

EROTICA ON-SCREEN: SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BOLLYWOOD MOVIES FROM 1940S TO 2015

Abstract

Movies are addressed as the vintage point of India's culture and tradition. One of the important and famous genres used by the popular Bollywood movies is romanticism and love which is expressed to the spectators through the means of erotic content. In the words of a famous 'French director Jean-Luc Godard, "all you need for a movie is a gun and a girl"' (Danesi, 2015), he essentially point towards two important components of popular cinema, that is, violence and sex or erotica. Eroticism' which had always been referred to as private and a taboo to talk about is the center of attraction for the new generation. Eroticism is portrayed and constructed in the movies to express romance in between two individual. This portrayal and construction of eroticism has undergone several changes from its initiation to the present day. The present study uses a qualitative approach using critical sociological perspectives to analyze seventeen popular Bollywood cinemas over a time period of almost eighty years, 1940s to 2015. Three popular movies on an average are analyzed in a single time interval of twenty years. The present study aims at understanding the major research questions which includes erotica, its constructed onscreen meaning and its onscreen acceptance among the spectators. It is observed that the concept of premarital sex has been introduced in the popular movies from 1980s onward, along with it, the aspect that movies use erotica to construct romance is also changing Irrespective of these changes in perspectives, the movies are popular to its spectators, because these movies meet their unfulfilled desires and fulfills their sexual libido, thus satisfying them visually.

Keywords : Movies, Popular, Bollywood, Eroticism, Onscreen

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I. INTRODUCTION

Media is a diversified collection of data or information which is communicated to a large audience via different forms of media such as print, audio, visual or social media. Films are a part of audio visual media, considered to be one of the most significant forms as it not only entertains audience but also educates aware, inspirers and enlightens the spectators. The movies which become very famous among the mass and reaches the box office can be referred to as popular films; so popular films can be said to have been well-liked as well as widely favored by the mass, creating a huge impact upon the public.

Bollywood is the Hindi film industry of India, also regarded as the largest film production center in the world, producing more than thousand films in a year. Bollywood movies are addressed as a major reference point of Indian culture, shaping and expressing the changing scenario from earlier days to the modern India. Representation of such transformation is expressed by the film through different genres like – fiction, nonfiction, romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, action and others.

1. Bollywood and its Popular Rom-Com Sensuous Genre: The genre of romance and love has always been the most popular form of films throughout the history of Bollywood. The depth of romanticism and the intensity of love in between a couple, that is, the hero and the heroine, have been portrayed through the attachment of sexual themes or eroticism; thus the status and position of erotica have been important in Bollywood movies. In the words of Partha Chatterjee, “sensuality and eroticism have always been a part of Indian films but they have been presented with grace and style by filmmakers like Kidar Sharma, Mehboob Khan, Zia Sharhadi, Guru Dutt and Vijay Anand”.

Eroticism and sex in movies are much different to that of sex film or pornography. A sex film portrays the act of sex as a subject matter and uses it to create arousal. It includes nudity and sexual acts. But a naked human body does not simply imply erotica. Eroticism is created by the filmmaker when an act of closeness among the actors (hero and heroine) is constructed with emotions. Therefore, a simple kiss might also seem to be erotic if it includes the emotions and sentiments as required by the movie. Bollywood have used several ways to portray and create erotica and thus have used eroticism to take the storyline further.

The showcase of eroticism in the name of adult scenes did not emerge recently; it emerged in the films of 1940s and 50s. During this era, adult scenes which can also be regarded as erotic scenes were portrayed through metaphors such as ‘kissing flowers’ or ‘shaking bushes’. These metaphorical representations advanced the narratives for the audience without any interruption, that is, these scenes suggested what is supposed to happen in the movies without actually showing it. The portrayal of adult scenes saw a change from 1960s to late 1990s; they included the display of female sexuality, that is, sexualization of women and their sexual charms. The measure of sexuality in those movies depended on sexually revealing clothes like swimsuits or bikinis and attractiveness of the woman character in the film. A few films until 2000, used symbols or songs and music to establish the romantic relation between the characters (the hero and the heroine), the sensuous image was provided to the spectators in a mystic blurry form.

In the contemporary era, after 2000, movies in regard to showcase of eroticism, has undergone a drastic change. The sensuous scenes are openly picturized which includes more long nude and sexual scenes than those of the previous films. Songs in the films have been a major medium through which the erotica is portrayed. Now-a-days, sexualization not only includes female bodies but also the masculine aspect of male characters engaged in the film, nevertheless the focus is more on female bodies. Now, the focus here is that how the exposure of human bodies and the picturization of eroticism are changing with time.

The presentation of sexual and romantic desires through the songs of movies has been used throughout the ages, be it in an explicit or implicit way. ‘Song sequences were often used as a means to introduce suggestive themes and body language to convey affection that would normally be forbidden in public’ (Bhattacharjya, 2009). ‘Film song sequence from the sixties and seventies witnessed a new degree of sensuality, which Ranjini Mazumdar identifies as originating in post-independence films’ (Bhattacharjya, 2009).

In earlier movies, that is, from 1960s to 1980s, implicit form of sexual and romantic desires were noticed in song sequences, for example - in a song from the film ‘Hum Dono’ (1961) - “*Abhi na jao chodd ke / ke dil abhi bhaar nehi*” (do not leave me now because my heart is not yet satisfied); another song from the movie ‘Who Kaun Thi’ (1964) – “*Lag ja gale khipir ye haseen raat ho na ho*” (embrace me as this beautiful night might not come again). From 1980s the lyrics become more direct compared to the implied language of the earlier days. In songs such as “*Chumma chumma de de*” (give me a kiss) in ‘Hum’ (1991) and “*Choli ke peeche kya hai*” (what lies beneath the blouse?) in ‘Khalnayak’ (1993), the representation of erotic desire become more explicit.

The scenes and songs are not the only source of eroticism; the dialogues in a film can be accounted as an important source which creates erotica. In a way it can be said that a sensuous scene is often accompanied with dialogues which enhances the erotica. In the words of Trivedi, ‘Songs and so-called ‘dialogue’ have such a highly significant place in Hindi (and Indian) cinema that they need to be discussed as special categories. Songs in some quantity in almost each film are a unique feature of Indian cinema and the most prominent emblem of its much talked about non-realism, as contrasted with the wholly prosaic realism of Hollywood.’ (Trivedi, 2007).

- 2. Rasa as Masala - is it Appealing?:** Many popular Bollywood films are regarded as having the ‘masala’ element in it. The original connotation of masala is blend of spices; in application to Hindi films, it refers to the blend of elements like music, romance, sensuous scenes, comedy, action and drama.

‘The culinary metaphor is not a random occurrence, but emerges from a context where aesthetics and performance are theorized in a gustatory language. An important dimension of classical Indian aesthetic theory, which helps to provide more context to make sense of the masala film, are the concepts of *rasa* and *bhava* elaborated in the *Natyashastra*, a Sanskrit treatise on dramaturgy composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE’ (Ganti, 2013, p. 140).

Though *rasa* has several connotations, the significance is that of *sringara*, that is love or desire and *bhasa* means emotion or mood. Both these elements are the heart of almost every mainstream Bollywood cinema.

In an article by Brown, he tries to understand why sexual media content is appealing to the audience, how the media can affect awareness and beliefs related to sexual behaviour. He conducted his study by interpreting the audience's opinion ranging from the age group of eleven years to seventeen years girls. He came to the conclusion that media texts provide scripts to people and make them think about the erotica which they would not have found anywhere else. 'Sexually inexperienced people especially may use the media to fill in the gaps in their understanding about how a particular sexual scenario might work' (Brown, 2002), for instance, from relationship oriented movies, his respondents said that they have started aspiring such erotica compiled with romanticism. Therefore it was understood that audiences like lust in the context of love.

The romantic theme has always been favorite for the director cum actor Raj Kapoor. Interestingly, all his blockbuster movies such as - *Jis desh mein Ganga baheti hi, Ram teri Ganga maili, Bobby, Shree 420, Mera Naam Joker* and *Sangam* are based on love stories and portrayed the erotica among the couples. The era from 1960s saw the change of location of romantic songs to lush gardens where heroes and heroines could prance among flowerbeds and express their love through blurry erotic moments (Bakshi, 2002).

In an article by Purnima Mankekar, she has vividly discussed the over emphasis of movies portraying masala content via erotic and intimate scenes. According to her, 'the programs of the 1990s displayed an unprecedented fascination with intimate relationships-particularly marital, pre-marital, and extramarital relationships-and contained new and varied representations of erotics (explicit as well as implicit). For years, however, popular films have provided opportunities for the public expression of erotics. In Hindi films, erotic longing is frequently portrayed in terms of romance and expressed through the use of song, fetishization, and metaphor' (Mankekar, 2004). She had opined that representation of eroticism in Bollywood movies have shifted with time. She added that in most mainstream cinema, the picturization of the film songs provide a greater opportunity for erotic sensuous display than the narrative or dialogue portion of the movies; as the songs use specific and particular images of clothes as well as the body and body language of the characters – Sexualisation of both female and male body.

Patricia Uberoi through her analysis of the film *Sahib, Bibi Aur Gulam* explains that how the movie has created a perfect blend between the destiny of woman to perform her responsibility to bear a child and her sexual freedom, her desire for lust. She has focused on the paradigm of desire in four relationships. They are – *Jabba* and *Bhootnath*, *Chhote Sarkar* and the courtesan, *Chhoti Bahu* and *Chhote Sarkar* and lastly *Chhoti Bahu* and *Bhootnath* (Uberoi, 2006). She mentioned that this movie created erotica with *Chhoti Bahu* and *Bhootnath* by focusing the camera on her eyes, feet, lips and then the face through the gaze of *Bhootnath*. This implied the sexuality of women and represents the libido of *Bhootnath* as seen in his gaze.

Sarkar through an article has depicted how the woman's body has become the prime focus of every form of media as it caters to ‘the male psyche tickling sensual pleasure in viewing ‘women's body and image. It also retained a dominant patriarchal tint with emphasis on traditional normative practices to induce overtly or covertly the ideal image of women’ (Sarkar, 2014).

Lastly, he paper also highlights that how women body is being commercialized and commoditized, ‘the media globally has reconstructed the women image keeping in mind its commercial benefits and projecting it to rake in profits by drawing a wedge between the ‘real image of women and reconstructed image’’ (Sarkar, 2014). The author has pointed out that women have always tried to meet up the desires of male, be it in the pre-independence or post-independence era.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to analyze how, with time, Bollywood movies have been able to bring about a change in the acceptance of certain level of sensuous activity on the big screen. This study aimed at following descriptive qualitative approach. The qualitative analysis included the analysis of certain films from 1940 to 2015. Twenty years of interval is taken to construct one era and three iconic movies within that twenty year time gap, has been selected.

- 1. Unit of Analysis:** Iconic Bollywood films are the unit of analysis for the qualitative analysis. Three popular films from different time periods (1940 - 2015) will be referred as the primary data for analysis. The movies chosen are some of the super hit films of their respective eras which portrayed sensual scenes. Movies that have been selected from the time period 1940 to 2000 are the few movies which were showcasing the bold scenes, denying the existing taboo and thus are super hits for other reasons also; while films after 2000 are taken on the basis of their sexual content, as reviewed by various news articles, rating and review sites such as – rotten tomatoes and IMDB.

Table 1: Unit of Analysis

Time Period	Movies Selected for Analysis	Released Year of the Movies
1940 – 1960	Andaaz	1949
	Pyaasa	1957
	Mughal – e Azam	1960
1960 – 1980	Sangam	1964
	Bobby	1973
	Julie	1975
1980 – 2000	Silsila	1981
	Ram Teri Ganga Maili	1985
	Raja Hindustani	1996
2000 – 2015	Murder series	2004, 2011, 2013
	Jism series	2003, 2012
	Hate Story series	2012, 2014, 2015

III. ANALYZING THE DATA

Bollywood movies from 1940s till date have undergone drastic changes in terms of the construction and portrayal of eroticism in the movies. The movies before 2000 revealed less erotic scenes than that in the contemporary era. Almost every movie, be it an art or a commercial film, now includes erotic scenes. This open-mindedness and the acceptance of this change by the audience, as achieved by the Bollywood movie have led to an ideological change among them. Sex or erotica, in movies has now been naturalized and normalized.

The freedom, rather the sexual freedom achieved in the public domain is regarded as a positive impact of films; while ‘eroticism’ used as a marketable commodity to be sold in the name of entertainment and the objectification of human bodies forms the negative aspects of films.

1. Construction of Meaning of Erotica Onscreen: Bollywood movies have created a drastic change in the understanding of erotica over the ages. The acts of erotica, the lengths and frequency of erotic scenes, the usage of metaphors and props have all changed from the 1940s to present date.

Romance and love have been the one context and genre where filmmakers have always placed eroticism and sensuality into. Most of the movies from the 1940s to till date have shown eroticism in the context of a person loving another. Either the erotica is shown before two people confessed their romantic feelings for each other or erotica is used to confess romanticism or it is after the confession of love that the eroticism is portrayed to enhance the depth of romanticism. But in the recent contemporary era, the construction of eroticism is found not only in the context of romance and love but also in the context of sexually exploiting others and also to blot or tarnish a person’s public image. Though these themes of constructing eroticism are new and found in few movies, its gaining popularity with time.

From 1940s to 2000s, Bollywood had produced movies where eroticism of sexual intercourse was always implied to happen after the marriage of the heterogeneous couple such as *Andaaz*, *Sangam* and *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*. Erotic essence of implicit sensuality was even found in movies of this era like – *Pyaasa*, *Mughal –e-Azam* and *Raja Hindustani*. In all these films, eroticism were constructed to focus more on the depth of romanticism that they couples shared. An exception in this era was *Bobby* and *Julie* where an indirect implication of sexual intercourse was found in a song sequence; although the scenes were not explicit but the premarital sex was very evident.

In this contemporary era, from 2000, although majorly the construction of eroticism is found in the context of romance, a new concept of premarital sex, that is, having sexual intercourse before marriage is being noticed in movies like *Jism* series, *Hate story 1* and *2* and *Murder* series. It can be said that this concept of pre-marital sex took its birth in the 1980s in movies in implied implicit scene sequences. But in the contemporary era it has taken a serious content of eroticism as film-makers are explicitly portraying it. The movies mentioned above have detailed explicit portrayal of eroticism.

Few movies of the contemporary era have started portraying erotica in the context of 'extra-marital affair', that is, adultery. For instance, the movie *Murder* (2003) is a story of a woman having an affair with another man despite being married. Although at the end, the heroine realizes that an extra marital affair is not a healthy relation, she goes back to her husband and discards her feelings for that relation. The movie gives out a message that the society would never accept extra-marital affairs yet the most of the erotica in the movie was constructed portraying the extra marital affair.

Another note-worthy aspect of today's portrayal of eroticism is that few filmmakers are moving away from the age-old tradition of merging erotica with romance. Erotica is now shown in a way to exploit a person's sexuality or to frame a person. For instance, *In Hate Story 1*, *Hate Story 3* and *Jism 2* either the heroine or the hero is found to have sexual attachment with people to frame them and tarnish their public image. These movies have explicit erotic content; the erotica constructed when the actors use their body and looks to seduce others. In *Hate Story 2*, another new form of construction of eroticism was found – the heroine is sexually exploited by other men. Thus new forms of eroticism are becoming prominent in this contemporary era.

Almost every movie constructs eroticism by focusing the female body more than the male body. When a hero is introduced, his masculine identity is much focused; whereas while introducing the heroine her body parts (legs, thighs, back side or cleavages) are shown at first considering these to be the feminine characteristics. Although both female and male bodies are objectified and commodified by films through erotic scenes, the commodification is more for female bodies. The libido of the male spectator is met when the erotic look is provided by the heroine by removing her clothes, wearing short dresses, bikinis or revealing dresses. Thus the women in the films are seen as objects or commodities being displayed for 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) and male enjoyment.

In every movie that has been taken as data for this research belonging to four different time periods, the exposure of the female body is evident. In films of 1940s to 1980s, even if the heroine is wearing a sari, it is observed that very often their sari is either blown away by the wind or it drops suddenly. In films after the 1980s, the heroine started to wear western dresses like shorts, one piece, swimsuits or bikinis. Hence, the focus is found to be more on the lower body parts of the heroine. Thus the female body is used to create eroticism in movies for the visual pleasure of the audience.

This explains the reason for objectifying the female body more than that of male. Most of the films chosen for data have male directors. The directors construct and portray the eroticism through his eyes and therefore attempts to fulfill the libido of the male audience when the male audience fixes his sight to that of the hero and through the hero gazes at the heroine; thus reducing the status of the heroine to a mere sexual object.

Despite women acting in movies, having the liberty to expose her body with her consent, having a career, creating a public image and having the liberty to wear western outfits, a major question is proposed – is it really the liberation of women or is it the commodification of their body?

- 2. Acceptance of Certain Level of Eroticism Onscreen:** With the change in the portrayal and construction of eroticism onscreen, the censor board is also evolving. It has become liberal over the years in censoring the erotic scenes. Previously, the scenes which comprised songs, dance and scenes are altogether censored as the director has to keep in mind that the movie has to be a Family movie, that is, everyone in a family should be able to watch the film; the films from 1940s to 1980s mainly had this understanding. So the erotica then was constructed in a blurry fashion, using pun meanings or metaphors. Now, in the contemporary era, sexual scenes are found more frequently and some movies do show it in detail and properly without any blurry projection. Therefore the freedom of the directors is increasing in a way that they can increase the amount and frequency of such sensuous scenes. The censor board has the tendency to censor the direct sexual scenes but never censored the songs which project sexual lyrics or these songs when is projected using the dance moves which directly implies sexual activity So it is understood that Bollywood and censor is changing and evolving together in a way that both are becoming lenient day by day.

Whatever be the erotic content in a popular cinema, explicit or implicit, the cinema becomes popular when it attracts spectators. As it is said by Freud that every person has sexual desires but are not allowed to meet those desires and libido openly because of societal constraints; an artist (film-maker) who also has such hidden desires and fantasy tries to incorporate eroticism in his creation (films); thus creating an opportunity for the audience and the spectator to meet their libido through the erotica present in the popular films, which he or she makes available to others (audience and spectators) who has the same desire, by creating a text (film). Therefore these texts provide certain liberation to the audience to fulfill the same desires which are not given consent by the society.

Moreover, these texts also provide a platform for the audience to symbolically play and fulfill the fantasy and desires in the texts. The idea of 'fore-pleasure', by Freud, depicts that erotica in films satisfies the unconscious desires and sexual urges of a spectator to a greater extent.

Spectators still watch and enjoy movies with erotic content in a way to fulfill the 'lack' (Lacan, 1989) that they have in their life. This lack can be experienced differently for different things but they are always out of reach of the person having the lack. If, for instance, the lack is taken to be sexual urge, then texts such as popular films portraying erotica act as a substitute object for the spectators to fulfill their lack and satisfy the lack. Films throughout the ages have portrayed romanticism and eroticism in such a way that audiences feel that it is a lack in their lives. Audiences desire that romantic and erotic aura. Indian tradition has never allowed expressing romance and enjoying the sexual urge in an open public space. So in reality such lack or desire is not possible to fulfill, therefore films act as a displacement strategy.

Therefore, it can be pointed out that the act of erotica is itself used as a commodity or object, used in the movies in order to satisfy the spectator. The eroticism is in reality sold to the spectator in order to provide them the stage to meet their repressed sexual urges. It is also understood that the film-makers are objectifying not only human bodies but also eroticism in order to sell them as a commodity in the market by the name

of entertainment. This confirms in a way that the audience would never ever stop watching films; thus with the audience's consent the intensity of erotica as portrayed in movies are changing with time.

The male gaze provided by every popular film confirms the interest of male spectators to watch the films portraying romance and eroticism. The female spectators are also keen to watch such romanticism and erotica in films as these texts provide some satisfaction to their definite needs -their sexual desire and urges. According to societal norms, a woman being subordinate to patriarchy, her sexuality is controlled by man; therefore, their wishes are monitored by the man, which makes them feel suffocated or damaged by the patriarchal power. Texts such as films portraying romance and erotica helps them to provide a secure world, away from the damage and suffocation of family (Coward, 1985); where they have the power to meet their desires and gain pleasure from the romance and erotica portrayed in the films.

This explains why the audience accepts to watch certain levels of eroticism in movies even if they are not according to the traditional norms and values of India. As every human being lacks a certain sexual desire, the films portraying erotica provide a platform for the spectators to fulfill those desires and urges which they are not allowed to express in the public domain. While male gaze can be a reason of male spectatorship, similarly, women are also attracted towards romantic and erotic texts as they fulfill their restricted sexual urge. So this explains why both male and female audiences accept the explicit or implicit erotic content on screen.

Finally, two major questions arose out of the data analysis; they are – firstly, is it really a sexual freedom being achieved by the common people in the public domain to view such eroticism on screen in today's era or is it the commodification of eroticism being sold in the market in the name of entertainment. And secondly, is it the liberation of women or is it the objectification of women's bodies leading to more male gaze.

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