

A STUDY OF FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE BOLLYWOOD MOVIE “QUEEN”

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the depiction of women and evaluates the role of film in promoting gender equality through contemporary media and examines the movie “Queen.” This movie breaks the stereotype that only men can be the hero and women must be provided with support, protection, safety and security by their families. In this movie, the main female protagonist Rani is shown in the lead role and as a hero. Through this paper, the main motive is to provide cinema as a powerful medium to spread attention towards female liberty and self-discovery. Instead of discussing the depiction of women in literature, cinema is taken into consideration. Hence the main motive of the paper is to examine the leading character Rani, a sensitive and shy character, finds her voice and creates an identity of her own by giving inspiration to many women.

Keywords: *Self-sufficient, Feminism, Identity, Patriarchy, New Woman*

Identity is a form of self-expression and articulation is necessary to establish it. Although many aspects of female content and the institution of marriage have changed since the early 20th century, a lot of change has been visualized in the attitude of women. Women are becoming more aware of how important they are in the institution of marriage and equality between men and women. They are not ready to internalize the age-old concept of femininity. They strive for their freedom and rights. The journey of self-definition leads to a powerful challenge to external definitions that control the image of women. It refers to the power dynamics involved in finding oneself, rejecting external definitions and controlling the image of women. Visual media was inherently patriarchal in nature. The language employed is male centred. However, in the movie Queen, the visual media has depicted a change in the representation of women. Now-a-days, media has played an important role in the modernization of society in Indian cinema in the way women are portrayed. This paper tries to examine the rapid changes in the role of women in Indian cinema. The motive of this paper is to find her voice and create her own identity.

In “Queen”, when Rani is rejected by her fiancé, she draws up all her courage and decides to go on her honeymoon to Paris all by her own, ending up on a whirlwind journey of self-discovery and growth. The movie shattered stereotypes about local women and what the trajectory of our lives should be. Through her travel, she meets friends that help her to find comfort and happiness in her life, and in fact, becomes the Queen of her life. Although women are guaranteed human rights by the Indian Constitution, how far these rights are mandatory for qualitative and meaningful survival is arguable topic. Cinema has always been a strong medium, which has played a role in spreading attention towards human rights in Indian society. In the research paper titled “Feminism in Indian Cinema: A Critical Analysis”, Price Prasad asserts that in the realm of movie Queen, We witness a woman's transformation, blossoming beyond societal expectations. The protagonist embarks on a journey of self-discovery, shedding the shackles of conformity, and embracing her individuality. Her unwritten destiny unfolds against a backdrop of liberation, inspiring countless others to question the confines that hold them captive. (b172)

Rani, the protagonist of the film “Queen” belongs to an Indian family where women are believed to do only household chores such as cooking and sewing. It is engraved in our society that girls should do these things from a young age. Girls usually buy toys like kitchen appliances or household toys, while boys buy cars, guns, bats, etc. It instils the mindset at a very tender age that women run the household of the family and men are the bread winners. Rani was always accompanied by her young brother since he was 5-6 years of age. This shows the mindset of the society that women are a vulnerable group in the society and always need the protection of men.

Rani is heartbroken when she is rejected by her fiancé Vijay and does not want to accept the truth. This can be seen when she repeatedly asks him if he is serious or just trying to prank with her. She is too worried not only for her but also for her family who will be taunted and judged by the society. In the so-called perfect life, women are always considered the reason for the broken marriages and people refuse to accept them. Being alone is further considered as a great misfortune by the society. The fiancé of the protagonist is shown as a stereotypical Indian male figure. Vijay acts negatively towards Rani's love for dancing, driving and working. In a flashback to his disapproval of Rani's work, he says:

Kya zarurat hai ye sab job wkarnay ki? Bekar ki baat hai, kya subha 8 baje se raat tak bahaar rahoge? Mai tumhe bukhaa rakhungha kya? Mai kar raha hu na job! Kya vishwas nhi hai mujh pe? (Why should you work? What/s the point? Why stay out all day? Am I going to starve you? I have a job! Do you have faith in me or not? Christine de Pizan in *The City of Ladies* (1404) has also argued that till date women are blamed and are held responsible for everything and men are never questioned for their action. She asserts that, “neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex, but in the perfection of conduct and virtues.” This point towards the hypocrisy of the society and Indian movies are certainly taking the right step in this regard. The patriarchal power structure is the root cause for oppression, subjugation and inequality in the society. Women can only free themselves from the age old chain if they can understand the dynamics of subjugation and overthrow and reconstruct the society accordingly.

Rani as a protagonist in the film faces the patriarchal system as women faced in earlier times. This shows the worst side of our society. The people of our society think that women can't be independent. In this context, Rani is portrayed as a woman who is dependent on her family and on her fiancé for her daily life decisions and important life decisions as well.

But Rani's decision to travel to Paris alone on her honeymoon shows the brighter side of her and after this journey undertaken by her she realises self-discovery and attains self-affirmation. This journey is symbolic of the journey that everyone has to undertake to break the stigma, taboos and unjust nature of the society to attain self supremacy and be self-sufficient. In Paris, Rani meets VijayLakshmi (Lisa Haydon) a skinny Indo-French girl who befriends and teaches her a lesson about love, desire and life. Gradually Rani's low self-esteem was replaced by self-confidence. Before she knew what was happening, she moves towards the sex capital of the world. International travel plays an important role in Rani's emergence as a new Indian woman and sees, to balance travel and entertainment with her personal pursuits, respectively, in the narrative of modernity in the context of globalization.

Rani as a protagonist looks like an emerging woman. There are many incidents that show the hidden courage and power of her. In Paris, there is a scene in the first half of the movie where a thief tries to steal her bag in Paris, but she refused to give it up. She grabbed the bag with all her strength. When Rani goes on shopping with VijayLakshmi, and changes in the dressing room, she sends one of her picture to Vijay. Seeing Rani's photos after her transformation, Vijay got attracted towards her and wanted her back in his life. He takes Rani as a doll to play with and this makes him to go in search for Rani.

As the movie proceeds, Rani begins to understand the honour and respect do not depend on the honour and the chastity of the women but it is used as the weapon by the patriarchal society to control women. From the character of VijayLakshmi, Rani learns about the normality of sex, her poor relationships with women and the many responsibilities and sacrifices women must make for their family. The film makes us understand that sexuality should not be merely seen as an expression of self, as in the New Sexuality Women's portrayal, but an effect of commerce and the transnational movement of labour and capital. Rani knows what it means to work with sex, as she tells Rukshar, “Ye toh bahut hee mushkil kaam hai” (This job is so hard. The film thus depicts the gender in the financial sector and shows that the woman has an organization even though she approves of her work as a foreign worker.

Tracing the heroin's transformation in to a new woman, the film highlights the contradictions and denials surrounding the role. Queen reflects the expulsion by representing an upper or middle class Hindu heterosexual protagonist as the New Woman, even though it creates space for other non-Hindu women and explores non-heterosexual desires. Similarly, two gestures of expression and control throughout the movie are symptomatic of the paradoxes surrounding the New Woman and how the New Woman emerges as the ultimate symbol of the modern world of New India and is protected and controlled by contradictory signs of westernization in the patriarchal system. Therefore, one does not fail to see the reshaped Rani as the need for “modernization instead of westernization” that the new woman and the new India need (Arora, 2014).

Thus the overall movie “Queen” makes a statement about women because it show the outcome of a woman who values herself and begins to express herself, follows her heart and live life on her terms. Throughout her physical and emotional journey, the character of Rani develops and explores the limitations and failures of some traditional institutions and hegemonic patriarchal social standards and ideologies in supporting the desires and ideas of 21st century women. However, despite the film/s own feminist tenor, the protagonist never breaks the rules of bourgeois patriarchal culture, even if some of the film tastes delight in flirting with crime. The film shows that the creation of new woman is also an affirmation of the renewal of gender. Therefore the new woman is not about the elimination of old/traditional woman, but also the fictionalization and taming of the new woman. Through Rani's embodiment, one can see how Bollywood's new Indian woman operates as a controlling concept, dispensing advice on maintaining true Indianess on screen despite industry and stripe. Customs are open to the moral education of woman. Queen with its possibilities and limitations, is symptomatic of a society in transition, which like many other Bollywood films, is also linked to the change that have occurred since 1990's. There is a paradigm shift in the portrayal of women in films, from entertainment to empowerment. It clearly shows the approach and attitude of society and changing the reality in cinema also.

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