



Review Article

DOI: 10.58966/JCM2025416

## Bollywood's Feminist Revolution: A Study of the Emerging Trends and Themes in the Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema

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### ARTICLE INFO

**Article history:**

Received: 25 January, 2025

Revised: 07 February, 2025

Accepted: 04 March, 2025

Published: 22 March, 2025

**Keywords:**

Bollywood, Gender Representation, Female Gaze, Female Protagonist, Women Centric.

### ABSTRACT

Women's perception of themselves in today's modern world has been profoundly affected by the media and has played an important role in modernizing societies. Previously men were considered to be the breadwinners in most societies, while women would be the homemakers.

Indian cinema has witnessed a significant transformation in the portrayal of women in its films in recent decades. Modern films depict women as increasingly autonomous, confident, and driven by their professional aspirations. India is characterized by a highly patriarchal society, and this has been especially true for women. In contemporary movies, gender representation has rapidly changed in Bollywood impacting patriarchal Indian culture where the depiction of women breaking out of conventional roles and proving themselves creating new benchmarks.

This study analyzes four women-centric Bollywood movies namely Saand Ki Aankh, Queen, Mimi and Gangubai Kathiawadi concentrating on the evolving patterns of how female characters are portrayed in movies. This study aims to assess the depiction of female gaze using a triangulation of both quantitative and visual content analysis methods discussing the shift in paradigm and portrayal of women as self-reliant, motivated, and career-oriented protagonists.

### INTRODUCTION

There's a notion that movies are meant to amuse, to transport the audience to a realm that appears drastically distinct from reality and provides solace from the everyday grind. Among the mass media that is consumed by large audiences, movies are essential for the creation of opinions, the building of images, and the maintenance of stereotypes. Contemporary Indian society is changing and people are starting to question, since now females are portrayed in

Bollywood movies as independent, courageous, strong, and lead roles. There has been a great deal of progress in the representation of women in Bollywood cinema from classical cinema to modern cinema. The Indian film industry has been a popular source of entertainment since the 1930s, with generations of performances under its belt.

Despite the large attendance at theatres and the success of blockbusters, most films have the trait of portraying males as manly protagonists while relegating female parts to chauvinist stereotypes. Because of this, the absence of equality in media, both on and off screen, has sparked debate regarding gender stereotypes, the calibre of media that the general public consumes, and the misconception of a balanced society.

The ideal of the perfect woman is frequently promoted in movies by supporting roles as romantic interests or in "nurturing" professions, wherein they are shown as weak, docile, and incapable of standing up for themselves or their opinions. Such films are not only far from reality, but also give people a distorted and inaccurate image of women's capabilities and interests, thereby indirectly promoting inequality. Throughout its almost seventy-

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**Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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year history, Bollywood has featured a variety of female lead characters, from sacrificing mothers to whimpering damsels in distress to self-determined women. Among the many things that become apparent when you examine the evolution of women in Bollywood is the role of viewers' gaze, which has been shaped by several factors at the time, including politics, socioeconomic structures of the society, and cultural change. Movies produced by the film industry appeal to audiences week after week, regardless of quality. While the films in the Indian industry are undeniably entertaining, the biggest drawback is the way ladies are portrayed. It has been a tradition in Bollywood to portray women in stereotypes that promote gender inequality from its very beginnings to the projects it is launching today. As a result of today's culture, there is a dilemma that exists between men and women, but the most important question is whether the gap between them has widened or narrowed over time.

In the golden age of Indian cinema, young women were categorized into two categories: "Vampires" and "Ladies in Distress". It was thought that damsels in distress were the heroes of a film, but they had little to do with the plot. Its purpose was to serve as a romantic foil for the heroes and to be the item saved by the hero at the end to demonstrate his manliness and bravery. It has been the Indian culture's tradition to depict damsels in distress as moral women who embody "proper" female roles. The couple respected the elders, were quiet and kind, and remained faithful to their husbands, whom they believed to be the "divine" person in their lives following tradition. On the other hand, vampires served a similar function, since they provided support to maidens in trouble although the costs are not always excessive. Those vampire seductresses had been the seductresses who could momentarily distract the hero from his prize and ultimate victory. The girls in these songs may be engaged in object songs or they may be romantic pastimes that the villains engage in with the help of or with the help of their helpers. It is believed that vampires were attracted to humans due to their scantily clad appearances and their acts (or dances) that left little room for imagination. Even though these stereotypes in reality no longer reflect the uniqueness of girls in real life, there are some acceptable elements in these disrespectful representations. Even though Damsels in Distress at least showed girls could be tough and supportive at the same time that vampires had freedom from appearances and actions, these differences caused quite an exciting problem, since they in some way caused a conflict. Films like *Saand Ki Aankh*, *Queen*, *Mimi* and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* have managed to contribute to the Bollywood Industry by creating a shift in the paradigm in depiction of women in films from entertainment to empowerment.

### Review of Literature

Cinematic portrayals of women have long been stereotyped. Movies not only depict women in a range of stereotypical

roles, but they also reinforce negative public perceptions of women. In Hindi movies, they are usually portrayed as defenseless, oppressed, and entertaining. Due to their objectification, women are more vulnerable to social injustice. Films have depicted negative stereotypes about women that seem to be ingrained in society. Films from the 1980s and 1990s usually portrayed women as socially excluded and stigmatized individuals (Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, n.d). They were portrayed as housewives who gave up on their goals in order to follow social norms, as well as entertainers who performed, sang, and shared intimate moments with heroes.

Films convey social and cultural beliefs regarding gender, class, caste, and ethnicity in the same historical manner as other artistic mediums like paintings, novels, and theatre. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" by Laura Mulvey elaborates on this idea of women's submissive roles. She contends that the movie satisfies viewers' visual cravings by appealing to "scopophilia," which Freud identified as a basic impulse. The study on *Women in Bollywood Films: A Paradigm Shift* depicts that the female character used the term "gaze" to describe how she was a spectacle that gave pleasure to the male onlooker (Communicationtoday, 2014). In addition, she examined "scopophilia" in classical film as a system that revolves on activity and passivity. The opposition in binary form is gendered. Traditionally, the male character is portrayed as strong and dynamic, serving as the focal point of the dramatic action in the film's narrative structure. The female character is helpless and submissive, and the male character(s) desires her. This type of straightjacketing restricts the woman's function to that of a glamorous, entertaining, and temporary reprieve. For instance, Priyanka Chopra's role in *Agnipath* serves only as a diversion from the violent scenes without having any bearing on the plot overall. In Hindi cinema discourse, the hero is typically portrayed as the rescuer and the heroine as a helpless woman in need of his rescue.

The trend of globalization has resulted in a growing impact of Western movie on Indian cinema. Bollywood imports technical know-how from other countries, and a lot of its films are filmed in western settings. Hollywood blockbusters are also the basis for a lot of Bollywood movies. Simultaneously, there have been multiple headlines in Indian media on Bollywood's growing prominence in the global cinema business and its rivalry with Hollywood. Women in India's strongly patriarchal society should take note of this. The study on *Shifting Roles of Women*:

Through the Lens of Bollywood explores the transition of societies into modernity, women's roles underwent significant transformations. The media had a significant impact on how cultures modernized and how women were perceived in the contemporary world. Numerous studies on women's roles in apathetic societies have been

conducted (Agarwal, 2014). It hasn't been discussed enough, though, how important it is for movies to show women in diverse roles across decades and how this affects society as a whole. In contemporary movies, women are shown as being more independent, confident, and career-focused. With an emphasis on a few key Bollywood films, this study examines how women's roles in Indian cinema are rapidly evolving and how this has an impact on the patriarchal Indian society. Since movies are a mirror of societal developments, the goal is to draw a connection between the evolving position of women in India and the changing roles that women play in films.

The way Western values are incorporated into movies is a major factor in how Bollywood ladies are shown to us as normal. Given that sex is traditionally associated with men in India, especially in Bollywood, women are frequently objectified in item numbers, and sex is either shown in an obscene or openly sensual way (Mastizaade, Grand Mast, Raaz). The topic of women and their sexuality has received very little attention, and the few movies that have dared to examine it seriously and unconventionally have, understandably, generated a lot of controversy among the general public and the Censor Board. Movies like Leena Yadav's *Parched* and Shoojit Sircar's *Pink* are gradually shattering stereotypes and tackling taboo subjects. The case study on Bollywood, which has approached the topic of sexuality in a daring way, is the foundation for the study *A Case Study on the Portrayal of Women's Sexuality in Bollywood* (Kaur, 2018). Has it been discovered that the way women's sexual desire is portrayed in Hindi movies has undergone a seismic shift? Revisiting societal conventions, a new wave of youthful, daring filmmakers eager to explore boundaries and take chances with the representation of their female leads, demonstrating that, yes, women are capable of experiencing desire—desire so strong that it transcends the expectations of society, which dictate that being a virgin is a must for being a “good Indian girl.”

The study on Bollywood, Skin Colour and Sexism: The Role of the Film Industry in Emboldening and Contesting Stereotypes in India after Independence the societal effects of the Indian cinema industry over the first 40 years following the country's independence in 1947 (Sheth et al., 2021). It shows that Bollywood, the popular Indian cinema, and Hollywood's American counterpart had the same prejudice against lighter skin than darker skin and the predilection for stereotypical, non-agency portrayals of women. Although Bollywood mirrored long-standing prejudices in Indian society regarding gender and skin tone, this study shows that unexpected events shaped what was portrayed on screen. Lighter skin tones became a common trait of stars due to the predominance of Punjabi directors and actresses who were arranged as multigenerational families. Since this study's conclusion in 1991, when policy liberalization started to take effect, a lot has changed. The Indian film industry became

increasingly accessible to foreign influences, and new media technologies aided in the quick dissemination of Bollywood films throughout India and outside. New online streaming services like Hotstar, Amazon, and Netflix acquired popularity as venues for widespread distribution and as new sources of funding for production, which hastened this transformation. However, Bollywood continues to exist despite these small modifications.

According to popular perception, movies are meant to entertain people by bringing them to a world that is drastically different from the real one and providing a break from the routine of daily life. A popular medium for mass consumption, cinema plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions, generating attitudes, and upholding established cultural standards. This study on *GENDER REFLECTIONS IN MAINSTREAM HINDI CINEMA* explores how women are portrayed in popular Bollywood films (Tere, 2012). Examining this topic is regarded appropriate given that women make up a sizable portion of the population of the nation and that how they are portrayed on film has a significant impact on how stereotypes in the society are perpetuated. The study talks about mainstream Hindi cinema's stick to stereotypes of what it means to be a woman, as well as feminist film criticism. While keeping in mind that the majority of mainstream films are made from the viewpoint of men, it also examines a few instances from well-known films to examine how prejudices about other people are established. Discussion of modern realistic film and how it treats women is covered in a separate area. A discussion of whether Indian women of various ethnicities have been successfully portrayed in mainstream Hindi movies in a culture where patriarchal ideals are prevalent follows. The ability to negotiate their place within the current power structures and even to topple those structures entirely should be granted to female characters. The idea of women as objects of male gaze in movies needs to evolve.

## Movie Plots

### Saand ki aankh

Chandro (Bhumi Pednekar) and Prakash (Taapsee Pannu) Tomar are two sisters who, at the age of sixty-five, decided to become sharpshooters; their story is told in the biopic *Saand Ki Aankh*. Women are expected to be homemakers and to submit to their husbands and dads in their patriarchal society, where the sisters are from. However, the sisters are determined to pursue their passion for shooting, even though it means defying their families and the community. The movie begins with the Tomar sisters getting married into the same family. They quickly bond over their shared love of shooting and their shared desire to break free from the constraints of traditional society. However, their husbands and fathers are opposed to them shooting, and they forbid them from going to the shooting range. Despite the opposition from their families,



the Tomar sisters continue to train in secret. They are helped by a local doctor, Yashpal, who believes in their talent and encourages them to pursue their dreams. One day, the Tomar sisters are discovered by their husbands at the shooting range. Their husbands are furious and forbid them from shooting ever again. However, the Tomar sisters are determined to continue shooting, and they defy their husbands' orders. The Tomar sisters' defiance of their husbands and fathers inspires other women in the village to pursue their own dreams. The sisters start training other women to shoot, and they soon become a symbol of women's empowerment in the village. The Tomar sisters' journey is not easy. They face many challenges, including ridicule from the community and opposition from their own families. However, they never give up on their dreams, and they eventually achieve their goal of becoming sharpshooters. The movie *Saad Ki Aankh* is an inspiring story about two women who overcame all odds to achieve their dreams. It is a story about the importance of following your passion and never giving up on your dreams, no matter what challenges you face.

### **Queen**

Born in Delhi, Rani Mehra (Kangana Ranaut) is an exuberant and vivacious desi girl engaged to Vijay (Rajkumar Rao). All of her joy and enthusiasm, though, quickly dissolves into heart-breaking sadness when Vijay confides in her and announces that he is going to change his mind and not marry her. Rani is currently inconsolable and unsure of what to do. She chooses to travel to Paris after spending a few days in a profound state of sadness. She is unaware, meanwhile, of all the adventures the journey has in store for her (Queen, 2014). Due to cultural shock and ignorance, she encounters difficulties and troubles upon arriving. However, she eventually makes a wonderful friend in hotel employee Vijaya Lakshmi (Lisa Haydon), who aids in her recovery and allows her to enjoy her stay in Paris. She finds three very amiable housemates in Amsterdam who assist her in getting over her loss. She ultimately realizes that her life is about herself during this process, as she also rediscovers herself.

### **Mimi**

Kriti Sanon plays Mimi, a 25-year-old Rajasthani actress with aspirations of becoming a Bollywood star. She works as a dancer to augment her earnings. Shama is her closest companion. An American couple named John and Sumer are searching for a surrogate mother in Rajasthan since they are unable to conceive. They are informed by Bhanupratap Pandey, their local cab driver, that he can locate a surrogate mother for their child. After seeing a program where Mimi is purportedly dancing, the American couple decides Mimi would make a good surrogate mother candidate, and they instruct Bhanu to find someone equally qualified as Mimi. However, Bhanu proposes to convince Mimi to act as the surrogate mother.

When all goes well with IVF, she gets pregnant. She had to lie to her parents in order to hide her pregnancy from them, telling them she was cast in a movie and would have to spend nine months in Mumbai.

After Mimi moves in with her friend Shama, the American couple asks Bhanu to take care of Mimi while they are away in the United States. A few months later, Mimi is examined normally by John and Sumer, who regrettably learn that the infant has Down syndrome. Following their abrupt departure for America, John and Sumer tell Bhanu that they no longer want the baby and counsel Mimi to get an abortion after learning of this shocking information, which tears their hearts. Mimi is dismayed when she learns of this, but she rejects the thought of abortion and resolves to carry the baby to term. She then decides to return home, but her parents are stunned to discover that she is pregnant (Mohapatra, 2021). Mimi, on the other hand, clarifies everything by explaining the surrogacy to everyone, and Mimi's parents, to Mimi's astonishment, support her. Mimi falls deeply in love with Raj and chooses to put her aspirations of becoming a Bollywood actress on wait in order to take care of him. Four years later, John and Sumer visit India following their viewing of an online video featuring Mimi and Raj. They tell her they've changed their minds about the baby and that they plan to take Raj back to America. John takes legal action, arguing that Mimi signed a surrogacy contract and has no legal rights to Raj as long as she was compensated for her services. Mimi confronts Sumer, saying that Raj is now her child and that she will not grant custody. Mimi rejects this proposal and decides to send Raj back to John and Sumer so that he won't have to cope with the stress of court procedures as

Bhanu and Mimi's parents get ready to go to court. On the day of their return flight to the United States to send Raj off with John and Sumer, Mimi, Bhanu, and family meet them and are shocked to see John holding a kid who Sumer claims is their daughter. On their way back from Mimi's place, the couple happened into an orphanage and decided to adopt Tara since they connected with her. After seeing Mimi with Raj, Sumer talks on how she realized that being a parent is all about love and caring, and having nothing to do with blood. Knowing that Raj is Mimi's son and that he is inseparable from her, they part ways with Raj and her family.

### **Gangubai Kathiawadi**

Madhu, a young woman, is coerced into prostitution against her choice. Rashmibai, the Madame of the cathouse, tortures her because she won't become a courtesan. Gangubai is subsequently asked to convert Madhu. When she first meets Madhu, she relates her own tale. Ganga Jagjivandas Kathiawadi (Alia Bhatt), daughter of a lawyer from a wealthy family in Kathiawad, dreamed of becoming a Bollywood starlet. At the age of 16, she ran away to Mumbai with her swain Ramnik Lal



after he promised to help Ganga pay for his aunt Sheela's education if she pursued a career in movies. Her entire world was flipped upside down when he sold her for Rs 1000 to Sheela Masi's cighthouse in Kamathipura, where she was compelled to work as a courtesan. Later, she makes a shift. When she appeals to cabal leader Rahim Lala for justice, he accepts her as a member of his family by oath. After Sheela Masi passes away, Gangu assumes control of her cighthouse, changes her name to Gangubai, and eventually rises to prominence in politics. She defeats Raziabai in the Kamathipura presidential elections after using visuals to distract voters from Razia's speech. She makes the case for women's rights in this new section. In a meeting with Rahim Lala, she later learns that a ward clerk wants to evacuate everyone in Kamathipura. With the help of an academy that claims Kamathipura is a centre of immorality, the clerk wants to build towers in the area. Rahim Lala declines the clerk's offer and cautions Gangubai to get ready for being sued and taken to court. With the cighthouse kids, Gangubai enters a meeting with an intelligence officer and an academy star (Gangubai Kathiawadi, 2022). There, she offers five times the freights for all eight girls and advocates for cighthouse youngsters receiving an education. Gangubai is supposed to read a speech on hooker education at a rally that Mr. Faizi has prepared for her, but she deviates from the plan. Instead, she questions the audience as to why prostitutes are the focus of distinction when they don't make a distinction when providing services. She also pledges to fight for the right of hookers' children to an education and for respect for hookers in society. Gangubai hosts Mr. Faizi and a unique politician in her cighthouse after her speech becomes viral. In order to meet with Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister, Gangubai plans a trip to New Delhi. The Prime Minister is asked by Gangubai to make harlotry legal, but he declines. The Prime Minister ultimately consents to form a commission after deliberation. He also consents to prevent Kamathipura and the cighthouse from being abandoned. Even though it wasn't made legal, Kamathipura celebrates harlotry as it has always been the case because of Gangubai Kathiawadi.

### Objectives

- To analyze the changing trends in the portrayal of female characters in Bollywood films.
- To discuss the shift in paradigm and portrayal of women as self-reliant, motivated, and career-oriented protagonists in Bollywood films.

### METHODOLOGY

The study uses visual content analysis method to achieve the objectives and analyze the visual representation of female characters, such as their body language, clothing, and facial expressions. This provides a qualitative perspective on the topic and helps the researcher to

understand the motivations behind the changes that are taking place.

### Visual Analysis

The visual content analysis approach is used to satisfy the study's objectives, which are based around examining evolving trends and talking about how women are portrayed in Bollywood movies. In order to comprehend the reasons behind these shifts, the methodology takes a qualitative approach, taking into account things like attire, facial expressions, and body language.

### Saand Ki Aankh

A notable illustration of the feminine gaze in Bollywood is the film *Saand Ki Aankh*. Chandro and Prakashi Tomar, two women narrating the story of the film, question many of the patriarchal conventions that have long been a part of Indian culture. Two strong, self-reliant, and competent women are shown in the film as the sisters-in-law. Despite criticism from society and their families, they are not scared to speak up for who they are and what they want in life. The way the movie depicts Chandro and Prakashi's relationship is another example of the feminine gaze in action. It is implied that they are close confidantes and friends who help one another along the way. In addition, the film questions Bollywood's long-standing male gaze. The male characters in the film are not portrayed as objects of desire, nor do they come through to save the day. The female characters are portrayed as heroes instead. *Saand Ki Aankh* salutes the female gaze and is, all things considered, a new and powerful film. This film demonstrates how strong, self-reliant, and accomplished women can be in a patriarchal culture.

Prakashi and Chandro engage in gunfire at targets in the film's opening sequence. They appear to be confident and competent shooters. It is not implied that the male characters in the film are objects of desire. They are portrayed as complicated, fallible people. Chandro and Prakashi's relationship is shown as being robust and uplifting. They appear to be each other's biggest supporters. The film questions Bollywood's long-standing male gaze. It demonstrates how, despite living in a patriarchal culture, women can be powerful, independent, and successful.

Bollywood's portrayal of women is changing thanks in large part to the film *Saand Ki Aankh*. Viewers are being encouraged by the film to question conventional gender stereotypes and to have confidence in oneself.

### Queen

*Queen* uses the "female gaze," a cinematic viewpoint that emphasizes the interests, needs, and experiences of women, to great effect. This method contrasts sharply with the prevailing "male gaze," which frequently objectifies women on TV. With a variety of techniques, the movie masterfully conveys this viewpoint. Overshadowing

any romantic or sexual plotlines are Rani's journey of self-discovery, independence, and personal progress. Female viewers are particularly moved by this emphasis on female empowerment. The portrayal of Rani is that of a typical woman coping with the psychological fallout from a failed engagement. Viewers who identify as female will find a connection with her because of her strength, independence, and capacity for vulnerability. Female ties and friendships are important, and the film emphasizes this. The importance of female support networks is shown by Rani's relationships with the other women she meets and her housemates at the hostel. By highlighting Rani's independence in navigating the world, "Queen" challenges gender norms and prejudices. Her path places a strong emphasis on discovering who she is, rather than fitting in with society's norms or dating a man. The movie gently portrays the strength of female camaraderie and the notion of women empowering one another. The value of shared experiences and support is emphasized in Rani's connections with other women. The song "Queen" rejoices on Rani's newfound liberty. Female viewers who have experienced social constraints may find empowerment in her acceptance of life and self-determination.

Queen is a revolutionary work of film that defies conventional Bollywood storytelling. It explores the complex process of female empowerment and self-discovery while questioning conventional wisdom and applauding female autonomy. Kangana Ranaut's mesmerizing portrayal brings Rani to life, a character who experiences a stunning metamorphosis from a timid and reclusive person to a confident and self-reliant powerhouse. The movie masterfully depicts her transformation as she sets off on a solitary journey, welcoming novel encounters and letting go of her shyness. "Queen" is a monument to the strength of individual development and the necessity of defying social norms. It emphasizes the transformational power of venturing beyond one's comfort zone and embracing the diversity of the world. It's a visually captivating and culturally enriching event. A woman's path towards self-discovery and independence is depicted in "Queen," with a focus on elements that speak to the lives and goals of many women. This is clearly a representation of the female gaze. Refreshingly, the film deviates from more conventional, male-centric Bollywood themes by emphasizing women's freedom, personal development, and female connections. This leads to a narrative that is in line with the female gaze.

### **Mimi**

The film celebrates the "female gaze" in cinema, a viewpoint that gives priority to and connects with the interests, experiences, and wants of female viewers. The film includes aspects that support the feminist stance, even though its main focus is on motherhood and surrogacy. Kriti Sanon's character Mimi is shown as a powerful,

resourceful woman. Her transition from surrogate to single mother demonstrates female empowerment and tenacity, which appeals to women who watch. Women's interactions and friendships are highlighted in the movie. The plot revolves around Mimi's friendship with Shama, her best friend. The significance of female connections in overcoming obstacles is underscored by their genuine and encouraging companionship. The female characters in "Mimi" are given depth, with their aspirations, challenges, and emotional complexity all being highlighted. Female viewers will find relatable characters in the film's portrayal of complex women. With regard to marriage and motherhood in particular, the movie questions established gender norms and expectations. Women who experience comparable pressures can relate to Mimi's determination to raise a child as a single mother and follow her aspirations despite social expectations. The majority of the film is focused on female-occupied areas, such as Mimi's house and her relationships with female friends and family. This focus on female-centric environments highlights the viewpoints and experiences of women, reflecting the female gaze. In order to tackle the difficult subjects of surrogacy and single parenthood while dispelling myths and conventions, the touching and socially conscious movie "Mimi" .It acts as a reminder of the power of female strength and the value of familial support. The film offers a captivating examination of motherhood and female empowerment in modern India, thanks to its deep emotional moments and sense of humour. Despite the fact that "Mimi" primarily addresses topics related to parenting and female empowerment, the female gaze is supported by the film's sympathetic portrayal of its female protagonists and their emotions. It tells a story that resonates with the experiences and goals of many female viewers by presenting women as complex, multifaceted people with their own independence, motivations, and challenges.

### **Gangubai Kathiawadi**

Gangubai Kathiawadi, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, depicts a female heroine in Mumbai's red light district as she goes from vulnerability to power. The film deviates from the "female gaze," which emphasizes the desires, interests, and experiences of female viewers, while addressing topics of female empowerment, exploitation, and freedom. Nonetheless, "Gangubai Kathiawadi" has aspects that appeal to the feminine gaze. Female viewers can relate to Gangubai's transition into a strong, courageous lady who takes charge of her life and defends her neighbourhood because it exemplifies female empowerment. Providing an authentic picture of women's experiences, the film presents its female protagonists as multifaceted persons with authority, desires, and difficulties. Female connections are highlighted in the video by showcasing the support and solidarity among women in the red-light area. The plot revolves with Gangubai's journey and her relationships

with other women, despite delving into the underground and criminality; this is consistent with narratives that highlight female characters. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the film's general style and direction—both of which are defining traits of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's work—might not perfectly conform to the conventional notion of the female gaze. Bhansali's signature grandiose and sumptuous visual and narrative elements are evident throughout the film. Even in the manner some sequences are filmed and the artistic decisions used, the director's masculine point of view is apparent.

### **Laapataa Ladies**

This film has done pretty well in speaking to a few themes of female empowerment, societal expectation, and the weirdness that exists today in relationships in a comedy that is nonetheless thoughtful. Here's how it affects viewers and influences society's discussions: It portrays women as multidimensional beings and has their own desires and aspirations against prevalent stereotypical displays. This display propels the minds of the viewers to formulate new ideas instead of what is traditionally known as societal roles for women. The movie uses comedy in a light-hearted way to create serious themes. It enables audiences to discuss the issues such as independence and identity without the seriousness they usually attach to these talks "Lapata Ladies" brings conversations amongst friends and families to platforms about the challenges facing women today. It brings on a discussion of women's rights, personal autonomy, and a sense of safety within groups of women. This does reflect the struggles and challenges in today's society in the movie, making it highly accessible to most viewers. It hooks the relationships and nuances of personal freedom to most viewers' hearts. Highlighting women's resilience and the importance of friendship inspires the viewer to work for change in their own lives as well as their communities, thereby instilling solidarity and empowerment in women. In a more general sense, "Lapata Ladies" both entertains and causes a positive attitude shift in society about women and empowers while initiating conversations that may eventually contribute toward greater understanding and change.

### **Mardani**

"Mardaani" is a very powerful 2014 Indian film directed by Pradeep Sarkar, raising awareness about the ugly topic of human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children in India. The movie stars Rani Mukerji as Shivani Shivaji Roy, an aggressive police officer committed to fighting one of the most ruthless trafficking rings. Here's how the movie makes a difference and impact on its audience: Awareness: "Mardaani" brings to light the darker realities of human trafficking, oft neglected in mainstream cinema. Through this, the film shines a light over women and children's vulnerabilities, calling for conversations over the causes and prevention. Women Empowerment: The

heroine of the movie is a very powerful female who is not only a victim but also a strong warrior against crime. Shivani's character breaks many of the gender-barrier fetters, and it shows women leading as protectors. This leaves a positive impact on the viewer's mind, especially the female audience to be bold and powerful. Promotion of Justice: In "Mardaani," it brings forth an importance of relentless pursuit of justice into the society by means of law enforcing, which thus encourages the public to support initiatives toward victim protection and punishment of criminals, hence creating a sense of responsibility toward the change being pursued. Emotional Engagement: The emotional depth coupled with the compelling storyline makes the issues dealt with in the film more relatable to the viewer. This might also be a bigger push for people to become more active in advocacy work and support for victims of trafficking. "Mardaani" is a movie that complements the ongoing discussion on women's safety and rights in India. It inspires a cultural shift toward more films regarding social issues and opening up for more empowerment. In a nutshell, "Mardaani" is really good not just as a thriller film but as something that creates an impact in terms of changing the societal views about women's rights and how urgent human trafficking issues are. Its message touches the hearts of many audiences to stand up for justice and support victims of exploitation.

### **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, this analysis of Bollywood films, including "Saand Ki Aankh," "Queen," "Mimi," and "Gangubai Kathiawadi," offers insights into the evolving trends in the representation of female characters and the paradigm shift toward the portrayal of women as independent, driven, and focused on their careers. By presenting the Tomar sister-in-laws as strong, independent, and talented women who defy social expectations, "Saand Ki Aankh" offers a compelling story that subverts patriarchal standards. By showing women as heroes and challenging prevailing gender norms, the movie advances the feminine gaze. The focus on the female perspective in "Queen" distinguishes it from other films and highlights Rani's path toward independence and self-realization. The movie offers a welcome diversion from typical Bollywood topics by questioning gender stereotypes and prejudices and highlighting the power of female friendship. Through single parenthood and surrogacy, "Mimi" delves into the issue of female empowerment. The movie challenges conventional gender standards by showcasing its female characters as strong and resourceful. Women can relate to the relatable narratives presented by the emphasis on female-centric locations and interactions, which mirrors the female gaze. "Gangubai Kathiawadi" highlights characteristics of female empowerment, even though it does not adhere to the typical female gaze.





The film emphasizes the support and solidarity among women under difficult circumstances, and it strikes a chord with female viewers as Gangubai transitions from vulnerability to power. In conclusion, an improvement in the representation of female characters is evident in the Bollywood films under analysis, which reject stereotypes and embrace stories that strengthen women. One way that Indian cinema portrays women more diversely and nuanced is through the usage of the female gaze in these films. The portrayal of female characters in Bollywood cinema has undergone changes, as evidenced by these four films. They show women as independent, driven, and focused on their careers heroes who overcome obstacles and prejudices in their lives. Mimi narrates the tale of a surrogate mother who, upon the baby's biological parents' abandonment, chooses to keep it. She pursues her passion of being an actor in defiance of the social conventions and shame attached to surrogacy and single parenthood. Queen chronicles the adventures of a young woman whose fiancé puts off their wedding, prompting her to go on a solo honeymoon. Through her travels and interactions with different people, she comes to terms with her own identity and independence. Saand ki Aankh tells the inspirational story of two old women who train to be sharpshooters and take home multiple awards. Their grandchildren are empowered to pursue their passions and they oppose the patriarchal society. The story of Gangubai Kathiawadi tells the tale of a brothel madam who rises to prominence in the underworld. She enters politics to effect social change while fighting for the rights and dignity of sex workers. Bollywood films' changing perspective and treatment of women are reflected in these productions. They honour the courage, resiliency, and self-determination of women who defy social norms and preconceptions. They also draw attention to the many and intricate experiences that women have in various settings and backgrounds. They are a worthy tribute to Indian cinema's feminism and emphasis on female empowerment.

## LIMITATIONS

Bollywood is impacted by commercial concerns and genre expectations, just like any other film industry. When straying from tried-and-true conventions, filmmakers may encounter obstacles that limit their ability to challenge preconceptions. Fulfilling audience expectations is typically a prerequisite for commercial success. Cinematographers could experience constraints in their capacity to explore non-traditional storylines due to feelings of obligation to meet current market needs. The investigation of particular issues may be limited by societal conventions and taboos. Because of the possibility of negative reaction from conservative segments of society, filmmakers may be reluctant to tackle contentious topics or question firmly embedded preconceptions. Filmmaking techniques and extra resources could be

needed to produce films that subvert conventional storytelling. Such studies may be limited in scope and the investigation of novel and varied viewpoints may be impeded by financial limitations. The film industry has gatekeepers that can affect the tales that are developed and released. Filmmakers looking to reimagine how women are portrayed in Bollywood may find it difficult to get past these gatekeepers with unorthodox stories. By adhering to these guidelines and constraints, filmmakers have the potential to enhance the diversity and resilience of women in society by creating a more inclusive and empowering film industry.

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**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:** Gandhi, K., Srinivasan, K. (2025). Bollywood's Feminist Revolution: A Study of the Emerging Trends and Themes in the Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 4(1), 36-44. DOI: 10.58966/JCM2025416

