

THE ROLE OF BOLLYWOOD'S PRODUCTIONS IN POTRAYING THE SOCIETY IN ITS REALITY

ANKITA SHARMA

Abstract: Since the inception of cinema in India, the silver screen has been an important medium of portraying the society in its utmost reality. Initially depicting epical stories and histories, cinema moved on to fantastical romance and love stories in the 1950s. But, with the advent of independence and the drastic change that the society underwent due to the aftermath of partition, the filmmakers in India realised the importance of projecting the social issues. 1960s, 70s, and 80s produced some movies that were not only realistic, but extremely revolutionary in subject. The content that these movies had to offer was revolutionary to the extent that they were able to bring a change in laws of the Indian society, making it more justice driven and propagating equality. Bollywood was no longer defined by couples singing songs and dancing around the trees. Reality of crimes being committed on women, social atrocities, confusions of the newly emerging middle class, and all such concepts pertaining to reality were now being portrayed on the silver screen. The films no longer belonged to 'the hero' but were increasingly focused on 'the heroine'. The filmmakers tried giving voice to the Indian woman, who had been suffering silence for such a long time. This approach of the filmmakers gave a new dimension to cinema. The cinema was now not just a medium of entertainment, but a medium of generating awareness amongst the masses. This paper explores four such films which drifted from the established trend of film plots. Shakti Samanta's *Kati Patang* and *Amar Prem*, Raj Kapoor's *PremRog*, and B.R. Chopra's *InsaafKa Tarazu* are films which stirred the minds of Indian society and made people think about the norms and superstitions they are blindly following. The paper looks into the plotlines of these films and aims to bring out the revolutionary and feministic nature of the stories. It also brings out the impact these movies were able to create on the larger society and takes into account their contribution made to the creative world.

Keywords: Bollywood, films, change, feminism, heroine

Introduction: Art is always considered a medium of expression. It is the expression of the artist's feelings, her thoughts and reflections, conveyed through her art. But for the world, in front of whom the art is projected, it is a medium of entertainment. Any art in the world, whether it be a painting, a song, a symphony, an act, a sculpture, a story, or a film, everything gives the viewer pleasure. Apart from pleasure, art is also used as a medium to provide a mirror to the society. It reflects and measures the changes which the society undergoes. Following the same principle, genius directors, time and again, have used films as a medium to reflect upon the condition of the society. They have used their filmmaking skills to bring forth the vices rooted in the society.

Bollywood is the second largest film industry in the world. Known for its vibrant and colorful movies, Bollywood has always had a reputation for being an 'entertainment' industry. The films that Bollywood produces caters to the common public and at the same time exerts quite an influence over them. The rumor has it that girls used to run after superstar Rajesh Khanna's car. The dialogues of movies like *Sholay* and *Deewar* are now a part of the mainstream colloquial language of people. Actors like Pran, Ranjit, and Amrish Puri, who played iconic villain roles were feared by people outside their reel lives as well. Hairstyles and body language of Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan are imitated by youth

across the country to create an impression. These kind of happenings are proofs of the power Bollywood has over the minds of its viewers.

Over the period of time, filmmakers of Bollywood have used this influential power of the silver screen to convey powerful messages to its viewers. In the 1950s, with movies like *Awaara* and *Shri 420*, Raj Kapoor brought to the screen the difficulties being faced by the common man in a newly independent India. The 1960s belonged to epic love stories and thrillers such as *Devdas* and *Jewel Thief*. The 1970s saw the advent of heroine centric movies. The women took the centre while the men were driven to the periphery. With the 1980s, the women grew even more powerful. The silent were given a voice.

This paper deals with four such movies which came at the turn of the centuries and issued powerful statements. They raised issues of gender inequality, feminism, and women atrocities in an era when women were still looked down upon. In the decade of 1970-1980, women slowly started stepping out of the boundaries of their homes. In such a decade came movies such as *Kati Patang*, *Amar Prem*, *InsaafKa Tarazu*, and *PremRog*. These movies brought forth the issues of widow remarriage, prostitution, and rape.

In recent years, Bollywood has seen a surge in women centric movies. Films like *Aisha*, *Queen* and the latest *Akira* and *Pink*, all have women empowering subjects.

But feminism isn't a new thing for Bollywood. Directors like Shakti Samantha, Raj Kapoor, and B. R. Chopra brought feminism in Bollywood almost 3 decades back with their powerful stories.

1970: *Kati Patang*, 1972: *Amar Prem*: In 1969, Shakti Samanta, the celebrated director of romantic films like *An Evening in Paris* and *Kashmir ki Kali* released his milestone classic *Aradhana*. At the turn of the century, *Aradhana* made a mark by drifting away from the established trend of movies. The 'hero' of the movie was a woman. The story revolved around a woman's struggles in a society which does not recognize the existence of a single woman. The movie was critically acclaimed and went on to become a classic in the Indian film industry.

On similar lines, Samanta created *Kati Patang*. The movie follows the life of Madhavi, an orphan girl, but a rich heiress. Madhavi is supposed to marry Kamal, but elopes on the night of wedding to be with her lover Kailash. Kailash, a crook, shows his true colors, and Madhavi is shattered. She goes back to her house, only to find her uncle dead due to shock of her betrayal. Madhavi decides to leave the town. On the railway station she meets Poonam, her childhood friend, who is now widowed. Poonam is travelling to her husband's house to introduce her child to his grandparents. Poonam confides in Madhavi and tells her that she has never met her parents-in-law. She also asks Madhavi to accompany her. The train in which they are travelling derails and in the accident Poonam dies extracting a promise from Madhavi that she will go to her husband's house in her stead and take care of her child. Madhavi reaches Poonam's house disguised as Poonam, and starts taking care of her parents-in-law. In a chance encounter, she meets Kamal, who is a childhood friend of Poonam's husband. She is attracted towards Kamal's kindness and happy nature, but restricts herself from expressing anything. The widow's garb that she wears restricts her from enjoying any happiness that life has to offer.

The movie is a narrative of a woman who is stuck in a cage of customs and societal expectations. Throughout the movie, we see Madhavi, fighting an identity crisis. She cannot reveal who she really is because of the promise she made to her friend, and as long as she pretends to be Poonam she cannot express her love for Kamal. The story becomes relevant since it introduced the idea of widow remarriage in the society. In several scenes of the movie, the reaction of various characters to the idea of widow remarriage is interesting. They display shock and anger. Only after recognizing the true identity of Madhavi, they agree to her marriage with Kamal. It is only Kamal, the male lead who doesn't believe in the societal restrictions.

To complete his trilogy, Samanta made the movie *Amar Prem* in 1971. Another woman centric movie, *Amar Prem* revolves around Pushpa, a young woman who is compelled into prostitution by her circumstances. Pushpa is abandoned by her husband due to her infertility. She goes back to her mother's home, who shoos her away thinking of her as a burden. Trying to find a living, Pushpa finds place in the brothels of Kolkata. Her beautiful voice attracts the attention of Anand, an influential businessman, who visits the brothel to cure his loneliness. Anand visits Pushpa regularly and both fall in love but never express their feelings fearing society. Apart from Anand, Pushpa starts caring for Nandu, a neighborhood boy. Eight year old Nandu is lovelorn after his mother's death. Pushpa adopts Nandu as a son and Nandu returns the feelings. Due to the lines that the community creates around them, Pushpa is forced to separate herself from Nandu and Anand.

The movie, following its predecessors, highlighting the struggles of a single woman. Pushpa loses her identity when she decides to move out of her husband's house. The dialogues of the movie clearly echo the narrow thoughts of Indian society. In a scene from the movie, where Pushpa tells her mother about her failed marriage, her mother's reaction forces the viewer to develop a hatred towards the societal expectations.

"*Patikagharstreekasansaarhotahai. Wahan se tohsirfarthimein hi niklajaatahai.*" (Husband's house is the world for a woman. She should only come out of that on a funeral bier.) (*Amar Prem*)

Throughout the movie, Pushpa's own identity is negated because she has left her husband's home. She is branded as a characterless woman who doesn't deserve any respect. Yet, Pushpa remains chaste. Even though she lives in a brothel and treats Anand as a client, yet there is no hint of a sexual relationship between them. She shares a lovely companionship with Anand and their relationship is limited to that. Throughout the movie, she dresses up as a married woman and adopts widowhood only when her husband dies. In the end, she is reunited with Nandu, but her relationship with Anand never attains a finality.

Both *Kati Patang* and *Amar Prem* established the fact that a woman is capable of fighting all sorts of circumstances and emerge victorious. Widowhood and prostitution, both are arenas which have been created by the society to isolate and silence a woman. The iconic songs of both the movies were penned down by AnandBakshi, the celebrated lyricist. The songs bring out the shallowness of the society in the best manner possible.

" *Humkojotaanedetehain, hum khoyehain in rang raliyomein*

Humneunkobhidekhachupchupkeate in galiyonmein." (The ones who chide us for spending time in revelry, we have seen them visiting the same lanes) (Amar Prem)

These lines from the song *KuchToh Log Kahenge* highlights the hypocrisy of the society and helps Pushpa understand the callousness of the people around her. Similarly, in the song *JisGali Mein TeraGhar* from the movie *Kati Patang* encourages the lead character Madhavi to break the shackles of the society and embrace her feelings freely.

"*Haanyehrasmeyehkasmesabhitodke, Tuchaliaachunarypyaarkiodhke.*"(Break the customs and the bonds of the society, and clothe yourself in the colours of love.) (Kati Patang)

The title of the movies speak volumes as well. *Kati Patang* (The Lost Kite) is a metaphor for Madhavi who has lost her identity. Similarly *Amar Prem*(Immortal Love) highlights the fact that love transcends societal boundaries and customs. ShaktiSamanta's movies introduced the concept of an individual pitted against the society. Both the movies raise important questions in a time when Indian society was still very much bound in shackles of superstitions and gender boundaries.

1980: Insaaf Ka Tarazu, 1982: Prem Rog: Samanta, through his movies, tried giving a voice to the hitherto silent women, but he did so in a subtle manner. His movies showcased the struggles of women in a toned down manner. The harsh reality was enveloped in romance and music without the characters being subjected to any brutality. The decade that followed the release of *Amar Prem* saw a surge in women empowerment. The women of India stepped out of their household boundaries and started exploring various professions. Although, this monumental change opened new gateways for the society, it also brought with it a surge in crimes against women. The roots of patriarchal domination are so deep in the society, that mere ideas of women empowerment doesn't bring a lot of change.

Directors now felt the need of bringing the harsh realities in front of the viewer as they are. In 1980, B.R. Chopra created *InsaafKaTarazu*. Through the movie, Chopra brought the sheer brutality of rape and its aftermath to the fore. The agony and trauma a woman experiences for no fault of hers was brought to the attention of the viewers.

The film is a courtroom drama where a young woman Bharati is being tried for the murder of Ramesh, an influential businessman. The flashback reveals that Bharati is a successful model who meets Ramesh during a party. Ramesh is smitten by her beauty and plans to woo her. Bharati rejects his advances because she is in love with Ashok. Ramesh feels insulted and in a fit of rage, rapes Bharati. Bharati files a case against him, but because of lack of evidence, Ramesh

is acquitted. Shamed and disheartened, Bharati leaves town with her sister Neeta. Some years pass, and Neeta bags an interview for the post of a typist. When Neeta goes for the interview, the boss is Ramesh, who molests her. When Bharati comes to know of it, she kills Ramesh in cold blood.

The movie, for the first time, brought forth the sufferings of a woman who dares to speak up. The protagonist of the film is a successful model, who hasn't committed any wrong except for saying 'no' to a man, which isn't acceptable. The very recent movie *Pink* highlights the same subject. Women are subjected to humiliation and torture for denying a man's dominance over themselves. *InsaafKaTarazu* brought to light the insensitivity that law in our country has towards women. In a dialogue from the movies, Bharati standing in the courtroom breaks down and says

"*balatkaarkesamaynakanoonhotahai, na police hotihai, aurna koi sahqigawah. Ekladjisharm se apnamuhtaknahidekhsakti ,ekbaar fir adalatmeinaakeapnibeizzatikaisekarayegi.*"(At the time of rape, there's no law, no police, and no witness. How will a girl who cannot even face herself out of shame, face the humiliation of the court?) (InsaafKaTarazu)

She says this referring to the countless harassing questions a woman is asked during a rape trial. She highlights the fact that a woman's word is not taken as truth. Till 1980s, the law demanded forensic evidence for rape. In several rape cases, the accused was acquitted because of lack of forensic evidence. The movie actually helped changing this law. After this movie, amendments were made in the section 375 of Criminal Procedure Code of the Indian law. Since then, the word of the woman is taken to be truth.

The movie highlighted the reality of crimes being committed against women. On similar lines, in 1982, the showman Raj Kapoor created *PremRog*. The movie revolved around Manorama, a young widow, and her relationship with Devdhar, her childhood friend. Manorama belongs to a wealthy family of feudal lords. She lives the life of a princess and is extremely innocent. She is married off to a young man belonging to another feudal family. Unknown to her, Devdhar, her childhood friend who grows to love her passionately is heartbroken but doesn't express his feelings. On the third day of her marriage, Manorama's husband dies in a car crash. Manorama's world starts crumbling around her as all the pleasantries of life are snatched from her. All sorts of taboos are imposed on her life. She has to wear white clothes, sleep on the floor, eat boiled food, and walk barefoot. Riots happen in the community when Devdhar proposes to marry her and give her the happiness of life.

The movie highlights the hypocrisy of the higher class people. The women in the families of rich feudal lords are subjected to various kinds of torture. They are supposed to stay silent and follow the norms of the society. The most important thing that we see in the movie is the fact that the women of the family endorse patriarchal norms. The men who try to flout these norms are made to shut up.

In one instance, from the movie, a widowed Manorama is asked to cut her hair. She begs the women of her family to not let the people do it. The head of the family also supports her and orders that her hair won't be cut. But the women in the family do not agree to it and state that since hair is symbol of sexuality, they need to be cut, so that Manorama may not entice another man.

This instance showcases the fact that patriarchy in Indian society persists because of women. A woman subjects the other to oppression. Unlike *Kati Patang*, Kapoor does not wrap the sufferings of widowhood in the colorful wrappings of romance. He puts it out there the way it is. The lost innocence of Manorama is clearly shown. The agony and trauma she has to suffer is clearly etched on her face. The fact that she is blamed for all the mishaps in her life brings out the sheer brutality of Indian society.

Conclusion: It has been three decades since these movies were created, yet even now the crimes against

women haven't changed or lessened. But one change that is visible is the awareness in the society and efforts to bring a difference. Widow remarriage does not create a controversy anymore, yet still in parts of the country, widows are subjected to countless traumas.

What comes forth as interesting is that these movies raised these issues in times when speaking on issues such as prostitution, widowhood, and rape was considered blasphemy. Victims were supposed to keep silent. They were not allowed to express their agony and sufferings. At such a time, these movies gave these mute sections a voice. They brought the marginalized to the centre.

Also, in all the four movies, we see male characters fighting for female rights. In *Kati Patang*, Kamal is the man who helps Madhavi come out of the pit she's falling in. In *Amar Prem*, Anand becomes Pushpa's strength to survive. Bharati is helped by Ashok's constant support in her struggle against rape in *InsaafkaTarazu*, and Devdhar becomes the pillar for Manorama in *PremRog*.

To conclude, we can sufficiently say that Bollywood isn't just a medium for entertainment in Indian society. It has been effectively proving to be a source of change for so many decades.

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Ankita Sharma

M.Phil., Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.