individuals who fit within patriarchal ideas of beauty: lighter skin, slender bodies, and

classic feminine features. The gaze strips people of their individuality and diversity with their appearance. Camera angles and style used will sexualize the ideal presentation by turning women into flawless ornamentation.

The male gaze also restrains women's voices and opinions. In other words, it reduces them to inactive participants in tales of their lives. In many romantic films, stalking and coercion are normalized. Such behavior is considered charming or persistent rather than invasive, as in *Raanjhanaa* and *Tere Naam*. Thus, these narratives romanticize male entitlement while portraying women as passive recipients of male attention, continuing the stereotype of women as voiceless and submissive. Moreover, the male gaze sexualizes female characters. For instance, in this film, it is using lingering shots and suggestive choreography to focus on their bodies rather than substance, which is a very common theme in the *Housefull* series. It leaves the audience with a stripping away of the complexity of women, who are made to seem to exist for their sexuality.

The **romanticization of patriarchy** is another result of the male gaze, which makes male control over women's lives seem protective or even desirable. For instance, “*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*” is a film that subtly promotes traditional gender roles by portraying men as saviors or decision-makers and reducing women to passive beneficiaries of male guidance. The glamorization of these dynamics makes the male gaze perpetuate the damaging notion that women need male validation to be fulfilled.

It is essentially the way by which the Indian cinema makes women trivial and perpetuates objectification and stereotyping. It is an area where the industry needs to shun the default narrative framework of the male gaze and embrace varied authentic representatives of women who celebrate their agency, complexity, and individuality.

Myths and tradition also largely influence the projection of women characters in Indian cinema. Idealized figures, like Sita of the *Ramayana* or Draupadi of the *Mahabharata*, which are thought to be the perfect examples of virtues, passivity, and sacrifice, have become ideal. Typical examples are *Baazigar* (1993), in which the female lead is a passive figure whose fate is largely decided by the male lead. This reflects a larger cultural story that women need to be patient, endurance-loving, and self-sacrificing very often at the expense of their own desires or identities.

Historical constructs of conservative social fabric have constrained the female representation in cinema in India. Despite the country being occupied by a diversified and evolving social landscape, films have mostly promulgated regressive gender roles particularly in family-oriented stories. The vamp, as personified by the likes of Helen and Aruna Irani popping in and out during the years 1940s, 1950s, and 1970s, often delineated an immoral seductive character challenging the traditional values and eventually wrecking her own life. Films such as *Shree 420* (1955) and *Howrah Bridge* (1958) reinforced this dichotomy that represented women stepping out of societal bounds as dangerous, thereby fueling the fears of female autonomy.

Returnless, *Cockroachavareas* might keep up these Stereotypes. Male-Dominated Industry-the storyline has been characterized biasedly that projects women by the patriarchal standards. Limited history in woman directors limited numbers in woman writers did the same that further reduced the scope of female characters. *Queen* by Vikas Bahl in 2014, and *Piku* by Shoojit Sircar, in 2015, are examples. The gradual change to complex female characters has been evident over the years, though sporadic and slow, as the initial portrayal of women in Indian cinema has not changed overnight. This is not a fast shift, and the examples are few and far between.

Thus, the summary would be women stereotyped Indian cinema embedded deeply in the fabric of societal norms where patriarchy, male gaze, traditional values converge and different perspectives lacking behind the camera to limit women's representation altogether. The effects of such stereotypes are felt too in the limiting of roles that women could otherwise play, as well as working towards the maintenance of many other historical structures within which women have shared subordination.

“Framing Females: Unpacking the Psychological Roots of Women's Stereotyping in Indian Cinema”

In India, women in cinema can be stereotyped with the help of several psychological theories that explain how these representations get formed, maintained, and internalized by society. One of the theories is **Social Learning Theory** (Bandura, 1977), according to which an individual learns behaviors, attitudes, and roles by observing and imitating others, above all by those who act as models, especially the ones memorized most from television and the cinema. In Indian cinema, both males and females internalize and mimic the gender stereotyped representations they see onscreen. The contradictory expectation constructed through images such as the sacrificial mother or seductive vixen makes a woman what society expects her to be. Though films such as *Mother India* (1957) and *Munni Badnaam Hui* (Dabangg, 2010) carry different images, these images are indicative of the social stereotype that

former exaltation glorifies self-sacrifice and submission, while the latter objectifies women for getting fulfilled his male gaze. Gradually these pictures enter human minds and different actors take the element of stereotyping, making a cycle of expectation perpetuated.

Another important psychological theory is **Cognitive Dissonance** (Festinger, 1957) and it refers to the uncomfortable feeling that one experiences when one's beliefs contradict the behaviors that one exhibits. Viewing the strong, independent woman in real life and consuming movies that reinforce female stereotypes, make women docile, or objectify them causes dissonance in the experience of a viewer, especially in theology. Most often, however, this discomfort resolves itself to the stereotype since mainstream films reinforce state and justify that value. Movies like Kabir Singh (2019), which often have female characters being used or treated as the other, put such deep-rooted perceptions in place that they become convincingly rationalized or brushed away in the audiences' minds concerning women portrayal.

Another perspective for viewing the perpetuation of such stereotypes is **Gender Schema Theory** (Bem, 1981). According to this theory, the cognitive structures called gender schemas are built up in children and adults through socialization and help them in making sense of their understanding concerning the expected gender roles and behaviors. These schemas are internalized within Indian cinema since childhood when one almost exclusively sees women glorified in roles of beauty, nurturing, or sacrifice. For example, idealized figures of “wives” or “mothers” in Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) or Pakeezah (1972) create within a woman the impression that her identity usually relates to her family or romantic relationships. On the other hand, women who do not conform to such prescribed forms—the “vamps” or the “modern woman”—are often represented as morally dubious or punished, such as in Hare Rama Hare Krishna (1971) or Shree 420 (1955). These very repetitions build gender schemas in viewers that become hard to invalidate because of being constantly reinforced.

In addition, **Objectification Theory** (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) elucidates the psychological impact hypersexualized representation of women produces within Indian films. According to this theory, it regards women as mere sexual objects, would lead often to internalizing that mode of viewing one's bodypart or sexuality, or externalizing into a woman. Such songs like Sheila Ki Jawani (Tees Maar Khan, 2010) or Chikni Chameli (Agneepath, 2012) mention “item numbers” in their content, but fail to address the character or freedom of women by objectifying them only through the bodies in a male gaze. Body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem, in addition to a preoccupation with appearance rather than achievement or ability, are effects of such objectification. These external standards are internalized by women audiences as “normalizing” self-objectification or, in men, developing a disposition toward seeing women as objects of desire, thus reinforcing the cycle of gender inequality.

Stereotype Threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) adds to these definitions that not only shape the outside world but also affect the very women who watch these films, showing how these portrayals in movies confine women to that stereotype. Most of the time, they are cast in minor roles, passive mothers, or as sexy faceless objects and hence tend to develop such images of themselves and live with them. The stereotype may coexist with the pressure to perform well so as not to confirm the negative one they already hold about women. Such backward prospect seems to inhibit the ambitions, confidence, and career growth of a female actor most of the time. The phenomenon is witnessed most evidently in the entertainment fraternity where actresses are geared more toward looking good than performing well. Such constant hammering into the social psyche through mass media will create such expectation levels that women have to behave and look in a particular way, limiting their expression.

II. RATIONALE

Indian cinema has a massive legacy of criticism when it comes to the projection of its women characters. Over the years, the industry has come from stereotype women to stronger and more nuanced representations. The stereotypical representations of women persist in the film and media world, reinforcing unhealthy gender norms and clamping down the mechanism of agency.

Objectification is one of the predominant stereotypes featured in these films against women. They portray only their physical appearance and aspects connected to their sexual appeal. An example, in such cases, is item songs that hypersexualize women and present them as mere objects of male consumption. Women are portrayed as damsels in distress waiting for a hero to rescue them, further asserting the idea of their vulnerability and dependence.

The common stereotypes again are monolithic portrayals, where women are good and submissive or bad and seductive. The “good girl” is mostly modelled as the perfect wife and mother, sacrificing her ambitions for family,

whereas the “bad girl” is usually shown as a temptress or bad woman who brings down men. Such dichotomous images deny the female characters their full complexity and abundant variety and deprive them of becoming full and real persons.

Apart from all this, women still have to be assigned supporting roles-a person in a love story. Their stories have just concerned men, not their hopes and aspirations. It also keeps the definition of women's characters as men rather than individuals based on their own achievements.

Bringing about tremendous changes is quite tangible in the case of path-breaking films; however, nothing changes as the representation penetrated through the stereotypes.

III.CASE STUDY

Over the years, Indian cinema was successful in really helping stereotyping women according to what the perception of society has meant and propagated. Here is a comprehensive study on the continuous portrayal of women in Indian cinema somewhere between the 1990's until the 21st century. These examples are grouped into categories that illustrate how in keeping with these ideology, stereotyping in women's representation is persistent:

90s to 21st century evolution of movies examples for using to addressing that they still portraying the women in same manner and stereotyping

1. “Damsel in Distress” gimmick

This trope stands for a wife who is unable to do anything for her troubles and relies heavily on a husband: the hero for finding her out or clearing her problems for her.

Examples We have:

1990s Examples:

- Sholay (1975): Basanti is a happy-go-lucky, lively person, but her character is reduced from a shreela victim, needing rescue by the male characters, her being made to a rather partial disbalance as regards her autonomy.
- Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995): In keeping with the tradition, simran is again called by the familial ties of the traditional woman, congesting her till she is saved by the Raj.
- Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (1999): Nandini approaches her husband for finding her lover, thus proving her disempowerment.

Modern Examples:

- Kabir Singh (2019): Preeti is shown as quiet and submissive, with her life being held slave to Kabir's choices.
- Baaghi (2016): The entire character of Siya is narrowed down to being dependent and then requiring rescue from the hero.

Analysis: These representations reinforce the stereotype that women are feeble and do not take an independent stand and always depend on men for safety and satisfaction. The stereotype discourages women from narrating tales in which they appear to be self-reliant or are able to resolve their struggles independently and without male intervention. The Damsel in Distress trope promotes such patriarchal concepts and mold the expected gender role as necessary by audiences. Young women are encouraged to internalize the trait of passivity as an acceptable one, whereas men are taught to see themselves as protectors or saviors.

2. The “Item Girl” Category

The item songs always objectify women as they touch the surface exclusively because they are only for the view of men and orgasm.

For example:

Example from 1990s:

- Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai (Khalnayak, 1993): Madhuri Dixit's character is very iconic but reduced to a subject under male desire.
- Rangeela (1995): The theme of Tanha Tanha represents the female character, but her personalities as living are put under cover.

Examples of a Modern Context:

- Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai (Khalnayak, 1993): While iconic, the song reduces the female character to an object of desire.
- Sheila Ki Jawani: This particular song makes an important step in making sure that what really matters is Katrina Kaif and her appearance and not that she is a character.
- Munni Badnaam Hui: The glamour brought to the place by Malaika Arora adds beauty but adds to objectification of women.
- Pushpa: Oo Antava: While the lyrics critique objectification, the song's visual slants it further.

Analysis: These item numbers many times mute women responses and concentrate only on their physical glimpses. Actually, such presentations shadow the most talented female students by being prey to the male gaze. The glamorization through an item song makes the so-called beauty standards, for society measures women in their beauty rather than their other attributes. Such conditions would perpetuate phenomena like body shaming, unrealistic ideals of beauty, and trivializing communication.

3. The “Sacrificial Mother” Archetype:

Such mothers in Indian cinema are born selfless; they have sacrificed dreams and desires through their lives for family.

Examples:

1990s Examples

- Karan Arjun (1995): Rakhee, as the archetypical idealization of the sacrificial mother, who devoted her life to avenge the death of her men.
- Hum Aapke Hain Koun.. ! (1994): The mothers are depicted as nurturing yet have no stories of their own.

Modern Examples:

- Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (2001): Simply put, Jaya Bachchan's character chooses to keep her family's happiness above her personal individuality.
- Paa (2009): Vidya Balan's character raises her son at the cost of her own dreams.
- The Sky Is Pink (2019): Priyanka Chopra's character puts aside her identity to look after her terminal illness-end stage daughter, who is very sick.

Analysis:

Such an archetype glorifies martyrdom and stimulates the belief that a “good” mother is one who neglects her own needs. It ignores a mother's possibility of aspiring to individual desires or leading multifaceted lives. Such portrayals create high societal expectations from mothers on following the self-sacrificing route sometimes at the price of their mental well-being and personal growth. It also promotes patrilocal family systems that constrain a woman's role to that of a caregiver.

4. The “Nagging Wife” Stereotype

So, they say wives are irrational, controlling, or emotional. There is a stereotype where wives exist merely to deliver the comedy.

Examples:

1990s Examples:

- Biwi No.1: The nagging wife character trivializes her reactions and lets them assume the form of the comic.
- Saajan Chale Sasural: Those overbearing heavenly beings, then, spice up the fun by dragging in wives as comic relief.

Modern Examples:

- Housefull Series: They always behave in what would be termed hysterical and therefore unreasonable ways, and they are used as an instrument to create comedy.
- Golmaal Again (2017): Female characters, primarily wives, are not obstacles to fun and freedom but obstacles on the road to this.
- Biwi No. 1: The wife is out-and-out jealous about her husband's infidelity, which gets trivialized.

Analysis:

Such stereotyping completely trivializes women's emotions and instills in popular culture that assertiveness from a woman is bad. It reinforces negative attitudes toward women in relationships. It normalizes the underestimation of women's concerns, thus promoting toxic masculinity. Such portrayals de-legitimize women's voices both in the relationship and in the society.

5. Career Women and Contemporary Independence: Still Stereotyped

A woman represents an independent character, but, in most cases, still gets illustrated as dependent on a romantic partner or under the weight of social expectations.

Examples:

1990s Examples:

- Dil Toh Pagal Hai (1997): Pooja is a pretty, talented dancer, but her tale is very much about love choices rather than independence.
- Aaina (1993): The older sister is blamed for being career-oriented and ambitious; the sister who stays home is hailed.

Modern Examples:

- Ae Dil Hai Mushkil (2016): Alizeh is independent but remains stuck as a muse to the male protagonist's emotional journey.
- Good Newwz (2019): At least Kareena Kapoor plays a career woman in this movie, but the fun part is mostly about how she juggles motherhood and the expectations of society.
- Shershaah (2021): Of course, based on the biography but the character of Dimple revolves around the storyline where the male protagonist acquires the focal point, hence limiting her agency.

Analysis: Career women in films usually wear the emotional non-completeness burden or deep-rooted traditional expectations in the name of independence.

6. The Overly Sexualized Villain or Seductress

Women often portrayed as antagonists lean more to the sultry seductress with an almost complete neglect of portraying her intellect or ambition.

Examples:

1990s Examples:

- Baazigar (1993): The character of Priya's friend is oversexualized to show the hero's superior moral value.
- Gupt (1997): The personality of this female antagonist is essentially shaped through deceit and seduction.

Modern Examples:

- Race (2008) and its sequels: The female villains are represented mostly as the seductive manipulators.

Analysis: These capes do not present a number of female antagonists with depth; their use of sexuality is indeed a very defining trait.

The Positive Changes Brought by Modern Cinema:

As much as it has continued to stereotype women, there are a few films that have tried to deviate from such attempts, presenting some slight nuances of empowerment or positive representation:

- Kahaani (2012): Vidya Balan's character is multidimensional pregnant woman and portrays a pursuit combining strength and vulnerability
- Mardaani (2014): The movie stars Rani Mukerji in a role of a daring police officer. The storyline presents her in a struggle against human trafficking with a message focused on how leadership and law enforcement have found strength among women.
- Queen (2014): A story where a young female protagonist struggles to build herself after getting engaged.
- Pink (2016): It speaks about the concept of consent as well as the struggles of women within a patriarchal society.
- Neerja (2016): A biographical melodrama entertainment for Neerja Bhanot, the stewardess who did not hesitate to lay her life for the safety of the passengers on the plane that was hijacked. The film is dedicated to the storyline and the reality of the heroism of a girl who demonstrates courage, selflessness, and foresight.
- Raazi (2018): Alia Bhatt taking over as the spy who was deployed to transmit secret information and distrust in Pakistan. Raazi is an entertainment packed with a strong female hero whose character passes through both professional and personal dilemmas while having a sharp brain and muscles.
- Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi (2019): In the historical drama, Kangana Ranaut as Rani Lakshmbai is powerful, brave, and a discreet leader against the British colonialism, which is perhaps most powerful about the empowerment of women in the history of India.
- Thappad (2020): The film looks into normalized domestic violence and an entire woman's travel journey to reclaim her dignity.
- Chhapaak (2020): It was in 2012 when Meghana Gulzar began to develop her film based on the true to life story of an acid attack survivor, in retrospect of her journey to recover occurrence and dignity. Presentation by Deepika Padukone confirms the trait of resilience and societal reform manifested regarding violence against women.
- Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl (2020): Featuring the life of a woman who first flouted the ability of Indian men in war by flying an airplane in the India Pakistan war during 1971. One of the films portrays, with emphasis on individual dreams vs societal opposition, the necessity to pursue someone's dream in such circumstances.
- Laapataa Ladies (2024): Directed by Kiran Rao, it explores a journey traversed by two young ladies against societal odds, bringing out their resilience as well as the search for the self.

IV.CONCLUSION

The image of women in Indian cinema has reflected the mindset of society and has been a strong factor in imparting gender stereotypes. While limited progress has been made in a few films, mainstream cinema still hangs on to the myths. To break stereotypes, there will be the need for relentless efforts at portraying women graduating into independent, grounded individuals, thereby bringing in gender equality at the end up and down the screens. This shows that the very progression of society along with changed narrative Indian cinema stereotypes women types through genres and decades.

Oftentimes, the portrayal of women in Indian cinema centers around attitudes originating from the society, and thus, it is much of a powerful conveyor for gender stereotypes. Even though a few progressive films, such as *Pink*, *Queen*, *Kahaani*, and *Thappad*, have come out in recent years, Indian cinema at large is mainly comprised mainstream media with the traditional male-narrative, that time and again women are depicted as the ones who were deprived of their rights and had only one unique dimension. To dismantle these stereotypes, Indian cinema must work continuously to show women in diverse roles such as being independent, being having a personality made up of many different sides, and being a part of the fight for the gender response throughout society.

It is crucial to consider both the progressive and the regressive features of Indian cinema when the subject is being scrutinized. On the positive side, some movies have functioned as starters for social change geared towards the challenge of typically patriarchal notions and have provoked public discussions on gender roles. In particular, *Chak De! India* revealed the leadership and self-restraint of women as well as *Lipstick Under My Burkha* courageously unfolded the suppressed longings of women and their struggles against the societal taboos. But the majority of mainstream cinema perpetuates these traditions while it extol the virtue of passive female characters, romanticizes stalking and uses women as the very device of the male protagonist's plot without it. These stereotypes suck the life out of a society striving for equality.

So, from a media psychology point of view, cinema is a powerful tool to accommodate social norms and shape people's behaviors. Media serves as a socializing medium and thus, it impacts audiences' views on gender roles. Continuous exposure to backward character images can support gender prejudice and in the meantime become a part of the established behavioral model, while a positive role model can develop and teach new positive attitudes. For example, movies depicting females in leadership or decision-maker roles may largely affect the public's opinion and thus prompt transformations around them. Media Psychology is also the subject that calls attention to how sensitive personal values and individual experiences, and culturally contingent backgrounds are in cinema, that indeed point out to the necessity of critical media consumption.

Even though cinema can become a powerful tool to increase stereotypes, it still stands as a very influential tool to people's minds. For instance, when movies provide realistic and detailed images of women, they may raise people's awareness of the constraints placed by social norms and then they will be more receptive to new values. To illustrate, while *Dangal* and *The Dirty Picture* also were capable of entertaining, they also challenged gender norms in sports and the entertainment industry, and performers also encouraged the audience to reconsider traditionally imposed women's limitations.

Throughout, personal decisions as well as people's viewpoints are the key determination factor of how movies change the individual and the public. Filmmakers critics, and the audiences also must consequently analyze the narratives being presented and demands that concurrently, experiences of women from different backgrounds, their strengths, and the complexities of their lives be told. The primary task here is for the Indian Film Industry to impeccably take charge of the cultural mirror, and it should ensure that what it portrays is incidentally, responsive to the exists of the day, besides being a pacer for gender equality.

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