

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

ScholarWorks @ UTRGV

Communication Faculty Publications and
Presentations

College of Liberal Arts

2017

Portrayal of Women in the Popular Indian Cinema

Sharaf Rehman

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/com_fac



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rehman, Sharaf, "Portrayal of Women in the Popular Indian Cinema" (2017). *Communication Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 19.

https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/com_fac/19

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

Portrayal of Women in the Popular Indian Cinema

Wizerunek kobiet w popularnym kinie indyjskim

Sharaf Rehman

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS – RIO GRANDE VALLEY, USA

Keywords

Indian cinema, women, stereotyping

Słowa kluczowe

kino indyjskie, kobiety, stereotypy

Abstract

Popular Indian cinema is primarily rooted in formulaic narrative structure relying heavily on stereotypes. However, in addition to having been the only true “mass medium” in India, the movies have provided more than escapist fantasy and entertainment fare. Indian popular cinema has actively engaged in social and political criticism, promoted certain political ideologies, and reinforced Indian cultural and social values. This paper offers a brief introduction to the social role of the Indian cinema in its culture and proceeds to analyze the phenomenon of stereotyping of women in six particular roles. These roles being: the mother, the wife, the daughter, the daughter-in-law, the widow, and “the other woman”. From the 1940s when India was fighting for her independence, to the present decade where she is emerging as a major future economy, Indian cinema has shifted in its representation and stereotyping of women. This paper traces these shifts through a textual analysis of seven of the most popular Indian movies of the past seven decades.

Abstrakt

Popularne kino indyjskie jest przede wszystkim wpisane w schematyczną strukturę narracyjną. Mimo, że jest to tak naprawdę jedyne „medium masowe” w Indiach, tamtejsze kino to coś więcej niż rozrywka i eskapistyczne fantazje. Kino indyjskie angażuje się w krytykę społeczną i polityczną, promuje pewne

ideologie a także umacnia indyjskie kulturowe i społeczne wartości. Celem tego artykułu jest zwięźle przedstawienie roli społecznej, jaką odgrywa kino w Indiach oraz analiza stereotypów, którym podlegają postaci kobiece przedstawiane zazwyczaj w jednej z sześciu ról, jako: matki, żony, córki, synowe, wdowy oraz „inne kobiety”. Od lat 40tych XX wieku, kiedy Indie walczyły o niepodległość, do dzisiaj kiedy powoli stają się jedną z najważniejszych gospodarek świata, kino indyjskie zmieniło swój sposób przedstawiania kobiet. Artykuł ten pokazuje i omawia te zmiany poprzez analizę siedmiu najbardziej popularnych filmów z ostatnich siedmiu dekad.

Portrayal of Women in the Popular Indian Cinema

I. Introduction

*A woman puts the man on this earth
The man puts her in a brothel.
– A popular Indian film song –*

Since 1971, India has remained the world's largest producer of feature length films¹. In 2012, Hollywood produced 476 films, China made 745, and India produced 1602². By the end of 2016, the Indian movie industry will exceed the \$3 billion mark³. Although the Indian film industry produces movies in 24 different languages, for the last 75 years, the most influential segment of the Indian cinema has been the Hindi language movies made in Mumbai.

Movies arrived in India in 1896 when the Lumiere Brothers held a screening of their moving pictures in Bombay (now Mumbai) in July 1896. Within two short years, an Indian filmmaker, Hiralal Sen was producing local shorts. Dadasaheb Phalke directed the first full-length feature film *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913. The first Indian sound film, *Alam Ara* (dir. Ardeshir Irani) was made in 1931, and the first color film, *Kisan Kanya / The Farm Girl* (Dir. Moti Gidwani) in 1937. The first cinemascope movie *Kaagaz ke Phool / Paper Flowers* (Dir. Guru Dutt) was released in 1959⁴; the first Indian 3-D film *Chota Chetan / My Dear Chetan* (Dir. Jijo Punnoose) came out in 1984⁵.

Not only has the Indian movie industry kept up with Hollywood in technological advances, but it has also duplicated three important aspects of the America cinema: the star system, the studio system, and the narrative structure. From the days of the silent movies, some of the actors gained such popularity that the producers were compelled to cast them in their movies⁶.

¹ See A. Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema: A Very Short Introduction*. New Yor 2016.

² N. Desai, Indian Film Industry, [in:] http://www.nishithdesai.com/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Research%20Papers/Indian%20Film%20Industry.pdf

³ Indian media and entertainment industry report 2015, [in:] https://www.kpmg.com/IN/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/FICCI-KPMG_2015.pdf

⁴ S. Gosh, The firsts in Indian cinema, [in:] [https:// www.punjabilok.com](https://www.punjabilok.com)

⁵ J. Lent, *The Asian film industry*, Austin 1990, p.229.

⁶ Compare F. R. Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*. New York 1965.

From the mid-1910s, with the popularity of Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, the American film industry has remained star-driven (Kardish, 1972)⁷. The same holds true of the Hindi cinema – the film industry in Mumbai. At any given time, about ten or twelve stars have controlled the entire film business. In time, new players replace the older ones; however, the control resides with the stars⁸. As is the case in Hollywood, male stars retain their top positions longer than the female stars.

Indian film producers, based on their close associations with established stars, ran and sustained their own studios. Mahboob Khan, K. Asif, Bimal Roy, and B.R. Chopra were a few such successful studio owners and producers during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Many of the (male) stars during those three decades not only controlled their own production companies but also ran their own studios. Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand, two of the biggest box-office draws during the 1950s and 1960s successfully managed their work through their studios⁹.

Most of the commercial movies produced in India are musicals. However, the narrative structure of these movies resembles the three-act structure used by the American movies. The art movies, known as the *parallel cinema* in India, too rely on the same narrative structure for telling their stories¹⁰.

In terms of dollars alone, Hollywood is a much bigger industry, however, in the year 2012 when Hollywood sold 1.36 billion movie admissions 2.64 billion admissions were sold in India (McCarthy, 2014)¹¹. India's fascination with the movies is not hard to explain. For a vast majority of the Indian population, movies are the only true mass medium. Printed media such as books, newspapers, and magazines require the ability to read and the ability to afford these media. In 2014, the literacy rate in India was 63 % and the per capita income was \$1581 (World Bank Report: 2015)¹². Many parts of India remain without electricity making both the radio and television the media for the urban populations. Hence, the movies are the only true mass medium

⁷ Compare L. Kardish, *Reel Plastic Magic*. Boston 1972.

⁸ Compare R. Dwyer & D. Patel, *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film*. New Brunswick, N.J. 2002.

⁹ Compare T. Ganti, *Bollywood: A guidebook to popular Hindi cinema*. New York 2004.

¹⁰ M. R. Binford, *Innovation and Imitation in the Indian Cinema*, [in:] *Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections of Film from Japan, India and China*, ed. W. Dissanayake, New York 1988, pp. 77-83.

¹¹ N. McCarthy, *Bollywood: India's Film Industry by the Numbers*, [in:] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2014/09/03/bollywood-indias-film-industry-by-the-numbers-infographic/#3d97ee5f7bf0>

¹² The World Bank Report [in:] <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP>. CD

that is available to the masses. A movie admission costs as little as \$0.93 at the low-end, single screen, rural theaters. In the high-end multiplexes in the large metropolitans such as Mumbai and Delhi, an admission may cost as much as \$3.95.

The appeal and lure of the Indian movies reach beyond the socio-economic, religious, cultural or geographic divides in India. Historically, the Indian cinema has played a significant role in building a national identity and in reinforcing the cultural values¹³.

II. Media Functions & Functionalism

Harold Lasswell identified three important functions of mass media for a society¹⁴. These were: 1. *Surveillance* of the socio-political and economic system to keep the individuals informed. Thus, the media has the responsibility of providing the news and other relevant information. 2. *Correlation* of parts of a society. This function relates to the reporting and interpreting the news so that people understand the political issues and policies. In so doing, the media can influence the opinions by framing and prioritizing the issues in a certain order. 3. *Cultural transmission*. Media inform the current generations about the actions and behaviors of the previous generations in a society to build a cultural continuity from generation to generation Wright added yet another function of the mass media – *entertainment*¹⁵. In recent times, social scientists and economists have also included functions such as “to hold a society together”, “to set the agenda”, “to service the political system” and “to service the economic plan”¹⁶.

Robert K. Merton posited that a society was similar to an organism with various parts, and each part had a function to perform – mass media of communication were one such part with specific functions. Merton argued that some of these functions were recognized, obvious, and intended while others were unrecognized, not so obvious, and unintended. He distinguished between these two types by labeling the recognized and intended as the *manifest* functions, and the unrecognized and unintended as the *latent* functions.

¹³ Compare S. Chakravarty, *National identity in Indian popular cinema 1947-1987*, Austin: 1993.

¹⁴ H. Laswell, *The structure and function of communication and society: The communication of ideas*. New York 1948, p. 203-243.

¹⁵ W. R. Wright, Functional analysis and mass communication. “Public Opinion Quarterly” 1960, vol 24, pp. 610-613.

¹⁶ G. A. Donohue, P. J. Tichenor & C. N. Olien, (1973) Mass Media Functions, Knowledge and Social Control. “Journalism Quarterly” 1973, vol 50 (4), pp. 652-9.

Merton also held that some functions could be disruptive or dysfunctional for a society (Merton, 1968)¹⁷.

Primarily, the planned or manifest function of the movies in India is entertainment. Cinema in India is a commercial enterprise and the investors invest with a hope for making a profit. To assure success at the box-office, the industry has developed a formula that requires equal portions of romance, melodrama, action, suspense, spectacle, music, dance, and comedy. With the exception of the parallel cinema, all commercial Indian movies are a mixture of the mentioned ingredients. Indian movies also present larger-than-life characters accomplishing and achieving near-impossible feats beating all odds and defeating forces of nature and society. In the contemporary Indian movies, love conquers all, the good prevails, the bad is punished, the unjust either receive their due or are converted to just behavior. In a country where a majority of the population lives in poverty, caste system, and financial hardships, any chance of success, any promise of equality and justice, and any glimmer of upward mobility is easy to sell.

The present paper argues that more than selling the dreams of a better future or prosperity, the Indian movies have served three extremely important *latent* functions in India.

1. The movies have served as a cultural glue.
2. The movies have played an important role in building nationalism and fueling the struggle for independence during the 1940s.
3. The movies have reinforced Indian social and cultural values through repeating the stereotypical roles for mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, husbands, and wives.

III. Latent functions of movies in India

Movies as a Cultural Glue. India has four different religions – Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. These religions have their specific cultures and traditions. Currently, as many as 780 different languages are spoken and 86 different scripts are used in the country. Constitutionally, India recognizes 23 languages. Movies are produced in 22 local languages. The most influential and popular are the ones in Hindi, a language that is understood in most of the parts of the country and, along with English, is considered the official language. Hindi movies are produced in Mumbai. These movies are the most popular. These are the movies with the biggest budgets and feature the biggest stars. These are the movies globally recognized as the “Indian cinema”.

¹⁷ See R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Glencoe, IL 1968.

Prior to the independence in 1947, Hindi movies repeatedly told stories that were anti-British and pointed to the tyranny and injustice dished out to the locals by the British rulers. These movies showed that people of all faiths and cultures grouped together to end the British rule. In the pre-independence movies, the westernized people, often living in the big cities, were depicted as bad people that controlled the poor in the rural areas. In those movies, the feudal lords, the landowners, and the big business owners were dressed in western clothing, residing in palace-like homes, led a lifestyle of decadence and low moral standards. The rural folks either worked the land or in factories and were exploited. Clearly, the producers of these films did not intend these as propaganda. Movies with such plotlines and characters were successful at the box-office because these themes and issues rang true with the masses. The latent or unintended function of these movies brought together Indians from all corners to join in the struggle that eventually led to the demise of the British Raj in 1947. Thus, it is not unreasonable to say that the popular Hindi movies served as “cultural glue” in joining the nation in a common cause.

Movies and Nationalism. After gaining its independence, India found itself surrounded by hostile neighbors – Pakistan on the eastern and western borders, and China along the northern border. Once again, the movies presented stories with patriotic themes urging the diverse populations to take pride in their new identity as Indians. Repeatedly, the movies presented the brave men and women that died for their country and principles. Stories of sacrifices were popular throughout the 1940s to 1960s (*Shaheed/ The Martyr*, Dir. Ramesh Saigal 1948; *Jagriti / The Awakening*, Dir. Satyen Bose 1954; *Shaheed* (remake), Ram Sharma 1965).

Stereotyping in the Indian movies. Not unlike the popular cinema in other countries, the Indian movies rely heavily on stereotyping. A reliance on stereotyping helps in two ways. On the manifest level, a stereotype helps to establish a character quickly. On a latent level, the stereotypical behavior -predictable as it may be – serves to reinforce the expected / anticipated models of behavior. American movies have repeatedly portrayed the Native Americans as war loving, primitive, and cruel, the Italians as gangsters and criminals, the Germans and Russians as untrustworthy, the Swedes and the Poles as simple and hardworking, the Japanese as brutal, and most recently, the people from the Middle East as terrorists. In the Indian cinema, the stereotyping of women has, unintentionally, shown how a mother, a wife, a daughter, a daughter-law, a widow, and “the other woman” are expected to behave. For instance, how the mothers behave in real life and how they are depicted in the movies has become so intertwined in the Indian culture that it is impossible

to draw a line between the reality and fantasy. However, among these stereotypes and demonization, the 'real' Indian woman is often lost or ignored¹⁸.

IV. Stereotypical roles of women

The following section offers a brief description of the six stereotypes of women that have been presented repeatedly in the popular Hindi movies produced in Mumbai.

The mother. In an Indian movie, she is selfless, protective, and devoted to her children. She is capable of making the greatest sacrifices, has strong moral and religious convictions, is honest, and is capable of great acts of courage and bravery.

The wife. She is unconditionally loyal, faithful, and subservient. She is undemanding, uncomplaining, and tolerant. She is patient and forgiving.

The daughter. She is obedient, non-argumentative, and accepts the decisions made by her parents. She is well behaved, respectful, and assists her mother with the domestic chores competently.

The daughter-in-law. As soon as she comes to live in her husband's house (which she shares with the in-laws), she ceases to be the daughter that she was and transforms into the role of a wife. Her in-laws are her new parents and new family. She accepts and obeys their wishes as her duty. Her loyalties shift from her own family to that of her husband's family. In time, she will acquire the status of a mother.

The Widow. Young or old, she will be dressed in white. She will wear no makeup or jewelry. She is treated as a cursed person responsible for her husband's death. She has no right to any happiness and will never be allowed to remarry.

The other woman. She comes in several variations. She is a woman wronged who will seek revenge; she may be a courtesan; she may be a "hooker with a heart of gold"; she may be a vamp or she may be a "bad girl turned good". The audience has come to have a love-hate relationship with "the other woman" characters. The audience loathes these characters yet these are the women that provide titillation and excitement in the movies where mothers, wives, and daughters are innocent, honest, and pure. The other woman is a home-wrecker who lures the husband away from his wife. She is driven by lust, greed, or some form of revenge. These characters often end up dead or behind bars. Moreover, the husbands return to their all-forgiving wives.

¹⁸ N. Bharucha, Of Devis, Devdaasis and Daayins: The image of women in postcolonial Indian cinema, [in:] <http://www.genderforum.org/fileadmin/archiv/genderforum/mediating/bharucha.html>

The courtesan (the singer/dancer) falls in love with either a married man or a young man of a well-respected family. In the Indian movies, the courtesan girls are either born out of wedlock or are the daughters of prostitutes. These women aspire to assume the role of a traditional wife, but because of their “past” or destiny, are unacceptable as wives. These women make great sacrifices for their lovers but are destined to remain alone and suffer.

As so many other industries, the men control the movie industry in India. Thus, the men have created the stereotypical roles that serve them the best. The roles that have been repeated thousands of times over the past 100 years in the Indian cinema. At the writing of this paper (2016), the Indian cinema is very different from what it was during the British occupation. At present, there are many successful women writers and directors working in the Hindi movie industry. However, there is no tradition of feminist approach to film studies in India, nor is there a feminist cinema in India¹⁹. One may ask if these stereotypes have changed any. Alternatively, if the women in the Indian cinema are just as subservient as they were prior to 1947?

V. Methodology

For the purpose of analysis, this author has included seven most popular movies from the last seven decades. The criterion for selecting these movies was their popularity and success at the box-office. The selected movies were the biggest grosser of their respective decades. Box-office success is a reasonable indication that the audiences embraced whatever values, ideas and stereotypes were presented in a particular movie.

Table 1 presents the list of these movies with the names of their directors and the years of their release.

Table 1
Most Popular Indian Movies for their Decade

Movie Title	Director	Year
<i>Andaz / A Matter of Style</i>	Mehboob Khan	1949
<i>Mother India</i>	Mehboob Khan	1957
<i>Mughal-e-Azam / The Great Mughal Emperor</i>	K. Asif	1960
<i>Sholay / Embers</i>	Ramesh Sippy	1975
<i>Karanti / The Revolutionary</i>	Manoj Kumar	1981
<i>Hum Aapke Hain Koun / What Am I To You?</i>	Sooraj Barjatya	1994
<i>Devdas</i>	Sanjay Bhansali	2002

¹⁹ Ibidem.

Andaz / A Matter of Style (Mehboob Khan 1949) is a story with a love-triangle. Nina is a rich and spoiled daughter of a successful businessperson. She represents the “modern woman”. She is engaged to be married to Rajan who is away in England pursuing higher studies. Nina meets another young man, Dilip, who belongs to a lower socio-economic class. Nina and Dilip continue to meet and he falls in love with her. He never gets a chance to declare his love for her and Nina never tells him that she is engaged. She marries Rajan but continues to meet Dilip. Rajan becomes suspicious, and Nina realizes that Dilip has misunderstood their friendship. She has to decide between her husband who does not love her and the Dilip who does. A story that begins as a conflict of social classes and a love triangle turns into a clash between the traditional Indian values and modern India. Despite her free-spirited behavior and western clothes (she wears riding jodhpurs and goes horseback riding), Nina chooses to play the obedient daughter and the devoted wife and rejects Dilip – her chance for love and happiness. There’s no room for extra-marital flirtation in the Indian culture. Nina returns to her husband. Tradition wins over imported values.

Mother India (Mehboob Khan 1957). This is the story of Radha, a mother of two and pregnant with the third child who is abandoned by her husband. Radha is trying to raise her children under conditions of extreme poverty. Yet she plays the dedicated and devoted mother making sacrifice after sacrifice for her children while still holding on to her moral principles and values. When a flood washes away the village and its harvest, the villagers want to abandon the village. She persuades them to stay back and rebuild the village. The village itself represented the country and the flood was the devastation that was served it by the partition and the bloodshed that followed in 1947. Her convincing the villagers to rebuild was the filmmaker’s call for rebuilding the nation. Using Radha as a symbol for the country that will be fair to its people and serve them, Radha shoots one of her own sons who had turned to crime, looting, and rape. Standing as the mother of the nation, Radha executes justice to suggest that the country will do right by its people. Radha as the mother has become the model for all the mothers of later years in India. Representing both motherhood and Mother Earth, who nurtures and occasionally punishes, the actress, Nargis, in her characterization of Radha immortalized the Indian mother on celluloid²⁰. As a devoted wife, Radha tried to reassure her husband: “I can bear the most severe sun under your shadow.” When nearly dying of starvation, she was propositioned by a moneylender, her response was, “I can sacrifice my son, not my honor.”

²⁰ A. Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema: A Very Short Introduction*. New York 2016.

Mughal-e-Azam / The Great Mughal Emperor (K. Asif 1960) tells the tale of a love affair between a Mughal prince, Salim, and Anarkali, daughter of a maid in the royal palace of King Akbar. Another courtesan, Bahar, has designs over Salim. When unable to win Salim's love, she exposes the relationship between Salim and Anarkali. Salim declares he wants to marry Anarkali. The king refuses, and orders Anarkali to be imprisoned. Salim rebels by gathering an army and going to war against the king. Salim is defeated, chained and brought to the king. The king orders him dead. The queen pleads with the king for the prince's life. The king is unrelenting. The prince is willing to die but not willing to give up Anarkali. Finally, the king puts a condition: If Anarkali would reject Salim, she would be released from prison and sent away. Salim's life would be spared. But she will never make any attempt to see the prince again. Anarkali agrees. Salim is freed. Anarkali is sent away. Salim is led to believe that Anarkali has been put to death. The queen plays the devoted wife, and caring mother. In the end, as a good wife, she submits to the wishes of her husband. Even though they are not married, Anarkali suffers and makes sacrifices for Salim as a devoted wife. Also living up to the stereotypes, Bahar, the courtesan dancer (*the other woman*) schemes and plots to win Salim's heart and become the queen. The prince loses his love, Anarkali, but he also rejects Bahar, the scheming "other woman." Bahar is left alone as all such women in the Indian cinema are left abandoned.

Sholay / Embers (Ramesh Sippy 1975), was an Indian Western in the style of Sergio Leone. A small village is being terrorized by a gang of bandits led by a ruthless leader, Gabbar. There's a handsome reward for his arrest. A retired police officer, Thakur, lives in the village with his widowed daughter-in-law, Radha. Gabbar had killed several of Thakur's family members including his son. To fight fire with fire, Thakur hires two hard-boiled criminals, Jai and Veeru, to capture Gabbar and bring him in alive. Thakur wants to take his revenge without interference from the law. Thakur promises the two thugs an even greater reward for Gabbar's capture. Jai and Veeru arrive in the village and begin to work on a plan to capture Gabbar. In the process, Veeru falls in love with, Basanti, a young woman who drives a horse-cart as a taxi. Jai becomes interested in the widow, Radha, who subtly acknowledges his affections. Basanti and Radha are the only significant female characters in this 204-minute long epic. Basanti is the love interest for the leading man. As such, she assumes the role of a would-be wife. She joins Veeru in the hunt for Gabbar and risks her life doing so. She stands by Veeru throughout the film as a devoted wife and waits for him at the end of the movie as he is leaving the village. She goes with him. Basanti plays the dutiful/faithful wife to Veeru even if they are not married. Radha, as a widow, is always dressed in white.

Hardly any makeup, and never any jewelry. The widows in the Indian culture are expected to live a life of isolation. They are not expected to remarry. She stays aloof and remains an outsider during the colorful “*Holi*” festival. Never smiling, never uttering a word of protest, she walks through the movie as a near mute. One hopes she will find a second chance at happiness with Jai. However, in a gun battle with Gabbar, Jai is killed. Living to the cultural stereotype of a widow in India, Radha is left alone at the end of the movie.

Karanti / The Revolutionary (Manoj Kumar 1981). Unlike most Indian movies where romance is the predominant theme, *Karanti* is a political film where several men are working together to bring the British Rule to an end. On the forefront of the movement is Sanga, an older man. He is joined in the struggle with a two younger men, Bharat, a Hindu, and Kareem Khan, a Muslim. Soon a young prince, Shakti, also joins the crusade. Women playing the roles of wives, mothers, and daughters are portrayed as stereotypical supportive, selfless, morally upright, and submissive. A young princess, Meenakshi, plays a rebellious young woman, and two young women (daughters) effectively fight off the advances of thugs and would-be rapists. Since the story takes place in the nineteenth century India when all attempts of overturning the Raj was unsuccessful, most of the revolutionaries in the movie either died fighting or were captured and sentenced to death for the crime of mutiny. Many of the women in the movie participated in the fight and died, fighting. The surviving women (widows, mothers, and unwed daughters) were left desolate.

Hum Aapkey Hain Koun? / Who Am I To You? (Sooraj Barjatya 1994). A family drama that revolves around two sisters, Pooja and Nisha. The elder sister, Pooja, is married to Rajesh, a businessman. Rajesh is assisted by his younger brother, Prem. Prem and Nisha fall in love. Pooja and Rajesh have a child. As a result of a freak accident, Pooja dies. The families decide that the best thing for the Pooja’s child would be to have Nisha marry Rajesh and raise her late sister’s child. As a dutiful daughter, she agrees to the arranged marriage. Moments before the wedding, Rajesh discovers that his younger brother, Prem and soon-to-be his wife, Nisha love each other. Realizing this, he confronts his younger brother and Nisha. They admit they love each other and had only kept their silence and sacrificed their own love for his child. Rajesh halts the wedding and Prem and Nisha are married to each other with the consent of their families. Nisha and Prem agree to raise the child as their own.

Devdas (Sanjay Bhansali 2002). An adaptation of a classic *Bengali* novel of the same name by Sarat Chander that tells the story of a man belonging to a higher caste and his relationship with two women from the lower classes. The main character, Devdas, is an introvert and a weak-willed person unable to stand up to his parents, or make decisions for himself. He is in love with

his childhood sweetheart, Paro, who belongs to a slightly lower social class than his own. They love each other, however, when Devdas's father disallows his marrying Paro, Devdas accepts the decision without any resistance. He leaves his village and goes to live in a big city. From there, he sends a letter to Paro, telling her that theirs was only a friendship and that he never loved her. He urges her to let her family find a suitable husband and make a home for herself. She should try to forget Devdas. Soon after mailed the letter, he has second thoughts and doubts. He rushes to the village and tries to persuade Paro to marry him. She has already agreed to an arranged marriage and turns down Devdas's offer. Realizing that there's nothing to be done, he returns to the city. Before leaving, he promises to come and visit her again before he dies. In the city, he meets a dancing girl, Chandarmukhi. Trying to forget his loss of Paro and the letter he wrote in haste, he turns to drinking and soon develops a dependence on alcohol. Chandarmukhi pleads with him to control his drinking but to no avail. In the process of caring for Devdas, she falls in love with him. He tells Chandarmukhi that he is unable to marry her because she comes from a family of entertainers and dancers. Such would have been totally unacceptable to his family.

Paro is married off to a much older man with had grown up children from his late wife. From being an obedient daughter, Paro changes into the role of an obedient wife and a caring mother to her step-children. Her love for Devdas never dies but she buries in the farthest memories. However, she shifts from one stereotype to the next.

In an otherwise typical Indian movie, Chandarmukhi would have been "the other woman." While she would have pined and made sacrifices for the man she fell for, she would have lost him. Such is the fate of the dancing girls and courtesans. She is humiliated and put in her place time and again – by her audiences and by Devdas. She suffers in silence.

Neither Paro as a daughter or wife, nor Chandarmukhi as a dancing girl is permitted to protest. Instead, both women accept what is given them by the society as their fate.

Keeping his promise, the dying Devdas reaches Paro's front door and collapses. Paro is not allowed to see him. Her husband orders the servants to lock the door and keep Paro within. Outside her door, Devdas dies.

VI. Discussion

Although only seven films are included in the analysis, the author has studied hundreds of Indian movies made during the 1940s to the 2000s. It is this extended exposure to movies that has led to the present investigation.

The depiction of the widow remains *the most unchanged*. Consistently, in box-office hits such as *Mother India* (1959), *Dewar / The Wall* (Yash Chopra 1975), *Sholay / Embers* (1975), *Karanti / The Revolutionary* (1981) and *Water* (Deepa Mehta 2006) she remains silent, aloof, ignored, neglected, and often abused.

The wife, the daughter, and the mother have undergone some changes. All three have become working women. Women in the movies of the 1970s, 1980s, and of more recent years have attended college, become professional women, and participate in running businesses and policymaking. All three have become more independent and assertive. Young daughter are more playful flirts. They take the initiative in starting friendships with men. If and when these women are wronged, they themselves seek revenge. They become the aggressors and settle the score. In the past, their men (brothers, fathers, or husbands) sought to get even.

The 1970s were a decade of a rise in the violent content in the movies worldwide. The action and crime genre that began with Bruce Lee in Hong Kong, *The Godfather* trilogy (Francis Ford Coppola 1972), Clint Eastwood as the ruthless cop in *Dirty Harry* (Don Seigal 1971) and a series of movies with Charles Bronson where a wronged citizen takes the law into his own hand, e.g., *Death Wish* (Michael Winner 1974). Indian cinema too became cinema of violence during the 1970s and 1980s.

An Indian leading man, Amitabh Bachan, a mega-star in his own right, was dubbed as “the angry young man,” of the Indian cinema. *Sholay / Ambers* (1975) and *Dewar / The Wall* (1975) were an attestation to the success of the movies with violence and bloodshed. *Karanti* (1981) further added support to the popularity of violence. In all three of above movies, the women worked. When they were mistreated or abused, they sought revenge. They were not always timid or soft spoken. Basanti of *Sholay / Embers* (1975) and the young daughters in *Karanti* (1981) were capable of matching men’s foul language, kicked back their attacker harder, and handled knives and guns. Daughters and single women in the recent Indian movies remain true to the older stereotypes when they are at home and in the presence of their parents. However, outside their homes, they are take-charge, no-nonsense, women ready to play the man’s game of sexual promiscuity as readily and effectively as men. One of the top female players, Rani Mukerji’s recent movie, *No One Killed Jessica* (Dir. Raj Kumar Gupta 2011) is one such example. However, in the end, when the tradition and duty call, these women still turned into compliant and altruistic mothers, daughters, and wives from *Andaz* (1949) to *Devdas* (2002).

The biggest noticeable change has occurred in the depiction of *the other woman*. Previously, these came in the form of home wreckers, cabaret dancers, gangster's moles, the courtesans, or the good-hearted prostitutes. All of them showed a weaker side by falling in love and making sacrifices for their love. The new breed of women in the movies of the 1980s and later years includes women that have been wronged, raped, have lost their family members at the hands of thugs. These women become the revenge seekers that won't rest until they settle the score (*Bandit Queen* Shekhar Kapur 1994). Similarly, the dancing girl, Chandarmukhi in *Devdas* (2002) is more assertive and tries to hold her ground more forcefully than the dancing girl, Anarkali of *Mughal-e-Azam/The Emperor of the Mughals* (1960). In the end, both women still lose their man. Anarkali saved Salim's life by agreeing to go away and never contact Salim again. Chandarmukhi's lover went away to die at the doorsteps of his childhood love, Paro. This seems to suggest that the Indian culture is still unwilling to accept a dancing girl, a courtesan, or a woman of the lower caste as a suitable match. The place of these women remains the street, the night club, or the brothel.

In the interest of space and time, the present analysis has limited itself to only seven movies and stereotypes of women. To gain a better understanding of the interrelationship between the Indian culture and its movies there is a need to conduct similar studies with a larger sampling of movies, movies in other Indian languages, and studies that place the male stereotypes under a similar microscope. In light of the fact that there has been an increase in violent crimes against women, there may be a dire need to scrutinize the popular movies of the last two decades for their violent content. In most cultures, movies mirror the values and trends of their times; the audience see their beliefs, values, and attitudes reflected and reinforced in the movies. In the case of India, the relationship between the movies and the public is a much closer one than in other places. In many ways, India is a movie-made culture.

The manifest purpose of the movies in India may be profit generation and entertainment, the latent functions are equally important. Themes of nationalism, stereotyping of women as subservient, and objectification of women need to be replaced with ideas of internationalism, representation of women as equal stakeholders in national development and policy formation, and portrayal of women as real people instead of sex toys for the pleasure of men. In a larger scheme of things, there is also a need for women to become actively involved in the process of filmmaking. To this end, the institutions of higher education and film academies may encourage women to study the art and craft of filmmaking so that woman may have a voice in the content of Indian cinema of the future.

Filmography

Asif, K. (1960). *Mughal-e-Azam / The Great Mughal Emperor*, DVD.

Bose, S. (1954). *Jagriti / The Awakening*, DVD.

Chopra, B.R. (1958). *Sadhna*, DVD.

Chopra, Yash. (1975). *Dewar / The Wall*, DVD.

Coppola, F.F. (1972). *The Godfather*, DVD.

Dutt, G. (1959). *Kaagaz Ke Phool/Paper Flowers*, DVD.

Gidwani, M. (1937). *Kisan Kanya / The Farm Girl*, DVD.

Griffith, D.W. (1914). *The Birth of a Nation*, DVD.

Gupta, R.K. (2011). *No One Killed Jessica*, DVD.

Irani, A. (1931). *Alam Ara*, DVD.

Kapur, S. (1994). *Bandit Queen*, DVD.

Khan, M. (1949). *Andaz / A Matter of Style*, DVD.

Khan, M. (1957). *Mother India*, DVD.

Kumar, M. (1981). *Karanti / The Revolutionary*, DVD.

Mehta, D. (2006). *Water*, DVD.

Phalke, D. (1913). *King Harichandra*, DVD.

Punnoose, J. (1984). *Chhota Chetan / My Dear Chetan*, DVD.

Saigal, R. (1940). *Shaheed / The Martyr*, DVD.

Seigal, D. (1971). *Dirty Harry*, DVD.

Sharma, R. (1965). *Shaheed / The Martyr*, DVD.

Sippy, R. (1975). *Sholay / Ember*, DVD.

Winner, M. (1974). *Death Wish*, DVD.

Yash Raj Studios: Corporate Report (2008).

Translation of the song from the Indian movie, *Sadhna* (Director B.R. Chopra 1958)

Lyrics by Sahir Ludihanvi

A woman puts the man on this earth
The man puts her in a brothel.
Uses and abuses her as he wishes,
Discards her when done.
Sometimes she's weighed in gold,
Sometimes sold for pennies,
She's made to dance naked
For the pleasure of the royals,
A thing without honor
That's shared among the honorable.
She put the man on this earth.

Men are forgiven all their cruelties,
She may not shed a tear.
A man may have a thousand beds
A woman must burn on a pyre.
All pleasures available to man
Life itself a punishment for her.
She who gives birth to man.

The lips that gave him love
He sold them.
The body that made him
He traded and disgraced.
Man created traditions for his convenience
And called them gospel
And for her to burn,
Her destiny.
He gives her two meals
As price for her body
And called it his generosity.
The woman that gave him birth
He sold her at auction.
All immorality of the world
Flourishes with poverty,
The path that starts with starvation
End at a whorehouse.
All of the man's lust
Is branded as her sin,
Woman – the destiny of humanity
Is dealt only misfortunes.
She mothers
Saints and prophets
And is called Satan's daughter.
As a mother
She's made to bed her offspring.
She gives him life
He gives her a brothel.