EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which spaces for female assertion on are constructed and affected in commercial Hindi cinema. The researcher also wishes to review time-honoured practices future trends related to these portrayals. The fundamental concern is with the influence of tradition, culture, social environment, political factors and psychological aftermaths all these have on a female character's on-screen negotiations.

This study attempts to underline the significance of such research for feminism, humanism and women's studies. Key concerns comprise: the influence of tradition in gender divisions, gender associations and organization of domination the socio-cultural construction, the influence of oppression on female identity and the nature of between gender, culture and social divisions in relation to space, place and nature.

Terms of Enquiry

The study primarily aims to explore conceptually how gendered opinions, spaces and perceptions are projected and represented in commercial Hindi films. This function will be realized by analyzing the portrayal of a woman character of screen as well as her various on-screen negotiations and interactions.

Within this broad aim, and as elaborated in the Rationale, the terms of enquiry are as follows:

1. **Cultural & Traditional Context -**
   a) To determine the parallels in the visual codes of the epic stories with the visual codes in Bollywood films.
   b) To analyse whether spatial situations of women characters in commercial Hindi films can be seen as a reflection of female representation in the epics.
   c) To study if varied portrayals of women are resulting in and/or deviating from the reinterpretation of the mythology in the epics.

2. **Space & Place (Socio-Political and Geographical Context)**

   a) To study the areas where a female character in a commercial Hindi film asserts or negotiates her space within her environment - her physical and geographical location.

   b) To examine the metaphor and boundaries of 'space' accorded to a female character in cinema with respect to her immediate environment within her 'private sphere' - her home.

   c) To examine the metaphor and boundaries of 'space' accorded to a female character in cinema with respect to her immediate environment within her 'public sphere' - shared spaces that she exists in vis-a-vis other characters.

3. **Identity & Being (Psychological Context)**

   a) To determine how a woman character in a commercial Hindi film perceives herself in terms of her sense of self - her body and her mind.

   b) To determine how much this sense of self is affected by –

   ▪ Multiple roles played by the woman character (daughter, sister, wife, mother etc)

   ▪ Extraneous circumstances - place, situation and event - that cause a character to make a decision

   c) To determine the extent to which sense of self is associated with quantum of resistance and subsequent resolution of conflict.

4. **Matrix of Cultural & Traditional Context, Socio-Political and Geographical Context and Psychological Context**

   a) To study if varied portrayals of women are permanent or simply deviations from notions of 'popular' cinema.

   b) To study and plot the frequency and nature of assertions made by female characters

Methodology

The most critical objective of the study is to examine the **changing construction of women characters** as portrayed in popular Hindi language cinema for the period 1950-2017 and also examine the inter-relatedness of the factors that define the extent and kind of negotiation a woman character in a mainstream Hindi language film undertakes to create a space and place for herself.

The researcher examines the portrayals of women in commercial Hindi films using theoretical perspectives, backed by analytic explanation-building while analysing 28 films from 1950 - 2017. The purpose is to demonstrate the implications of these portrayals for feminist praxis in further propagation of filmic agendas, creation of policy frameworks and also add to the existing body of work on theoretically-informed research concerned with gender issues in Indian cinema. Films are produced in the context of **precise social, historical and cultural locations,** and are analytical tools through which people signify themselves and their environments to themselves and to others. For the purpose of investigating how Hindi mainstream cinema depicts Indian women and womanhood, the study places commercial Hindi movies produced in India in a detailed **narrative analysis** as well as **discourse analysis**. This approach is useful as it would help explain not only **the process of value and meaning construction** in the society, but also provide insights into **dominant ideologies**. Integrating methods of visual analysis and semiotics, while drawing on converging fields of sociology, film, psychology and cultural studies, a multidisciplinary framework has been used to examine the case studies. Since one of the objectives is also looking at analyzing trends in Hindi cinema, a chronological format has been followed in selecting the sample.

For the sake of organization, and to necessarily study theories pertaining to female positioning and representation in commercial Hindi cinema with a multidisciplinary and inter-dependent approach, the following categorization system will enable a **cross-discipline analysis** of theories:

- **The Cultural & Traditional Context** (in terms of traditional Indian culture as well as what is *traditionally* the origin of film theory)
- **The Environmental (Socio-Political and Geographical) Context**

- **The Psychodynamic Context** - concerned with how internal processes such as needs, drives and emotions motivate human behaviour. The viewpoint has advanced over the years, moving from the classic psychodynamic emphasis on innate drives and unconscious processes towards greater emphasis on the adaptive capacities of individuals and their interactions with the environment. The environments of behaviour are generally limited to the family and are conceptualized as presenting conflicts with which the individual must struggle. Mental activity, unconscious as well as conscious, is thought to serve as the motivating force in human behaviour.
- **The Interactional Context (A matrix of Self, Space, Place, Culture) -**The **inter-relatedness of the cultural, environmental and psychodynamic aspect** – that make up the Social Behavioural Context – which focuses on the matrix of the social, cultural, economic and political environments of human behaviour which have power and oppression, conflict and cooperation, stability and change as inherent factors.

Key Findings

The aim of Gender, Place and Culture is to provide a forum for debate in human geography and related disciplines. For the purpose of this study, that analyses the space negotiations by female characters in Hindi commercial films – the insights and influences are multidisciplinary. Right from literature, social sciences, to psychology and art and feminist studies, and even myths and fables, films have had a symbiotic relationship with disciplines that deal in human interaction, expression and conduct. There is, then, a significant interconnection of how a woman character in a commercial Hindi film navigates through or discovers her sense of self in a certain geographical or social space, situated in a particular cultural environment.

Media representations of Indian women reveal that they are less accepted and respected as persons and more looked upon as objects. She has three projected roles – biological, domestic and decorative. Bollywood remains an arena in which **women negotiate a plurality of both modern and traditional Indian roles**. While women may be more westernized and glamorous, at the core of these representations, they are still expected to be conservative, domesticated, subservient, and *Sita*-like. Deviant women must change their ways to meet patriarchal

expectations. Few onscreen women are educated and are not shown using their skill or in their place of work. Women are often shown in the confines of the home. Popular cinema portrays ideal women in Indian society as self-sacrificing wife and mother who glorifies in her pain to bring pleasure to others. By confining women to the private domain, Indian men derive their sense of Indianness and are free to pursue modern modes of thinking and living without guilt. These characteristics tie women to notions of nationalism and even religious continuity as they are the moral gatekeepers and transmitters of Indian values to future generations.

The findings are significant in terms of **whether cinema follows stereotypes or breaks trends and whether this is significant in societal interpretations.**

a) From theoretical point of view

Most studies pertaining to Hindi cinema asked contextual questions regarding the way in which the portrayal, treatment and development of women on screen corresponds, contradicts or supports the role of women in existing society. There has not been too much emphasis **on formal questions of cinematic expression and language**. In terms of the review of literature done for the present study, there were few cases where work has been done to **recapitulate traditional film and social theory** and initiate some of the transitional links to the structural-semiological forms of current film theory, especially in the context of Hindi films. Very little variety of realism is found in projection of women. Does cinema present the survival stories of women, struggling between the many roles and obligations that today's society imposes on them? Women are a major chunk of the country's population and hence their portrayal on screen is crucial in **determining the furtherance of already existing stereotypes in the society.** This study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge about mediated stereotypes and representation of women in mainstream Hindi cinema by addressing the representation of the evolving womanhood – a topic that has received scant research attention. Taken as a whole, this work can be considered to contribute a new framework for analysing film content which synthesises elements of corpus linguistics, information extraction, narratology and film theory. Also this would be one of the pioneering studies incorporating the Indian/ Asian model of Sadharanikaran in studying Hindi films, which have been hitherto looked at from a Western prism.

In the same vein, some Western theories have been built upon - such as Theories of Natyashastra, the Ritual View of Communication, Symbol Theories, Cultural Theories and how they 'relate' to an individual, Theories of Conflict & Hegemony and so on.

Additionally, the parallels drawn between Kenneth Burke's Pentad Theory and the Indian theories of Natyashastra and Abhinaya lend a synergised and holistic perspective to theories of film narrative.

b) From the point of view of Methodology

The study analyzes a select number of films from the perspective of **amalgamating the cultural, socio-political and geographical influences with a character's sense of individuality and assertion thereof**. In studying women's portrayals, negotiations of spaces and characterizations in Hindi cinema, the categories of the traditional and the modern have been placed more contextually against the historical and institutional conditions which produces these oppositions and contradictions. Whether the construction of women characters changed over a period of time has been examined by means of studying films from different time periods. The films studied are considered typical and representative of a greater pool of films from a specific era. In terms of the methodology, emphasis was placed on **recapitulating traditional film and social theories** and initiate some of the transitional links to the structural-semiological forms of current film theory, especially in the context of Hindi films. The study bridges these gaps by analysing films from the perspective of Indian theories - more relevant to Indian contexts than Western theories.

The construction of women characters has been examined from a "self-actualisation" perspective, as well as from an external perspective. The external perspective considers the woman characters' relationships with other people, the work she does and the social activities in which she engages. Keeping alive the sense of agency, this study explores how and to what extent women simultaneously comply with and resist the dominant patriarchal representations that saturate Indian cinema.

During the Review of Literature, it was found that **prior studies were analysing narrative content from singular aspects** - either assertion or lack of it - without studying the dynamics of negotiation underplay. By incorporating the traditional, socio-political as well as individual

dynamics that influence a woman character's on-screen negotiation, this study provides a holistic perspective to representations and stereotypes by explaining what causes them.

Significantly, no other study has used **a comparative method by incorporating a 'control group'** - as a measure of a film's acceptance, as measured by its box office collections which reveal how has the film been received by audiences.

c) Policy Implications

James. D. Wolfensohn, former chairman of World Bank has said that free press lies in the center of justice and development. In an age where filmmakers are governed by private profit instead of public welfare, the study may pave a middle path.

Also, in present times, the Censor Board has come under the scanner for various aspects. Is it a tool of manipulation in the hands of the dominant ideologies or political parties or is it a certifying body? The study helps highlight the fact that a film that affects the masses cannot be 'controlled' by an organisation whose primary function is to be a certifying body. In this aspect, this study makes a case for the Censor Board to be made more flexible and culture-specific that is able to gauge the mood of the society and present a mirror to it when needed.

The study also brings to the fore an important debate - are films with strong themes that flow against the current allowed a fair audience or not. Policy-makers stand to analyse the 'bitter pill' aspect of cinema - some films need to be allowed an audience if social changes are sought.

The study is also a tool for filmmakers to analyse the trends that are emerging in 'women's cinema'. Is this a movement that will define film production and spectatorship? Was the mass accepted film as well as the 'avante garde' film on the same platform in terms of the portrayal of the women characters? Why not? Does that need to be changed?