

Women Journalist(s) on Celluloid: Understanding the Portrayal of Female Journalist(s) in Hindi Cinema

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ABSTRACT

Women journalist(s) have been portrayed in a number of Hindi films. This article examines the portrayal of women journalist(s) in Bollywood cinema. As the practice and profession of journalism has evolved over the years, so has the representation of journalism on screen. Many media reports suggest that even in the 21st century women continue to face hurdles in their professional journey as a journalist. The visual representation of female journalists plays a crucial role in constructing a social identity of women newsmakers. The objective of analysing media representations is to determine the beliefs and attitudes that go into the choosing of words and images that seek to depict real life, as well as what this can imply about the positions of the groups being portrayed. This article discusses how women journalists have been portrayed in Bollywood journalism films over the last two decades (2000-2020). It looks into whether these movies encourage or denigrate female journalists. The study contends that there is a mutually beneficial interaction between the news media and society seen in the explicit depictions of journalism in Hindi movies.

Keywords: *Women in Media, Journalism, Film Studies.*

Introduction

Any discussion about the position of women journalists in newsrooms should begin with the larger picture. For about four decades in India, women working in journalism and other media organisations have led the charge for change. Women in journalism and other media professions have worked independently and through organised groups. Typically, women are often considered for secondary roles in media and journalism. But with changing times, women journalists have created a distinct identity for themselves and are also playing a crucial role to reverse patterns of workplace discrimination. This research article is about the portrayal of women journalists in journalism films. Over the years, filmmakers have been attracted by the role of the journalist, and the news industry has been represented in a variety of ways in Indian cinema. Research on popular culture portrayals is important because such portrayals shape popular perceptions as well as beliefs about journalism. Film theory suggests that films are a reflection of real-life (to some extent), and therefore, films play an important role in documenting the contemporary trends of journalism.

The main point to focus on is the degree to which films mediate our lives. Not only films occupy an important position in our personal space, rather, it creates interlinkages between ourselves and the world around us beyond our personal environment and our direct sensory activities. Cinematic portrayals provide us with various points of contacts or point of reference with the institutions of the society. Since it is a reflection of our culture, films reflect what and how our society is like. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that different portrayals of women journalists in films provide a prism of various perspectives, making it possible to comprehend the social status of women journalists.

Review of Literature

Many studies have investigated the ways in which the media and the film industry portray reality. Lea Hellmueller in the paper "Professional roles and news construction: a media sociology conceptualization of journalists' role conception and performance" talks about how with the media and journalism industries undergoing such dramatic transformation, it will be fascinating to see how future research compares media cultures and media outlets (especially online news and niche media)

institutions may be impacted by various restrictions or which provide more room for a negotiation of journalistic responsibilities and whose political institutions allow for more deliberate thinking and do not impose as many rigid limits. We believe that only by overcoming this prejudice can the variety of journalism in society, as well as the roles, norms, and practice, be appreciated.

Journalists go through extreme hardships in their career and many cinematic arts has tried portraying this through movies and shows. There are many researches done on this portrayal and one such paper is "Modern Portrayals of Journalism in Film" by Alexa Milan. The paper talks about how films depicting the media have also changed throughout the years, reflecting the development of the business itself. In screw ball comedies from the 1930s, such as "It Happened One Night" and "Meet John Doe," journalists make moral mistakes but ultimately redeem themselves. In light of the rise of new media as the primary source of news, the cinematic representation of journalism is continually developing. While there is a large body of literature on classic journalism films, less has been written on more recent documentaries that mirror contemporary journalistic practices.

Methodology: Film Theory and Film Analysis

Film not only entertains, but it also informs and educates people about the world. Most importantly, cinema influences audience's perceptions of the world. Most people aren't conscious of this persuasion or influence, but films do persuade their audiences to think about things in a certain way. Film analysis is the process in which film is analyzed in terms of semiotics, narrative structure, cultural context, and mise-en-scene, among other approaches. (Long, Minervini, & Gladd, 2021) In this research article the author will do an analysis of the 'Narrative Structure' which is a crucial aspect of Film Analysis.

The 'Narrative Structure Analysis' is the analysis of the story elements, including plot structure, character motivations, and theme. Like the dramatic structure of literature (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution), film has what is known as the Three-Act Structure: "Act One: Setup, Act Two: Confrontation, and Act Three: Resolution." (Long, Minervini, & Gladd, 2021)

Further, elements such as Mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound, and narration are fundamental aspects of analysing a film. The lighting, space, costume, decor, and acting style are all part of the Mise-en-scene. Different techniques of framing, visual quality, composition, continuity, camera movements, and perspectives are all components of cinematography. The forms of editing, which could be continuity or montage, can be used to analyse the editing of a film. Also, there are both diegetic and nondiegetic aspects in the sound of a movie. Film analysis has grown in importance in the field of media and communication studies because films are a powerful medium of mass communication.

This research aims to analyse the portrayal of women journalists in Hindi films. The period chosen for the study is between 2000 to 2020. Journalism films that fall within the scope of the study are as follows:

S.No.	Film	Director	Year of Release	Character
1.	Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani	Aziz Mirza	2000	Television Journalist/Reporter cum anchor
2.	Lakshya	Farhan Akhtar	2004	Television journalist/ Reporter cum anchor
3.	Page 3	Madhur Bhandarkar	2005	Print Media Journalist
4.	Peepli Live	Anusha Rizvi	2010	Television Journalist/ reporter cum anchor
5.	No One Killed Jessica	Raj Kumar Gupta	2011	Television Journalist/ reporter cum anchor
6.	Satyagraha	Prakash Jha	2013	Television Journalist/ reporter
7.	Noor	Sunhil Sippy	2017	New Media Journalist

Findings and Observation

Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani is a satirical take on the ethical concerns in media. It is the story of two successful and fiercely ambitious television journalists Ajay Bakshi (Shah Rukh Khan) and Ria Banerjee (Juhi Chawla) who work in rival news channels. While Ajay is the 'Star Reporter' of Kay TV, Ria is the face of Galaxy TV. The entire film revolves around their professional lives as TV reporters. The character of Ria Banerjee is played by Juhi Chawla who is portrayed as a successful journalist and anchor. She is outspoken, smart and clever in getting her work done by her charm. The film is a satirical take on the ethical concerns in media such as Fake News. After 23 years since its first release, the film holds up well now, even after a gap of two decades. The movie's narrative and theme warned of the danger of "Fake News" and the "commercialization of news."

As mentioned in an article, "Phir Bhi Dil Hai" Hindustani had warned us 20 years ago about Fake News and called for a Revolution. The moral of this Aziz Mirza film starring Shah Rukh Khan and Juhi Chawla is, "Listen to your heart, not the Government's interpretation of things." (Ghosh, 2020)

The film *Lakshya* is set against the background of the Kargil War. Actress Priety Zinta's onscreen character of Romila Dutta is inspired by a real-life journalist. Romila Dutta is depicted as a career woman, passionate about journalism, ambitious, fearless and not afraid of taking risks. She is portrayed as a powerful and strong character who breaks all stereotypes.

The character of the female journalist is just the opposite in the critically acclaimed movie *Page 3* which revolves around the life of a young journalist Madhavi Sharma (Konkona Sen Sharma). She is shown to be a well-known *Page 3* reporter and works for a popular newspaper in Mumbai. Her job as a 'Page 3' reporter is to attend parties of high-profile celebrities and socialites and publish their stories on the *Page 3* of the newspaper. In Mumbai's urban culture, parties are hosted by businessmen, fashion icons and celebrities for networking and business opportunities. The film gives a sneak peek into Mumbai's celebrity culture through the eyes of a journalist. As a part of her reporting job, Madhavi interacts with shallow high-society people every day. With passing time, she questions her own conscious as a journalist and is eager to do 'meaningful journalism'.

Another film analysed is '*Peepli Live*'. It is a hard-hitting commentary about farmer's suicide and the media frenzy surrounding it. *Peepli Live* is a film that depicts ethical dilemmas in television news in a dramatic way. The premise of the film is centred on two socio-political themes. The first is the problem of farmers committing suicide as a result of debt and poverty. The second theme relates to ethical concerns and challenges in Indian media. "*Peepli Live* is directed by Anusha Rizvi and Mahmood Farooqui but it bears the hallmark of the cinema of concern heralded by Aamir Khan within mainstream Bollywood." (Raghavendra, 2010)

Actress Malaika Shenoy is portrayed as a television reporter named Nandita Malik. She plays the role of an experienced journalist who competes with rival news channels. She has earned name, fame and money in the field of journalism and is a modern, go-getter journalist. Roy is also not afraid to take risks and is often seen digging beyond the surface of the news story. She also believes in the idea of creating sensational news to gather more eyeballs in order to generate a higher TRP (Tele Rating Points) than the rival news channels.

A similar depiction of a dynamic female journo is seen in the movie '*No One Killed Jessica*'. The film was directed by Rajkumar Gupta and was released in the year 2011. The storyline of the movie dwells on a media advocacy campaign for seeking justice for the common man. Rani Mukherjee plays the role of a bold and fearless television reporter named Meera. The plot of the film rests on her shoulders as she is the social crusader who creates a media advocacy campaign for 'speaking truth to the power'.

Another fearless female journalist portrayed in the movie *Satyagraha* is played by the actress Kareena Kapoor. The hard-headed TV reporter Yasmin is always out in the field to do ground reporting. Yasmin's role in *Satyagraha* indicates the importance of 'constructive journalism' in creating a social moment in national interest. In the light of such depictions, it is not an exaggeration to state that society has high expectations of journalists, and that the public frequently considers media as a 'last resort' for dealing with societal crises or issues of major public concern.

The character of Noor is portrayed as a 'cub reporter' who dreams of making it big in the field of journalism. The emergence and popularity of online journalism is shown brilliantly in the film *Noor*, in which journalist Noor (Sonakshi Sinha) publishes her investigative story about the whereabouts of an organ harvesting scam on an internet site using the hashtag #iamnoor.

Conclusion

Journalism and the media are often considered the watchdogs of society, and the on-screen construction of journalistic characters reaffirms that society holds journalism in high regard as the 'fourth pillar of democracy'. Journalism films cultivate popular perceptions, tales, and myths about journalism, and hence have cultural relevance as text(s). In Bollywood films, ethical journalists are portrayed as heroes, whereas unethical journalists are portrayed as scoundrels (villains). Journalists who are 'social crusaders' are investigative reporters or war reporters who risk their lives in warzone. The study affirms that women journalists in media have been filmed in varying roles and profiles such as television reporter, news anchor, *Page 3* reporter, war correspondent, cub reporter and investigative journalist.

On the screen as in reality, female journalists in India have historically struggled to gain equality with their male peers. But a slew of recent Bollywood films depicting female reporters indicate that change may be afoot. (Khorana, 2012) This study affirms that most depictions of women journalists are progressive portrayals. Women journalists have been shown in impressive roles. Whether it is the character of Ria Banerjee in *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani*, the bold and fearless Romila in *Lakshya* or the courageous journalist Noor; all depictions of women journalists are powerful portrayals.

The only exception in the study is the film *Page 3* in which the protagonist is portrayed as a *Page 3* reporter who is undervalued and vulnerable.

The image of the female journalist in popular culture revolves around a dichotomy never quite resolved. The female journalist faces an ongoing dilemma: How to incorporate the masculine traits of journalism essential for success – being aggressive, self-reliant, curious, tough, ambitious, cynical, cocky, unsympathetic – while still being the woman society would like her to be – compassionate, caring, loving, maternal, sympathetic. Female reporters and editors in fiction have fought to overcome this central contradiction throughout the 20th century and are still fighting the battle today. (Saltzman, 2003)

The marginalisation of female journalists occurs when females are not represented as independent agents. The female journalist who takes centre stage in *Page 3* is unable to fully realise her potential as a reporter and is perceived by the editor and other male journalists with stereotyped attitudes. The plot highlights the concern about the marginalisation of women journalists.

Overall, the study suggests that most movies feature career-oriented women journalists. They have been portrayed as professional journalists who are socially conscious and have a high level of integrity. *The media to a large extent serve to constitute our perceptions and definitions of social reality and normality for the purposes of public, shared social life, and are a key source of standards, models and norms. (Quail, 2010)*. In the light of the above statement by noted media scholar Denis McQuail, it is worth mentioning that such encouraging depictions not only support narratives about the empowerment of women, but also serve as modern examples of women making significant contributions to the journalism industry.

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