

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The study was focussed on the representation of women in Hindi Cinema and it compared the difference in the portrayal of female characters in the commercial and parallel movies. After the analysis of the movies and further research this study came to the conclusion that commercial cinema is mostly concerned on the male viewpoint and look at things in the same manner as well.

There are several research methodologies that have been used in various researches. But in this particular research content analysis has been used as the main research methodology. In content analysis the properties of the content are systematically identified and then analysed. In this thesis, randomly selected films of some of the famous and popular selected directors were analysed in terms of gender based biasness. Surprisingly, such biasness is more apparent in the commercial or the mainstream Hindi cinema than the parallel Hindi cinema. Movies of the commercial Hindi cinema often show male leads overshadowing the potential of the female characters of the film.

Analysing a female actor today is not an easy job. There are far too many facets of a woman in a single film sometimes. It is not feasible to apply only one kind of feminist theory. Shoma Chatterji had expressed her views on the same, “I have realised over my years of research into the portrayal of women in Hindi cinema that these constructs, theories and perspectives can neither be directly applied to nor superimposed on Indian mainstream cinema’s treatment and portrayal of women. One has to develop a mode of analysis that is culture-specific and situation-specific. Feminist film theories that draw mainly upon psycho-analysis, semiology and structuralism do not have much bearing on an analysis of portrayals of women in Hindi cinema. So, one has to develop a new theory of such analysis against the backdrop of the Indian socio-economic backdrop within which the real woman lives and works and study the intersections of these with celluloid women in Indian cinema. How distanced are the real women from the celluloid women? Does distancing help nurture better images of the celluloid women or does it hinder the

image more and thus distance the audience from these films? Globalization has changed it all and one needs to look at the woman portrayals in Hindi cinema in 2010 with new eyes and through a new pair of glasses tinted with the razzmatazz of Western packaging, sophisticated marketing strategies, the launching of music and stars taking part in reality shows to plug their about-to-be-released films.”

Speaking about the commercial cinema, Benegal had said, “The narrative structure of Indian cinema is unique in the sense that it is very different from the cinema of the rest of the world. Most films are punctuated with songs and dances. These are often used to express the interiority of the characters and sometimes to further the narrative. Most times, however, they are used simply as music or dance interludes, or as periods of rest in the narration before the next dramatic event takes place. More recently, a new term describes this interlude - 'item number'.”

The themes and plots of Hindi cinema has changed a lot from the time of its initiation. If we look at the colonial period, most of the movies of that time dealt with the subject of patriotism and showed that Indian tradition was threatened by the Western culture. Moreover, the villains were dressed in Western clothes and westernised women were seen as vamps who were smoking and drinking and were engaged in promiscuous activities. The hero was seen as a traditional Indian man who had to fight with the evil westernised people on his way to goodness.

But gradually the themes focus on the other social evils and family issues. Romantic and comedy also became the central theme of many of the movies afterwards. It showed the development of the thematic scene in the movies.

This study was mainly based on the representation of women in Hindi cinema and how their treatment differs when compared to the two main streams of Hindi cinema, i.e., Parallel and Commercial cinema. Though Parallel cinema came into the Hindi cinema several decades later still the comparison is valid because it was only after then that the real worth of originality and reality came onto the celluloid. The image of women became much better afterwards.

However, exploitation of the female body has still not stopped in many of the mass communication tools including media and particularly films still the improved situation is far much better than that of the pre-colonial or the post-colonial period.

While there were certain unwritten conventions for the commercial cinema, Satyajit Ray became the first to produce films that created a radical departure from these conventional Indian traditions. It was during the 1950s that Ray brought a more realistic picture on the silver screen that dealt with a genuine modern sensibility and, to loosely paraphrase Rabindranath Tagore, ‘an independent manner of expression within the world he created.’

Ray explored the Indian reality and brought them on the foreground with a genuine aesthetic sense that was not only liberal and humanistic but was also socially enlightened. He was an inspirational figure in the history of Indian cinema who took films to an altogether next level. He made use of this artistic tool of entertainment for something much better than just entertaining. Though it was not easy to use an art form as an eye opener for the audience or to make them an active participant rather than just being a passive one especially through cinema which is treated as an escape mechanism for most of the viewers from their daily grind in life. Still Ray’s attempts were critically acknowledged and appreciated by everyone.

It was not long when the New Wave that started in the West Bengal came flowing through the 1970s in Hindi cinema with the help of many young and experimental filmmakers including Shyam Benegal, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, and many others.

Though many of the movies made under the label of Parallel cinema were mostly heard rather than seen, still the trend continued to more than two decades when in the new millennium it saw a resurgence in the genre.

This was a time when a new batch of filmmakers emerged to mainly experiment with their cinema. The movies were closer to reality and projected core social issues which was a vital trait of the parallel cinema. However, the term occasionally used for this kind of cinema was ‘off-beat’ as it was different from the conventional mainstream cinema.

The representation of women in these movies were genuine and realistic. Here women were not only used as decorative dolls but had meaningful roles in their share. Though such movies were not in a huge number still they were being screened in cinema halls/multiplexes and appreciated on global level through various film festivals around the world.

In 1921, Mahatma Gandhi stated, “To me, the female sex is not the weaker sex; it is the nobler of the two: for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge.”¹

The idea of a traditional woman in the Hindi cinema is more or less based on the same pattern. The mind-set of almost the whole of India agrees to this part that women are meant to make compromises, sacrifices without complaining and this shows our supreme culture where women are the caretakers of a family.

People behave in a particular manner because they are being socialised in that particular way. They have seen their mothers and grandmothers, aunts and sisters who perform household chores all through the day. Even if they are working in the public sphere and used to come home late, it is either they who do the laundry, cooking, and other household chores or there is a maid (again a female) who does all this work to help the woman of the house. In any case, the children will see females doing all the household work.

They are being socialised in this way that they feel it is the duty of a female to work inside the house, no matter if she is working outside the house or not. Whereas, the males are the ones who will remain outside the home for the most part of the day and will earn money to buy things for everyone.

The same socialisation is done by our cinema. The movies show a frail picture of females and a strong and macho image is projected by the males. The image of a pious and shy female is positioned opposite the blatant and bold male. Thus, the children are shown everywhere their positions and are practiced to be that way since childhood.

Movies subtly make its way through the unconscious mind of the audience and without any preaching they programme the brain of the viewers. Whatever the reality may be, it is always exaggerated in the movies and accepted by the audiences.

In commercial cinema, most of the time when a woman is shown, she is shown satisfying men’s desires and is portrayed as raw material for producing and rearing children. The girls, who are shown in the scantily clad outfits until they are married, are denied to have a ‘say’ while choosing their life partners. The parents,

¹ Quoted in Jayawardena et.al.: 1986: 95

the custodian of traditions, are required to do that job for them. After getting married these women are mindlessly loaded with the weight of bangles, ornaments, and conventional clothes. Such a turnaround, while artistically displayed on screen, thins the morale of the girls who want to take hold of their lives and its decisions, no matter how trivial they may seem.

In this research the focus was on the characters portrayed by women in commercial and parallel cinema and how those characters were different in both the genres. The observation has also been made with respect to the characters and how they have been differentiated. The reasons of such differences were analysed by scrutinising each movie and its content. The characters may be as small as that of a maid or as powerful as that of a mother. This research made an account of all those nuances of the characters that has been portrayed on screen to enhance or overshadow a woman's role.

Women always had the potential to act well on screen and stand tall with their male counterparts. There are cases when their potential is not completely shown to the world in order to boast the patriarchy that has always been omnipotent in our society in each and every sphere of the life. For instance, Madhuri Dixit is a very well-known name in the Hindi film industry. She was considered to be the queen of Bollywood since she had been giving blockbuster hits during the late 80s to the 90s. Still if we look at the roles that she had played in many of her movies, we could see how her male counterpart used to overshadow her hard work.

One of her movies that was taken in chapter four of this thesis that dealt with the film analysis, was *Ram Lakhan* that was directed by a renowned director, Subhash Ghai, and was released in 1989. The movie showed her as a simple village girl who was completely dependent upon her father and after getting involved with *Lakhan*, she became dependent upon him. Her exploitation in the movie has shown at several places. One of them was the incident when she was been asked to perform in a mansion and was referred to as a prostitute by the host in a degrading and humiliating way. Therefore, her role showed her as a timid and submissive girl who could not stand up for herself.

In contrast to her male lead who was not only smart and cunning but also avenged her father death in a brave manner. Here the two characters were totally different and the male was shown in a superior position to his female lead.

Women subordination is an old age practice, since the patriarchal society came into being this practice can be observed. Male domination over their female counterparts is sometimes not even looked upon as an issue in many places of the world. But still when women continued to be subjugated through generations, they finally decided to raise their voices against such oppression. They wanted to free themselves from the shackles of such bondage. This voice that women raised against female exploitation has been given the name of ‘Feminism’. Feminists simply want to uplift the position of females in this male-dominating society.

Women have always played an important role in the society but they have never given their due respect. Most of the societies are dominated by men and controlled by them. Only in a handful of the progressive societies, women have the decision-making power. This exercise of the decision-making by women was not started in a day; it took a lot of effort and a lot of time. It has been a continuous process to assert the equal rights for women by many women and some men as well. This process wanted to bring about a change in the society and it was termed as ‘Feminism’. Men have been repressing the female rights for too long when finally some women stood up against the old age customs. Feminism was started for the equality of men and women. It was a movement started for the social, political, and economic equality of everyone. Equality is, basically, a balance between a male and a female with the intention of liberating the individual. Feminism is a human rights movement. It is about proclaiming equal rights for every human being, men or women. It wanted to spread egalitarianism around the globe. The feminist scholars have divided the study of feminism into different waves based on the beliefs and ideologies pursued by the women in a particular time period.

If we talk about cinema and its traits, initially the main purpose of the cinema was to entertain and to educate the masses. Gradually it became a commercialised medium for people to earn money through making films. The commercial cinema is also known as the mainstream cinema. This kind of cinema is, as the name suggests, produced with a commercial aspect associated with it. In simple words, commercial

cinema is a business oriented cinema made for the masses in general. Mainly, all the movies that run in the theatres and shown on the television are the commercial movies. Commercial movies mostly work on a particular formula and the structure of the movies is similar to make it a success.

Parallel movies are often known as the art films. These are unique, exclusive, unconventional, and have a signature style of the director or the team. Unlike the commercial movies, parallel films do not have similar themes or settings. They are diverse in terms of plots, themes, and subjects. They are mainly concerned about the social issues and evils related to the society. It was because to change the trend of the commercial cinema and to produce some innovative movies that parallel movies came into being.

In India, commercial cinema is the most popular form of cinema. Ever since its inception, Indian commercial movies have a huge fan following. Gradually the viewership increases and now Indian commercial films, especially Hindi films, are seen in almost all the parts of the world. It has now made a niche for themselves at a global level.

Movies has been changing according to the era and the period. Each decade holds a different taste when it comes to the themes, plots, or trends of the movies. The family dramas of the 80s showed the values and modesty of the middle-class Indians in contrast to the vulgarity and lack of values of the rich and upper class Indians. The female protagonists often embodied femininity and an ideal nurturing woman. Films like Sooraj R. Barjatya's *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) showed how a middle class girl, Suman, easily adjusted to the upper class Prem's household and how she even impressed Prem's mother with her charm and her Indian values so much so that Prem's mother agreed to accept Suman as her daughter-in-law. Here in contrast to Suman was Seema, a woman belonging to the upper class, rich parents. Her westernised attire and looks were in contrast to the traditional Indian looking Suman.

Here Seema was seen as the Westernised vamp who wanted to take control of the male protagonist but Prem was in love with Suman who was morally upright and chaste. In one of the scenes Prem was talking about the girl who wears jeans and have bob cut hair, "Aisi ladki ghar ka kam kaj thodi karegi, arey matar thodi

cheelegi. Bado ki izzat, hum umro se apnapan, aur chhoto se pyaar, ye sab thodi karegi." (Such a girl will not do household chores or peel peas. She will neither respect elders, nor care for other people, nor love young kids.)

It showed how traditional women in India are seen. They are seen as humble, home makers, who does all the household chores, cooks food, and takes care of everyone in the house.

Hence, in this movie the winner was Suman who was not only innocently charming with her Indian beauty but was also full of Indian values and morals who quietly obeyed her father in all of his decisions.

Then in 1998, there was Karan Johar's *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) where Tina was seen an Indian girl who studied at Oxford as a Westernised girl in contrast to Anjali who was a tomboy, also kind of a Westernised version of an Indian girl.

But as soon as Tina fell in love with Rahul, an Indian boy, she disposes off her western attire for the Indian *salwar-kameez* to look a girl with Indian values and morals. She proves to the audience time and again that she is a typical Indian woman who sacrifices her life to give a child to her husband and who even after her death proves to be an ideal wife by asking her daughters through her letters to get Rahul married off to his ex-best friend.

Anjali, on the other hand, is also seen to put on Indian attire to look beautiful in an Indian way. Post interval of the movie has seen Anjali only in sarees and *salwar-kameez* as if western outlook does not make her beautiful. Just because she was a tomboy Rahul never notices her but once she becomes feminine by wearing Indian dresses, Rahul not only notices her but also falls in love with her.

Though Rahul often says in the movie that *we live once, we die once, and we love once*. But in his case, he loves twice and get married twice as well. Perhaps, the femininity of Anjali was too strong for him to not love her. It can easily be seen that love transforms and Indianises both Tina and Anjali for good. But all in all the movie shows the supremacy of the Indian morals and ethics over the western culture.

However, this film was criticised by many feminists saying that Anjali ought not to become a feminine to make someone fall for her. Her identity was her tomboyish look. Only to make someone love her she took a complete turn in life and

transformed her fully and became someone that is completely different from her identity.

This challenges the way an ordinary Indian girl thinks. It shows how a normal girl has a low opinion about her if she does not seem to be feminine enough to the males. And in order to find love she has to change her identity. This does not show females in a good light at all.

Family relationships are vital in the Hindi movies and a person's responsibilities and attitude towards his/her family decides whether the character is a hero or a villain. Hence, in the lost and found tales the one who takes care of the family (especially the mother) and expresses his emotions at various intervals of the movie is considered to be the good guy in the film. In contrast to the other who does not think of anyone's emotions and is rude to people is often regarded as irredeemable.

The plots may change in every film but the central conflict in Hindi films mostly revolves around the concept of 'good' and 'evil' relating to the Hindu concept of 'dharma' or duty. A fine fictional world is prepared in the world of cinema which is unrelated to the reality as such. However, it does not mean that its depiction is totally different from the real world or bizarre but simply that its aesthetic content and musical attempts segregates it from the real world where we live in. it creates its own logic and realism especially to give rise to emotions within the audience which is vital for the success of the film.

In contrast to the parallel cinema where bold themes were dealt with, commercial cinema has always been walking on a simple straight path. When it comes to experimentation, parallel films have experimented a lot more in terms of themes, storyline, and characters when compared to the commercial movies. Themes of lesbianism was first introduced through parallel films like Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996), themes of child abuse was dealt with in the films like Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), themes of bisexuality and gay were shown in movies like Onir's *I Am* (2010), and themes of erotic love were a central theme of movies like Mira Nair's *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1996).

Certain characteristics were prominent in commercial cinema and one of the famous ones have been the song and dance sequences added in between the film. Many directors have tried to omit the song and dance sequences from their movies but the

result was always a disaster. In popular or commercial Indian movies, song is a requirement of the movie. The promotion of a movie starts with its songs. The music directors and lyricists are always given a special place in the credits of the movie. On any poster or a billboard of a movie, their names are written alongside the director and producer of the film.

Apart from the songs of the film, ‘stars’ are also important feature of the Hindi movies. Those actors that rose to the heights of popularity in the country are referred to as the movie stars. Mostly male stars are paid more than the female stars. The number of male stars are also larger than the female ones.

These stars or sometimes ‘superstars’ need not be identified by names on the posters of the movies or the hand painted billboards of films mounted at almost every city in the country. These stars are popular enough to be identified by the native people only by face. A star studded movie is often more successful at the box office than a film with actors having less popularity.

Whereas, when looking at the parallel cinema we can see how it is devoid of such stars in the films. During the 70s, when the New Wave Cinema came into Hindi cinema, most of the theatre artists preferred working in the parallel movies, including Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri, Pankaj Kapoor, Ratna Pathak Shah, Supriya Pathak, etc. Many a time new faces were used to act in the movies where no commercial actors were present. It was only after the resurgence of the parallel cinema during the new millennium when off-beat movies began to consider to be movies of substance and many popular stars also tried their hands into acting in such films, including Juhi Chawla, Aishwarya Rai, etc.

Though parallel cinema gained its popularity mostly in elite classes, it was no way near the commercial cinema in terms of monetary profits, public acceptance, or recognition. Still it continued to become a strong movement throughout the 70s and 80s in a full-fledged manner. Along with the commercially popular films of India, parallel movies were being constantly produced and appreciated all over the world. Though in India there were only a few takers for such artistic movies but there were still many directors and filmmakers who were ready to create realistic cinema instead of popular movies.

The 80s, however, was quite a confusing time for the Hindi cinema. No set formula was working during this period. Romantic, comedy, fantasy, artistic, and other kinds of movies were accepted as per the audience's choice. Filmmakers were making movies one after the other no matter how much confused they were. Also it was the time when television entered the country. It was a time when people had other sources of entertainment including television and serials. Watching movies and going to the cinema was not the only means of entertainment left for the people of the country.

This was the time when Hindi cinema took notice that it had two greatest enemies now – cable television and piracy. The cable television started to telecast in India during the starting of the 90s. Privatised television channels were an excitement for the natives. India was the first country of the subcontinent to allow the telecasting of the cable network. Piracy was at its boom at this period and the film industry was unaware of its threats. It was only when the industry lost millions of dollars' worth of money because of the pirated copies of the newly released, and sometimes even unreleased, movies that it started working strongly against this threat.

But as the history of the Indian cinema had shown that film industry never lost hope and so this issue was also casted away with focus on other matters. Romantic and family oriented movies once again became the trend in the 90s.

This was the time when the growth of Indian cinema, especially Hindi cinema, was seen in the international market as well. The Hindi movies were screened at foreign lands and the box office revenue was increased like never before. Many a time Hindi were screened at any international Film Festival before even releasing in India.

New technologies were used for the production of the movies. Special effects, lighting, camera works, cinematography, and digital sound was improved way ahead from the past few decades. The movies started to be made taking the foreign audience in mind along with the Indian audience.

The storyline, plots, and themes of the movies were different from the movies of the past decades. The landscapes and set ups of the shooting were made keeping in mind the world audience rather than only the domestic audience.

But commercial Hindi films are being criticised for several reasons time and again. One of such criticisms have been the portrayal of women in the movies. When it comes to represent a hero of the film it is always a brave man with morals and who can fight the villain with valour to save the powerless heroine. Only a few commercial movies have been made with the situation vice versa and those movies can be easily counted on our fingers.

In commercial Hindi cinema, women are always seen as good or bad, the character will be in the shade of black or white there will not be any greys in it. The good woman has to be the heroine of the film while the bad woman has to be the vamp in the film. The heroine would be full of virtues and good values and could never do anything wrong. She is the one who takes care of her family, is good to her parents (and in-laws in many cases), loves her family, and is obedient to her husband no matter what. On the other hand the vamp is evil mouthed and does not care about anyone but herself. Even the dressing sense of the two females would be different from one another.

The women in the Hindi films will have a passive role. The patriarchal order of the society has to play a major role in the production of such movies. The man is always tend to be stronger than the woman in the film.

When looking into the several years of the cinema, many of the films where issues regarding the females were dealt, including V. Shantaram's *Dahej* (1950), A. Bhimsingh's *Gauri* (1968), Madhusudan Rao. V's *Devi* (1970), J.K. Bihari's *Biwi Ho To Aisi* (1988), and Madan Joshi's *Pati Parmeshwar* (1990), but the main focus was not totally on a woman. The women in such movies were shown as submissive and helpless until the hero comes in and helps them in taking control of their lives and ending the film on a happy note.

It is questionable to ask if such women exist in the world. As these females are shown as an ideal for the audience who can commit no wrong and who is pure beyond imagination. Their feelings, desires, emotions are hardly dealt with reality in the movies. They are often sacrificial when it comes to the happiness of their families. They are not seen ambitious and they are devoid of any ego also. For instance, in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Abhimaan* (1973) the heroine is a better singer than the hero of the film, which is unconventional. But to satisfy the ego of the hero,

the heroine decided never to sing again. Hence, she gives up her passion for singing only to adhere to the traditional values of marriage.

The females in the movie are mostly satisfied to be inside the private sphere rather than go out into the public sphere. Only a few popular movies in the 70s could be seen with females having a job including Jaya Bachchan in *Zanjeer* (1973) as a knife sharpener, Hema Malini in *Sholay* (1975) as a horse carriage driver, or in *Trishul* (1978) as a general manager of a company, Rakhee in *Trishul* as the corporate secretary, or in *Kaala Pathar* (1979) as a nurse, and Vidya Sinha in *Chhoti si Baat* (1975) as a private firm worker.

Such characters were almost gone in the 90s. The females were seen either a college going student who later on is married off or is seen working nowhere at all. It is only after the new millennium hits in that professional women came into foreground in the Hindi movies including Juhi Chawla being a television reporter in *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000) and an undercover agent for the secret police in *One Two Ka Four* (2001), Rani Mukherjee as a fashion designer in *Chalte Chalte* (2003), Rimi Sen as a store worker in *Hungama* (2003), Gracy Singh as a doctor in *Munna Bhai MBBS* (2003), Sushmita Sen as an assistant commissioner of police in *Samay* (2003) and a chemistry teacher in *Main Hoon Na* (2004), Shilpa Shetty as a worker in an advertising agency in *Phir Milenge* (2004), Konkona Sen Sharma as a newspaper reporter in *Page 3* (2005) and a producer in a radio channel in *Life in a... Metro* (2007), Bipasha Basu as a vice president of a corporate company in *Corporate* (2006), Preity Zinta as a fashion magazine editor in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), Vidya Balan as a radio jockey in *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), Ayesha Takia as a voiceover artist in *Sunday* (2008), Priyanka Chopra and Kangana Ranaut as models in *Fashion* (2008), Kareena Kapoor as a doctor in *3 Idiots* (2009), and Kajol as a hair dresser in *My Name is Khan* (2010).

There have been a change in the portrayal of females in the Hindi commercial movies as earlier females were most of the times shown to lure the audiences into the cinema halls. Today also this can be said to be the scene in many cases. They are objectified in most of the songs of the movies which are shown before the release of the movies. The scantily dressed females are often painted on the posters of the movies as well.

The themes and the plots of the Hindi movies have always been from a male centric. The movies were always looked upon through a male point of view. The females in the movie are hardly the centre of the story. The role of the female is always chalked around the character of the male protagonist of the movie. Many a times the role of the female is insignificant to the main plot of the film and the female is used only for providing a relief to the audience through the songs and dances in the movie.

For instance in Karan Malhotra's *Agneepath* (2012) the role of Priyanka Chopra is totally insignificant to the story line of the movie. Still she is forced into the scene to give the audience some relief from the continuous bouts of anger and fight sequences of the movie. Similarly many other heroines are unreasonably put in the action films where we can see Sunil Shetty, Sunny Deol, or Akshay Kumar being the protagonists.

According to the popular Indian conventions, an ideal woman represented on the celluloid has to be dutiful towards everyone, sacrificing for her family, obedient for his husband, and full of values and ethics. She was not supposed to do anything wrong and if she does, she must repent and apologize immediately. She was also supposed to wear decent clothes and must not smoke or drink at all.

However, there were no such protocols for the males portrayed in the Hindi cinema. Hence, it was not unusual to see the hero smoking, drinking, or flirting with girls. But there were a few female actors who broke the conventions and came into the Hindi movies setting a different trend of fashion and glamour. Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi were among those actors who portrayed strong women of the 20th century who were bold and beautiful. In fact, Parveen Babi was the first Indian female actor to be featured on the cover of the TIME magazine in 1975.

The female lead of the movie was supposed to be chaste and morally upright unlike the vamp of the movie who had no ethics and were always bolder than the heroine. But the common thing between the two females of the movie was that both of them were objectified for the audiences.

According to a famous film scholar, Shoma Chatterji, females were often used as mere objects in the Hindi cinema in the beginning. It was only gradually that their real worth was enhanced on the screen. She further added, "Each decade has presented its own brand of women in Hindi cinema. *Mother India* is a strong

political statement on a woman who can do anything to establish that justice has been done even while remaining within the framework of marriage and motherhood. She defies the micro state of being a biological mother in order to fit into the framework of becoming the mother of the nation when she shoots down her own son to save the honour of a woman of the village. The ordinary woman has hardly been visible in Hindi cinema.”

She further added that “During the time of Meena Kumari, Madhubala and their peers, the camera focussed more on the face of the leading lady than on the body. This changed radically from the 1990s when the body of the heroine became as or more important than the face. The *sati-savitri* image underwent a radical make-over probably with Nutan, who, without showing skin, made a powerful presentation in strong roles such as *Seema* and *Bandini*. Geeta Bali promoted the image of a mischievous tomboy, also a positive deviation from the *sati-savitri* image.”

During the 1970s, there was the end of romance and the rise of the violence in Hindi movies, a need for an alternative to these violent movies was also brewing inside many filmmakers. There was a kind of aesthetic vacuum in the movies of the 60s and 70s. It was not long before the signal to establish the New Wave Cinema movement entered into the Hindi cinema which was a relief from the ‘formula’ Hindi movies. Though this movement was already been started by Satyajit Ray during the 50s in Bengal but it took some time for the Indian cinema to fully acknowledge the fact that it was a useful and developing genre.

This alternative Hindi cinema, which was started by Satyajit Ray, was now finding its way by the Hindi filmmakers. It was further encouraged by the establishment of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in 1961 and the Film Archives in 1964. The institute was specifically made for the professional training of actors, directors, and technicians. Many of which went into the mainstream cinema but some of which were absorbed by the parallel cinema.

There were filmmakers who abstain from the conventions of Hindi cinema that include, song and dance sequences, romantic dialogues, unrealistic fight sequences, and a happy ending. The linear narrative and a realistic aesthetic was adopted by the directors of the parallel cinema. Showcasing the social issues and problems of the

common man, these directors contributed to this new genre. Some of the parallel filmmakers were Gulzar, Shyam Benegal, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Mahesh Bhatt, Govind Nihlani, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, and Ritwik Ghatak.

The treatment of the theme and the dialogues were much natural than those of the commercial Hindi cinema. Shyam Benegal came into the film industry from the world of advertisement and his first Hindi film *Ankur* (1974) paved the way for many such budding filmmakers. A simple story of the way lower classes were being exploited was shown in a realistic manner. His movies were appealing to the western educated intellectuals who were finding a reason to appreciate Hindi cinema. The western critics accepted this genre with open arms and till now Benegal's movies are screened in many of the international Film Festivals.

A new wave of filmmakers came to the forefront when it came to produce parallel movies. This new breed of directors were came to be known as the 'auteur' directors. They portray their own points of view while making a movie. The lighting, the camera works, the dialogues, all were synced together to show the perception of the filmmaker.

The stories were simple life stories of the common man. The protagonists were not larger-than-life but were rather the realistic people living amongst us in the country. The lavish houses, the glittery song and dance sequences, and the heroic fight sequences was missing from these movies. The clichéd characters of the commercial cinema, like the evil mother-in-law, or the suffering wife, or the brave man protecting a girl from ten goons at a time were all invisible from the scene.

Such movies were not palatable to most of the movie watchers in the country. The songs in these movies were added only if absolutely necessary. The social and political systems of the society was portrayed in a realistic manner. More often than not the movie ended tragically.

The genre brought many talented actors into the cinema including, Smita Patil, Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Anupam Kher, Pankaj Kapoor, Deepti Naval, Farooq Shaikh and many others. These actors were linked by the average movie goer as the artistic film actors. These movies were gloomy and sensitive in treatment when compared to the commercial movies which were lively and pure entertaining.

When a commercial movie used to preach or gave a social message to the society it was usually in a fun filled way with a solution that was sometimes unrealistic. But whenever these parallel movies showed social evils they never preached anything or concluded the movie by showing a solution to the problem. It mostly only aware the people of those evils and gave a realistic picture through the characters of the movie as to how would a common man face such threats of the society. Many times they left a thoughtful message for the minds of the audience to ponder over it and decide the answer for themselves.

Hence, parallel cinema is more known for its serious content of realism and naturalism than the commercial cinema which was more like a fantasy land meant for pure entertainment.

There are some differences in the commercial and the parallel cinema. One of the major differences is that of the theme and plot of the movie. Most of the time a tragic real-life situation is shown in a parallel movie. It deals with a social issue that is experienced by most of the middle or lower classes of the country. The pace of the screenplay is also a bit slow as compared to the fast pace of a commercial movie. The song and dance sequences are almost none in the parallel cinema. It mainly depicts a real life situation where there is no use of a song.

One more significant difference between the commercial and the parallel Hindi cinema movies is the treatment and portrayal of women in them. The way women have been portrayed in Indian cinema over the years also speaks volumes about their position and power (or the lack of it) in Indian society. Often, Hindi cinema, especially commercial cinema has been put in the dock for objectifying women, presenting them as useless second fiddles, or worse just using them to fill the required song and dance routine.

However, despite its sexist tendencies, Hindi cinema has also succeeded in portraying numerous women characters that were powerful enough to inspire a generation. If Mother India has a profound psychological and emotional impact on its generation, later day movies like *Bhumika*, *Arth*, *Prem Rog*, *Damini* etc took a more humane and nuanced view of women.

In recent years, a whole lot of female-oriented Hindi films too have asked pertinent questions. *Chandni Bar*, *Lajja*, *Fashion*, *No One Killed Jessica*, and more recently,

The Dirty Picture, Kahani, and Mardani portray powerful women who defiantly chose their own paths and lived on their own terms.

Though in the past, where commercial cinema used women as mere secondary participants, parallel cinema has always given a fair share to the female actors since its inception. So much so that the initial famous Hindi parallel movies were female oriented and the protagonists used to be females. Some of those movies are *Ankur, Arth, Mandi, Bhumika, Fire, Saaz*, and more recently *Bawandar, Hazaar Chaurasi ki Maa*, and *Listen...Amaya*.

Commercial movies are made mainly for the entertainment purpose and to gain profit out of the commercial success. However, parallel movies are made to ponder over the social issues prevailing in our society and to spread awareness about the various social evils around us. Many of the parallel films may have a preaching style of showing things and many may end with a very realistic and tragic ending.

Hence, commercial and parallel Hindi cinema is different in various stands including not only the treatment of the plot but also the way a theme is selected and presented on screen. The casting of actors and the way they are portrayed are also worth noticing.

As John Hodge has argued, “The traditional Western family, with its authoritarian male rule and its authoritarian adult rule, is the major training ground which initially conditions us to accept group oppression as the natural order.” We are always taught love and care in the families but are often taught how power is also important to have and, hence, the elders are often dominating the younger siblings as they are being dominated by the adults of the families. Hence, power is seen as an important tool for survival and the patriarchal society holds this power against the females of the society.

Moving back to the movies in the New Wave Cinema, particularly known as the Parallel Cinema, we can see that equal screen time is devoted to the female characters. They were more realistic and females were given strong and powerful roles. They were not only used as objects, rather they were dealt as subjects in a movie.

Throughout the years, there has been a changing trend in the portrayal of women in the Indian films. Movies at the initial years of the cinema were made in a different way as compared to the movies made in the 70s and from then those made in the recent times. At first the movies revolved around the struggles of common man but then gradually the focus shifted to romance, action, and then comedy.

Cinema expresses a complete mixture of myth and reality when showing fiction or non-fiction. Since the time of its inception, cinema must have entertained more than millions of people all around the globe. Though, Indian cinema is said to be a reflection of its culture and ethos many a times Indian cinema is criticised for becoming an escape mechanism that is not at all closely related to the reality. Much of such depiction is based on the filmmakers and their way of direction.

The female protagonists, however, also kept changing since then but on a rather slow pace when it comes to their depiction as characters. Female protagonists in Hindi commercial cinema were depicted in a stereotypical way. The good girls are fully clad wearing beautiful ornaments and are shy and obedient. Whereas, if you see a girl wearing short skirt and is not loyal or obedient, she either needs to be tamed by the male hero or will die till the end. Though, in the past few years the roles of females in Hindi movies have taken a full U-turn in terms of treatment and characterisation.

There was differences in the treatment of movies in each decade. While commercial movies were changing with having themes changed from the nehruvian era to the ‘angry young man’ action to the romantic themes. But when we look into the parallel cinema, they were also changing from one decade to another.

The 70s were the age of experiment for the Hindi filmmakers when they accepted the New Wave Movement into this film industry. When they saw that they have made the audience they included more realistic themes but this time it was different in treatment as well. While the 70s saw a much darker side of the world, 80s took a light hand on the subjects and most of the movies had songs in them, mostly *ghazals* as a kind of relief from the continuous viewing of a serious theme.

India has been changed a lot since its independence. In terms of cinema as well, India has gone through a lot of changes and modifications. If we look at the Commercial films of the Hindi film industry, we can see how the feudal village

drama of the 50s and 60s, which was considered to be the golden age of Indian cinema, has been transformed into the glossy, high budget movies with the locations of Europe and United States. Mehboob's *Mother India* (1957) was a story of courage and bravery of a woman based on the post-independence era and it was clearly an allegory of the heroic Indian nation of how it had achieved the self-sufficiency through modernisation.

The 70s and the 80s were the era that witnessed the action packed films featuring the 'angry young man' who showed how Indian underclasses have triumphed over the social injustice and political corruption. Moreover, the movies that were made during the 90s emphatically exhibited the Indian development through its wealth, grand settings, fast cars, youth culture, and cosmopolitan lifestyles, the folk inspired song and dance sequences were being changed into the hip hop Michael Jackson style form, with the unconventional camera angles and rapid editing of the MTV music videos, which was all conveniently "Indianised".

While the themes related to rural background and social issues were dominant in the 50s, the 90s saw the emergence of family drama set up in urban areas with wealthy Indian families holding onto the traditional values of our country. These films were no only big budgeted but also glossy that have songs shot at various outdoor locations including Europe, United States, Australia, and others.

These movies gave their audiences a chance to cross the threshold of their homes and enter into the extravagant lifestyles of the elite classes with the Western style mansions and luxurious villas were a common sight. The conflict now focuses on the modernity and traditional values of the country rather than the class conflicts that were predominant during the previous two decades of the angry young man films.

These family dramas of the 90s endorses the Indian traditional values through its extravagant and elaborate Indian marriage ceremonies and by showing the joint families in the modern world where nuclear families were replacing the extended family among the middle class Indian society.

According to Shyam Benegal, "The use of signs, signals and symbols often work on different levels of consciousness and have great motivating power in catalysing change in society." He even gave examples of advertising saying that "motorcycles

are no longer motorised two wheelers, they are expressions of testosterone-driven masculinity; wrist watches and pens are not utilitarian objects for which they are normally bought – they are fashion accessories and jewellery. Designer clothes are no longer simply clothes to wear – they are lifestyle symbols denoting privilege and class.”

Similarly, in movies there are certain directorial touches and symbolic shots which denote to something that is not directly said but only implied. Such scenes sometimes make a mark on the person’s consciousness while watching the movie. The audience is not always aware of the fact that they are not only watching a movie but also being influenced by those few nuances. Perhaps that is why it is said that the films reflect the society, its temperament and its frame of mind.

It would also not be wrong to say that films produced by a particular country or community usually reflect the upheavals, social movements, changing trends, and persisting traditions of that society. Cinema is not only a means of entertainment as considered by many, but the content is shaped in an artistic way so that it would become a catalyst in social change.

In all these movies that were analysed in this study, different decades produced different kinds of stories. Yet a huge change in the parallel movies can be seen from depicting rural women (*Rudaali*) to urban women (*Monsoon Wedding*), and from the confident village girls (*Mirch Masala*) to the smart new age professional girls (*Phir Milenge*). Still the commercial cinema depicted women in more or less the same light from a dependent and meek girl in *Ram Lakhan* to a shy yet professional girl in *Munna Bhai MBBS*.

If we look into the trajectory of both the genres, we can see how innovative ideas were adapted and acknowledged in the parallel cinema became hugely successful when compared to the new perceptions adapted in the commercial cinema.

While bold female characters are shown in the parallel movies, meek and timid ones are shown in most of the commercial movies. A crude reality can be seen through the representation in the parallel films. The attitude and behaviour of the female characters are much smarter even if they are seen to be villagers. For instance, in

Manthan (1976), the character of *Bindu* was shown to be a bold one when she scolded *Dr. Rao* after he took a small sample of the milk from her house. She was courageous enough to follow him and then explain the whole matter in front of a crowd of villagers. But when we see the character of *Gehna* in *Virasat* (1997) that was released two decades later, she was portrayed as a shy woman who followed her husband's words blindly.

Such portrayal clearly shows that parallel cinema was not only bold but also ahead of its time, as some would say, and showed a much realistic picture without pleasing or falsely depicting any character.

Indians have already seen the way in which women are perceived in this country. Moreover, we have been celebrating *Mahabharata* for centuries now where *Draupadi* was used as a pawn in a gambling game and on top of that humiliation, she was even disrobed by the *Kauravas* in public. We also saw some legendary kings like *Ravana* who kidnapped *Sita* and many others as well who never cared about the dignity of women including their own wives. There are certain sections in the *Shiva Mahapuran* where women are not only equated with death, snake, poison, or destructiveness but also concluded, “there is no bigger sinner than women. Women are the roots of sin, you must know.”²

Hence, women are considered to be destructive, poisonous, and degrading still they are supposed to be pious and cultured as their image is etched in the *Sati Savitri* form that had been continued from ages and which was enhanced by the cinema as well.

Electronic media is a very powerful tool in influencing the audience. Films have always played the role of preaching or teaching or even providing morals to the viewers. Cinema must provide women with more liberating, positive and influential role models.

The parallel cinema started to decline during the 1990s. The rising costs of the film production and that the investment returns could not be guaranteed for the movies were the main reasons for the decline of this genre. The political and economic turmoil and the underworld financing of the movies were not in favour of the parallel movies. Also the rising trend of television and video piracy were major threats to the

² Cited in Myers, 296

cinema, hence, filmmakers opted to close down making parallel films with such high risk factors.

In the present cinematic scenario, there are people who are trying to make Indian cinema a more real one and making slightly different kinds of films that were usually seen earlier. Some of those filmmakers are Anurag Kashyap, Anand Gandhi, and Rajat Kapoor. These films are no more considered to be included in the parallel cinema but still they are not hard core commercial Hindi films as well.

These young directors considered the new millennium as the resurgence of the parallel cinema where movies like *Black Friday* (2007), *Mithya* (2008), *Dasvidaniya* (2008), *Dev D* (2009), *Ship of Theseus* (2013), and *Ugly* (2014) are not only accepted but also critically acclaimed by many.

Similar to the commercial cinema, parallel cinema in Hindi films too underwent a lot of changes in terms of theme and storyline. While the initial decade of the parallel cinema in the Hindi film industry dealt with hard core realistic subjects with real locations and dark lightings, the next decade was a brighter one. The movies of the 70s including *Ankur*, *Manthan*, and *Bhumika* dealt with some serious themes like infidelity, loyalty, freedom, independence, and taking charge of one's own life.

Most of the parallel films of that time were shot at real locations using realistic props. Instead of involving the conventional actors from the commercial cinema, the parallel cinema preferred hiring new faces and people belonging to the theatre. Film and Television Institute both in Pune and Kolkata played an important role in inculcating a modern sensibility into the Indian cinema. Several artists from these institutes were actively involved in the parallel cinema.

If we move on to the parallel movies of the 80s, we can see how a slight transformation came to those movies. Though the subject they dealt were humane and realistic still the treatment of the story was a bit different from those of the 70s movies. A few movies included *ghazals* instead of adapting to the conventional song and dance sequences of the commercial cinema. This somehow became a trend for several of the parallel movies. They started including *ghazals* in their movies to add that as one of the differences from the commercial movies. However, during that time many of the commercial movies also started including *ghazals* in their films as

well, one of the famous movies being Mahesh Bhatt's *Naam* (1986) that had the famous *ghazal* 'Chitthi aayi hai' to its credit.

During the 90s, the parallel cinema saw a decline due to the rising cost that was involved in the production of the film and commercialisation of movies were having a negative effect on these films. Such films could not guarantee investment returns and filmmakers were reluctant to make more of these movies.

Another reason for this decline was that the National Film Development Corporation of India was not looking seriously into the exhibition and the distribution of these films. Many of the distributors thought that these films did not have the entertainment value like most of the commercial movies. Hence, screening of such movies became less and though there was some talk about building small theatres for parallel movies no such attempt was seriously made. Therefore, only a few Film Societies screened these movies but only on a single screening basis. Thus, parallel cinema tried to use production techniques like lighting, sound, editing, and background score similar to that of the commercial cinema but still it was meant to decline.

It was only during the 90s that parallel cinema saw a resurgence of this art. Though movies now were not referred to as the 'parallel' ones, they were rather being called as the off-beat movies that were produced in the Hindi film industry popularly known as the Bollywood. Ram Gopal Varma made his movie *Satya* (1998) and gave birth to a new genre in the Hindi films that came to be known as 'Mumbai noir'. It showed the societal problems in the city of Mumbai. Later on many other films came to be classified under this genre including Madhur Bhandarkar's *Chandni Bar* (2001) and *Traffic Signal* (2007), Ram Gopal Varma's *Company* (2002) and its prequel *D* (2005), and Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2004).

Many other off-beat movies came to the fore and with them came a fresh batch of filmmakers who were ready to experiment with a new genre and break the conventions of the commercial Hindi cinema once again.

The new millennium brought some more of the off-beat Hindi movies with new filmmakers as well. Here again serious themes were dealt with realism and serious acting. Many of the commercial movie actors were also ready to experiment by working in these films including Juhi Chawla, Urmila, Shilpa Shetty, Abhishek

Bachchan, Anupam Kher, Aishwarya Rai, Saif Ali Khan, Sanjay Suri, Jackie Shroff, and Jimmy Shergill.

These movies were not only critically acclaimed but also became popular amongst the mass audiences. This was the time when crossover movies came into being. Such movies were made in English language to appeal to their international viewers. Many of the movies were made in dual language to have a connection with the Indian audience as well. A crossover movie had actors from the Indian film industry with the dialogues in English language. It was actually an English language Indian film. It was basically meant for the elite class and for those Indians who lived abroad. It had a *desi* flavour to it with a Hollywood styled movie. It was more like a movie where we can experience the “East meets West” kind of a flavour.

International productions with Indian themes together made Indian crossover movies. It started with Merchant Ivory Productions when they made *The Householder* in 1963. It had an Indian setting, an Indian story, and an Indian cast, including Shashi Kapoor, Leela Naidu and Durga Khote. But the movie was in English language. It gave way to many more such ventures but it took a while before Indian directors commercially took up making films in English language.

The 1990s saw the emergence of such movies which paved way for other directors like Nagesh Kukunoor, Gurinder Chadha, and Mira Nair to make several such crossover movies. Some of the famous crossover movies are *Hyderabad Blues* (1998), *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* (2002), *15, Park Avenue* (2005), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), and *Parzania* (2007). These movies were a blend of both Hollywood movies and Indian films. Some of them even had songs in them just like an Indian film whereas most of them had only background score to go with them. These films were made on Indian themes for international acclaim. These movies showed the genre new ways of both creativity and commercial profit.

Though the theme and plot of the movie was either like a commercial film or a parallel one but the language and the treatment of the movie was a bit different from the Hindi films. Some movies were made on a set-up of a commercial film like *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) and *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002) while some movies had

the aesthetics and aura of a parallel film like *The Mistress of Spices* (2005) and *Being Cyrus* (2006).

Actor and director Rajat Kapoor had made several of such films including *Raghu Romeo* (2003), *Mithya* (2007), *Fatso* (2012), and *Ankhon Dekhi* (2014). Then there was another actor/director of the same calibre, Saurabh Shukla, who made some off-beat movies like *Raat Gayi Baat Gayi* (2009), *Pappu Can't Dance Saala* (2011), and *I M 24* (2012). Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, and Vikramaditya Motwane contribute a lot to these films by making interesting entertainer that also have a message in them.

These movies also gave break to a huge number of actors and also made way for some of the existing actors who were otherwise underrated in the commercial movies. These actors include Rajat Kapoor, Ranvir Shourie, Vinay Pathak, Neha Dhupia, Sanjay Mishra, Vijay Raaz, Brijendra Kala, Mannu Rishi, and Gul Panag.

As the new millennium barged in, it came with a lot of experiments, innovations, and excitement with it. Those bold movies that were used to make their way through the parallel movies in the 80s and 90s made their way in the commercial cinema in a full-fledged manner. Bold themes and serious storylines were dealt with pleasure in the movies that were meant for the youth that was controlling the box office of our country. More than ever, it was the time when male body also became the object of desire. Females got a chance to engage in voyeurism and they were able to ogle shamelessly.

This was the time when the females stop accepting the orders of the males and start finding the answers for themselves. They have broken the shackles of bondage that were clutching their feet for too long now. They were free from the societal as well as the psychological barriers which were put forth by the patriarchal society to hold them back. Females were free to make their own choices something that they were denied to acquire from the past several centuries under the classical male oriented society.

Women are now looking at the big picture and just like their male counterparts want to make their own place in the society. They have become ambitious, competitive, and desperate for fame. Such a society has been eventually reflected through several

of the contemporary films with females having meaningful roles, including Madhur Bhandarkar's *Page 3* (2005), *Fashion* (2008), Sudhir Mishra's *Inkaar* (2013), and Milan Luthria's *The Dirty Picture* (2011).

Clearly it shows the transformation of a traditional saree clad woman who was usually seen doing all the household chores to the modern fashionista classy woman who has an attitude of a devil and a personality of an angel.

Just like the male with their testosterone running through their blood were shown in a negative way in the movies, here females were shown sexually charged in a positive light. Movies were made where such taboo subjects were dealt with precision and creativity, including Amit Saxena's *Jism* (2003), Abbas-Mustan's *Aitraaz* (2004), Anurag Basu's *Murder* (2004), and Siddharth Anand's *Salaam Namaste* (2005).

The trend for the films have been continuously changing with females gaining equal and sometimes more screen space/time with their male counterparts. It can be the beginning of a new era, a period where even if females are not the rulers, they are also not the slaves of the patriarchal society which have oppressed their free soul and have snipped their wings for too long.

A batch of fresh filmmakers are exploring something that could make a huge difference in the film industry and the society as a whole. We can only hope to see a better future for the females all around the country when it comes to one of the most prolific film industries of the world.