

GENDER ROLES AND REPRESENTATIONS IN BOLLYWOOD ITEM SONGS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EMERGING TERMS

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Abstract

Gender based polarization among the people of different societies exists since the time immemorial. It is reflected through attitude, behavior and discourse of the humanity as a whole. Findings of various gender based studies reveal that males were assigned with the tags of bravery and roles of active performance whereas females were known by the name of frailty and assigned passive roles in the walk of life. This study has focused on gender roles and representations reflected in discourse of music. Items songs of the Bollywood movies have been targeted on the basis of their popularity and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model of Fairclough has been applied for the analysis of emerging terms in these songs. The study reveals that under the significant influence of Bollywood social inequalities are reproduced, represented and reinforced through popular music especially Item Songs. The audience capture innate message in the musical discourse, which implicitly suggests the acceptance of female roles in terms of social performance at lower level under the influence of males. It is quite significant to explore the patriarchal ideology in terms of its influence which causes subordinations and creates a sense of inferiority among the females, and also portrays them as inferiors and usable commodities.

Keyword: Gender, Role, Representation, Item Song, Emerging Term.

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INTRODUCTION

Bollywood stands as the world's second largest film industry and has gained the status of a very powerful source of entertainment not only in the subcontinent but in the western world as well. By emerging as the largest producer of films marketed throughout the world, it has spread its tentacles in the world of entertainment around the globe. For the western masses it is a great source of getting insight into the Indian culture portrayed through movies in the form of rituals, traditions, music and dance etc. There has always been huge social impact on Indian cinema but the interesting thing is that it was never one sided, rather it goes both ways. Although there is a great debate about Bollywood as a true depiction of Indian Culture and Society, one cannot deny the strong possibility for the reflections of reality. Bollywood films are mostly musical, catchy music and dance numbers act as a key to success for these films thereby guaranteeing their commercial success. Music as well as dance has undoubtedly been one of the most defining characteristics of Indian movies. In order to promote and market these movies internationally before their release, music and dance numbers are used as a convenient vehicle. Hence the role of songs in Indian movies has been pivotal since the emergence of Bollywood film industry.

The increasing popularity of the songs interspersed with dance has emerged as a uniquely powerful marketing technique. Most important to mention here is the concept of "item songs" which is rapidly gaining popularity and fame in the current Bollywood industry. Item songs gain popularity even before the movie is released, and their success paves the way for the success of movie in which it appears. The item song also termed as item number, a highly charged song and dance sequence is mostly performed by a beautiful provocative dancing women, also known as an 'item girl'. The inclusion of item songs is not a new phenomenon in Hindi movies, in fact, item songs appeared in Bollywood movies as early as 1950s, but since then there is a huge difference in the way they have been

pasteurized, especially in the settings, choreography, and the dressing and moves of the lead actor performing the song. However in the 1980s and 1990s, flirtatious and hesitant suggestiveness of the item songs of 1950s is replaced by more open evocativeness, even less clothing and lyrics that leave little to the imagination.

Despite all the differences between item songs in the past and present few things have been consistent throughout as far as gender representations of Men and Women are concerned. In active roles Men have often been represented as saviours, powerful, bold, heroes protecting and rescuing the heroine. Whereas in passive roles, especially in the songs, they are represented as royal majesties enjoying the moves and steps of heroines who are reduced to an object of entertainment. The interesting thing to note is that, while retaining its two extremes, this difference is widening with the passage of time. Keeping all this in the backdrop, this paper will focus on the analysis of lyrics of ten item songs in all, five songs focusing on the representation of women, and five representing males. The main objective of the analysis is to explore the ideology behind these differences in representations and to explore the role of power and hegemony leading to the different depictions of men and women in the binary categories of positive and negative, of powerful and powerless.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual basis for this analysis is adopted from Norman Fairclough's ideas on discourse and power, and discourse and Ideology. The mode of analysis would be qualitative and focusing on micro as well as macro analysis of the sample lyrics, there will be an attempt to link social practice and linguistic practice for exploring the relationship between language, power and ideology. Fairclough's model for Critical Discourse Analysis focused on three aspects mainly, text (the object of analysis), discursive practice-the processes by means of which the object is produced and received (production,

distribution and consumption), and social practice-the socio-historical conditions which govern these processes- (social and historical context). Each of these dimensions requires a different kind of analysis according to Fairclough. For example, text analysis with focus on description, processing analysis with focus on interpretation, and social analysis with focus on explanation. This three dimensional method of discourse analysis introduced by Norman Fairclough will be used as the main analytical tool for the analysis in this paper.

The micro and macro level analysis will focus on the discursive elements and strategies which deserve to achieve special attention. For this purpose the analysis will focus on certain important aspects: How is the text positioning Men and Women? Whose interests are served and whose interests are negated by this positioning? What are the consequences of this positioning? The way persons (men/women) are named and referred to linguistically. The traits, qualities, characteristics and features attributed to them. The ideology behind these labels and attributions reflects Overt Vs Covert power. The discursive construction of US and Them is the basic fundament of discourse of (representation) identity and difference. In the light of these questions I will explore the discursive strategies, which are all involved in the positive self-and negative other-presentation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The communication among the human beings takes place through various interactions (personal, social, cultural, official, formal, semiformal, informal etc). These interactions result into their respective texts (written or oral). These texts result into various types of discourse but it cannot be interpreted as texts which are produced without specific objectives of the producers. In accordance with the point of view of van Dijk (1997a), discourse is such a phenomenon which cannot be comprehended appropriately outside a socio-cultural setting. It is also claimed by van Dijk that formulation of the

discursive language does not require a series of words or clauses and sentences only rather it is the name of a sequence which comprises acts sharing a reciprocal relationship. This sequence does not involve speakers, senders, listeners, or receivers only but also acknowledge their various roles in the social setup. Their roles as father or mother, employer or employee, wife or husband etc. enable them to establish their identity through use of language. It stands pertinent to pay due consideration to these extra-linguistic elements in the process of discourse analysis.

According to (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000), ideological national interests, socially motivated movements and politically designed social identities can be better examined through discourse analysis. These identities may be referred to gender in the prevailing social dichotomies in certain communities and societies of the world. Along with the social and economical situations, the study of gender and identities also fall under the purview of discourse analysis. The point of view of Liu (2008) on discourse also favours that multifaceted identities and social relations are established, competitively contested and confronted through discourse. In addition to this claim, Fairclough (2005) also talks about the two aspects of discourse analysis in particular: 1) the associations in the perspective of social affairs with respect to discourse are realized and critically examined in discourse analysis, 2) the semiotic connections between social events, structures and practices are traced / discussed linguistically and made comprehensible through discourse analysis.

In accordance with the point of view of Butler (2003), there are certain principles which are mandatory to be given due considerations in the process of discourse analysis and the same are appended below:

1. Discourse analysis is required to deal with information / data which stays genuine and reliable in the natural circumstances.
2. The process of discourse analysis is obliged to be on familiar terms with the dynamic and behaviorist nature of discourse.

3. The contestants of a situational discourse must be referred as representatives of certain communal and cultural faction along with their recognition as essentials of specific discourse.
4. Last but not the least and the most important one as well, the description of the pragmatic and semantic associations among the participants of a discourse must be realized and taken into account accordingly.

The social interactions are analyzed in the perspective of linguistic oriented constituents through critical discourse analysis (CDA) by Fairclough (1989). According to Fairclough, the rudiments of linguistic play a significant role for the representation of cultural and social associations in prevalent system of socially and culturally connected communities and societies, and CDA a method of discourse analysis recognized as a multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach which furnishes comparatively detailed and comprehensive analysis for discourse in its various forms. CDA is denoted by Fairclough as a critical approach, because the links among the discursive practices and communal procedures are discussed and criticized through it under the rubric of social ideologies and power politics. The structure provided by the Fairclough (1995) comprises three main aspects of analysis which are interconnected to each other and the same are produced in the following:

1. Text which may include spoken or written language.
2. Practice of discourse in the form of production of a text or may be interpretation of a text.
3. Involvement of the relevant social and cultural aspect prevalent in that particular society.

However, in accordance with the reflections of Mayer (2008), multiple methodologies are available in terms of application of CDA which display the focus of the research scholars in two dimensions:

theoretical or philosophical. For example, 1) the methodology of Fairclough (1995) is based upon neo-capitalism in accordance with Marxist point of view, which assigns a mission to CDA for the recognition of supremacy and disproportion / disparity in human relationship along with the identification of reasons and schemes of its projection and reproduction, 2) whereas the framework of van Dijk (1997a) for CDA, follows a perusal of cognition in the social perspective in search of connections between collective cognition and communal organism prevalent among the people of a society, 3) Wodak (2002) has deliberated a different approach for CDA which is known as DHA (Discourse Historical Approach) and it is meant to discover historical link of the discourse in terms of its phrases or complete arguments in the issues of political nature (difference of creed / breed, dichotomy of faith, discrimination of race etc.) particularly.

The study of gender representation in discourse (language) has been considered quite significant by Nuyts (1990), Lakoff (2004) and Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013). As a member of a society the realization of self-existence also entails a sense of being female or male and the same is reflected in the discourse. According to Lakoff (2004), the negotiation of gender in discourse is deemed imperative to be elaborated in terms of its different ways for better understanding of gender based roles in social interactions. This task falls under the scope of CDA which deals with cases of subjugation and inequity among the members of the same society reflected in their day to day interactions through their own language. The differentiations on the basis of gender, also falls under the similar scope without any significant exception. The tags of females and males may be referred to the time of birth, which are further conformed and modified in accordance with their communal, discursive and cultural practices with the passage of time: also known as a process of socialization (Wodak, 1997). It is further emphasized by the Wodak that these labels are unswervingly linked to the

communal appraisal of the females and males along with their social positions in the particular society and the definitions of these labels, tags and attributes of gender may differ and change with the passage of time (generation after generation).

There is majority of the researches conducted in this regard which reveal that gender studies cannot be separated from discourse analysis. It may be further emphasized that gender researches are profoundly incorporated into discourse analyses. CDA exploits the maximum part of its study on gender and media discourse and therefore, results into entrenching the unequivocal forms of struggle and conflict (Meyer and Wodak, 2000). The significance of discourse studies in the perspective of gender distinctiveness has also been highlighted and emphasized by Talbot (2010). It is claimed by Talbot that such discursive assessment divulges the methodology of language use for communal reproduction and subsequent social revolution.

The main concern of the studies based on CDA is to determine how language is applied or manipulated for the portrayal of the image of self and others indirectly. Image defines gender based social relations and designates positions of powerful as well as oppressed members of the community in social setup. According to Talbot (2010) one member of the society acts / behaves under a broad spectrum of duties and responsibilities which are reflected in the relevant social discourse. No one can exist without them, for example a woman linguistically represented as she is constituted as person of the society by some deeds and discursive practices. It also means that gender based social activities / performances are contextually situated under the influence of cultural norms, values, traditions, customs etc. The stereotypical polarization of gender (femininity and masculinity) places the males and females at active and passive positions respectively.

Analysis

Under the influence of Bollywood the growing popularity of songs and especially items songs in the subcontinent makes them a potent source of influencing the masses. Although, apparently songs are just a playful source of entertainment but at the deeper and broader level they are used as an important tool of hegemony by constructing and perpetuating stereotypes about men and women. These stereotypes are not only constructed but they get so popular and hence get legitimized when they are consumed by the masses unquestionably. The popular terms or the titles about men and women emerging out of these songs become talk of the town especially youth and consciously or unconsciously create influence on their beliefs and ideology. These popular terms and titles about men and women, constructed and perpetuated in item songs is the main focus of this analysis.

Lexical choices for Women	Lexical choices for Men
<i>MUNNI</i> Budnam	Sing is <i>KING</i>
<i>SHEELA</i> ki Jwaani	Shehansha <i>BOSS</i>
Chickni <i>CHAMAILI</i>	<i>KHILAARI</i> Bhaiya
<i>JALAIBI</i> Bai	<i>DABANGG</i>
Baby <i>DOLL</i>	

Titles used for Men and Women in songs' lyrics

Objectification and commodification of women Vs Glorification of Men: Micro level analysis of the text

The most important aspect of analyzing representation of gender in popular songs lyrics is to look at the way men and women are positioned. This analysis of gender positioning in lyrics gives an insight into many important areas concerning gender and language use. The Item Songs in particular objectify female bodies as purchasable commodities whereas men are positioned on the pedestal of heroism.

Women are presented as “Baby Doll”, “Jalaibi Bai”, “Chikni Chamaili”, all signifying non-living objects which can be displayed and appreciated on the basis of their external features and use. Equating women with such non-living objects points to some very serious implications. A *Baby Doll* for example is just a toy, having no feelings and emotions, no thoughts, a lifeless object which is completely passive and can be used and exploited in any way. as a toy it can be picked up for one’s pleasure or can even be thrown away if one doesn’t feel like playing with it. Thus, completely, dependent on the moods and choices of the ones, who is using it. Look at the term *Jalaibi Bai*, the very first part of the term refers to something eatable *Jalaibi*- a kind of sweet, but when combined with the second word *Bai* it has quite different implications. The word *Bai* has very negative connotations in the South Asian culture because it is particularly associated with the sex workers. The use of word *Bai* is presenting women with all its negative connotations, as something on display which can be purchased. The term *Chikni Chamaili*, though apparently the word *Chamaili* referring to a flower but when it is combined with *Chikni* here again it carries a number of negative connotations because this word is used as a slang for something which is sexually attractive and provocative.

One recent item song has introduced quite popular term *Munni* which is very famous with all its implied meanings and suggestiveness. In the same song *Munni* is objectified as *Zandu Balm*- a kind of balm which is used as muscle relaxant. The objectification of women is not only limited to the choices of vocabulary but it goes beyond that: Especially the way these songs are choreographed and picturised focusing on female bodies, hyper sexualization, an object of male gaze, and cameras close ups on female body. This focuses on the sexual appeal on female body, dancing in the middle of the chorus, surrounded by and looked upon by male co-dancers and the Hero, shows that women are objectified and commodified to satisfy and please men.

This objectification of women as *Item Girls* in Item Songs leads ultimately to their commodification. In fact, the very use of the word *Item*, in its literal sense, signifies a product or a commodity which is there for purchase. *Item* is also used as slang, particularly for women, implicitly pointing to their body and sexual appeal. The suggestiveness of both words as well as visual in these songs guarantees a larger appeal and audience thereby serving as a tool of advertising and sale for the film producers.

When it comes to the representations of men in songs, the focus completely shifts from passive and lifeless to very active and energetic. Men are positioned as “King”, “Boss”, and “Khilaari” / “Dabang”-carrying and exercising all the power and energy as active agents. They are seen not as the receivers of an action but rather as individuals, very much alive, having agency to emerge as glorified and celebrated heroes. The terms used for males *King*, *Boss*, *Dabang*, *Khilaari* all have not just positive but heroic connotations attached focusing on the achievements of the characters rather than on body or looks. The interesting point to note is that there even is an element of pride, power and strength in choreography of songs which present Men in main roles. The moves and steps of the heroes are full of attitude, pride and dominance. They are not objects of gaze like their female counterparts, rather they become more of an impressive model to be followed. Since Songs are a popular genre, these dichotomous representations of men and women unconsciously or consciously penetrate into society thereby furthering the gender gaps.

Songs and Stereotypes-Item Girls Vs Kings & Bosses

According to Fairclough’s theoretical propositions which frame his approach to CDA there is two way relationship between language and society-the way language is used affects the way world is represented. This two way relationship between language and society is very important for understanding the connection between the two. It is commonly believed that society impacts language but it is also

important to understand how language impacts and influences society. It is pertinent to understand how language creates, perpetuates and promotes certain stereotypes, positive as well as negative. With the boom in popularity of Item Songs gender stereotypes have taken quite different shape in the present scenario. The classical shy, docile and coy heroine performing on the songs with quite delicate steps is now replaced by a provocative, seductive and throbbing female of the Item Songs. The most famous stereotype, rather notorious, to be more realistic, is the concept of *Item Girl*- a stereotype which is fully loaded with negative verbal as well as visual references with no room for the possibility of any positive reference being attached to it. The girls which were once metaphorically praised as *Rose* and *Moon* are now appreciated as *Item*, *Chikni* and *Hot*.

Attributes for Women	Attributes for Men
<i>Munni k Gaal Gulaabi nain Shraabi chaal Nawaabi</i>	<i>Sing is King</i>
<i>Sheela ki Jawaani</i>	<i>Boss Hai Hukam Ka Ikka Boss- Laakhon ka Sikka Boss</i>
<i>Jalaibi Bai Zulphon say Raat main nay ki Chehray say chandni ki</i>	<i>Khilaari Bhaiya-aar lagayenge paar lagayenge –Sab ki doobti Naiyya</i>
<i>Chikni Chamaili –Bichu Naina, zehreeli aank ,Kamsin Kamariya-</i>	<i>Jo sab ka baar uthaave re hai wohi DABANGG</i>

Attributes used for Women & Men in Item Songs Lyrics

Munni, *Sheela*, *Baby Doll*, *Jalaibi Bai*, and *Chikni Chamaili* are the most popular stereotypes now a days which has added a new lens to the way women are taken. In all these representations, women have been reduced to just an object of entertainment, especially for men. Women as *ItemGirls* are pictured as dancing while surrounded by men all around gazing and commenting on their body and moves.

Almost sixty percent lyrics of an Item Song focus on describing the physical features of women either explicitly or implicitly: *Sheela ki Jawaani*, this is the most repeated line throughout the song describing her *Jawaani*-(Youth) in physical terms accompanied by very suggestive dancing steps. *Munni k Gaal Gulaabi nain Shraabi chaal Nawaabi* – here *Munni* is the lead actor in the song and the song focuses on her beauty by similes describing her pinkish cheeks, drunken eyes and royal walk. *Jalaibi Bai Zulfon say Raat main nay ki Chehray say chandni ki* – and *Chikni Chamaili –Bichu Naina, zehreeli aank ,Kamsin Kamariya-* all focusing on the physical features as typical embodiment of women – and stereotypical expectations of beauty from women. Long thick hair, fair pinkish complexion, *Nasheeli Ankhain* (Drunk Eyes), and *Patli Kamar* (thin waist) signify the typical expectations from a female irrespective of her qualities and competence.

Quite contrary to the female stereotypes, depiction of Men in these Item Songs is very much on the positive track where men, with all their highlighted masculinity, are positioned as heroes. Men are not celebrated and appreciated for their physical features but rather in terms of their actions which are exaggerated to the extent of heroic stature. For example-in song *Singh is king*-the very title positions men as superior beings having power and authority. Later in the song the hero is issuing orders like a king when he says *Follow Me, Listen to Me*, the typical patriarchal image of a man, who is active and who is issuing orders in an authoritative manner. The next song portraying the hero as Boss continues: *Boss Hai Hukam Ka Ikka Boss-Laakhon ka Sikka Boss*. The term *Boss* again places men at high pedestal in a superior role. The cards' metaphor *Hukkam ka Ikka* refers to the superiority and value of the hero which is further complemented by the phrase *Laakhon ka Sikka*. The song *Khilari Bhaiya* proceeds as- *aar lagayenge paar lagayenge –Sabki doobti Naiyya-* here the hero emerges as a savior who is not dependent and who has the ability to rescue people around.

Hence, the above analysis highlights some serious implications about the way stereotypes are created, validated and popularized with the help of language. The difference in gender representations in these songs seems to work along binary division of positive and negative, good and bad, powerful and powerless, and superior and inferior. On one hand these songs are adding new dimensions to the stereotypical image of a women, and quite unfortunately these are even more negative as compared to the past. But on the other hand they are maintaining the older versions of expectations from women which is more in terms of physical features and less in terms of ability, actions and performance. This combination of past and present gives birth to yet another stereotype in the form of *Item Girl*. Whereas for men, the stereotype of positive and powerful is further strengthened and perpetuated.

Gender Representations in Songs-Reflection of Power & Ideology

According to Fairclough, while analyzing any text we should keep in mind that discourse is shaped by relations of power and invested with ideologies. The shaping of discourse is a stake in power struggles that language is a powerful mechanism for social control. The notion of Power can best be described in terms of Control. Language can be used as an effective tool for exercising power through control. The previous discussion has focused on micro level analysis of the differences in the labels, attributes and traits used for men and women. Now I will try to build up a link from micro to macro level analysis in order to explore the ideology behind these labels and attributions will also explore the element of power and control as reflected in the way language is used for men and women.

In item songs the power lies with men. They are attributed as *king*, *Boss* and *Dabang*. Let's look at above mentioned examples in table 1.2 with the lens of power and ideology at work. For example, in the song *Sing is King* the hero says *follow me-listen to me-* reflections of control and power are explicitly evident in this line suggesting that the power lies with the *King* and the rest have to listen and follow. *Boss Hai*

Hukam Ka Ikka Boss-Laakhon ka Sikka Boss. Although the word *Boss* in itself carries full power and control it is further empowered by the use of metaphor like the winning card *Hukam ka Ikka*. In cards game, the specific card *Ikka* or *A* is such a powerful card that it has the power of victory for the player who possesses it. Furthermore, *Khilaari Bhaiya* has been portrayed as the one who is taken as *paar lagaen gay sab ki nayya*- assigning heroic stature to him.

From above examples in table 1.2 we can observe that women are represented as passive objects, unlike men, women are described only in terms of physical and aesthetic beauty and not in terms of an active soul having control or power to accomplish heroic actions. While positioning women in terms of physical attributes is a way of trivializing their potential as individuals. No matter how bold and confident persona of an *Item Girl* emerges apparently, especially as far as the visual aspect of item Songs is concerned, yet, deep down the reality has not changed much. They are still presented as powerless and marginalized group. One very interesting point about the sample Item Songs is that, for all songs the lyrics have been written by the Male lyricists. So, one can get an insight into the ideology behind the production of these songs and the differences in gender representations. It seems as if the male lyricists are consciously or unconsciously giving vent to their biases. The typical patriarchal ideology of a powerful dominating, male Vs a powerless, passive female seems to be at play. But the unfortunate fact is that it's the females who are performing in these Item Songs which may also be a biased strategy to validate and legitimize the stereotypes as depicted.

CONCLUSION:

The negative stereotypical images of women along with sexually provocative representations as, *Item Girls* in Bollywood movies has serious implications for society. The marked difference in gender representations of men and women in popular songs is crucial because it advances gender stereotypes, objectifies female body and

endorses patriarchal ideologies. The depiction of females in item songs is not only a reflection of previously developed ideology but it also promotes certain values and ideologies in the society.

Under the overwhelming influence of Bollywood social inequalities are reproduced, represented and reinforced through popular music like *Item Songs*. The audience internalize inherent message in the narrative, which implicitly suggest that status-quo and social inertia should not be challenged. The important point to be focused here is that there is need to investigate the link between this patriarchal ideology and how it is perpetuating subordinations and inferiority for females in society by portraying them in inferior roles as usable commodities.

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