Masculinities and Media Culture in Indian Bollywood Films

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades women’s studies have centered their attention on the role of media in shaping the attitudes and social behavior of people. The role of men and the trait of masculinity has been considered as the norm and in most cases the portrayal of men in media is seen as unproblematic and exemplary. In view of such a situation it becomes immensely important to not how find out the roles of men in regard to the women but also how men too have problems in constructing the larger gamut of gender as one of the key ingredients of social relationships. This article provides an in-depth study of the role of men, media and society with special attention to the popular Indian cinematic genre of Bollywood.

KEYWORDS

Gender, Masculinities and Bollywood, Media Culture, Men

INTRODUCTION

Media studies is still in its nascent stage among popular Indian media scholars and academicians. Media studies takes its roots mostly from cultural studies, political science, linguistics and other inter related disciplines. The popularity of gender mainstreaming in media in western part of the global arena is booming which is significant and research has also been done to find out the empirical evidence of media and its impact on gender role stereotyping. But the same cannot be said of Indian media. There is too much of controversy in the gender role stereotyping in western culture vis-à-vis Indian culture. In this paper efforts have been undertaken to analyze gender particularly masculinity both from the western and Indian point of view. In the West, especially in UK and in Australia, swimming and tennis is considered unmanly and sissy, but in Indian context both these sports are taken to be manly. As such we can term that masculinity is entirely contextual and culture specific and cannot be universalized. Media in this regard has been significant in molding people’s notions, attitudes, behaviors about ideal masculine behavior and personality. Mass media are a resource that is widely available for research into determination of idealized version of gender role and shaping of such roles into forms. They have far-reaching effects on many different members of society. They affect how people perceive and understand various issues. This is most likely due to the media’s availability in many different forms (e.g., television, radio, magazines). Along with the state, family and religious institutions the impact of media is revolutionizing society from bullock carts to cyber marts. In a democratic social set up, media is considered as the fourth estate the other three being- legislature,
judiciary and the executive. While media encompasses an entire gamut of electronic, print, online and multimedia, the present study seeks to analyze gender role behaviors through the study of few selected Indian films. The influence of cinema is undeniably phenomenal- it finds its way through people in the form of their lifestyle. Films perpetuate and reinforce traditional gender roles and gender inequality by portraying how ideal men and women are and present themselves in real lives. In almost every society, ideal men are dominant, strong, successful, and sexually appealing. Ideal women are physically beautiful, submissive, and sexual objects. Almost all the Indian films follow this ideology and tradition of highlighting idealize version of men and women. But certain films are a deviation from this idealized version. The paper presented here tries out to analyze these certain films with deviation from the stereotypical gender roles. It is an attempt to lay out the interrelations of media to gender with special focus on masculinity and Indian Bollywood cinemas and their significant contribution and influence in setting up the society’s outlook and attitudes. It also at the same time reviews all the popular scholars and researchers dwelling on the areas of gender and media, media culture and also of Bollywood representation of Indian males.

BACKGROUND

Masculinity studies as an area of study was introduced to understand the gendered world in a fuller and more complex form. Masculinity is often essentialized as a category of knowledge enacted in the social space with a complex entanglement of biological and ideological attributes. In the earliest of all writings dealing with men, we can cite Michel Foucault’s book on History of Sexuality (1976) wherein he talks extensively about Greek men and that they did not see love for one’s own sex and love for the other sex as opposites but it was common for a male to change preference for women after boy-loving inclinations in his youth. It was simply because of the appetite that nature implanted in man’s heart for ‘beautiful’ human beings, irrespective of their sex and sexual proclivities (Foucault, 1992).

THE STUDY METHOD

A qualitative analysis of the entire gamut related to gender, media and cultural studies have been taken taking into context the Bollywood movies and their depiction of male bonding, male dominancy/submissiveness and how they are relayed to the cultural production of stereotyping of particular behavior. Content analysis is used in studying the characters of the male role portrayals and the underlying meaning they generate in culture specific context.

MASCULINITIES AND MEDIA CULTURE

John Beynon in his book Masculinities and Culture (2002) points out clearly that masculinity is composed of many masculinities. There continues to exist a wide range of masculinities among men while they all share one common thing – that is the male body although that too varies in shapes, sizes and appearances. He also contradicts the widely held belief that masculinity is standardized according to biological traits wherein all men are placed giving them certain psychological and physical attributes (Beynon, 2002). He tells us to look at the linkage between culture and masculinity and the moment we do it we realize that masculinity is not a fixed set of qualities but is as diverse, mobile and unstable as life itself (Beynon, 2002). The key factors that shape masculinities are - historical location, age and physique, sexual orientation, education, status and lifestyle, geographical, ethnicity, religion and beliefs, class and occupation, culture and sub culture (Beynon, 2002).

Ruth Vanita in her introductory note in the book Masculinity and Its Challenges in India: Essays on Changing Perceptions (2014) says that when Simone De Beauvoir claims that women are not born but becomes one (suggesting that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired), the same can
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