

Dismantling the Stereotype: A Perspective on PINK

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ABSTRACT:

Films are one of the major sources of entertainment for people in India as elsewhere across the globe. Films of any country mirror its culture, tradition, hopes, aspirations of people besides lot many other factors. In totality, films could be termed as the cultural consciousness of a nation. However, sometimes, among these stereotypical portrayals, there have been films dealing with women's issues. Moving away from the usual tradition, these movies have attempted to give the women central roles. Pink is one such Bollywood flick that dares to portray the contemporary issues bothering the Indian women of today. The film tries to raise such questions as: Is it unexpected of women to be modern? Don't they have the right to say what they want to say to men? Is freedom something reserved only for men? Etc. The present paper tries to examine these questions in the backdrop of the movie.

KEYWORDS:

Culture, film, Bollywood, stereotype, tradition.

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India is the largest producer of movies in the world. With around 2000 movies a year, the reach of Indian movies has crossed Indian boundaries to several continents. The movies are now being screened in more than 90 countries worldwide. The country produces films in about 25 languages. Among these, Hindi films have the privilege of being called National Cinema of the nation. Hindi films are known as Bollywood movies, Bollywood, a word which is similar to the word Hollywood of America.

Movies can be categorized roughly as Mainstream or commercial or popular films and Parallel or art cinema. If art cinema tries to project life in its real color, commercial cinema need not do it. This very quality makes commercial films more popular among masses. Even then, the influence they have on people is huge. Sometimes, this mass appeal creates problems for the producers!

Actors in India enjoy a very special status among general public. Many a time, they are revered on par with Gods and there have been

instances of fans erecting temples for them. Taking advantage of this strange affection, many actors have succeeded in carving out a safe political career. M.G. Ramachandran, Jayalalitha, Ambareesh, Shatrughan Sinha, Paresh Rawal, Hema Malini are a few such popular actors to name.

Keeping these details in the background, this paper tries to analyze a Bollywood movie titled PINK of 2016. In the paper, an attempt has been made to look into the stereotypical roles assigned to women historically, the reason for such portrayals; movies that did not fit into this age-old mold; and how is PINK one such movie?

By the way what is PINK all about? PINK narrates a scintillating story of three young educated working women of Delhi Minal Arora, Falak Ali and Andrea Tariang. The girls' one casual night-out turns out to be a nightmare when they go out with three young men for dinner, one of whom is well-connected. There are attempts of molestation and retaliation. Minal is arrested and there ensues a legal battle between the two sides. The girls are portrayed as prostitutes in the courtroom because of their independent living, their way of dressing and their occasional habit of boozing. However, they are rescued by a retired lawyer with timely legal assistance. The girls are acquitted of all the charges while the boys get what they deserve!

PINK is a welcome change in Bollywood. Because, historically women are denied the kind of role and space that are given in the movie; or in the very male-dominated industry. If we look at Indian cinema, it is quite interesting to know women's arrival on silver screen. The very first Indian feature film Raja Harishchandra of 1913 did not have a single woman actor. It was the young man Anna Salunke who played the role of queen Taramati in the film. The film's director Phalke had approached many women, including the women of red light areas, to play the role. But, no one had accepted the offer as those were the days when acting was considered a disreputable career for women!

Two theatre artists Durgabai Kamat and Kamaladevi Gokhale became the first female actors to have acted in an Indian feature film. Even afterwards, for a few years, only women of Jewish origin and Anglo-Indians acted in films hiding their original names. Prominent actors of 1920s were Ruby Meyers aka Sulochana, Esther Abrams aka Pramila, Renee Smith aka Sita Devi, Iris Gasper aka Sabita Devi, Susan Solomon

aka Firoza Begum, Effie Hippolet aka Indira Devi, Bonnie Bird aka Lalita Devi, Beryl Claessen aka Madhuri and Winnie Stewart aka Manorama. According to Kathryn Hansen, audience, chiefly men, accepted these 'Gori Miss' as they could possess the "English" Beauty, and in doing so enact a reversal of power relations that prevailed in British dominated colonial society.¹

It was only after the arrival of Durga Khote in 1932, an educated English speaking Brahmin woman, on screen that many Indian women started choosing acting as a profession. Shantha Apte and Shobana Samarth were prominent among them. But, it was unfortunate that women in films were always denied significant roles. They were given limited, secondary and marginal roles. Even now, things are not so different. The so called heroine roles are mere glamour-doll roles and there is nothing special about them. They are used only as objects of male gaze. They are fitted in films as bearing the burden of sexual objectification. Hence, they become the bearer, and not the maker of meaning as said by the famous feminist film critic Laura Mulvey. Even though women are inevitable in commercial movies, they are 'used' for supplementary and stereotypical roles; that of hero's paramour, villain's moll, ill-fated mother, wise grandma, heroine's friend, bubbly sister etc.

Analyzing reasons for such ill representation, Jyothika Viridi, in her seminal work, *The Cinematic Imagination* claims that even after a century, women are still doubly vitiated and subordinated by a nationalist patriarchy and a sexist film industry. Quoting Partha Chatterjee's essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," she says that in the nineteenth century a popular version of womanhood was created by the nationalists in response to colonial rule. The fight for freedom was termed by the nationalists as the struggle between insiders and the outsiders, between the material and the spiritual, between the 'us' and 'them.' It was argued that when men fought with the material aspects of the West, it was the women's duty to keep the spiritual aspects of the home intact, thereby serving the interest of the nation. It was always believed that if the West was at its best in terms of arts, science and technology, it was never anywhere near in the spiritual qualities of India which resided in the inner sanctum of homes. The traditional woman kept these qualities intact and this role of women was perpetuated in the minds of people not only by literature but different media as well, cinema not being an exception.

However, rarely there have been shifts in the way women are portrayed on screen. The change can chiefly be attributed to globalization, films attaining the status of an industry, multiplex culture to list a few. *Astitva* (2000), *Lajja* (2001), *Parineeta* (2005), *Kahaani* (2012), *English Vinglish* (2012), *Gulaab Gang* (2013), *Queen* (2014) fall into this category. The movie presently taken for study PINK is one more entry into this list.

Several factors make PINK a special one. The movie is a bitter critique of male chauvinism that exists even in the 21st century developing India. It attempts to change the feudal mindset of umpteen Indian male who have different set of rules for men and women. Be it very ordinary issues like the way one dresses, smiles, eats, drinks or talks, rules are different. Men make rules here and women are forced to submit to their illogical fancies. The movie denounces such ideas.

The movie has three strong female characters as mentioned earlier. Minal, Falak and Andrea are in Delhi to eke out a living. On a night out, Minal and Andrea become victims of molestation by Rajveer and his friend Raunak. Minal attacks Rajveer in self-defense and the three friends leave. Rajveer's friend Ankit Malhotra enters the scene and pitches for revenge. He takes the lead to teach the girls a befitting 'lesson' as they are not so easy to 'bend.' Falak loses her job, Andrea is stalked and Minal is molested once again. When Minal files a complaint with police, a counter complaint gets lodged and Minal gets arrested. Deepak, the girls' neighbor-lawyer fights the case for them. With his expertise, he brings out the darker shade of boys' mentality. Explaining about a girl's safety manual, he rips open the orthodox mindset of the oppressors.

According to Rajveer and his friends, the girls got what they deserved because they had the habit of going to rock concerts at night and had even the habit of drinking alcohol. Rajveer tells in the court that girls who belong to 'decent families' never drink. Boozing is a sign of wicked character and when a girl has all these negative characters, she would definitely be sexually promiscuous. Boys could take any liberty with such girls as they are readily available for anything. Even a friendly smile and touch could also hint at one being immoral in character. The waiter and the manager's testimony in court is also similar to Rajveer's cheap thought.

Women can't invite male friends to their house especially when they are not living with their parents. Such liberty could mean that they are infidel. One of the girls' neighbors feels so and he has no qualms in sharing this dirty thought openly in court. The respectable society expects women to invite their male counterparts to their home only in the presence of elders. If no elders are there, God must save them.

When the perpetrators of crime are well-connected, women have no safety, even from the law enforcing authorities. When Minal and her friend go to an inspector to lodge a complaint against Rajveer and his friends, the inspector not only discourages them, but even casts a suspicious eye on them. He too believes that women should not come out at night or that they should not drink. Women's these attitudes would prove detrimental to their own safety. Better they stay indoors.

In his concluding argument, lawyer Deepak, the role brilliantly enacted by veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan, tells the court that the word 'No' is not merely a word. It is a complete sentence in itself. When a girl says 'No' to someone, it requires no further logic, explanation, clarification or even a definition. The other person may be anyone, let him be the husband of the lady, No means No. The man cannot take liberty with the lady. PINK's overall message lies in these remarks. It is better patriarchy understands this message.

Conclusion:

For ages, there have been several questions unanswered when it comes to the rights of women. Is freedom something reserved for men? Why are women victimized and stigmatized when tried to exercise their basic rights? How can there be different sets of rules for two different sexes on numerous trivial issues? PINK does not provide answers to all these questions, but it succeeds in instigating a thought process in several minds which are feudal or timid in nature. PINK dismantles stereotype on this front and that's why it is different.

Notes:

1. Kathryn Hansen: 'Stri Bhumika: Female Impersonators and Actresses on Parsee Stage'; EPW, 29 August 1998. Web.

Film:

1. PINK. Dir. Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury. Perf. Amitabh Bachchan, Taapsee Pannu, Kirti Kulhari, Andrea Tariang, Angad Bedi, and Piyush Mishra. NH STUDIOZ, 2016. Film.

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