

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT WITH REFERENCE TO QUEEN : THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVIE

Krishna I. Patel*

ABSTRACT

Discrimination against women is often justified in the name of Culture. Women constitutes the family, which leads to society and Nation. Social and economic development of women is necessary for overall economic development of any society or a country. Though India has been claiming very strongly of the women empowerment and gender equality, the position of women has always remained subsidiary in India. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (Caste and class), and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

One key factor for the gap in implementation of law and policies to address discrimination, economic disadvantages, and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in much of India. As such, women and girls have been restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence. This paper uses classic movie Queen to introduce and study the elements of women's world. This movie is not just to be enjoyed but also to be critically appreciated. The movie throws light on women, their victimization by various factors in society and their emergence as the survivors. The paper aims to equip the readers with the ability to discern underlying messages in the movie rather than simply absorb them.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is meant and believed to entertain, to take the viewer to a world that is starkly different from the real one, a world which provides escape from the daily grind of life. Cinema is a popular media of mass consumption which plays a key role in moulding opinions, constructing images and reinforcing dominant cultural values. The paper deals with representations of women characters in mainstream bollywood movies. It is deemed appropriate to examine this issue because women are a major chunk of the country's population and hence their portrayal on screen is crucial in determining the furtherance of already existing stereotypes in the society. The paper begins with a discussion on the field of feminist film criticism and how mainstream Hindi Cinema has restricted itself to defined sketches of womanhood. It also undertakes some glimpses from popular films to analyze this process of

* Assistant Professor Ambaba Commerce College & M.I.B.M. Sabagam Affiliated to Veer Narmad South Gujarat University (Surat)

stereotyping the woman's role-considering that reality in mainstream cinema is constructed from the male view point. The paper discusses the contemporary realistic brand of cinema and its understanding of women. And most importantly, in the movie taken for research mainstream Hindi cinema has been successful in portraying Indian women of different shades in a society dominated by patriarchal values.

According to Wikipedia, Bollywood is the informal term popularly used for the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, Maharashtra. The term is often incorrectly used to refer to the whole of Indian cinema; it is only a part of the total Indian film industry, which includes other production centers producing films in regional languages. It is one of the largest centers of film production in the world.

The Indian film Industry has promoted the entertaining, educative cinema among young audiences and explored the possibilities of using the visual medium as a tool for better entertaining, educational, material, human and spiritual upliftment.

While cinema in India is in itself a diverse strand of expression incorporating mainstream cinema which holds popular appeal, art/parallel cinema that engages with social issues, middle cinema and regional language cinema. The explorations in this paper are limited to the portrayal of women in the mainstream/popular Hindi cinema. The paper in its ensuing sections will build an argument about the portrayal of women in Hindi cinema based on various strands of feminist film criticism which have certainly enriched our understanding of women on screen.

It is difficult to come to a uniform conclusion on the portrayal of celluloid women. Considering the fact that women in India are not a homogenous group they belong to different religions, castes, class, socio-economic status and have different kinds of ambitions and desires as a result of which they lead different lives, it would be improper to conclude on a particular portrayal of woman in the cinema. The portrayal of course has to be sensitive to the category to which they belong. For e.g.: An urban middle class woman's story would be entirely different from that of a woman in a village. Films, thus have to be responsive towards the context in which they locate women characters. Women characters should possess agency to dismantle the existing power structures as well as be able to negotiate their own position within this structure. It is time that cinema seeks a redefinition of women as objects of male gaze. Women's experiences and dilemmas as points of narration are the need of the hour. Going beyond the stereotypes will do a great help to the cause of women in Indian society. Cinema has to create a separate and independent space for Indian women to help them realize their dreams. Cinema's only end is not to entertain. It must begin a quest for social change through entertainment. As a media product, it should come up with more progressive representations of women. Such portrayals would do justice to women and their role in the society.

Movies and Women

Though there exists a body of feminist film making in Hindi cinema, the leading lady of Hindi films has more or less played defined roles which conform to the values upheld by Indian society. Women in Bollywood have been uni-

dimensional characters, who are good or bad, white or black. There are no shades of grey. This dichotomy was reinforced in popular films which distinguished between the heroine and the vamp, the wife and the other woman. Films have also been inspired to a large extent from religion and mythology whereby women characters were seen as the epitome of virtue and values, those who could do no wrong. The image of women as 'Sita' has been repeatedly evoked in many films after independence. Through the ideas of loyalty and obedience to the husband, Hindi cinema successfully institutionalized patriarchal values. Films like 'Dahej' (1950), 'Gauri' (1968), 'Devi' (1970), 'Biwi ho to Aisi' (1988), 'Pati Parmeshwar' (1988) depicted women as passive, submissive wives as perfect figures and martyrs for their own families. In these films, women rather than being depicted as normal human beings are elevated to a higher position of being ideal who can commit no wrong. Their grievances, desires, ambitions, feelings, perspectives are completely missing from the scene. They are really portrayed as the 'other' because they are shown as not belonging to this real and worldly life. For e.g.: Abhimaan (1973) begins with premise of the wife (Jaya Bachchan) being more talented than the husband (Amitabh Bachchan). This in itself is a definance of the stereotype. However, the film crumbles from then on when the wife gives up her thriving musical career for satisfying the husband's ego culminating to a conventional closure that demands adherence to traditional values of marriage and motherhood. Bollywood heroines have mostly been homely, content to stay happily ever after in the institution of marriage even if educated and living an independent life. The society as if does not want to see woman as being independent, assertive and free. The working woman vanished from the popular blockbusters of the nineties which relegated Indian women to the boundary of the home. The concern boils down to the embodiment of women who stay next door, walk on the street, spend time working in office and return home after a tiring day. The narratives of Hindi cinema have undoubtedly been male dominated and male centric. Themes have been explored from the male audience's point of view. The heroine is always secondary to the hero, the villain, the father, the boss, and elderly male figure etc. She is devoid of any independent existence and her journey throughout the film is explored in relation to the male character. Film scholar and author Shoma Chatterji (Subject : Cinema, Object : Women, 1998) says:

Women in Hindi cinema have been decorative objects with rarely any sense of agency being imparted to them. Each phase of Hindi cinema had its own representation of women, but they were confined largely to the traditional, patriarchal frame-work of the Indian society. The ordinary woman has hardly been visible in Hindi cinema.

This kind of straight jacketing limits the women's role to providing glamour, relief, respite and entertainment. The woman is docile, domestic, honourable, noble, and ideal or she is the other extreme wayward, reckless and irresponsible. The 'man' as the saviour and the 'woman' as the victim are also prominently seen in Hindi cinema discourse. The heroine is a damsel in distress who has to be rescued by the hero if she is in trouble. Scene after scene of heroes rescuing their ladies from the clutches of villains have been captured by the camera. In recently released Ra-One

(2011), the film's poster clearly depicts the hero (Shahrukh Khan) carrying the leading lady, Kareena Kapoor in his arms. It builds up his image as her savior, something which the film's story too follows. The woman of substance is missing from such portrayals, the women who can lead her life independently and take decisions without relying on any male is completely absent till now. There are a chunk of film-makers who have reacted against the stereotypes set by mainstream cinema and have dared to explore subjects from the women's perspective. Contemporary films like *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), *Cheeni Kum* (2007), *Chameli* (2003), *Ishqiya* (2010), *Paa* (2009) and *Dirty Picture* (2011) have pictured extraordinary themes and portrayed women as central to the story line. These films have forced creators to take a fresh look at the different roles played by women and introspect into the kind of typecast that was being perpetuated earlier. It is also to the credit of the current crop of actresses who have not been hesitant to accept bold roles. Actresses like Vidya Balan (*Paa*, *Dirty Picture*, *Kahani*, *Ishqiya*) and Konkona Sen Sharma (*Page 3*, *Wake Up Sid*, *Life in a Metro*, *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer*) have led this change of direction. Other actresses like Jaya Bachchan, Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, Nandita Das, Kajol, Deepika Padukone, Aalia Bhatt and Knagnan Ranaut have also appeared in strong and independent roles which for the time being shifted the camera's focus from the women's body to her identity as an individual. Such actresses have challenged the norm. For eg: *Chak De India* (2007) talks about the conflicts that women face when they decide to excel in the field chosen by them. In the movie's case the field is sports. The sportswomen in the movie are shown to negotiate these conflicts and not be morally upright by choosing family over career. They are not super-women; they are just normal beings who are able to decide their priorities. This portrayal is no mean achievement of Hindi cinema. *Astitva* (2000) has been pitched as a film which explores the unconventional, the desires of a married woman who has long been neglected by her husband. The film is a revelation in the sense that it makes a strong statement about the hypocrisy in the society. The film questions that realm of patriarchy which may not necessarily commit violence but manifest domination in other forms like denial of space, freedom and subjugation. The society needs to accept these forms as patriarchal domination and not just focus on violence. The protagonist Aditi (Tabu) emerges in the end as a strong woman with her own thoughts who rather than seeking forgiveness from her husband, chooses to walk out and live life on her own terms.

The recent movie *Queen* also presents woman in new colours-getting rid of the traditional roles of being ideal women and asserting her own identity. It gives a new path to the Hindi cinema in terms of portraying the woman as she is and should be instead of showing her as an ideal woman.

QUEEN

Queen is a 2014 Bollywood comedy-drama film by Viacom 18 Motion Pictures and Phantom Films, directed by Vikas Bahl, the film stars Knagnana Ranaut, Lisa Haydon and Rajkummar Rao in lead roles. The film's story is about a middle class Indian girl in Rajouri Garden, Delhi, who decides to go on her honeymoon to Paris and Amsterdam alone, after her fiancé walks out of the marriage two days

before wedding. Amit Trivedi has scored the film's music for the lyrics by Anvita Dutt. The film premiered at Busan International Film Festival in October 2013, and released worldwide on March 7, 2014.

Rani (Kangana Ranaut) is a 24 years old Punjabi girl staying in Rajouri Garden, Delhi. She is from a very conservative family; her brother escorts her everywhere for her safety. Two days before her marriage, her finance Vijay (Rajkummar Rao) meets her in a local café and announces his unwillingness to get married to her. He cites that he has changed, and she would not match his lifestyle now as the reason for calling off the wedding. Shocked at the development, Rani shuts herself in her room for a day.

She decides to take control of her life and plans to go alone on her pre-booked honeymoon to visit her favourite place, Paris and Vijay's favourite place, Amsterdam. After initial hesitation, her parents agree and Rani departs from Delhi.

Now enters Paris and the city's eye-pleasing sights. Here she meets Vijayalakshmi (Lisa Haydon), who has a French/Spanish mother and an Indian father. She work in the hotel where Rani Stays. Initially reluctant and getting into trouble twice already- once by local police and once by a robber, Rani decides to return. But soon Vijayalakshmi become her friend, confidante, and shows her around Paris. Rani enjoys her company and has series of humorous situations they fall into. On one such occasion, Rani sends her selfie clicked in western outfit to Vijay, instead of Vijayalakshmi, and soon realizes mistake. Rani relives the memories of Vijay patronizing her for so many of the things which she is not allowed to do, as she dances, drinks, lets herself free in Paris.

She bids an emotional farewell to Vijayalakshmi and boards train for Amsterdam. She arrives at Amsterdam and hostel, which is on sharing basis. With no option and contact to make, she agrees to move into the room on shared basis with three other guys and meets Taka, Tim and Alexander. Soon, four become good friends and move around the city shopping, sight seeing, visiting sex shop, meeting pole dancers in a club. Here Rani's character builds confidence. Rani drives her friends when drunk, earns money in cook-off on sailor front by selling gol gappa. She learns stories about her new friends and understands how different life can be.

One day, after returning from Cook off, Rani encounters Vijay who has been eagerly waiting for her outside her hotel. He apologizes and asks her to reconsider the relation. Rani advises him to leave after he tries to drag her in front of her friends and they retaliate.

Next day Rani meets Vijay and says she will speak with him in Delhi upon her return. She meets her friends for one last time in the rock show she previously cancelled. After bidding emotional farewell and realizing she has to face her life, Rani returns to Delhi, as a changed person.

Upon arrival, she meets Vijay and without saying anything, she hands him her engagement ring and thanks him. Rani leaves his house and is relieved and relaxed.

WOMEN GAINING POWER

Queen is a movie that discovers a new woman, who, instead of accepting the so-called rules and regulations of society finds her way out of the miserable situation she has been put in. In the very opening scene of the movie, we listen the unfiltered internal chatter of excited bride-to-be Rani, even as a quartet of elderly grannies rehearse their steps to a popular dance number while wedding preparations continue around them. Rani and her simple mithaiwala family are deliriously happy during the mehendi ceremony, yet even before her henna can darken, the arrogant groom calls off the wedding. "It's better this way," the London-returned Vijay (Rajkumar Rao) tells his disbelieving fiancée. He's that brash would-be who's suddenly discovered that he's bored at the idea of marrying a girl who just doesn't match up to him. In that once scene set in a coffee shop, director Vikas Bahl conveys volumes. Rani is shattered, while Vijay mutters to her to stop making a scene, then puts on his shades to shut himself out. Refreshingly real, the conversations lead your right into the heart and the purpose of the film. In the identifiable scene when Rani visits her aunt in Paris, typically the family shows off their 'firang' side: uncle relaxing in his massage chair, aunt and grandma speaking broken French, even as they indulge in a pity party over Rani getting jilted at her wedding.

There is one point that was not predictable when a stressed out heroine goes out and drinks alcohol for the first time in her life, you expect her to go crazy and break free. Kangana does not. Even when she drinks and sort of breaks off the bonds, she still remains in the confines of the traditions. Interestingly, a high point in the movie arrives right there. Just as she goes into flashback and remembers that her fiancée did not like her dancing at public places, she literally lets her hair down. There is anguish, aggression, revenge and defiance. And out of that anguish and defiance takes birth the desire for boundlessness. Rani compares her status with that of 'Gupta Uncle' who is suffering from Cancer though he never smoked nor drank ever. Still he had cancer.

"Isse achha to pee lete"

(Queen)

Rani says. Here she understands the importance of being happy in the new world she has been put in unwantingly. And gradually she starts loving that new world. A lone Indian girl, a 'behenji' with a 'desi ghee tadka', would usually fumble her way across crowded streets and annoyed pedestrians and find herself in a handsome stranger's arms, sing a few songs, do a few nakhra and gratefully accept 'mandap' and 'mangalsutra'.

But not Rani aka Queen. She does make silly touristy mistakes, nearly gets mugged but doesn't let it get to her, and discovers she has a spine after all. Lucking into a long-legged hotel maid Vijaya Lakshmi (Lisa Haydon) is the first departure from standard Bollywood practice: this other Vijay takes Rani under her wing, drags her into a store with lovely Parisian clothes and generally hands-holds Rani for an enjoyable spell. Of course Rani doesn't find a Prince Charming there, rather a sexy

French friend Vijaya Lakshmi. And in her company she finds something more charming than Prince in Paris : Life and Self.

Rani, whose hand shivered at the time of talking of the cancelled marriage on the phone gains self-confidence gradually to the extent of cutting the call of Vijay her finance. As the journey Proceeds, the designs on her hands get faded, so do the old memories of the cancelled marriage. During her journey Rani remembers at one after other occasion how her development and growth was blocked by her finance. She was scolded very insultingly by him while she was trying to learn to drive car and the occasion when she drives her drunkard friends home gives her a lot of strength.

The construction of a woman

What's interesting about Queen's protagonist is that she decides to make it to the honeymoon on her own. And not for a moment is this journey about finding the prodigal fiancée and trying to get him back. Rani makes this journey because Paris is important to her, she had always wanted to travel to France and wedded or not, she was keen on going there. Rather than sit and mope about a guy, she decides to live a dream. And the story of this journey is so exciting that not once do we find any need of romance in her life. The director is right to let go of Vijaylakshmi (Lisa Haydon) a lovable girl full of spunk and style in Paris and not saddle her though Rani's travel to Amsterdam. Because it's Rani's journey; no one else's. It's a completely different world for Rani A girl who has hardly ever stepped out of Delhi, has always listened to everyone, been readily apologetic even if it's not her fault. It's only in Amsterdam that Rani begins to come into her own. She lands in a hostel where she has to share a room with three boys. She learns to tide over her insecurities. She has to figure out her own way without any companion watching out for her like Vijaylakshmi did in Paris.

Rani's Journey is interesting; Amsterdam is a place of new learnings peppered with moments of genuine humour. And just because she is staying with three boys, we have no slow motion blowing of hair in the wind and one of the guys falling for her. Yes, there are moments of honest affection and comfort but no awkward attraction.

The film pays attention to detail and you see Rani's mehendi slowly lose colour as her journey progresses. Rani's character evolves but they are not marked by the superficiality of wearing hippie cloths, she still continues to be most comfortable in cotton kurta and a pair of jeans.

The under confident protagonist doesn't overnight evolve into a feisty heroine but through her Solitary musings you realize she questioning the many dictates that she had just grown to accept over the years. You see how she had unquestioningly accepted that there is no need for her to work and that she shouldn't dance at weddings. Why had she allowed her boyfriend to impose his biddings? This made no sense to her anymore. Rani could have easily become a caricature but Kangana pulls off a class act never missing a beat, making you feel for the initially heart broken protagonist and celebrating with her as she relishes a newfound sense of self.

There's a moment towards the end of *Queen* when our heroine Rani (Kangana Ranaut) sways on the edge of slipping back onto her old life. She hesitates, the moment passes, and you feel Rani's sheer sense of liberation as she turns her back on a selfish man.

As the pure, chaste and absolutely uncontaminated Rani comes in contact with the big, bad world out there, she makes mistakes as frequently as she makes friends.

In the bargain, a whole new universe opens up for her. In a secluded Paris bylane, she fends off a mugger and is thrilled to bits about the act of bravado. This is the beginning of the journey of getting self-confidence. She befriends a half-Indian Parisian hotel staffer and single mom Vijaylaxmi and, in all her innocence, advises her not to sleep with all and sundry.

Lap dancer, graffiti artist, musician, tsunami victim- Rani meets all manner of new people and instinctively connects with them. Not only this, she learns from them that her own grief is nothing in front of the Pakistani girl's who sells her body to educate her younger brothers and sisters and Taka-who lost his parents in the Tsunami.

Rani wears her innate naivete like a shield against the pitfalls that she faces on her incredible voyage of discovery through the city of love- Paris and Amsterdam, a below the sea- level metropolis where she finds herself and a lot more than she could have bargained for, including her first kiss with an Italian bunk.

Both the actress and the director use the element of *gaucherie* in the character to great effect, crafting a believable and adorable heroine who evokes both empathy and enchantment.

SUPPORTIVE SYSTEM : BOOSTERS FOR WOMEN

At her wit's end and in danger of retreating into a self-pity, the guileless Rani, with a bit of moral support from her granny and her surprisingly supportive father, takes off on a solo European honeymoon. In *Queen*, You can see the initial shock register on her face and as the truth of the situation sinks in, her eyes brim over. Fortunately, we don't have her family go all melodramatic about this unexpected turn of events. In fact, her grandmother wisely states that there are bound to be several suitors for Rani, just like she had managed to find the grandfather at a refugee camp immediately after she had been parted from a Pakistani lover. The movie captures the pain and the concern that Rani's family feels for her, but the film doesn't linger on the gloomy mood. With a stranger resolve, Rani decides to go on her honeymoon to Paris and Amsterdam on her own. The tickets are booked and she needs to escape the crushing rejection. At first, she faces a series of typical touristy misadventures, including almost getting mugged. Yet slowly, dealing with a world far different from her own and making unlikely friends, Rani regains her confidence. Bahl, the director is making a case here for opening up your mind nothing is the end of the world if you just try to step out of your problems.

CONCLUSION

'Queen' is as significant Bollywood marker, a film that is intensely local and gloriously global, with a terrific lead performance by Knagana Ranaut, in a story that bubbles over with real feeling and meaning.

Queen is a good entertainer, sure, but, more critically, it is a showcase for an actress poised to reign. This is one of those monumental moments when you feel the movies shift, and nothing remains the same. It's been a journey of self-discovery, across oceans and continents for this Rajouri Garden girl, but Rani finally chooses herself. It is a sweet victory and you feel richer for the choice she makes because Queen is that rare, disarming film that has you smiling throughout.

In Paris, Rani meets the long legged, dusky Indo- French girl Vijaylakshmi who befriends her, giving her lessons on love, lust and life. Slowly, Queen's low self esteem gives way to supreme confidence. Before you know it, she's on a train to the sex capital of the world. At a hostel in Amsterdam, Rani Shares a room with three men. And this diverse group goes on to forge a bond. Soon, you are as engrossed in their friendship as she is.

Whether she's crestfallen or ecstatic, selling golgappas or naively buying sex-toys, hiding her infatuation for an Italian restaurateur or showing deep dejection about her wimpy beau Vijya, Rani proves herself to be the Queen. This is a film that is no less tangy than the gol gappas that Rajouri Garden girl Rani Mehra rustles up in an Italian pizzeria in faraway Amsterdam. The bright and breezy Queen does not require even "tow minutes" (that is how long it takes the heroin's culinary output to activate the first Dutch buyer's unaccustomed taste buds) to work its magic. It hits its straps from the very outset.

Queen is spicy, balmy and uplifting. Like good gol gappas, it leaves a zesty aftertaste that lingers on until long after the ride has ended. It warms the heart and tickles the funny bone with equal force. The film makes a feminist statement, but it does not put up the ism at its core for display like an obtrusive penant.

It embeds its message (for want of a better word) within the structure of a rip-roaring drama that is consistently funny and frequently thought-provoking. This is a love story with a difference and a great climax. Queen learns to love herself and lives happily ever after.

"Dedh Ishqiya", "Hasee Toh Phasee", "Highway" and now "Queen", It seems Bollywood is finally getting rid of the coy, virtuous heroine for good. This is the story of a simple vulnerable woman who learns to live life through experiences and finally flings off the bondages as she dumps her finance wishing thanks to him as she got the opportunity to learn the lessons of life because of his rejection only. Queen is the story of Rani getting power from within that poses a challenge to gender hierarchy as well as opens up new realms for a post-gendered future.

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