

(In)Significance of Select Popular Hindi Film Songs: Trends and Traditions

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Abstract

Bollywood, or the Hindi film industry is a truly enigmatic world of its own. One of the major attractions of it, which differentiates it from Hollywood, is the song-dance sequence which never fails to strike a chord with the audience. They have a significant role to play in the order of storytelling. They, at times, serve as an important narrative function and are strong medium of entertainment in a typical Bollywoodian style and at times outlive the films themselves in its popularity. They also depict moments of celebration and also display acts of desperation. They have been folkloric, hip hop, rap or plain melody. In Aristotelian terms, they also offer purgation of emotion by release of narrative tension. The present paper examines significant evidence of Bollywood influence on the masses and explores the (in)significance of select popular hindi songs over the years. These songs will further be examined as a molder of popular culture and a strong means of ideological communication.

Keywords: Hindi films, Popular songs, objectification, trends, traditions.

Hindi film industry is one of the most popular entertainment industries across the globe. The music-song-dance is an integral part of Hindi film genre in relation to its plot, setting and characters. Song-dance sequence occupies the place of a parallel /an alternative narrative in movies. The reason behind the popularity of these songs is the dance, lyrics and music associated with it and vice-versa. But if we are to take a closer look at this, we observe that since the beginning of Bollywood, certain Hindi songs have been overtly regressive in nature. They have, till date, classified women as a ‘thing of beauty’ which is forever joyful and there is nothing more to her identity except her physical attraction. And lately focused on objectification of women where she is labeled as ‘*maal*’, ‘bombshell, etc.’ Several examples of such songs can be

cited, from the past to present, to validate this point. When the entire nation is divided on the parameters of tolerance and intolerance, this is one such platform, where both the Centre and the margin, the left and the right, the north and the south, the high and the low have shown infinite tolerance for such sexist songs even in this post-feminized world. This kind of immense tolerance for these sexually over toned gender bias songs in the name of entertainment has posed/ is posing/will continue to pose bold questions about our faculty of reception. What has led to the successful propagation of such sexist song over the years? How much has the censor board played a role in promoting such songs in the movies? How far are these fueled by the commercial success of the movie? Since Bollywood is one of the largest cinema industries creating a worldwide impact on the minds of the people, how are these songs responsible for framing/reframing/defaming the identity of women in the global context? The question that also arises is that in the name of popular culture, has crudity, sexism, filthy references to women being passed off as creativity? Is it a recent activity or has it been there since time immemorial? Has Bollywood always maintained the tradition of commodifying/ objectifying/ degrading women in their songs or is it a recent development? Are the leading ladies of our Indian Cinema, in the name of entertainment and asserting selfhood, actually lured by the profit-making industry? Is it an informed choice that they are making or is it like going with the flow of what is easily saleable, fashionable and popular? How far is performing in such songs directly proportional to their stardom? What is the role of the audience/ listeners in making these songs a superhit within hours after its release?

From *chaudhwi ka chand* to *chiz badi hai mast mast* to *munni badnaam*, the lyrics of bollywood songs have gone lower and lower in standard. But a song is not just lyrics, it has more to it. In Audio-visual art, a song also has dance steps/its choreography, music and picturization among others. This is not to suggest that the old numbers were better than the new ones. Suggestively, the trend of degrading women through choreography or other ways was also prevalent then. Though the lyrics of these old/gold songs were far more meaningful than the present ones but the idea of depicting these songs were redundant at many places. We have several examples of songs from the 50's where the female protagonist rejects the male one and this gets followed by a song dance sequence whereby repeated 'stalking', her rejection turns into acceptance. Bollywood, over the years has very subtly made stalking normal. It has unsaid habit of accepting a 'No' from

a girl as an indication of a song dance where the five minute of effort can change her 'no' to a 'yes'. The present scenario of these songs is an exponentially multiplied effect of the old songs in all respects.

As Raymond Williams says, art is no more just reflection but mediation and mediation are rather an active process too. Songs, as a form of art, also mediate. They are not just formed by experience but also shape our experience and are passed on with time. These narratives orient us both in kinds of time, by linking before and after, within the lives of characters, thereby linking one action with another. They reveal the patterns of human conduct, from motive to result through actions. Since art is no longer reflection but mediation, this representation/misrepresentation of women as an object, more appropriately a sex object, even after hundred years of Indian cinema, is acutely problematic. Such incidences are not only historical but also address the structural asymmetry of social justice and human perception. Audio-visual leaves a heavy impact on the minds of the viewer.

In his seminal essay, "Advertising, The Magic System", Raymond Williams argues that advertising has passed the frontier of the selling of goods and services and has become involved with the teaching of social and personal values, it is also entering rapidly into the world of politics. If the same idea about womanhood was transmitted through other ways such as poems, painting, shayri, story it would not be so widely accepted because of the literacy value associated with these mediums as it is when in the form of songs. For all other mediums cater to a certain kind of audience. But the audio-visual medium of songs crosses all these limitations and therefore, language of these songs gets coded and thus conventions get established very easily.

In the light of the above argument if we go on to interpret some of the classical songs from each decade, we can clearly see different facets of womanhood being portrayed over the period. All these representations impart a different meaning to our understanding of these songs and women in general. Since the relation between art and society is now two-fold, it is definitely responsible for shaping certain kind of human psyche if not anything else. It might also affect the language of the listener. Instead of boycotting these songs we have thoroughly embraced it, more often, closer than the films themselves. It seems that poetry which is an integral part in songs is

now facing a slow death in these songs. In cases where lyrics are sensible, the dance move kills the poetic effect of it. All and all the end product is a sexist song which comes into the frame.

Without making a sweeping generalization, let us study one popular song from each decade to prove the point. The following is a sense-to-sense translation of the Hindi film songs done only for this research paper. The title song of the movie *Nakhrewali* (1956) starring Kishore Kumar targets women in general and accuses them of how they tend to look innocent but are actually evil hearted, cruel and disloyal only because they are not easily submissive. They are targeted solely because they are not ready to give into the wishes of the onlooker. The next in this row is a very popular song from the movie *Teesri Manzil* (1966) where our classic but super enthusiastic hero Shammi Kapoor leaves no stone unturned to disgrace womanhood. The song *aaaja aaaja mai hun pyar tera* can be read as Come to me, I am your Love... Several eyes are on you and you need companionship, let me hide you in my eyes since you have a vulnerable body... Like a typical damsel in distress story, the hero believes that only he and his love can rescue the girl from all other things in this world and according to him she needs this badly. From the 70's we have another classic movie *Yeh Jawani Hai Diwani* (1972) starring another Kapoor son where the lyrics of the title song *yeh jawani hai diwani* can be read as like adulthood is crazy, stop my queen, look back, where are you upto? This is an evening to sit and talk. You are upset but its all false, even if you have complained on your lips, you have love for me in your eyes... Here too we see that the hero is taking certain things for granted. He is certain that even though the heroine seems to be angry, its fake and behind this angry face is her unconditional love for him. From the 80's we have a song from the movie *Lootmaar* (1980) *jab chhaye mera jaadu* whose lyrics read as when my magic gets spread, nobody can escape it. I am the softness of flower and I have the heat of embers. Sometimes I inflict pain, sometimes I heal your wound. I am the turmoil of the storm. Sometimes I hide your secrets and at times I am myself a mystery... Such kind of songs which have pun intended words used to lure the hero was often used in hindi songs during the period. Bollywood has always degraded women, sometimes in the garb of entertainment, at times romance and at times comedy. From the 90's, we have a very popular song from the movie *Aankhen* (1992) called *O laal dupatte wali* which can be translated as O women clad in red shawl, tell me your name, hey girl in the black shirt tell me your name.

Tell me what are your plans for tomorrow, tell me a night you would like to spend with me. Here harassment gets justified not only through the lyrics but also through the dance moves where in the name of creating comic effect in the song, the ladies are forcefully cuddled and touched in the song. In the next century we have a song from the movie *De Dana Dan* (2009) which has lyrics like *kyu paisa paisa karti hai* translated as what is it (money), why do you keep on chanting 'money'? why do you love money? Just tell me one thing, why aren't you scared of God? I shall shower you with money, if you be mine. The entire philosophy of money is preached in the song by targeting the women alone. Again, deciding on behalf of them that it is money that they are looking for in their life and not true love and that validates the sermon made by the male protagonist on money. The latest is from the movie *Dabangg 2* (2012) where the songs goes like O my friend, stick my photo on to your chest using *fevicol*, I have been ready for a long time, persuade me by giving me a missed call ... swallow me with a gulp of alcohol, oh my beloved...just another example of a disgraceful song where the representation of women shows them as taking pride in claiming themselves to be an object of desire, more appropriately lusty desire. The worst part of these songs is that they all bring fruitful results. At the end of all such songs the woman submits herself to the man.

As an informed audience, we cannot/ should not disown the responsibility associated with it. These songs can be seen as those which glamourize crudity thereby making maximum profit out of it. Certain ideas like these affect the popular consciousness of the listener and the youths consider this to be 'cool.' The paper also tries to focus on as to how freedom of expression needs to be reconsidered. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* talks about this aspect of human nature. If such kind of music is depicting misogyny and if films and television are censored, the dominant forms of popular media, then why shouldn't such songs also be censored? Society is an ever-growing organism and needs freedom to survive. This is where the third part of Mill's *On Liberty* comes into being. Mill writes that he believed *On Liberty* to be about "the importance, to man (mankind) and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions." So, all these songs which are repeatedly compromising womanhood needs to be monitored/ filtered and censored as it does more harm than good. It took bollywood more than hundred odd years just to understand

the basic fact that a 'no' from a girl only means no and not yes or may be or later or let's see (referring to the movie PINK (2016)) and even after that it is yet not fully accepted by the nation. Bollywood has a huge role to play in framing the ideologies of its audience through the representations it bears. Such kinds of misrepresentations where women are not treated as equal but a commodity, a *cheez*, a *maal*, a bombshell, an object of desire who, must be followed, stalked, harassed and what not to draw her consent. The problem with movies like *Haseena Maan Jaegi* (1999) and *Mardaani* (2014), for example, which happened to have released in a time gap of fifteen years is just the same. In the previous, the speaker is so definite that the lady love would agree to his love, he is so sure about it. In the later, even though the title has historical connotations, the problem is that in order to depict a woman unlike a typical bollywoodian woman, we need to associate her with the characteristics of a man. Let us accept the woman of our country as they are. Let us stop ourselves and others from framing a picture of womanhood for the rest of the world. Let us stop misleading anymore. As claimed earlier, songs are very important part of our cinema and our Indian culture. There are enough examples of soulful, meaningful, sensible songs which have affected all of us at some point of our lives. Let us not ruin our taste anymore.

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