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Tales of Transition in Bollywood

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Abstract:
Indian cinema has played a significant role in reflecting and shaping Indian society, portraying women in diverse roles, including mothers, wives, professionals, and more. While it has addressed critical social issues related to women, it often grapples with distorted perceptions and sensationalized depictions that hinder intended social change. Over the years, Hindi cinema has captured the evolving narratives of modern India, influencing mind-sets and perceptions. The influx of Western influence, triggered by economic liberalization and globalization, introduced a new archetype of the modern Indian woman who embodies assertiveness and confidence. This transformation in the portrayal of women reflects broader societal changes, with empowered women seeking better and more nuanced roles in the film industry. Female actors are increasingly in the spotlight, marking a shift towards thematic versatility and recognizing the significant role of women in contemporary cinema.

Key words: Gender, Transition, Hindi Cinema, Bollywood, Globalization, Liberation.

Introduction:
With approximately 15 million people attending cinemas every day, Hindi cinema stands as the largest segment of the Indian film industry, writes Moini Shifwat (2016, p2). Originally conceived as a means to creatively portray social reality, it later became commercialized, primarily for profit. Filmmakers invest substantial resources in their productions, striving to maximize returns. In pursuit of these returns, they often tailor their content to cater to the changing tastes and demands of audiences. The ever-evolving profile of the audience itself has played a pivotal role in shaping the direction of Indian cinema. Over its 115-year history, Bollywood has mirrored a wide array of societal issues, fueling public debate and occasionally prompting state interventions. The narratives and themes within Indian cinema have undergone transformations, with a significant shift towards fantasy-oriented entertainment. Despite vacillating between responsible and sensational storytelling, Indian cinema has consistently attempted to mirror social reality. Various issues, ranging from freedom and unemployment to poverty, exploitation, dowry, women's emancipation, social conflict, national integration, education, and fantasy-oriented entertainment, have found representation in Indian cinema. Cinema, as a facet of media, holds immense socio-cultural significance and serves as one of the most powerful means of visual communication in contemporary society. It extends beyond being a mere aesthetic object and operates as a social practice, shaping the understanding of culture and society. Academic discourse surrounding cinema's structure, art, its effects on the public, and its role in culture has gained prominence.

The constructive efforts made by Indian cinema to promote social awareness and challenge age-old restrictions. Films have addressed various social issues, such as the exploitation of the lower class by landowners and moneylenders, widow remarriage, forced marriages of young girls to older men, the lethal consequences of discrimination, the detrimental effects of dowry, and the plight of untouchables. Indian cinema has played a pivotal role in driving social change, advocating for reform, and reflecting positively on social values. While opinions on whether cinema can have a social impact vary, it's clear that films have the potential to influence society. Some believe that films are incapable of causing significant societal change, while others argue that films can encourage viewers to initiate improvements. Films become a reference point for various situations, offering rudimentary knowledge and solutions, which individuals may draw upon when seeking answers and guidance.

Cinema can have both positive and negative effects on society. It serves as a source of entertainment, spreads awareness about critical societal issues, and provides information. However, it can also convey wrong values, contribute to social and sexual violence, encourage escapism, promote destructive role models, and generate cynicism towards social institutions. The role of women in Indian society has been a prominent topic in Indian cinema since its inception. Numerous films have tackled issues related to women, advocating for social reform. These films have addressed caste barriers, religious bigotry, inter-caste marriage, Hindu widow remarriage, forced marriages of young women to older men, alcoholism, unwed mothers, and dowry. By portraying these issues, Indian cinema has played a significant role in advocating for social reform and women's rights.

Women in Mainstream Hindi Cinema:
Cinema has depicted women in various roles within Indian society, including as mothers, wives, daughters, housewives, professionals, business leaders, and laborers. Women have been portrayed as single women, unwed mothers, and even prostitutes. The portrayal of women in Indian cinema reflects their social roles and positions within the social hierarchy, encompassing dominant, subordinate, balanced, and marginalized roles. The feminist perspective on media content,

according to Vrinda Mathur (2002), often highlights the stereotyping, neglect, and marginalization of women that were prevalent in Indian cinema during the 1970s. While Indian cinema has addressed critical social issues concerning women, it is essential to acknowledge that distorted perceptions and sensationalized depictions often hinder the achievement of intended social change and reform.

Hindi cinema's long journey has been marked by its profound influence on Indian society, its ability to mirror social reality, and its role as a medium for promoting social awareness and change. Despite varying opinions on the extent of its impact, Indian cinema has consistently addressed a wide range of social issues, serving as a reflection of the dynamic evolution of Indian society. Its portrayal of women and their roles within society has also evolved, although challenges such as stereotyping persist. The significance of Indian cinema as a social practice and its potential to shape culture and society cannot be overstated. Cinema holds a unique power to reflect the values, culture, and identity of a society. The Bollywood or Hindi film industry, as one of the largest in the world, plays a pivotal role in shaping and representing Indian culture. There is a profound influence of Hindi cinema on Indian culture that it has effectively captured the evolving narratives of modern India. Over the years, it has not only mirrored societal changes but also significantly impacted the way people perceive their lives, influencing their mind-sets, thoughts, fears, and biases.

The Indian economy experienced a substantial downturn in the early 1990s, prompting the implementation of new financial policies. These policies marked a shift towards economic liberalization, which led to India opening its doors to Western investments. This era of liberalization, as described by Shabistan Zafar and Ajoy Batta (2017), ushered in not only foreign capital but also cultural influences. The influx of technology and the advent of satellite channels, previously under state control, revolutionized the landscape of Indian broadcasting. These new satellite channels brought a fresh wave of content that was distinct from the traditional and nationalistic narratives prevalent in the Indian media landscape. The influence of Western programming standards began to permeate popular culture, including cinema and television. This transition was accompanied by the emergence of a new archetype: the modern Indian woman. Unlike her traditional counterpart, she embodied qualities of assertiveness, confidence, and urbanity. This transformation in the portrayal of women within popular culture is integral to understanding Indian nationalism in the context of globalization. These evolving representations of women transcended the boundaries between tradition and modernity, often causing moral dilemmas within society.

As societies embarked on the journey of modernization, the role of women underwent a profound transformation. Media, including cinema, played a pivotal role in this transition and significantly impacted the image of women in contemporary India. While various studies have examined the roles of women in different societies, the specific role of movies in portraying the shifting roles of women across decades and their broader societal impact has received less attention. The last two decades have witnessed a remarkable metamorphosis in the portrayal of women in Indian cinema. Contemporary movies present women as more independent, confident, and career-oriented. This transformation reflects broader changes in the social fabric of India. A new generation of educated, savvy, and empowered women is demanding better and more nuanced roles in cinema. Furthermore, the number of women entering the film industry has multiplied, and female actors are increasingly in the spotlight. While male counterparts often dominate the narrative, there is a palpable shift towards thematic versatility, acknowledging the rightful place of women at the forefront. Attention could also be drawn to the fact that the economic crisis of 1991 prompted producers to adapt to changing market demands and create a "New Bollywood." This evolution led directors to employ women's bodies for sexual display within the boundaries set by censorship and tradition.

The economic success achieved within the patriarchal structure of the Indian film industry has generated a somewhat elusive and confusing model of the ideal Indian woman. The global forces that surged into Bollywood transformed it into a global cinema that caters not only to the Indian audience but also to the Indian diaspora across the world. This dual responsibility necessitates accommodating the tastes and preferences of audiences exposed to Western lifestyles. Yet, the paradox remains, as the modern representations of women within Indian cinema are deeply rooted in historical depictions. Women were traditionally seen as custodians of moral values, cultural norms, and traditions. They played a role in educating future generations. Even the idealized traditional Indian woman represented a unique blend of strength and docility. Symbols of marriage like the "Mangalsutra" and "Sindoor" were venerated, signifying a woman's pivotal role in upholding cultural values.

In the context of Indian society, women's lives have traditionally been segmented into four roles, all assigned by a patriarchal framework. The first position depicts women as innocent and often subservient, especially in the presence of male family members. The second role casts women as potentially bold but, this boldness is subject to the approval of the dominant class. The third role is that of a wife, where Indian culture places immense importance on her being the torchbearer of her married household, resulting in her being constantly scrutinized by society.

The fourth and arguably most significant role in Indian society is that of a mother. A family without a mother is considered weaker, and films from the 80s and 90s celebrated the concept of 'Maa' (mother) as the epitome of achievement and completeness. However, women's identities remain closely tied to their family, and they are predominantly defined by their roles within it. Despite India's advancements in various fields, women are often confined to roles that emphasize self-sacrifice, self-denial, and patience. These traditional values are also reflected in Indian cinema. Women have long faced obstacles, whether disguised as religious, cultural, political, or social norms, which limit their roles and potential in society. The women's movement that began in the 19th century sought to challenge these obstacles. As a result, many

societal issues were addressed by activists in pre- and post-independent India, leading to a push for women's education and participation in the country's development.

While Hindi cinema has preserved traditional values and often depicted patriarchal societal norms, there has been a noticeable transition in recent decades. Female performers in cinema are now breaking away from traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. This transition emphasizes "difference" rather than striving for mere equality. It shifts the focus from the original theories of feminist film analysis, such as "Althusserian Marxism" or "Lacanian psychoanalysis," to female individualism, choice, and empowerment. Scholars like Imelda Whelehan (1995) argue that to include this sense of "difference" within feminism, the focus should be on removing oppression rather than merely seeking equality. She cites the roles of women in Indian cinema, from "Mother India" to "Mirch Masala" to "Chandni Bar," all of which challenge traditional female characters. Many regional, parallel, and mainstream films feature women who defy oppression and assert their full identities. For instance, Aparna Sen's "Paroma" from the 1980s portrays a woman who explores what's considered promiscuity to achieve emotional maturity. In contemporary cinema, directors like Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, and Meghna Gulzar openly address taboo subjects like lesbianism, polygamy, and surrogate motherhood, where women take the lead role in making choices and decisions, even without the consent of their future husbands.

The late 1990s saw the blurring of lines between traditional character archetypes, such as the heroine and the vamp, the good girl and the bad girl. The portrayal of women as aggressive, confident, and career-oriented was almost absent in the films of this period. Many contemporary young filmmakers failed to represent women as career-oriented individuals, choosing instead to emphasize their roles as homemakers. Ruchi Agarwal (2014) provides several examples to illustrate these trends. In movies like "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham," "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai," "Dil Toh Pagal Hai," and "Biwi No.1," women were often relegated to decorative roles or portrayed as homemakers. Even when a woman embarked on a career, it was usually after experiencing failures in her personal life, perpetuating the notion that a woman's career was a fallback option. In such films, women's characters were often defined by their relationship with men rather than as individuals with their own identities.

For a comprehensive understanding of how the portrayal of women has evolved over the decades, particularly in the last two, it is essential to chart a timeline of Bollywood's characterization of female characters. The film industry itself grappled with the challenge of defining this new woman. The emergence of women-centric films, which sought to break away from conventions, has not been without controversy. Films like "Fire" and "Water" stirred immense conflicts and debates in Indian society. "Fire," directed by Deepa Mehta and released in India in 1998, depicted a romantic relationship between two sisters-in-law within an urban, middle-class North Indian household. Such movies signify a significant transformation in how women's roles are portrayed in Indian cinema.

Additionally, there has been a notable shift in the portrayal of female characters with substance. Films like "Dor," "Silsilay," "Tehzeeb," "Pinjar," "Chameli," "Satta," "Filhaal," "Zubeidaa," "Lajja," "Fiza," and "Page3" have showcased women as more independent, resilient, and dynamic figures. They often reflect the changing status of women in India and signify the broader shifts in societal structure. An analysis of groundbreaking films like "Kya Kehna," "Ishqiya," "English Vinglish," "Queen," "Dil Dhadakne Do," and "Pink" explores the personal and interpersonal consequences of liberalization on women's lives. There is a clear link between the changing characterizations of women in these films and the roles they played in earlier cinema, reinforcing the notion that Bollywood often relies on stereotypical portrayals of women and men.

John Berger (1972, p 47) writes, "Men act, women appear. Men watch, women watch themselves being watched". His quote has been used to interpret the representation of women across media, but essentially, it talks about the effect of the 'male gaze' on the art form people view, which in this case is cinema. The disparity in the number of men compared to women in the writing process leads to female characters in Bollywood being presented through a predominantly male perspective. However, one observes some slow changes. With female filmmakers like Zoya Akhtar (Gully Boy) and Alankrita Shrivastava (Lipstick Under My Burkha) taking charge of the narrative, and actors themselves—Priyanka Chopra, Anushka Sharma—venturing into production, Bollywood is seeing more movies where the woman is more than just an accessory. Here is a look at how women have been portrayed onscreen through mainstream cinema over the years.

Gender roles in Bollywood films have been a subject of academic research, but there is a growing need to deconstruct these roles through the lens of women's empowerment and development discourse. The analysis reveals that heroes often exerted negative agency over heroines in films, and even when heroines exercised choice or portrayed empowerment, their decisions were often influenced by male characters, such as fathers and husbands. One recurring theme is the conflict between "Indian-ness" and empowerment. While modernized, independent women coexist with traditional ideals, they are often held accountable for any transgressions. This duality shapes the depiction of women in Bollywood, with those who conform to traditional roles being more readily accepted. The distinction between the heroine and the vamp, good girl and bad girl, gradually faded, particularly in the 1990s. Heroines started dressing boldly and behaving provocatively, often resembling the traditional bad girl characters. Some critics argue that the demands of globalization and consumerism have compelled heroines to become ornamental objects, catering to the male gaze. Despite the apparent changes, the patriarchal undercurrents in society remain intact, and women continue to be objectified in cinema, contributing to the compartmentalization of women.

The portrayal of women in films often serves as a selling point, with audiences drawn to song and dance routines, stereotypical images, and various costumes. These elements perpetuate the objectification of women and hinder the representation of authentic female characters. Laura Mulvey's theory (1985) underscores cinema's role in shaping ways of seeing and pleasure in looking, with a particular focus on gender and feminism. The discourse on gender and feminism is intertwined with contemporary social and literary theories, and it extends to film theory. Given the prevalence of visual media in modern life, it becomes crucial to explore the space occupied by gender, particularly women, in cinema. Films possess the capacity to reflect and challenge societal norms, including gender roles and stereotypes. However, despite some positive changes in the portrayal of women in Bollywood, there is an underlying economic rationale driving the industry. The commodification and sexualisation of women are sometimes used as marketing strategies in low-budget films that, in essence, objectify women. The transformation in the portrayal of women in Bollywood reflects and shapes evolving societal norms. From the traditional archetype of the docile Indian woman to the modern, independent woman, the cinematic journey of female characters mirrors the shifting dynamics of Indian society. However, despite the progress, there is still a need for more nuanced and authentic representations of women on screen. As India continues to grapple with the complexities of gender dynamics, Bollywood remains a powerful medium for both reflecting and influencing these changes.

According to D. Bhoopaty (2003, pp 507-17), "Cinema is widely considered a microcosm of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. It is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected". The changes taking place in society get a broader reach to the public through visual media. As Amir Ullah Khan and Bibek Debroy (2002) write, "Films over the years reflect in their own unique flair the changing moods in economic policy. The days of heady idealism of Raj Kapoor, a cynicism that creeps in with Guru Dutt, the strength of character that is seen in Dharmendra's early movies, and romance in the films that follow—the heady mix that kind of culminated in the era of the angry young man. Then follows a phase of confusion and complete lack of imagination, after which we see the happy-go-lucky recklessness of generation next". The symbolism in all this is crystal clear. Today as the Indian economy looks outward, Hindi cinema goes global too. Cinema is the mirror of society, and more than that, cinema is a robust way of propagating the right rational idea.

With the current libertarian approach of Indian movies and arts where the art forms with their fictional attributes are depicting the things as they might be and ought to be, one may say that Indian society is progressively improving and is set to accept and evolve as a free society looking for further establishing individual freedom. Both the Indian socio-political economy and Bollywood affect the day-to-day life of an ordinary Indian. As an emerging economy and a nation housing the world's second-largest movie industry, India still has to cover quite a distance to bridge the gap between itself and its counterpart. There are many examples of how Cinema in India evolved in its effects, treatment, and subjects. One such example is the favourite family drama genre of Hindi Cinema. Hindi films earlier, more often than not, revolved around the family drama of which the journey was fixed. The films started with happy families, had some minor misunderstandings in the middle, and ended happily. What is interesting to be noticed in such films is that there was a precise grading; men before women: be it, husbands, before wives, fathers before mothers, or brothers before sisters. Younger ones were expected to respect older people and not question their opinions, even if they contradicted facts. Women were expected to put aside their own lives and be ceaseless caregivers, even when it means going back to abusive partners and families. These happy families of the Hindi Films were engraining patriarchal hegemonic roots firmly in the social order. It was also when directors like Sooraj Barjatya came up with family movies like Hum Apke Hain Kaun and Hum Saath Saath Hai etc. The problem with family movies was that they reinforced gender roles in the name of a family where women characters were usually homemakers and their lives revolved around the hero, making them lack agency of their own. The movies were full of drama, action, and violence. If a movie was coming under the family comedy category, usually it focused on gendered statements or sexist jokes to provide comedy relief. Patriarchy as an institution includes culture and family, religion, education, governance, and media reinforcing the norms. Patriarchy or societal norms might result in certain kinds of culture developing into a hegemony. Parallel to this, once particular cultural hegemony is established, it also furthers the norms like patriarchy through modes of interpellation, ideology, and coercion. The happy filmy families were never shown questioning the hegemony. The gender hierarchy was well accepted in the films and thus by the audience. One can also see it under the light of Bourdieu's Symbolic violence as it describes a type of non-physical violence manifested in the power differential between social groups. It is often unconsciously agreed upon by both parties and is manifested in imposition of the group's norms possessing greater social power on those of the subordinate group. Symbolic violence can be manifested across different social domains such as nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic identity.

However, as said above, the socio-political and economic changes influenced the thinking of the movie makers and receivers. On the one hand, the competition with Hollywood movies added with the steady demand for diverse topics created a new challenge for Bollywood filmmakers. On the other hand, several new directors, producers, and actors started their careers in Bollywood, who were educated, socially aware, and eager to bring new ideas to mainstream Bollywood movies.

Talks of the Transition:

Changed demands coupled with new ideas from the supply-side started to bring in variations in the nature of Bollywood films. Thus, globalization had its effect on Indian films as well. Appadurai (1996), too in his work, talks about globalization, pointing out that globalization is not a new process: modern capitalism has always been a global system. He distinctively talks about how there has been a drastic rupture in the pattern of social relations globally over the last twenty years, which he calls the Global Now. For him, therefore, Global Now calls for a new political and theoretical imagination to make sense of the almost ubiquitous effects globalization now exercises on people's lives. This Global Now has been influencing Indian cinemas as viewers of the movies are no longer confined to one country/culture. Another important reason behind the presence of Global Now in Cinema is the coming in of international production houses, thus compelling the foci of Cinema even more appealing to audiences worldwide. Like the many changes coming in Hindi Cinema and the issues it brought on screen, one could easily observe the change in the depiction of families in films. Over the last couple of years, Bollywood has moved away from its typical happy joint families to depict dysfunctional ones. These films are closer to reality because not only do they highlight human flaws and insecurities, but they also highlight the nuances of the bond shared between millennial and their parents. The generation gap, communication gap, the opposing ideologies, and differing expectations from life are beautifully portrayed. These films, also, very importantly convey the questioning of hegemonic authorities within a family and the societal norms.

Director Avinash Das looks at it as 'the movies moving towards more realism.' He says that with more exposure to the world, with better understanding of gender and with more probe, families now have conflicts more than earlier. This is what is being depicted in films, where we see more and more dysfunctional families. The hegemonic routines are changing. If not shared, the power is at least questioned, and the knowledge is, both, held and explored by many. With the new market liberalization policies, the Indian media scenario rapidly changed how it reached its audience. Waves of change in the Indian media industry penetrated the Hindi film industry as well. This marked a departure of Hindi popular cinema from how it operated in the eighties and deliberately changed its ways both as an industry and a commercial product. Hindi popular cinema, preferably termed as Bollywood, under the new global ethics became international in production and global in consumption, at the same time maintaining and reiterating facets of what we may call Indian culture. This may be termed as 'glocalization,' which means global ideas with local stories. The new Bollywood also came with the overarching presence of the NRIs, who gained importance in the new Bollywood of globalization. The over-seas business and opportunity certainly influenced and changed how Hindi popular incorporated locations, songs, choreography, and merchandizing items starting from fashion and accessories to other commercial products. With time, as society grew more exposed to external factors, women started redefining their status in society. This change did not arrive overnight but with the gradual shifting of the newly acquired strength. Whether women actually gained anything substantial from the process of liberalization is yet to be seen. Although Indian cinema continues to change and evolve, reflecting new trends in gender relations, at least in very traditional Indian cinema, women who live by these traditional norms are portrayed as happy and ethical. On the other hand, women who go against rules of narrative and culture in films are punished and seen as immoral. These roles and constructions of women are reflected in a great deal of popular Indian cinema.

Films like Cocktail (2012) bolden these binaries of women's representation. Through the depiction of Veronica and Meera, the film has polarized the notion of being a woman, especially an Indian woman. Veronica, a girl who is not so good because she is independent and not apologetic in life, is the one who is the loser at the end, who is at the receiving end, and who should not be idealized. In the end, she wants to 'change' herself and become one like Meera. On the other hand, Meera is the winner because she is the ideal type. She is the one who should be every Indian woman's inspiration. This polarization of the idea of woman is dangerous as it says that one form is supremely correct and the other is absolutely incorrect. So, the imperfect version, 'Veronica', has to and should transition and become the ideal 'Meera.' And Gautam is what these women are competing for. The truth of fact and fiction are incompatible, yet they are curiously blended in Indian cinema to present a homogeneous reality with the unmistakable stamp of male-authoritative hegemony. The male characters of Indian cinema, i.e., the heroes and the villains, move around the movie's space like players in a deadly choreographed game of chess with the women characters as the sacrificial pawns. As the stories progress towards expected and anticipated endings, Indian cinema proves again and again that its women characters will always need something more than the brains which God almighty has given them. Their loves, dreams, and unexpected destinies shall constantly oscillate vacuously between the pluralisms of culture and traditions, paradoxes of progress, and representational emporia (Jain and Rai, 2002). The vitalising power of the women characters is always absolutely ignored. The two areas which need to be focussed on are, firstly, the mother's role, inheriting all the power and status of the 'mother goddess' tradition of Indian culture and secondly, women characters trapped in secondary roles as somebody's wife, somebody's daughter or somebody's love interest but never their own selves, i.e., never as women, as individuals in their own right. Also, it is crucial to focus on the image of a vamp and a heroine, the two opposite characters which were very distinguished in early Hindi cinema, but now the parting line between heroines and vamps are getting blurred, so it is fascinating to locate the changes in female character over the decades. As explained earlier, this is the Madonna and the Whore dichotomy where women in Cinema are conveniently placed. Although Veronica was not the vamp in Cocktail, she definitely fell under the whore category for how she was. However, there have been many films where women were breaking all the stereotypes and were coming out of ages.

As discussed in earlier in the paper, women have primarily broken the representational binary of good and bad women. Some relevant examples can be added by analysing the status of unwed mothers in Hindi films. The cinema in context has been presenting the very stereotypical way of looking at women and men. For a woman to be complete, she had to be a mother, and she is idolised for being a birth giver. There have been thousands of Hindi films depicting an ideal mother. Nargis in Mother India, Nirupa Roy in Deewar, Maa, Mard, Suhaag, Reema Lagoo in Hum Aapka Hain Kaun, Maine Pyaar Kiya, Fareeda Jajal in Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jaenge etc. These were the traditional, rule-abiding, soul-cooler mothers the audience was habituated to watching. Hope Marie Childers (2002) writes that the films, in fact, reaffirm traditional stereotypes of women in which their behaviour is carefully controlled within a patriarchal framework. Nationalist mechanisms are put into play to glorify the ideal of woman-as-mother. However, as said many a time, women's depiction has witnessed many changes in the past years. One such example of the transition is of unwed mothers. There have been films where Indian audiences saw unmarried mothers. These were women who were either immoral or victims. The relation between society and cinema played a significant role in such depiction. These women were unhappy, humiliated, or victimised to be shown as a lesson to their audience. A woman who has a physical relationship before marriage ends up being troubled. These films have been spanned in for many years. Explaining this phenomenon, Shoma Chatterjee (2010) adds that there have been films dealing with the issue of unwed motherhood in a society where marriage is both mandatory and sanctified. Nevertheless, with changes coming in, one could quickly notice that these unwed mothers are no longer the sufferers; rather, they take control of their own lives and decisions. "If one were to take a closer look, the parameters that defined the position of the unwed mother were different in each film and began evolving in keeping with the changes in the Indian value system where girls were getting bolder and had the courage of their convictions to take responsibility of their child outside of marriage. The unwed mother on celluloid has slowly but surely been liberating herself from social ostracism by refusing to be bugged down by social and moral value judgments made on her position.

Kundan Shah's "Kya Kehna" (2000) stands as a remarkable cinematic representation of an unmarried mother's unwavering commitment to her unborn child. This narrative unfolds amidst formidable opposition from the young man involved, his mother, and even, at least temporarily, the unwed mother's own parents, who eventually rally behind their daughter. Srishti Magan (2019) beautifully observes that single parenthood can come about due to both life's circumstances and personal choices. The poignant portrayal of Vidya Balan in "Paa" exemplifies the latter, presenting a meticulously crafted character that delves into the resilience and fortitude required to be a single parent. It serves as a poignant commentary on the challenging journey of navigating societal norms, particularly when confronted with the heart-wrenching prospect of potentially outliving one's child. Special mention goes to Arundhati Nag, who plays Vidya's mother in the movie, serving as an unwavering pillar of strength for her daughter, mirroring the strength Vidya exhibits in her role as a mother to Auro. Bollywood has been a witness to the transformation of mothers and motherhood in various captivating ways. It marked a significant departure from conventional portrayals when we encountered a mother accepting her son's involvement in a same-sex relationship in films like "Dostana" (2008) and "Kapoor and Sons" (2016). These movies, despite their disparities, bore certain intriguing similarities. For instance, both featured rather cantankerous mothers initially unwilling to embrace their sons' unconventional choices. Their reactions initially adhered to societal norms, but as the narratives unfolded, they ultimately came to terms with and embraced their sons' decisions, demonstrating a significant shift in their characters. Remarkably, both films were produced by the same production house. Although "Dostana" was not centered on same-sex relationships and maintained a lighter comedic tone, "Kapoor and Sons" adopted a more serious approach to exploring same-sex relationships. The latter film not only showcased the mother's struggle but also delved into the son's internal conflict and guilt. These films served as a catalyst for bringing to the forefront issues that had long been shrouded in secrecy, offering a fresh perspective where women accepted decisions that society might not readily endorse.

Furthermore, Bollywood's evolution extends to the portrayal of men and the evolving concept of masculinity. The critical role that masculinity plays in shaping the socialization of young minds worldwide. Gender roles are acquired and perpetuated through notions of masculinity and femininity. As one of India's most influential industries, Bollywood has played a pivotal role in shaping our thoughts and expectations through the films we grew up watching. The concept of masculinity has been a recurring theme in societal discourse. R.W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "practices that legitimize men's dominant position in society." Over time, masculinity in Bollywood has undergone significant transformations. The "Angry Young Man" era, spanning from the 1960s to the 1990s, left an indelible mark on societal perceptions of masculinity. Actors like Amitabh Bachchan, who frequently embodied such roles, defined masculinity by battling on-screen villains and being the ultimate protector of their mothers and love interests. Iconic films like "Sholay" played a defining role in delineating gender roles within Bollywood, with heroes saving damsels in distress and resorting to threatening dialogues against villains. This era established a vision of masculinity characterized by toughness, ruggedness, and unyielding machismo.

Post-1990, actors like Akshay Kumar and Govinda took the reins and continued to play similar roles, introducing elements of comedy into their narratives. During this period, issues such as extramarital affairs were often employed as punchlines in many movies. For instance, Salman Khan's character in "Biwi No. 1" portrayed a husband engaged in an extramarital affair, perpetuating internalized misogyny by assigning blame to the girlfriend instead of the husband. The evolution of mothers and masculinity in Bollywood cinema symbolizes the changing societal norms and expectations. The industry has transitioned from conventional stereotypes to portraying multifaceted characters that challenge traditional gender

roles. This transformation in Bollywood encompasses a shift in the portrayal of mothers accepting non-conformist choices and a redefinition of masculinity, emphasizing that being a man in contemporary Indian cinema is evolving into something more multifaceted and nuanced. The passage offers a nuanced exploration of the changing landscape of gender dynamics in Bollywood, specifically focusing on the evolving portrayal of women and the societal impact of these representations. A deep and insightful analysis of the evolving portrayal of women in Bollywood and the broader societal implications leads to understanding of a wide array of aspects that encompass the transformation of gender representation in Indian cinema, addressing issues such as the normalization of stalking, the challenges posed by toxic masculinity, and the gradual shift towards more empowered portrayals of women. The influence of popular films and actors on societal attitudes is prominently featured throughout the text. There was a period when Bollywood proliferated with sexism, and stalking was slowly normalized as an acceptable form of expressing interest by the male protagonists. During this era, the larger-than-life "angry young men" who ruled the screens were often portrayed as family-oriented, yet they served as the authoritative heads of their households. This dichotomy between family values and maltreatment of women in movies blurred the lines between fiction and reality, leading women to perceive such mistreatment as normal and acceptable behavior. The influence of these movies was such that characters who embodied the "prince charming" image often still exhibited stalking tendencies, prioritizing their egos and treating women as trophies.

Conclusion:

In contemporary times, Bollywood has seen a change, with male characters emerging as liberators in films like "Chak De India," "Shubh Mangal Sawdhan," "Dil Dhadakne Do," and "Pink." However, alongside this positive change, there has been the proliferation of toxic masculinity, exemplified in films like "Raanjhana," "Kabir Singh," "Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety," "Dabangg," and "Kambhakht Ishq." These movies present male characters who disregard mutual respect and consent, creating harmful examples of how men should behave. The common thread in many of these films is that women continue to be mistreated, yet they often struggle to assert themselves. The normalization of such behavior contributes to its acceptance in society. This period has also been pivotal in challenging conventional notions of masculinity. Movies such as "Jaane Tu Ya Jaane Na," "Hindi Medium," "Tumhari Sulu," and the "Tanu Weds Manu" series introduce male characters who are not threatened by strong women but, instead, are supportive. These characters exhibit their masculinity in new and more nuanced ways, being more involved in housework and home affairs and expressing their emotions more freely. A notable example is Ayushmann Khurrana's role in "Vicky Donor" and "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan," which confront preconceived notions of masculinity.

Renowned actor Shah Rukh Khan's acknowledgment of the negative qualities of his iconic characters "Raj" and "Rahul" from movies like "Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge" and "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" is a significant turning point. He openly admitted that these characters were not good role models and even advised his daughter to reject suitors who resembled them, indicating growing awareness within the industry about the influence of character portrayals on societal norms.

The shift from an era of invisibility to hyper-visibility of women in Indian cinema, as highlighted by Maitrayee Chaudhuri. This transition is placed within the context of neoliberal capitalism, emphasizing the role of cinema in challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Bollywood's evolving role, from being primarily a form of entertainment to a platform that addresses broader societal issues, is noted. The has been progress, there have also been regressive films, such as "Cocktail," "Raanjhana," and "Kabir Singh." However, it underscores the importance of films like "Queen," "Ishqiya," and "Pink" as building blocks in promoting a more sensible portrayal of women in cinema. The transition from viewing heroines as mere commodities for spectacle to showcasing them as multi-dimensional characters with personal traits and substance is noted. Strong portrayals of women in Bollywood will contribute to changing societal perspectives. While acknowledging that feminism in Bollywood may not yet be fully intersectional and that gender balance is still skewed, it anticipates a promising future where women have more substantial roles in Indian cinema.

In sum, the provided text offers a comprehensive examination of the changing landscape of gender representation in Bollywood, addressing the challenges, developments, and evolving societal attitudes that have accompanied this transformation. Bollywood, as a reflection of society, plays a significant role in influencing and shaping perceptions about gender roles and relationships, and the passage effectively highlights this complex relationship between cinema and society.

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