

Cinematic Kaleidoscope: Hindi Films Transforming Gender Identities

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Our society is a reflection and fodder for the media content that we consume. Hindi Films have been a pivotal part of our culture. This paper analyses the Bollywood heroine and her mannerisms in the movies over the last half-decade. The new emergent protagonist is neither reserved nor modest concerning her desires, sexuality and actions. What she speaks and what she wears, and how she carries it have all been altered. The reasons and impact of this change in the larger social fabric are the focus of our study.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Observational Analysis of films of the five years of the turn of this decade. Years 2010 to 2014 are chosen for analysis of films as this is when the internet started booming as a source of OTT platforms. Films started to be consumed online along with the cinema halls. The audience and their perspective were changing the maximum with respect to the kind of Hindi Cinema that they were demanding and consuming.

Findings: The female protagonist in the Hindi films, started to shift from the coy and the shy to the aggressive and even foul mouthed. In comparison to the previous five decades of Hindi Cinema, the five years at the turn of the previous decade, saw more individualized women characters in Bollywood who spoke their mind and were unapologetic of their sexuality.

INTRODUCTION

Hindi cinema is the largest film industry in the world with the most prolific rate of production, a staggering 800 films a year, screened for approximately fifteen million people a day. It is the dominant cultural institution and product in India (Kumari, P., 2023). Films are believed to be the opium of the Indian masses as people rely on this medium to help them escape to a world of fantasy (Rad, M.T., 2016). Hindi films are immensely popular throughout the country, they are

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an integral part of every Indian's life. (Das, P., 2022) and hence can be considered as a uniform cultural measure.

Studies and research on cinema have time and again reinstated 'the claim of the mainstream cinema as a repository of national cultural value'. While researching the impact of mainstream Bollywood cinema and its generated ideas on the discourses present within middle and upper-middle-class urban Indians, especially the role of women in marriage and family hierarchies, Lahiri, deduces that cinematic discourse provides positive insights into a steadily changing socio-cultural discourse within urban Indian middle-class society. (Rajapandian, R. *et al.*, 2022). This dominant medium configures the 'nation' in post-independence Hindi cinema, with the family deployed as a symbol of the nation. The pleasures the commercial film offers and the desires it creates make it a vital part of popular culture and a critical site of cultural interpretation (Talukdar, H., 2022).

This impact of liberalization policies over the content and marketing of Hindi films makes it all the more necessary to see if the difference in the characterization of the protagonists that has come over the decades is a prototype of the changing society and how it influences the way the society functions if at all the impact is there.

RATIONALE of the STUDY

Media takes its content from the happenings around it and in turn prompts society to seek refuge and solutions into/from it. The impact etched by media has garnered interest of the theorists and practitioners attention since ever. Different forms and their content are unique and sometimes 'Medium itself becomes the message.'¹ Among all the media forms, films in India are a major dose of consumption. They do not only spell entertainment but become a part of the viewer's lives. The people do not watch films in isolation, they relate to them, they learn from them, and they

idolize the characters. Films are believed to be the opium of the Indian masses as people rely on this medium to help them escape to a world of fantasy (Cobb, S. & Tasker, Y., 2015)

The society and the media gears up to 'salute the rise of the modern assertive 21st century Indian woman conscious of her rights and daring to go the distance in shaping feminism 2.0' (Outlook, 2013). We also notice alterations in the 'barren cinematic landscape which (earlier) entirely ignored the variety in female roles, (it) is achieving groundbreaking dimensions devoted to exploring the possibilities inherent in female (depiction)' (Roy, S., 2021). Also offering a fresh free spirit, about moments lease of life are the film writers and lyricists who are convinced to pen songs "about a when a girl shackled by social taboo is breaking away enjoying her freedom. Salute the spirit of every girl, a girl who breaks free of social restrictions (Bassi, V.S., 2018).

This paper is an attempt to explore how the role of female protagonists in Hindi Cinema underwent a changed over a period of time and explore its impact in terms of empowering women in India. The explorations in this paper are limited to mainstream/popular Hindi cinema better known as Bollywood, because such cinema is seen to exercise widespread influence over people and enjoys mass appeal. Popular cinema and culture derive from each other (Zubavina, I., 2022).

OBJECTIVES

This paper seeks to map the change in and social compatibility of the film heroine by trying to:

- Draw a character sketch of the Heroine Post 2010 and analyze whether she is different from her predecessors
- Trace the trajectory of the changes in the profile of the Heroine
- Find out the reasons of this change (if found)
- Equate the social scene with the Film scene

¹ The 'medium is the message' is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan meaning that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.: McLuhan, M. (1964). Understanding Media. London: Routledge.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

When you relax by clicking the remote and watching *The Hills* or *So You Think You Can Dance*, you might like to assume that you are only being amused by these shows. (There are) theories arguing that you are attempting to moderate your mood, theories asserting that you are actually unconsciously and inexpertly processing enormous amounts of information, or theories claiming that this seemingly routine choice is the result of your seeking a particular set of gratifications from a quite specific use of media (Chakrabarty, D., 2022).

Let us put across a theoretical perspective to this study.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory² says we accept what is in line with our comfort levels. Thus implies that even if we believe that movies exert the power upon us to change the social fabric, they can only do it to the extent we wish them to, given our cultural, social upbringing, environment and education that gives us certain beliefs, stereotypes and acceptable norms (Kaur, H & Gupta, S., 2021).

Bandura's Social Cognition Theory³ talks of learning through observation of role models, and what better medium to offer role models than Bollywood in India. From their hairstyles to attires, accents to desires, we ape our film stars to the hilt. In a very explicit way, cinema has shaped the cultural, social and political values of the people of this country (Kumar, K & Bharti, G., 2016). The renewed Indian identity is being shaped by the new globalizing Bollywood.

The focus of **Reception Theory**⁴ is on people's ability to make sense of specific forms of content, presumably for personally relevant ends. The meaning of a film is not inherent within the film itself, but is created within the relationship between the film and the audience. Viewers of Bollywood films often apply their own negotiated and oppositional meanings to the preferred readings intended by the content producers (Stefanovic, P. & Parac, G.A., 2021). Going by this argument, it is safe to assume Bollywood portrayals do not do things to people; rather, people do things with it. Being active, the Indian audience makes media do things to serve their purpose. 'Text', 'genre', and 'society' are three crucial nodes that allow us to access the many levels at which individual films and groups of texts make meaning (Swamy, P.D., 2022).

Media Dependency⁵ states that the more a person depends on media to meet needs, the more important media will be in a person's life, and therefore the more effects media will have on a person. We rely more on the media when the external situation is not stable. And for women in India such situations are immense, for example: Troubled by the news of Rape cases, workplace harassment, marital discord, domestic violence, financial instability, eve teasing, khaap, forced marriages, insecure live-in relationships etc. Within the relationship between the women and the films, access and availability are important antecedents to an individual's experience. And in India again, the availability and access to film viewing is abundant, be it on Television, theatre or these days the phone. Women of almost all sections watch movies. And

² Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance focuses on how humans strive for internal consistency. When inconsistency (dissonance) is experienced, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance. : Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. California: Stanford University Press.

³ Social cognitive theory posits that portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences. Media provide models for a vast array of people in many different environmental settings. : Bandura, A. (February 2001). *Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective*. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1-26. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1.

⁴ Reception Theory states that a 'text'—be it a book, movie, or other creative work—is not simply passively accepted by the audience, but that the reader / viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. : Eco, U. (1972). *Towards a semiotic inquiry into the television message*. *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. University of Birmingham.

⁵ Media systems dependency theory ties together the interrelations of broad social systems, mass media, and the individual into a comprehensive explanation of media effects: Three media needs determine how important media is to a person at any given moment: surveillance, social utility, fantasy-escape. : Rokeach, B., & DeFleur, S.J. (1976). *A dependency model of mass-media effects*. *Communication Research*, 3(1), 3-21.

to them, the melancholic and the mimetic in the film, allow for an examination of the socio-political condition that the film seeks to represent (Rajlaxmi, R. et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

An analysis of the heroine in films from 2010-2014 has been done by randomly selecting five films per year. The female protagonist is not analyzed in terms of her external attributes like dress or hair. A broad derivation of her attitude is attempted, contrasting it to the earlier times' heroine. To establish the past context five films immediately pre-2010 i.e. of 2009 have been dealt with. References have been drawn from more films from 1950s onwards. To equate the social scene, newspaper articles, magazine stories and academic publications have been referred to.

ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION

Hindi film is emerging in the realm of fast-changing contemporary India with its new market-friendly economy, a globalized and upwardly mobile middle class, a vast diaspora that constantly searches for authentic Indian values, and a huge, exportable, techno-savvy workforce that thrives on growing western pop-dominated cultural forms (Agarwal, R., 2014).

The changes initiated by the liberalization of the Indian economy throughout the 1990s facilitated the growing internationalization of the production and distribution of Hindi films. With the entry of satellite television, Indian filmmakers began operating in a new media landscape, where a vast range of options, including easy access to Bollywood and Hollywood films, were available to viewers at home (Rastogi, S. & Chatarjee, S., 2020).

Since 2001, there suddenly grew an interest in tapping the Western audience, a lot of films started having NRI protagonists like Kajol in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Pardes* (1997), *Aa Ab Laut Chalen* (1999), *Hum Tum* (2004), *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gum* (2001), *Kaho Na Pyar*

Hai (2000), *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), *Murder* (2003), *Salaam Namaste* (2005), *Yaadein* (2001) among others. Bollywood wants to lure global audience and is itself getting globalised in the process. But did it remain limited to the westernized themes, foreign locations, actors and singers and liberal use of English in the dialogues or did it penetrate to the portrayal of our Heroine. Did she get a modern makeover as well, shunning the traditional Indian-ness? Is our leading lady of today modern only in her attire or has she changed from deep within? Let us look at some of the Heroines from 2014 to 2010 to see what has changed?

2014

Begum Para⁶ and Munniya⁷ of *Dedh Ishkiya* are sure of what they want and are not guilty of using their sexuality to lure men to fit into their scheme of things for purely selfish motives. In Bollywood, it remains progressive for the narrative to categorize a woman with sexual appetite as anything other than vamp; it is rarer still for such transgressive female characters to not repent or to go otherwise unpunished by the narrative by losing their lives, lovers or both (Gandhi, D. & Mangrola, B., 2018).

2013

Leela⁸, the sure beauty of *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* parts a kiss to a strange boy in their first meeting. She is in contrast to her counter part of fifteen years ago Nandini (*Hum Dil de Chuke Sanam*, 1999) of the same director who innocently asks her lover if she would bear a child after their kiss which obviously happens after a stretched relationship.

These girls are too sure of themselves and do not feel the need to guard their body or image. They are the new age women who are not all good, not all bad but have shades of grey.

2012

Veronica⁹ of *Cocktail* is not hesitant about living with a man who she has no intentions of

⁶ Madhuri Dixit in *Dedh Ishquiya* (2014)

⁷ Huma Qureshi in *DSedh Ishquiya* (2014)

⁸ Deepika Padukone in *Goliyon ki Raasleela - Ram Leela* (2013)

⁹ Deepika Padukone in *Cocktail* (2012)

marrying. No, she does not slap (Hema Malini in *Naseeb*, 1981) someone who offers her a bikini. She is a no-fuss woman who lies around in a bikini as per her own comfort, a material girl who enjoys sex, drugs and rock and roll.

2011

Sanjana¹⁰ of *Ready* is 'Kamini' by her confession. She does not hesitate to engage with her boyfriend in the full vicinity of her family. An equal to all the mischief conducted by the boy, she is a match to him in every way. Her dance steps, walk and the confident dialogue delivery leave no difference in the body language of the hero and the heroine of the film.

2010

Krishna¹¹ of *Ishqiya* is a widow who gives two men shelter and tries to seduce them to achieve her own secret goal. She smears both of them simultaneously and is still a heroine. Imagine someone doing this in a 1980 film.

All these girls we have been served on the platter of movies since 2010 are not demure by any definitions. They are complete in themselves and not waiting to be fulfilled by the man. Their body language does not protect them. They do not tolerate misbehavior and are not in at the mercy of the men to fulfill their desires.

India produces more films than any other country in the world, and these works are avidly consumed by non-Western cultures in Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and by the Indian communities in Australia, Britain, the Caribbean Islands, and North America. Hindi cinema is a 'handmaiden of a dominant elite discourse, reinventing imperial metropolitan culture on one hand and bringing regional/ oppositional strains to heel on the other. It enjoys popular mass investment in the hegemonic ideal while claiming to resist acculturation (Amaljith, N.K., 2021).

COY PREDECESSOR

When we look at the yesteryear Heroine, whatever the difference in the character she essayed, some things remained universally true of her. She was shy, evasive, her posture protected her body, and her dance steps exhibited a feminine shyness. Her eyelids dropped. And outside the screen, the reality too was the same. Talking of Madhubala and Meena Kumari, the dream girls who ruled 50s and 60s of Bollywood, Laje, A. (2014) tells us that they would go on to play the grandest stories of love and fulfillment but had their hearts broken in real life.

Hindi cinema Marshalls its own distinctive poetics and aesthetics to address and negotiate theories of political, social, national, modern and global interventions in the imagination' of the medium (Kumar, K & Bharti, G., 2016). No matter how modern the subject matter, the ideal of woman living according to stri-dharma (traditional norms, duties, rules, roles of womanhood (Putrianti, E. *et al.*, 2022) remained. 'Fascination for the traditional archetype of the feminine' existed and was exhibited in the films. This should in no way mislead us into thinking that she was the doormat who never dared to speak her mind and take her own decisions.

HAS ALWAYS BEEN ASSERTIVE

Cheeky, cosmopolitan, and seductive, the Indian modern girl made her flamboyant and very public appearance as the 'worldly and wicked' sitara, of Indian silent cinema; as an icon of commodity culture; and as the 'English-educated' college girl in the 1920s and 1930s (Zubavina, I., 2022). Though she is a "virtuous Indian women - two predominant emotions that are projected on the heroin are those of sacrifice and obedience. and the ideas of loyalty and obedience to the husband were omnipresent, yet she asserted herself. Whether poor and weak or

¹⁰ Asin Thottumkal in *Ready* (2011)

¹¹ Vidya Baalan in *Ishqiya* (2010)

wealthy and educated, she would always do what she deemed fit even if that meant taking up arms against a strong opponent.

Tulsi¹² and Bidya¹³ do not let the wealthy Lalas take advantage of their poverty despite being very needy. Guddi¹⁴ openly confesses her unwillingness to the boy chosen by her family to marry her. Sunita¹⁵ tells her father that there is only one person who has a right to take decisions of her life and that is she by herself. Meeta¹⁶ does not hesitate to live in the house of her lover in his absence to take care of his mother. She has not been wed and her father does not approve of the match. But this does not stop her from following her heart as early as in 1961. Vidya¹⁷ refuses to be with the man who adores her, as her disapproval of his deeds. All these women from the mainstream Bollywood movies of the 1970s, 60s and even 50s have demonstrated strength. Their soft and blushing girly predisposition no way hinders their assertive minds.

It is true that definitions of assertion have changed as have the middle-class values, making kissing and love making scenes commonplace. Keeping in mind the generation of upper-middle-class Indians raised on cable TV and western films, heroines are more assertive; heroes more introspective and the old sexual taboos have vanished (Patricia *et al.*, 2021).

BREAKING STEREOTYPES

Being modest and sheepish no way made her timid. Our Heroine always had the power to overthrow the conservative norms. She dared to challenge the accepted and change the norms of what was acceptable. She has at many times broken the mould and built a new one to house herself.

The protagonist's positioning within these narratives allows her to reshape her role in innovative ways, to deviate from earlier binary

models imposed upon Bollywood heroines, create new modes of femininity and female agency (Agarwal, R., 20214).

Zeenat Aman helped inaugurate new forms of sexuality and femininity in 1970s Bollywood along with redefining the rules of a screen heroine's identity.

Nikaah (1982) scripts a woman who can divorce her husband as he has no time for her. No heinous crimes like adultery, wife bashing, or law breaking were needed. Thus breaking the Doli-Arthi Combo advocated in our films. *Arth* (1982) gives the freedom to a woman to not accept her husband back after he betrays her, hence challenging the longing for the pati-parmeshwar projected in our films.

Later in the 90s, a girl in *Dil Se* (1998) asks her prospective arranged match if he is a virgin and *Dor* (2006) celebrates the bond of female friendship.

Much recently *Dedh Ishquiya* and *Queen* (2014) tell us that a girl means no when she says no and no she is not denying the love approach out of shyness. She can survive without a man and can live a fulfilling life even if she is dumped in the 'shadi the mandap'

WHAT HAS CHANGED? - DEATH OF THE COY BOLLYWOOD HEROINE

Earlier, even though they were modern and confident women, they would submit to their family desires and eventually be domesticated (Rad, M.T., 2016) but not anymore. From villain to traditional housewife, the politics of globalization and women's sexuality has changed her portrayal in the new Indian films (Govindam, P., & Dutta, B., 2008). There has been a merger of the 50s heroin and 50s vamps in one woman as we see heroines playing both the 'virtuous' woman as well the item girl.

¹² Maushmi Chatarjee of *Roti Kapda aur Makaan* (1974)

¹³ Nargis of *Mother India* (1967)

¹⁴ Jaya Bahaduri of *Guddi* (1971)

¹⁵ Aasha Parekh of *Teesri Manzil* (1966)

¹⁶ Sadhna of *Hum Dono* (1961)

¹⁷ Nargis of *Shree 420* (1955)

The reason for this change can be attributed to the market forces. Since the 1990s, the popular film industry in India has successfully renewed its popularity among the South Asian Diaspora and the globalized Indian middle class. Its recent films have undergone a thematic shift where the characters encounter the west in a variety of situations reached through travel and migration. The films sport a fantasy-like, rich look, trendy locations and designer clothes worn by young men and women (Bassi *et al*, 2018).

NOW TURNING UNAPOLOGETIC

As per the pre-21st century portrayals in Indian films, a woman with sexual desire is a vamp. And such transgressors had to bear punishment either by losing their lover or life or both. The Hero always gets the girl, who will ultimately be convinced of his awesomeness no matter how sternly she opposes at the outset. Films have also been inspired to a large extent from religion and mythology whereby women characters were seen as the epitome of virtue and values, those who could do no wrong. The image of women as ‘Sita’ has been repeatedly evoked in many films.

The films discussed above signify the major change—no remorse and no guilt. The thematic thread that binds the two *Ishquiya* films together is the subtle (for Bollywood) examination of female desire and sexuality. Especially, both Krishna and Munniya are unapologetic about exploiting sexual intimacy to manipulate men into doing their bidding and are evidently well capable of separating sex and love even if the male patsy is not). This isn't exactly revolutionary—after all the noisish *femme fatale* is a cherished trope in popular culture of all stripes—but it is notable if only for the fact that the two women go pretty much unpunished for their alleged betrayals of the purported male lead. This could never have been possible in the pre 2000s.

The Bollywood Heroine) has emerged as a powerful, independent and confident self who is bold enough in expressing every emotion be it love, anger, passion, resentment, pleasure, elation or anything that she was known to be silent about.

WHAT LED TO CHANGE? - BIRTH OF THE NEW AVATAR

The non-Indian or pan Indian portrayal of its female lead in our films can be said to stem from the need of the Indian to be recognized globally. Breaking of the post-colonial hangovers and then suddenly the emergence of the liberalized economy that brought media content and societal norms from foreign lands to Indian homes, is the dual need to be global sans Desi.

2009

Films in 2009 also deal with sure unhesitant modern women.

A girl allures her timid boyfriend into pre-marital sex in *Kaminey*. Meera of *Love Aaj Kal* calls off her weeklong wedding upon realizing she still loves her ex. The ambitious protagonist of *Gulab* uses her man as a ladder. Are these ladies made to display globally acceptable traits in our films? As India integrates further into a globalized free market economy, Indian films are likely to have global reach attracting new viewers beyond their traditional South Asian constituency (Mishra, M., 2020).

HAS THE CHANGE COME TO THE SOCIETY? WE HEAR ECHOES OUTSIDE

Looking at the relationship between individual films and social situations in contemporary India at large, it is evident that films undoubtedly contribute to the changing socio-cultural discourse.

In the 1980s, Bollywood actresses displayed a penchant to play cops - Rekha in *Phool Bane Angare*, Hema Malini in *Andha Kanoon* and Dimple Kapadia in *Zakhmi Aurat*. These roles were not played in a vacuum. This was the time when more women reported instances of sexual abuse and violence across the country. By the late '70s and early '80s, heroines were not only shown as working women - often as sole breadwinners in the family - but also as women who fought several social

battles through their work. Popular Hindi cinema has regularly reflected and influenced cultural and political contexts. Though it is difficult to measure 'the tangible impact' of films on society, certain social developments can be attributed to the changing female imagery in the films.

There is a plethora of examples of what has changed in the society: This is either the result or the reason of change in the films. Women now stand up against injustice and actresses have turned women rights activists. Women's dressing has changed to less conservative, and she has a role in decision-making on family and work fronts.

Rape victims in Bollywood films would have no option but to commit suicide by jumping in the well or hanging themselves from the fan. Aishwarya Rai in *Hum Aapke Dil Mein Rehte Hain* (1999) gets a man who gives her a respectable life. And today we have Suzzette Jordan a Park rape street victim who demanded to be identified by her real name.

A journalist in *Shool* (1999) dares to give a stern look to a politician who tries to get cozy with her in his car and in real life we see a law intern who plucked up the courage to blog about retired Supreme Court judge AK Ganguly.

On the screen as in reality, female journalists in India have historically struggled to gain equality with their male peers. But a slew of recent Bollywood films depicting female reporters indicate that change may be afoot. And outside Bollywood, we have a young journalist from Tehleka who spoke up against her powerful editor. Three media needs determine how important media is to a person at any given moment: surveillance, social utility, and fantasy escape. Films in such situations of dependence can be assumed to inspire change.

A woman exposes Godman Asaram Bapu and his son Naryan Sahi landing both in jail and acid attack victim Laxmi takes her fight to Supreme Court – crime becomes part of CRPC and States are directed to pay Rs 3 lakh as compensation. We are witnessing these changes in society and seeing our Heroines in Bollywood becoming braver and bolder.

THOSE WHO HESITATED HAVE FOUND A VOICE.

If the female voice seems more empowered, taking on a fiery, a go-getter tone, the nature of debates too has shifted. The discourse has gone on to include talk of gender brutality and sexuality. People are talking not just about violence but about violent stereotypes like the lyrics of certain kind of music eg: that of Honey Singh. It's true with every new song, film, debate, complaint, new standard is being set which is a talking point at least for greater reflection.

There is a ripple effect, not just on public platforms but also in homes. Subtle inequalities exist everywhere. There is discrimination at every level. Ten years ago, I may not have protested gentle moments of discrimination but now I see asserting my right at every level.

We now see a lack of tolerance for daily harassment by women who have now internalized a sense of right. The public discourse has expanded to schools and drawing rooms. The voices are rising. Even men are waking up to the consent. Issues are out in the open. You do not relate to the keeping quiet business any longer. The renewed feminist voice is rising in other quarters. New generation speaking up with renewed confidence. Those who hesitated to speak up have been provided the push. Stereotypes of femininity have been subverted.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The study uncovers significant transformations in the portrayal of female protagonists in Bollywood from 2010 to 2014, reflecting broader socio-cultural changes in India. These changes are marked by the emergence of strong, unapologetic female characters who are assertive about their desires, sexuality, and individuality. This shift from the traditional portrayal of women as coy, submissive, and domesticated to bold, independent, and sometimes aggressive personalities has several implications:

1. **Cultural Reflection and Influence:** The changing portrayal of women in Bollywood films

mirrors the evolving attitudes towards gender roles in Indian society. As films both reflect and shape cultural norms, the emergence of these new female characters indicates a progressive shift in societal views on women's autonomy and empowerment.

- 2. Impact on Gender Norms:** By showcasing women who are confident and assertive, these films challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. This can have a positive impact on viewers, particularly young women by providing them with diverse role models who embody strength and independence.
- 3. Market Forces and Globalization:** The shift in female characterization can be attributed to market dynamics and the globalization of Indian cinema. With an increasing international audience and the influence of Western cultural norms, Bollywood has adapted to present women in ways that resonate with a global, modernized view of gender roles.
- 4. Empowerment and Representation:** The new portrayal of women in Bollywood serves as a form of empowerment, suggesting that women can break free from societal constraints and pursue their own paths. This representation can inspire real-life changes in how women perceive their roles and assert their rights within Indian society.
- 5. Social and Political Commentary:** The characters and narratives in these films often comment on broader social and political issues, such as women's rights, sexual freedom, and gender equality. By bringing these topics to the forefront, Bollywood films contribute to important conversations and debates within the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that Bollywood has undergone a significant transformation in its portrayal of female protagonists, reflecting and potentially influencing the changing dynamics of gender identities in contemporary Indian society. The emergence of bold, unapologetic female characters who assert their desires and individuality marks a departure from traditional portrayals of women as submissive

and domesticated. This shift highlights the impact of globalization, market forces, and evolving cultural norms on Indian cinema.

The study emphasizes that while Bollywood continues to entertain, it also serves as a powerful medium for social change, challenging traditional gender norms and offering new role models for empowerment. By analyzing films from 2010 to 2014, the research demonstrates that Bollywood heroines are now characterized by their complexity and agency, embodying the spirit of a modern, assertive, and independent Indian woman.

In conclusion, the evolving portrayal of women in Bollywood is both a reflection of and a catalyst for societal change, promoting gender equality and encouraging a more nuanced understanding of female identity in India.

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