

Bollywood's Current Trend of Reimagining Female Icons and Their Ensuing Impact on Gender Imbalance Perception Amongst Gen Z Viewers of India

Anisha Ray^{1*}, Dr. Reshmi Naskar²

¹Research Scholar, St. Xavier's University Kolkata Email ID- anishacarmel@gmail.com Orcid id :0009-0001-6159-0409

²Assistant Professor, St Xavier's University, Kolkata Email ID- dalal.reshmi@gmail.com orcid.org:0000-0002-6469-5329

*Corresponding Author- Anisha Ray,

*Research Scholar, St.Xavier's University Kolkata Email ID- anishacarmel@gmail.com Orcid id :0009-0001-6159-0409

Citation: Anisha Ray, (2024). Bollywood's Current Trend of Reimagining Female Icons and Their Ensuing Impact on Gender Imbalance Perception Amongst Gen Z Viewers of India, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1) 8297-8306
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v31i1.11412

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Bollywood, as one of the most influential cultural industries in India, has long operated within a distinctly gendered aesthetic framework—one that privileges a masculinist worldview and normalizes the dominance of the “male gaze.” This gaze, theorized extensively within feminist film criticism, is not merely a visual mechanism but a cultural logic that determines how narratives are structured, whose desires are legitimized, and which bodies are rendered visible or marginal. For decades, Bollywood's grand musical arrangements, spectacle-driven storytelling, and formulaic romantic tropes have collaborated to naturalize patriarchal hierarchies, embedding them seamlessly into popular consciousness.

Cinema, undeniably, is a form of mass art that responds to the aspirations, anxieties, and fantasies of its audience. Yet to view Bollywood solely as a passive mirror of societal desires would be reductive. On numerous occasions, filmmakers and production houses have not merely responded to prevailing attitudes but have actively capitalized on them, reinforcing dominant gender ideologies for commercial gain. The industrial palette of Bollywood—its choice of narratives, character arcs, and representational strategies—has consistently been calibrated to suit the “whims of the moment,” often at the expense of ethical responsibility and gender sensitivity. Historically, female characters in Hindi cinema were confined to secondary or ornamental roles, their existence defined largely in relation to male protagonists. Women functioned as romantic rewards, moral anchors, or sacrificial figures whose virtue legitimized male heroism. This acceptance of women's subordinate positioning was not merely tolerated but aestheticized through song sequences, visual framing, and dialogue that celebrated submission, endurance, and emotional labor as feminine ideals. The cinematic language thus worked subtly yet powerfully to reinforce gender imbalance, presenting patriarchy not as oppression but as cultural normalcy.

In more recent decades, Bollywood has attempted to rebrand itself as progressive, aligning with global discourses of feminism and empowerment. However, this shift has often been superficial rather than structural. The contemporary portrayal of women frequently oscillates between tokenistic empowerment and what may be described as “pitiful acceptability”—a conditional inclusion of women into the male-dominated mainstream world. Female characters are now permitted ambition, agency, and even rebellion, but only in so far as these traits do not fundamentally destabilize patriarchal norms. Their strength is often carefully curated to remain palatable, inspirational, and non-threatening.

This paradox becomes particularly evident in Bollywood's recent fascination with biopics centered on iconic women figures, such as Rani Lakshmi Bai. At first glance, these films appear to signal an “icon revolution,” reclaiming historical and cultural narratives for feminist reinterpretation. Yet, a closer reading reveals that many such biopics remain entangled within masculine narrative frameworks. The female protagonist is often celebrated not for her autonomy or ideological resistance but for

embodying traditionally masculine virtues—martial prowess, sacrifice for the nation, or loyalty to patriarchal institutions. Feminism, in this context, is subsumed under nationalism, heroism, or martyrdom, thereby diluting its transformative potential.

Moreover, these biopics frequently sanitize complex histories, stripping women of their contradictions, vulnerabilities, and political radicalism. The result is a media narrative that elevates women as symbols rather than subjects—icons to be revered, not individuals to be understood. Such representations risk reinforcing stereotypes under the guise of progress, replacing passive femininity with exceptionalism, where only extraordinary women are deemed worthy of visibility.

Bollywood, therefore, operates less as a catalyst for gender reform and more as a pawn in a larger socio-cultural game—one that continues to privilege orthodox perspectives on gender roles, relationships, and desire. Its narratives often legitimize traditional dating norms, moral surveillance of female sexuality, and the expectation of emotional conformity, thereby sustaining systemic gender imbalance. Even when feminism enters the cinematic vocabulary, it is frequently depoliticized, aestheticized, and commodified to suit market demands.

In conclusion, while Bollywood possesses immense potential to challenge stereotypes and reshape public discourse, its engagement with gender remains fraught with contradictions. The industry's selective embrace of feminism, its reliance on the male gaze, and its instrumental use of women-centric narratives reveal an ongoing struggle between commerce and conscience. Until Bollywood moves beyond performative progressivism and commits to genuinely inclusive storytelling, it will continue to reproduce the very inequalities it occasionally claims to critique. Cinema, after all, does not merely reflect society, it teaches it how to see.

Key phrases: *Gender Imbalance, Icon revolution, film and feminism, Stereotypes, Biopics, Media narrative*

INTRODUCTION:

Situated in the eventful year of 2022, there is little need for further clarification as to why Bollywood constitutes such a formidable component of India's economic framework and cultural representation on the global stage. Bollywood has developed its own strategies of revelation, deeply imbued with a tenacious instinct for survival and an enduring tendency towards monopoly. Given the industry's immense scale and influence, its impact can be examined through multiple analytical lenses. One particularly dominant perspective is the evaluation of Bollywood's reliance on idol representation and its interdependence with idealized forms of content curation.

Gender equality and feminism must now be regarded as necessities rather than luxuries, as they are often dismissed by certain privileged sections of society. Bollywood's reach enables it to influence vast audiences, thereby placing upon it the responsibility to absorb and reflect the nuances of social transformation and evolving cultural realities. Bollywood's revenue ranks among the highest globally, and cinema—an artistic craft of the twentieth century—operates within a success model that has long been institutionalized and monetarily validated.

Bollywood also attempts to communicate with the Indian diaspora by articulating a renewed sense of "Indianness," one that is less anchored in citizenship and more deeply rooted in imagined identity and communal belonging (Takhar, 2012). Even as the world came to a standstill during a global viral outbreak, Bollywood located alternative pathways that ensured its continued dominance and survival as a principal form of entertainment for the generations it serves and the platforms it elects to occupy.

It has been an unusual period in India, as the nation's cinema-obsessed millions were compelled to forgo visits to their beloved theatres following closures imposed in March due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, a measure of respite emerged for families confined indoors as streaming platforms rapidly expanded to fill the void. A significant number of films bypassed theatrical releases to mitigate financial losses and instead premiered on digital platforms, while an increasing number of A-list actors embraced leading roles in original productions for Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar.

The pandemic, much to the mounting frustration of cinema proprietors, accelerated a transition that was already underway—the gradual erosion of the boundary separating the small screen from the large screen in India. For films originally intended for theatrical exhibition, streaming platforms were not merely the only viable alternative; they emerged as the most logical and accessible choice (Pathi, 2020).

Renowned lyricist and screenwriter Javed Akhtar once observed that "films do reflect what is happening in society, but they reflect its desires, hopes, values, and traditions. They are not an exact mirror but a projection

of a society's aspirations." Growing up in India, terms such as "women's empowerment" or "women's advocacy" were commonly encountered phrases that lacked the negative connotations often attached to the word "feminism." Although feminist scholars and advocates have acknowledged the presence of underlying feminist themes in progressive cinema, several filmmakers and actors with substantial fan followings have repeatedly asserted that their films should not be categorized as feminist.

Alia Bhatt, Priyanka Chopra, and Lisa Haydon—eminent Bollywood actresses who are global icons with millions of admirers—have publicly declined to identify themselves as feminists and, in doing so, have inadvertently contributed to the negative connotations surrounding feminism. This stance persists despite the fact that they portray strong and independent women on screen and personally endorse the empowerment of women and girls. It is not an attempt to censure them for resisting the feminist label; rather, it is reasonable to expect that public figures of such influence actively dispel prevailing myths and misconceptions associated with feminism (Bhat, 2019).

Despite achieving substantial box-office success, recent films such as *Dangal* and *Pink* were sharply criticised for positioning the male gaze as instrumental to women's liberation. Critic Laya Maheshwari asserted that "female empowerment in these films often functions merely as a form of male gratification. There is little autonomy or agency afforded to the woman; she would be rendered directionless if left to her own devices. The burden of her growth and happiness ultimately rests upon the man's shoulders" (Bhat, 2019; Rammohan, 2018).

Bollywood thrives on trends, and its evolution is almost always marked by distinct phases, where particular narrative formulas outperform others. In recent years, major production houses such as Dharma Productions and Yash Raj Films have released high-budget films featuring leading stars that increasingly centre on historical narratives. Filmmaker Karan Johar remarked, "Our history is incredibly rich; we have simply never explored it adequately. In the 1980s, we were remaking South Indian films, followed by the parallel cinema movement. The 1990s ushered in the era of romantic storytelling with *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*, prompting an influx of love stories. In 2001, films like *Lagaan* and *Dil Chahta Hai* introduced a new cinematic language. The 2000s were a period of experimentation, and following the success of *Baahubali* in 2015, the concept of the large-scale event film emerged" (Rammohan, 2018; *A March for Women: Feminism in the Last Decade*, n.d.).

As history becomes an integral component of Indian cinematic storytelling a wield considerable influence when mediated through Bollywood, it becomes imperative to critically examine its impact—particularly in relation to the portrayal of female historical icons. While scholars have long engaged in critical studies of Bollywood, the correlation between the film industry and gender representation, neutrality, and ideological construction remains underexplored.

Feminist thought, with a legacy spanning over a century, has consistently foregrounded the lived realities and struggles of women and gender minorities. From the suffragette movements of the early twentieth century to the global resonance of the #MeToo movement in 2018, feminists have persistently faced resistance in articulating that their demand is for equal rights rather than disproportionate "special treatment." Many individuals readily express allegiance to the notion of equality while deliberately distancing themselves from the feminist identity. Feminists, both online and offline, continue to be marginalised, discredited, and subjected to threats of violence for challenging entrenched power structures and speaking truth to authority. Governments and institutions increasingly acknowledge the importance of women's empowerment, yet they remain reluctant to engage with so-called "radical feminism," thereby failing to confront the patriarchal systems that perpetuate inequality (*A March for Women: Feminism in the Last Decade*).

It is therefore essential to analyze films from two distinct perspectives. The first concerns the commercial success of the film and its subsequent reach and reception. The second pertains to the choice of icon for popularization and the selection of the star entrusted with icon representation, as Bollywood stars exert a cultural influence that often surpasses that of the characters they portray. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that the films selected cater to diverse target audiences shaped by varying socio-cultural factors. These distinctions must be accounted for to develop a nuanced understanding of how such films interpret and represent iconic figures within the framework of gender conventions and societal roles.

SURVEY AND ANALYSIS

The proposed study was conducted in Kolkata and was systematically divided into two distinct analytical components. The first component addressed the user perspective, with the objective of developing a deeper understanding of audience psychology and perceptual tendencies. The second component employed qualitative content analysis in order to arrive at conclusions characterized by greater objectivity, analytical neutrality, and conceptual clarity in relation to the propositions advanced within the research article.

From a quantitative standpoint, a limited sampling design was adopted, comprising a total of 100 respondents. The sample reflected a near-equal gender distribution, with approximately 51 per cent female and 49 per cent male participants. In alignment with the thematic focus of the study, the survey was deliberately confined to individuals belonging to Generation Z. The rationale for this selection lies in the relative novelty of the trend under examination, wherein its impact may be more accurately and credibly assessed through the perspectives of future consumers. Accordingly, the study concentrated on two subgroups within this generational cohort.

A modest survey sample of approximately 100 respondents was selected using a simple random sampling technique, ensuring an equitable and unbiased representation of the target population.

Although the Generation Z demographic can extend beyond the age of 28, the selected age range was deemed most appropriate for the objectives of this investigation. The study remains open to expansion and further refinement through more comprehensive and detailed analysis in subsequent research. To adequately serve the purpose of the present study, the methodological parameters were not unduly restrictive, thereby allowing scope for future scholarly inquiry within this domain.

The research was undertaken in the metropolitan city of Kolkata, India, which functions as a representative explanatory sample for prospective studies involving other urban centers. This selection was intentional, as the study is primarily concerned with urban populations, and metropolitan cities constitute a significant segment of the urban demographic landscape.

The movie choice method for qualitative analysis:

The present study undertook a textual analysis of four films released in recent years that achieved substantial box-office success and emerged as commercially viable works of mainstream cinema. Textual analysis is a methodological approach that involves systematic interpretation of language, symbols, and imagery embedded within texts in order to derive insights into how individuals make sense of, articulate, and negotiate lived experiences. Visual, written, and spoken messages function as communicative cues through which meaning is constructed. Such messages are frequently shaped by, and reflective of, broader social structures and, in certain instances, possess the capacity to question or challenge prevailing historical, cultural, political, and ethical contexts within which they are produced (Allen, 2017).

The selection of commercially successful Bollywood films was informed by the widespread scholarly recognition of their extensive dominance over mass audiences and their enduring influence since the post-independence era. A significant body of research concurs that Bollywood, owing to its early and expansive reach, has evolved into a formidable monopoly within the global film industry. As an ever-expanding and dynamic enterprise, Bollywood functions not merely as an entertainment industry but also as a reflective medium of the masses. Historically, it has operated as a mirror to society—occasionally attempting to initiate social transformation through path-breaking thematic content, yet almost invariably remaining anchored to culturally entrenched norms and popular acceptance.

This reciprocal dependence between the industry and its audience has fostered a form of mutual gratification, wherein both comfort, familiarity, and validation from one another. Bollywood, with its economic interests and the vast commercial ecosystem surrounding fandom, has substantial stake in maintaining its cultural relevance and longevity. Consequently, it often adopts a cautious and conservative approach to content creation, favoring narratives that are more readily embraced by the masses. Ultimately, it is the financial patronage of its audience that sustains Bollywood's growth, elevates its stature, and propels its aspirations towards global dominance.

Beyond entertainment, Bollywood has consistently influenced contemporary trends across the nation, ranging from lifestyle practices and culinary preferences to consumer behavior and strategic brand promotions. As a result, its cultural resonance extends well beyond national borders, exerting a profound impact across South Asian countries and the global diaspora.

In examining Bollywood films that depict the contemporary phenomenon of heightened fascination with female icons—ostensibly contributing to discourses of equality and cultural gender inclusivity within an otherwise conservative and patriarchal society—it becomes evident that many such narratives remain grounded in restrictive and problematic representations of women's status in male-dominated social structures. In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this evolving cinematic landscape, films released through both traditional theatrical platforms and over-the-top (OTT) streaming services such as Amazon Prime and Netflix were included in the analysis.

Among the films examined, *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi* (2019) emerged as one of the most prominent commercial representations of historical realism within Bollywood cinema. The film chronicles the life of Rani Lakshmibai, a central figure of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and a powerful symbol of resistance against British colonial rule. Directed by Radha Krishna Jagarlamudi and Kangana Ranaut, with a screenplay by Vijayendra Prasad and dialogues by Prasoon Joshi, the film stars Kangana Ranaut, Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub, and Kulbhushan Kharbanda.

The narrative is based on the life of Rani Lakshmibai, the warrior queen of the Maratha princely state of Jhansi in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India. As one of the foremost leaders of the 1857 uprising, she became an enduring emblem of defiance against the British Raj and a revered figure in Indian nationalist history. *Manikarnika* was released on approximately 3,700 screens across 50 countries in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu on 25 January 2019. The film performed strongly both domestically and internationally, registering the highest opening-day collection for a female-centric film at the time and receiving largely positive critical reception.

The storyline centers on Rani Lakshmibai's valor, patriotism, and resistance against an increasingly aggressive colonial power determined to subsume India under imperial domination. Kangana Ranaut received critical acclaim for her committed and intense portrayal of the titular character. However, the central concern lies in the way the narrative prioritizes her identity as a wife and mother before foregrounding her significance as a warrior and political leader. While this portrayal has been defended by some and contested by others, the

underlying issue is that emotional bias is permitted to overshadow the depiction of a courageous rebellion led by a ruler who fought for her nation irrespective of gender. Rather than centering the narrative on patriotism, leadership, and strategic resistance, the film ultimately frames the struggle through the lens of personal loss and emotional motivation, thereby diluting the revolutionary potential of the historical figure it seeks to immortalize.

Among the films selected for analysis, one Bollywood production that was recently released on an OTT platform was *Shakuntala Devi*, which premiered on Amazon Prime Video. The millennial generation has frequently been characterized as exhibiting a marked preference for OTT platforms over traditional media formats. India's on-demand digital streaming industry surpassed the national film industry in terms of both viewership and growth, registering a remarkable 240 per cent increase in viewership within just three years following 2016. Amidst the ongoing global pandemic, OTT platforms further consolidated their position by offering on-demand digital entertainment within the comfort of one's home, thereby posing a significant challenge to conventional media platforms such as cable and satellite television.

The adjacent data representation highlights the overwhelming popularity of OTT services, with approximately 70 per cent usage recorded particularly during the lockdown period, identifying these platforms as the most preferred source of entertainment among Generation Z and millennials in urban India. The Indian on-demand digital streaming sector not only exceeded the national film industry in viewership but also demonstrated unprecedented growth, reaffirming its dominance within the contemporary media landscape. These trends underscore the growing centrality of OTT platforms as primary modes of content consumption (*The Underlying Study: Insights Published in This Report*, 2020).

Shakuntala Devi is a 2020 Indian Hindi-language biographical comedy-drama film written and directed by Anu Menon and produced by Sony Pictures Networks India and Vikram Malhotra under the banner of Abundantia Entertainment. The film features Vidya Balan in the titular role of Shakuntala Devi, widely celebrated as the "Human Computer," alongside Jisshu Sengupta, Sanya Malhotra, and Amit Sadh.

The narrative opens in 2001, when Anupama Banerjee arrives in London with her husband Ajay and publicly announces that she is filing a lawsuit against her mother, Shakuntala Devi. The storyline then transitions to Shakuntala Devi's childhood in Bengaluru during the 1930s, where her family first recognizes her extraordinary ability to solve complex mathematical problems mentally with remarkable speed and precision. Her father, Bishaw, decides to capitalize on her exceptional talent by organizing "math shows," during which Shakuntala would perform calculations as a form of public entertainment. As she grows older, Shakuntala continues to conduct these performances, becoming the primary source of income for her family.

However, rather than foregrounding the mathematical brilliance that defined Shakuntala Devi's legacy or emphasizing the professional challenges she confronted, the film predominantly centers on the emotional dimensions of a woman's life, in a manner that aligns with predictable Bollywood conventions. The protagonist is portrayed chiefly as an emotionally vulnerable figure, preoccupied with strained personal relationships and interpersonal conflicts. Consequently, the inspirational narrative of a legendary woman's intellectual achievements is relegated to the background, overshadowed by relational discord that assumes narrative precedence. The credibility of this representational choice, particularly when justified on the grounds of relatability, remains deeply questionable.

- Another commercially successful film offered by Bollywood in recent times is *Raazi*. *Raazi* (transl. *Willing*) is a 2018 Indian Hindi-language espionage thriller directed by Meghna Gulzar and produced by Vineet Jain, Karan Johar, Hiroo Yash Johar, and Apoorva Mehta under the banners of Jungle Pictures and Dharma Productions. The film stars Alia Bhatt and Vicky Kaushal in lead roles, with Rajit Kapur, Shishir Sharma, and Jaideep Ahlawat appearing in supporting roles. The narrative is adapted from Harinder Sikka's 2008 novel *Calling Sehmat*, which recounts the true story of a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) agent who, at her father's behest, is married into a Pakistani military family to relay intelligence to India prior to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.

Principal photography for *Raazi* commenced in July 2017 in Mumbai and concluded on 27 October 2017. Filming took place across multiple locations, including Patiala, Nabha, Malerkotla, and Doodhpathri. Released in 2018, the film was produced on a budget of ₹350 million (approximately US\$4.9 million) and went on to gross ₹1.96 billion (around US\$27 million) worldwide, establishing itself as one of the highest-grossing Indian films led by a female protagonist. The film received widespread critical acclaim, particularly for Meghna Gulzar's direction and Alia Bhatt's performance. *Raazi* garnered fifteen nominations at the 64th Filmfare Awards, winning five honors, including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Actress for Bhatt.

The narrative framework of *Raazi* is presented through the perspective of Indian Army officer Lieutenant General Nikhil Bakshi, who addresses a group of Indian soldiers aboard the INS *Viraat*, recounting the exploits of a woman who served as a covert operative for India's external intelligence agency, RAW, in Pakistan. While *Raazi* is widely regarded as an inspirational film, a recurring concern emerges regarding the disproportionate emphasis placed on Sehmat's emotional vulnerability in comparison to her husband's, despite both characters being portrayed as equally patriotic and committed to serving their respective nations. Although Sehmat courageously chooses to prioritize the welfare of her country, she ultimately withdraws from her mission following the loss of her husband and her pregnancy, aligning with conventional expectations imposed upon women.

Female emotional turmoil, within traditional cinematic narratives, frequently culminates in withdrawal or isolation. While *Raazi* is based on a true story and incorporates elements grounded more in reality than fiction, it is essential to acknowledge that every narrative inherently offers multiple interpretive possibilities. The privilege of one perspective over another ultimately rests with the filmmaker's creative choices. It is therefore regrettable that Bollywood continues to adhere to entrenched conventions that prioritize emotional trajectories in stories centered on female icons, often at the expense of narratives foregrounding their resilience, agency, and accomplishments beyond familial and relational domains. Notably, the film could equally have concluded by underscoring Sehmat's unwavering commitment to national service, even in the face of life-threatening risk, thereby reinforcing her political and ideological agency.

The fourth film considered in this study is *Padmaavat*. *Padmaavat* is a 2018 Indian Hindi-language epic period drama directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Loosely inspired by the epic poem of the same name by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, the film stars Deepika Padukone as Rani Padmavati, a Rajput queen celebrated for her beauty and virtue, and the wife of Maharawal Ratan Singh, portrayed by Shahid Kapoor. Ranveer Singh plays Sultan Alauddin Khilji, who becomes obsessed with Padmavati's beauty and launches an attack on her kingdom to claim her. Supporting roles are performed by Aditi Rao Hydari, Jim Sarbh, Raza Murad, and Anupriya Goenka.

The central issue with *Padmaavat* lies in its credibility, beginning with the very foundation of its narrative, which is derived loosely from a poetic text. Although the film explicitly declares its fictional nature, it operates within a socio-cultural context where Bollywood holds immense influence. In a nation characterised by widespread cinematic obsession, significant literacy disparities, and a large population belonging to lower-middle and economically marginalized groups, deeply entrenched beliefs and traditions continue to shape public consciousness. When such beliefs are validated through Bollywood narratives, their social legitimacy and ideological dominance are further reinforced.

In this context, Bollywood's fictional framing often yields to its relatability among orthodox patriarchal audiences. During theatrical screenings, Rani Padmavati was revered for sacrificing herself in the name of honor and dignity, a portrayal that sparked substantial feminist backlash. Nevertheless, the reality remains that Padmavati emerged as a powerful symbol and inspirational figure for women across various regions of the country. Her iconography was further amplified through Bollywood's casting of Deepika Padukone, whose star persona significantly reinforced Padmavati's stature as a cultural and feminine icon, thereby cementing her presence and influence within popular imagination.

Analysis:

The four films examined position women as central subjects and have received critical acclaim as well as positive reception from mass audiences. These films foreground female icons who ostensibly contribute to national upliftment and cultural pride. Ideally, the emphasis of such narratives should rest on icon representation as a vehicle for promoting feminism and gender equity. At the foundational level, equity demands a balance that narrative structures ought to establish, irrespective of culturally ingrained stereotypes. However, instead of achieving this equilibrium, these films construct plotlines that place women at the center in a largely ironic manner, where they function as quasi-protagonists while subtly remaining adjuncts to male characters. Female characters are framed through conventionally accepted tropes: figures of sacrifice, unquestioned compromise, and perpetual emotional turbulence, narratives that predominantly revolve around familial conflicts. Rarely is emotional or psychological strain depicted as stemming from a woman's professional life, personal ambition, or existence beyond the confines of domestic or relational boundaries.

The films further rely on characters whose credibility remains contentious, given that historical narratives are inherently constructed, mediated, and open to subjective interpretation. This leaves ample scope for alternative perspectives that could have foregrounded women's struggles beyond stereotypical frameworks. Instead, the emphasis remains fixed on characterization that reinforces women's identities in relation to male authority and fragile masculine ego. For instance, in films such as *Manikarnika* and *Padmaavat*, the historical figures depicted are celebrated for sacrifice—one in the name of patriotism and the other in the name of honor and virtue. Yet in both cases, women are shown assuming agency only after male characters exit the narrative. Despite overcoming substantial obstacles, these women are repeatedly portrayed as emotionally fragile and vulnerable in accordance with traditional gender stereotypes.

Another significant concern lies in the physical portrayal of female characters, which is crafted to satisfy the male gaze. Idealized body proportions, height, attire, and facial features are designed to align with male fantasy rather than realistic representation. Even in films such as *Shakuntala Devi*, Vidya Balan's character is styled in a manner that accentuates curvaceous aesthetics, with carefully tailored costumes, flawless skin, and idealized appearance—attributes far removed from the real-life persona of a mathematical genius whose lived reality bore little resemblance to this cinematic depiction. In historical portrayals, factual imperfections are systematically erased, and women are presented through artificial beauty standards dictated by patriarchal norms.

A further recurring element is the forced integration of male and child characters as indispensable anchors in the woman's life. Despite narratives ostensibly centered on struggle, dignity, career, or national service, plotlines ultimately revert to conventional roles expected of women. Familial obligations consistently overshadow individual agency and capability. While maternal instincts and emotional bonds are not inherently

regressive, their disproportionate emphasis perpetuates reductive stereotypes concerning women's psychology and purpose.

Beyond these observations, the films contribute minimally to advancing awareness of gender equity or balance within society. At no point are dominant gender stereotypes meaningfully challenged—men are rarely depicted engaging in domestic labor, emotional vulnerability, or sacrificial roles comparable to those assigned to women. Paternal instincts, though prevalent in real life, are conspicuously absent from narrative focus.

Perhaps the most significant limitation lies in the absence of sustained dialogue that genuinely promotes equality. Motivational monologues about women's strength appear frequently, yet they remain isolated proclamations rather than integrated conversations within the narrative framework. The lack of supportive male character arcs further weakens the inspirational potential of these films. Women are consistently portrayed as solitary warriors amidst adversity, rather than participants in narratives of shared resilience and mutual empowerment. This imbalance disrupts the notion of gender equilibrium that the films claim to advocate, confining female icons to narrowly defined interpretive frames.

Ultimately, films grounded in idol representation fail to generate the transformative impact they promise. From the selection of icons to their portrayal, representation consistently aligns with patriarchal hierarchies that dictate acceptable forms of women's liberation. The so-called revolution advanced by Bollywood operates as a performative façade, concealing entrenched gender biases rather than dismantling them. The absence of rebellion, unconventional choice, or acknowledged flaw underscores the limits of this cinematic feminism.

Another critical concern arises from the persistent portrayal of women as incomplete without dominant male figures. When women are depicted as prioritizing selfhood and ambition—as seen in *Shakuntala Devi*—they are framed as antagonistic or morally questionable, reinforcing the perception that female autonomy is undesirable rather than aspirational.

Although isolated moments of inspiration appear throughout these films, they remain subordinate to dominant patterns of idol construction. Attempts to engage with feminist discourse through representation repeatedly falter due to adherence to conventional characterization. For example, *Padmaavat* cannot be interpreted as a narrative of female strength; its depiction of sacrifice is excessive, unjustified, and subordinate to male ego, reducing the protagonist's existence to relational dependency.

Audience reception further complicates interpretation. Critical discourse frequently prioritizes artistic performance over gender analysis, particularly as these films feature A-list actresses whose cultural influence amplifies impact. While star power enhances reach and resonance, it also magnifies regressive narratives, creating a deceptive sense of progressive representation. The absence of deliberate attempts to disrupt stereotypes ultimately reinforces patriarchal norms and validates the male gaze.

This qualitative analysis is substantiated by quantitative findings that examine audience psychology and consumption patterns. Survey data indicate that biographical narratives centered on women often function as subtle propaganda, reinforcing defective gender constructs. While non-fictional female narratives possess the potential to authentically represent lived realities, this potential is compromised when characterization is restricted to relational dependency. Notably, such narrative limitations are rarely imposed upon male-centric films.

Despite a near-equal gender distribution among survey respondents, findings consistently reveal the powerful influence of star casting on perception. When popular actresses portray roles embedded in sexist frameworks, the likelihood of reinforcing stereotypical thought processes increases significantly. Although no absolute ethical judgment can be imposed, audience responses indicate widespread recognition of the long-term implications of such portrayals. What appears to be a benign narrative choice ultimately contributes to a larger ideological apparatus, underscoring the profound power of media in shaping future perceptions of gender.

do you think this kind of propaganda largely shifts the focus from applauding a woman beyond her role within her personal relationships?

100 responses



Do you think that these non fictional plot lines narrow down the reality to a certain sexist propaganda of associating the woman with a man only?

100 responses



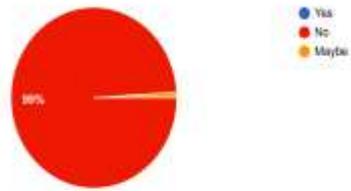
If No, do you think that strong male characterisation in female centric movies impacts the consumers badly with a certain gender specific propaganda?

100 responses



do you think that female characterisation is equally strong and viable in male centric movies?

100 responses



Do these male characters extend any form of support to these female characters in a pivotal way in accordance to the plot line?

98 responses



according to you, do you think the male validation and support from these male characters play an important part in the plot line?

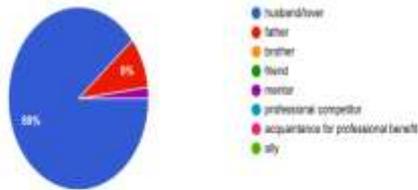
99 responses



If yes, what are the type of role that they mostly cater to?

100 responses

Copy



according to you, do male characters play an important role in these women centric movies?

100 responses

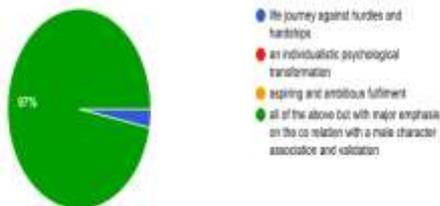
Copy



If agreed, what are the generic plot lines that we look at in these movies?

100 responses

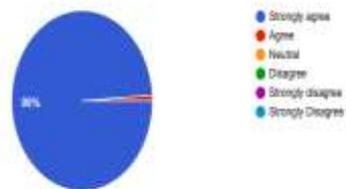
Copy

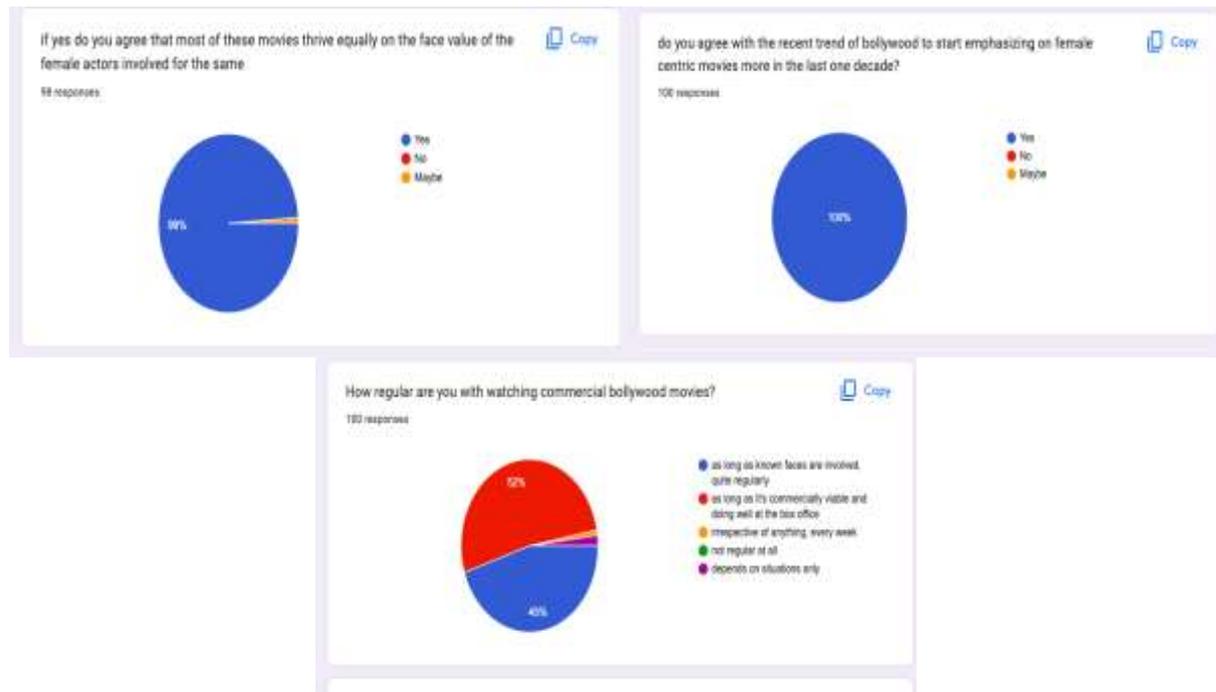


Most of these women centric movies, are non fictional and are based on biographical note of narration, agree or disagree?

100 responses

Copy





CONCLUSION:

The subjective interpretation in the shape of essential takes a look aimed to discover the effectiveness of Bollywood in camouflaging for the lack of content material deliverance that promotes gender fairness. The film enterprise plans to create an area inside the mind of the human beings which they may be doing very correctly via their interdependence on societal and cultural shape in India. Bollywood has predominance over different forms of audio visible codecs of leisure. The main cause for this is their pivotal function as monopoly inside the recreational field regardless of the age institution or socio demographic limitations that normally divide the target market otherwise. While someone watches a film for 3hours, the viewer's attention is unappalled due to the whole active involvement with watching the movies. Every other vital motive for getting incredible visibility is whilst Bollywood picks up trends that are most in demand, within the current instances icon representation in the form of outstanding historic figures were quite famous. With the want for feminism at the upward thrust due to ever increasing discrimination and disparity and growing crimes, the role of Bollywood as a social revolution tool increases. but regrettably, Bollywood is leading a parade of types in the call of revolution. it's far catering to patriarchal hierarchy and conventions which can be discriminative in nature. The vital study of some commercially successful movies in the last few years which have been properly obtained by means of the target market and also have been significantly acclaimed has been taken into consideration. India's obsession with stars has additionally been considered whilst selecting films for essential observation. In India, Idol worshiping could be very famous; for this reason the presence of celebrity plays a critical role within the film choice in addition to developing the influence of the various human beings. human beings don't forget and join well while their preferred celeb comes on display to speak about a sure trouble or when stars determine to paint a certain idol/man or woman. The inspirational tale at the back of popular ancient figures ends up even greater credible and inspirational. To finish it is actual that a hit business Bollywood films, which are primarily based on popular icons have a bigger attain and therefore results in large impact. The casting of feasible popular Bollywood actresses who are also in large part successful as actors increase the acceptability of these icons as inspirational inside the mainstream world. Despite the fact that the life story of icons is greater fact than fiction, it's also important for filmmakers to make contributions to the recognition of a positive angle to the tale than almost constantly emphasizing at the part that caters to the gender roles set by using the patriarchal society. A women's story can be interpreted in ways, one as a woman with success irrespective of anything occurs as a girl, its subjective to her adventure that results in her triumph and the opposite could be the translation on behalf of the society that has prefixed way of looking at a lady as merely a 2d intercourse, whose lifestyles irrespective of every other elements have to ideally usually revolve around emotional biases and relationships to be handled for buying approval as an idol girl of kinds. The failure to do which can bring about the blacklisting of the female as an inspirational parent in any way. indeed, it has continually been the identical and usually will be. Bollywood in the name of bringing about a revolution in assisting ladies and gender equality is merely contributing to setting roles as described by means of the desire of the phallus. The portrayal of sturdy girls icons is just a mere camouflage of the loopholes that exist while making these films starting from their choice to their angle of portrayal. Either that is a safe game for Bollywood or it's just a manner to strengthen the patriarchal hierarchy hooked up via a while and to retain the legacy of traditional gender roles.

REFERENCES:

1. Bollywood Cinema's Global Reach: Consuming the "Diasporic Consciousness".(2012, May 14). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146712441799>
2. Bollywood bets on the small screen as Covid shuts cinemas. (2020, September 22). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-54187040>
3. What Does "Feminism" Mean in Bollywood?.(2019, July 31). Retrieved from <https://msmagazine.com/2019/07/31/what-does-feminism-mean-in-bollywood/>
4. Going Back in Time: Bollywood's Latest Obsession With Historicals, Why is Bollywood producing so many period films?. (2018, December 08). Retrieved from <https://www.thequint.com/entertainment/bollywood/find-out-why-is-bollywood-making-so-many-historical-films>
5. A MARCH FOR WOMEN, Feminism in the Last Decade: An Interactive, What has been the focus of the feminist movement in the last decade. (2020,November).Retrieved from <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/womens-day-feminism-in-the-last-decade>
6. THE UNDERLYING STUDY The insights published in this report were compiled from the Dentsu Marketing Cloud (DMC) Insights IndiaMillennial & GenZ Study. (2020).Retrieved from <https://images.assettype.com/afaqs/2020-09/29d6734e-75b8-44e8-a250-495637c3doaf/c2a7e479ef56b544ad65bd78810aefofd4446397.pdf>
7. Allen, M. (2017). Textual Analysis. The Sage Publication on Communication Research Methods.
8. Aristotle, Horace, Hobbes, T., Twining, T., Moxon, T. A., & Demetrius. (1947). Poetics Aristotle. London: J.M., Dent & Sons.
9. Kothari, C. (2019). RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Methods and Techniques. SL: NEW AGE INTERNATIONAL.Martz-Mayfield, M., & Hallahan, K. (2009). Filmmakers the Social Advocates. Public Relation Journal, 3(4). Retrieved June 25, 2020, From <https://Prjournal.Instituteforpr.Org/WpContent/Uploads/Filmmakers-As-Social.Pdf>
10. Zoysa, R. D. (2002). Globalisation, Soft Power and the Challenge Of Hollywood (Pp. 185-202)
11. (O. Newman, Ed.). Contemporary Politics. DOI:10.1080/1356977022000025678