



Strengthening the Stereotype: Women and their Representation in Mainstream Cinema

Abina Habib

Department of English, Amar Singh College, Srinagar, Kashmir, India

ABSTRACT

Nurtured by Indian culture and history women's role in commercial Indian films is that of a stereotypical woman, from the passive wife of Dadasaheb Phalke's 'Raja Harishchandra' (1913) to the long-suffering but heroic mother-figure of 'Mother India' (1957) to the liberated Kangana Ranaut of 'Queen' (2014), it has been a rather long and challenging journey for women in Hindi cinema. Culture and tradition mean different things for different women, but there is always the historical context of what it entails in the form of ownership. What this paper seeks to unravel is what being a woman means in Indian cinema. Indian film industry is one of the largest in the world, my effort then is to understand how an industry so vast caters to half of the world population. In today's globalized world, how are female actors treated? How do directors and female actors deal with vital issues of the three-pronged 'trishul', othering, violence, and voicelessness? What effects do films have on perceptions of beauty, sexuality, and gender? It is important to note that the sheer number of Hindi movies produced each year is huge and viewership is even greater, yet, in this globalized world, peppered with neocolonialism, caste distinctions, intolerance and aggression, the portrayal of Indian women in Hindi films creates, produces, and reinforces women's roles in a strictly heterosexual and rigid fashion. This does not allow for many variations in representation. Unarguably there has been some progression in Indian movies as in, they are more accessible but as far as improvement of the Indian woman is concerned, little progress has been made.

Key words: Cinema, Identity, Misogyny, Patriarchy, Stereotyping.