

Societal Changes Viewed Through Bollywood Lenses

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Abstract

Bollywood, the Hindi film industry of India, has been entertaining the global population through its music, songs and dances shot in picturesque and exotic locations. These films generally revolve around a powerful male protagonist involved in different activities and females encrypted only to enhance the position of these males. The females tend to glorify the movies with their looks, gorgeous dresses, music and dances. Though, this may be the prevailing scenario of the women in the industry, there are films where a story is scripted around a female. This paper of mine intends to go through some of the movies of Bollywood so as to highlight how along with the metamorphosis in the life of the real Indian woman, there comes a very subtle modification in the depiction of females in these female centric movies.

Key Words: societal change, Hindi film industry, female centric movies, Indian women

Portrayal of Females in the 20th Century Movies:

Director Mehboob

On turning the pages of Bollywood film industry, the first movie which had an actress in the leading role is *Mother India* by Mehboob in 1957. This film had Radha (Nargis Dutt) in the lead role but here she is not an individual woman. Here she is the prototype of India viewed as a mother to all. Dr. Soma Chatterjee says in an interview: “Mother India is a strong political statement on a woman who could do anything to establish that justice has been done even while remaining within the framework of marriage and motherhood. She defies the micro state of being a biological mother in order to fit into the framework of becoming the mother of the nation when she shoots down her own son to save the honour of a woman of the village.”

Director Shyam Benegal

The other director who has depicted women in roles that are different, making a shift from the contemporary stereo-types, is Shyam Benegal. A few of his films in this setting would be *Nishant*, *Bhumika*, *Hari-Bhari*. *Nishant* portrays two women, Rukmini and Susheela the former the legal wife of Vishwam and Susheela the concubine of Vishwam, each dealing with their situations in life in their own ways. *Bhumika*, portrays the life of an actress Usha as she keeps shifting from one male to the other in search of contentment and *Hari Bhari* brings to light the condition of a woman who could not bring forth the male progeny to the family.

Thus, he puts these women in different situations of life and shows us their reaction to it. Irrespective of the social class to which the woman belongs, her problems creep into her life with the onset of family life where she is either the dumb sufferer (as Rukmini in *Nishant* or Gazala in *Hari Bhari*) with none to alleviate her pains, or the one who tactically uses her position as a woman to gain something out of the men folk (as is done by Susheela in *Nishant* or Usha in *Bhumika*). It is so because the woman was never allowed to desire anything beyond the four walls of her house and her family. Her life was epitomised in her duty of making herself into a successful home maker. All her equations of life had to be settled within the four walls of the house and among the members of that family, especially the males and even if justice had to be meted out to her it could only be done by some menfolk. As for the men, none could judge them. All their actions seem to be always

justified. At the end, all we get to see is the all-powerful male under whose shadow lurks the woman without even knowing that she is being unjustly treated. She accepts all that she gets as her DESTINY. She cries but none see those tears. So, this being the contemporary situation films mirrored them.

Films by Rajkumar Santoshi

Films like *Daman*, *Lajja* both by Rajkumar Santoshi have portrayed women in the lead roles and she is not the 'voiceless' here, but defenceless. These two films make her somewhat of a better human being, for now the sense of the prevailing might of right and/or wrong descends on her. She shouts, she cries, she does it loud enough this time to gain the public attention, but she alone cannot defend herself. She has not become strong enough to stand alone for herself; still she needs someone and so comes the powerful male character. But, this time only to stand as her support. Thus, we see a very slow growth in the feminine character in the films. This growth is the obvious outcome of the changes in the outlook of the people of the society.

Portrayal of Females in the 21st Century Movies



Courtesy: <http://www.hiff.org/content/bollywood-nights-hiff-spring-showcase/>

Astitva

Winds of change began to be felt with the production of films like *Astitva* by Mahesh Manjrekar, where the mother and the wife denounces her family after 25 years of marriage on

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being accused of infidelity. Here she doesn't stay back to bear the insult of her husband or beg for his mercy for the rest of her life. Before leaving she confesses her love for her son and husband, but does not stay back anymore. Though aged and only a housewife for all these years, she is confident enough to give herself a solo but respectable existence. Here she is also a victim of the evil discrimination on the gender basis but she is neither the voiceless nor the defenceless. She is capable enough of giving an apt answer to the situation and for this she does not depend on anyone.

English-Vinglish



Courtesy: <http://www.koimoi.com/reviews/english-vinglish-review/>

Films with this new outlook where the woman is confident, determined as well as aware of her role as a mother and a wife are being seen and felt. An example of such a movie is *English-Vinglish* where Sridevi, a simple homemaker who lacks English speaking capabilities, with time learns English and gives a speech on 'family' in English. She not only proves her capabilities of learning English, but through her speech shows her love and respect for the same family which once mocked at her for her shortcoming. Here again emerges a

new confident mother and wife who by proving her worth regains the respect which she might have lost once.

Queen and Highway

Films like *Queen* and *Highway* too have shown the new, confident, determined women who alone is self-sufficient to give herself what she requires. She is unlike the heroines of the past century (to be specific *Pakeezah* and *Andhi*) and do not cut a sorry figure in the movies, for not having a well settled family. There are films too where women are having roles at par with the men like *No One Killed Jessica*, *Kahaani*, *Mary kom*, *Satta*, *Mardaani* and the latest being *Jazbaa*. All these films portray the new female altogether unknown all these days and with the release of *Jazbaa* she is the women trying to balance her life between her job and family. Rightly has Anshoo Sharma (2009:117) said: “In conclusion one can say that like phoenix she rises from her ashes- stronger, more capable. It is the rebirth of Durga, the Poroma, who has realized her ‘shakti’ but in a new form, a different context’. Today woman may be in any walk of life, but whichever field she chooses to be in, she shows a much higher level of confidence and seeks respect for the part she plays, which the film makers of this generation are trying to put up.

Alterations in the Women Centric Roles

These alterations in the women centric roles of the movies reveal that Indian women too have undergone a good amount of transformation. Her thoughts are no more unidirectional as it used to be in the earlier century. Social awareness has brought about an up-lift in the position of the women. No more do the four walls circumscribe her. She now tries to be at par with males of the society.

Another important thing that has changed is the general audience’s look out for films. People these days want to see movies whose story lines are different from the traditional ones. They watch movies irrespective of the central role being portrayed by either the hero or the heroine. Somewhere the demand of the beautiful singing heroine clad in beautiful dresses has stopped appealing to the people and the new type of heroine who is smart, vociferous and wants to get her things done in her own way is more welcome to the society.

Tanu Weds Manu



The film *Tanu Weds Manu* proves this point. In the title of this film Tanu is a girl who weds Manu the boy as against the popular belief in India where the boy marries the girl. The character of the hero and heroine as shown in the movie are almost a total reverse of what was shown in the past century. This movie being a deviation from the normal set pattern not only landed with a huge success, but also has a second part to it by the same name, starring the same hero and heroine. So, we do see some changes in the way people are thinking.

Meagre Changes?

Changes in the role of women have taken place, but may be this change is very meagre and at times not noticeable without proper lens. But, on thoroughly comparing and scanning the heroines of the past century and the present a shift will be noticeable in the **Language in India** www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **15:11 November 2015**
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female centric role of Bollywood. This shift from the traditional thinking is an evidence of the changing scenario of the position of women in India.

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