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The Depiction of Rape Scenes in Popular Hindi Cinema: A Critical Examination of Representation of Gender in Media

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Abstract: **The portrayal of female gender in performing arts has been a product of constant societal change. From the days when Female parts were acted upon by male counterparts to the advent of motion pictures and the role of women in making the medium their own , the journey has been long. This can be also studied under the context of anthropology, gender issues, and women emancipation. The female characters have been always fixed into the narrative by the virtue of a certain appeal they exhibit. From Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory in cinema to the aesthetics of violence in cinema , both have been depicted in experimental ways in films. The portrayal of rape scenes dishonoring the basic existential being of any women have been shot in a number of ways to make a case in point in the film narrative. The shooting of such sequences and the psychological impact of this on the female casts is a critical study within cinema studies. Much to the women empowerment and vocal voices there has been a critical debate on how to film the female body and more so traumatic sequences such as the depiction of rape in the narrative.**

Keywords: Rape, Portrayal, Gender, Narrative, Filming

1. INTRODUCTION

From the early mehboob khan film Amar to Insaaf ka tarazu there have been interesting and challenging times when such sequences required a kind of sensitive treatment while shooting the scenes. Rape scenes or attempt to rape have found a profound space in hindi cinema more so after the 1970's. Some of these sequences have found critics' examination and media coverage of a kind but many have gone into oblivion as far as discourse of a kind concerning these scenes is concerned. Most of the rape scenes have been shot with a voyeristic intent and have often passed the censorship test on their way to be included in the final reel of the film. The Kuleshov effect is also used to full effect where multiple shots convening a specific meaning are played simultaneously to bring required impact into the scene. The Kuleshov effect in a way also deals with censorship issues in a rather convenient manner. Many B grade films have thrived on such gory depiction of the violation of the female body catering to a specific adult target audience and their psychographics and demographics. Cineartists bodies

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and crusaders of emancipation for female artists in cinema have fought a long battle for imposition of guidelines and norms on movie sets while shooting rape sequences in films.

Rape sequences have been shot in mostly close up angles where the violation of the female body and the expressions of trauma have been portrayed. The film Dushman with a psychopath postman playing a rapist who rapes and kills the women, a depiction of Jack the ripper on screen. Marital rapes have been depicted in some films like Daraar(1997), Agnisakshi(1996) both in visual narrative as well as a latent backdrop. 7 Khoon Maaf (2011), is an interesting (and long) take on Ruskin Bond's Susanna's Seven Husbands, 7 Khoon Maaf delves into the very hush-hush territory of marital rape. Susanna's (Priyanka Chopra) third husband Musafir (Irrfan Khan) is a poet, a charmer by the day and a fiend who assaults and rapes her night after night.

A dominant narrative of child rape in critically acclaimed films like Jaago(2004) and in Pitaah(2002) do present a scenario where even girl child are not spared by the colloquial psyche of a society where potential rapists are in abundance.

Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat(1996) starring Rani Mukherjee in the lead role is raped what follows the traumatic incident is that the rapist and the rape victim gets married in a popular solution propounded by the society. The rape scene is filmed where a group of childred close their eyes as they bear witness to the horryfying gory scene where the disgruntled insulted male character(He was earlier slapped by the female lead in a scene for his misogynist pro dowry remarks at a wedding) .

The perpetrators of rape in bombay films are also depicted in a way. Sploit, brash, with a peculiar sense of getup. Their are certainly lechereous men hell bent on proving their masculinity and dominance by forcibly mounting on weaker sex to satiate their quest for lust and power. The resultant self defence by weaker sex involves slapping such rapists, bitting their hands or kicking phallus. The result is that the rapist becomes even more ferocious and then his lustful endeavours take violent dimensions.The disturbing visuals showing a rape scene are often picturized in a multicamera setup where some preexisting cultural signages associated with violation of female honor such as the bangles geeting crushed or forehead tika being swooshed off or the lipstick getting wiped of its lusture and color are some of the signifiers of female honor getting trampled upon by one or the other forms of penetrative forceful sex. The rehabilitation of rape victims after the unfateful aftermath is equally disturbing with peer pressure on getting married to the rapist or aborting the conceived child are common. Name calling happens with society addressing the rape victims as symbols of loose character, impure and worthy of ostracization. Such characters also known as the victims of rape either tread on the path of vengenance , self harm(often resulting in sucide) or simply trying to live with the trauma.

Guilty(2020) an OTT film is a film in the recent past which delves on serious debate about the psyche of rape and issues with victimhood. How in college and university spaces the conflict between class and privilege can bear serious consequences. The rape sequence in the film is shown in flashback with alot of voyerism playing a part in the background, as one of the accomplice of the rapist is filming the event with all the diabolical quirkiness in action. The

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juxtaposition of the #Metoo movement in the narrative proves to be a vital cog in understanding the concepts related to consensual sex and issue with consent.

Mohra(1994) - The gang rape scene is bone chilling and proves to be an important turn in the narrative where a law abiding citizen in order to avenge the turmoil caused in his life due to the death of his rape victim sister and then sucided by his wife to protect her honour from the same rapists turns into a cold assasin, out to cleanse the society of drug mafias . As the rapists were under the influence of drugs and so was the male friend of the victim who couldn't protect her. It is important to note that the girl needs a male protection of sorts to venture out in late night parties. The rape scene is filmed with a loud western music playing in the background, maybe a signifier of how western influence corrupts the youth leading them to debauchery and an increase in sex drive.

Matroobhoomi - A Nation without women(2003) is a film set in an alternate setting where due to widespread female infanticide, a crisis of extreme distortion in sex ratio occurs. A girl is obliged to wed five male members of a family and barring one, who truly loves her, all the other takes turn to have forcible sex with her. Even the patriarch of the family makes sexual advances towards her daughter in law and rapes her.

Ankush(1986) is a vigilante film where the vagabonds , good for nothing street loafers, take revenge when a woman who is also behind their transformation gets raped. The film tells the story of four lower middle class unemployed young men in Mumbai who feel disconnected with society and are wasting their lives, when new neighbours, the beautiful young girl Anita and her grandmother, change their perspective. The men change their attitude and are trying to blend in with the normal, honest and hard-working society of 1980s India when Anita is raped at the hands of her employers. However, the culprits are let off for lack of evidence and Anita commits suicide. Having lost faith in the law of the land, the men take revenge on each culprit, killing them. They are later tried, with all four receiving capital punishment for doing what they thought was right. The depiction of rape scene is done with acute sensitivity without voyeristic intent and is one of the few examples where a necessity in narrative is done with an aplomb of camera work and direction.

The rape scenes have been filmed in a number of perspectives and styles, some incite a kind of voyeristic appeal whereas some have a sense of deep sensitivity in them. In the absence of guidelines and lack of pre contractual agreement as to the the filming of rape scenes clauses there have been multiple instances when a sensitive and traumatic experience of rape has been filmed with a kind of eroticism and voyerism. The censorship rules over the times have also influenced the framing of such sequences in the narrative. The certification process in India has given a rating of ‘A’ to the films and the fight on the part of the makers of the film is to get a ‘UA’ certificate.

Insaaf ka tarazu(1980) is a big budgeted film from a big production house B R chopra films where an important sequence is the rape of the female lead by a maniac villian. The narrative which follows this is a courtroom battle for justice and truth. The sequence is known to present a struggle and fear full of traumatic upheavals.In Insaaf ka Tarazu , Justicia is a woman, a blinded woman. The Tarazu of Insaaf in this story interestingly tips in the favour of the criminal

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time and again. First, Zeenat Aman is shown being brutally raped by Raj Babbar in a graphic scene that sexualises her more, portrays a criminal act less. Right from the helpless woman's bra straps being dramatically removed (expect background music) to the enormous amount of her skin showed, the rapist just throws "rapist looks" but the camera stays on her.

The critically acclaimed Damini(1993) has been touted as one of the most realistic woman-centric films in Bollywood. Damini A Raj kumar Santoshi film has a traumatic rape sequence in it , inflexion point of the plot. A rape done by members of priveledge class on someone who comes from a lower starta of society.

It goes on to tell the story of how a rich family breeds absolute brutes. Damini witnesses the rape of their domestic help at the hands of her husband's brother. The rape done amidst the festivities of Holi is traumatic to the core. A girl is grabbed and taken to unused area in a big palatial house where the perpetrators notably under the influence of intoxicants takes violent turn to rape the victim. The victim happens to be an innocent and bright maid of a promising future at the same household. The violation of her body and soul is so extreme that a scene where the daughter in law of the household who witnessed the scene when visits the victim in a hospital, the victim is shown to be bleeding profusely.

Vinod Mehra and Rekha play newly weds in Ghar (1978), are really happy with their youthful love. However, paradise is lost when Mehra's character Vikas Chandra gets attacked by a bunch of miscreants who then abduct his wife and rape her.Disturbingly close to the Delhi gang-rape case in its order of events, the young couple walk out of a late movie and get no cabs to get back home.

Madhuri Dixit plays Kajri, a young "low caste" girl (the camera loves to linger more on Madhuri’s curves than the issue at hand) who gets raped by a powerful man in Prem Granth (1996). However, this man remains in the background as the story follows a search led out for Kajri by her guileless lover Somen (Rishi Kapoor) who finally discovers a woman who has lost a child. A child born to her by way of rape.The film ends at a vengeful note with the rapist being burnt on Dussehra (again the Goddess Durga motif) which in turn raises a gamut of problematic questions. The film's approach to a sensitive issue like rape is crude and conveniently primitive.

The media portrayal of sensitive issues like rape have been depicted in various ways in cinema. A need for gender sensitization can be an important aspect in creating a sort of literacy on gender issues and crime. The role of cinema as a powerful mass medium, the impressions it is capable of leaving on masses and the predominant ways of depicting the gender on screen is an important study with several dimensions noteworthy of public discourse.

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