

Sportswomen in Hindi Sports Films from the Eye of Feminist Film Theory

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Abstract: Gender representation in sports is one of the main concerns in the present scenario (Amaljit, 2021). In films, women are measured on the standards of societal norms subjected to male perspective leading to inequality and discrimination. Women representation in Indian sports films has faced challenges to establish their identity as sportswomen on-screen. Hindi cinema has contributed to sports genre with more women-oriented sports films than other regional films in India. However, films are made from the eye of male perspective; narrative being driven by men. Today sports movies have become a teaching and inspiration medium (Ghoshal, 2018). The present study aims to find how sportswomen are represented in Hindi Sports Films with reference to parameters of Feminist Film Theory, using Laura Mulvey's essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". The films are observed and analyzed keeping the parameters- Narrative driven by men, male gaze, voyeurism and narcissism (scopophilia); and by understanding the elements of feminist theory. A total of 10 Hindi feature films centering women as sports players are selected between the period of 2007 and 2021. The researchers use qualitative approach for the study with content analysis using coding technique and Feminist Film Theory as a theoretical framework. The study directs to showcase the frequency of inequality between men and women portrayed in the films in addition to establishing the character arcs of leading ladies, pointing towards their identities as sportswomen.

Keywords: Gender, Sports, Films, Representation, Sportswomen, Feminist Film Theory, Laura Mulvey.

INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema has a massive contribution in discussion of Indian culture. Cinema in India was introduced in the year 1913 with the film *Raja Harishchandra*, directed and produced by father of Indian Cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke. Around 1947, the industry went through significant changes. Indian cinema which focused on historical and mythological stories was replaced by social-reformist films. Later in the 1950s, it gave birth to a new wave as filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and Bimal Roy focused on a neglected subject of society, lower castes. With the change in social and political environment, the cinematic movements differed from the early times where directors' desire were driven to offer a great sense of realism and understanding to laymen (Grant, 2018).

Hindi cinema, also known as Bollywood is the hub of the Indian cinema industry that produces Hindi films. Formed from "Bombay" and "Hollywood" due to production of films in Mumbai (Bombay), Bollywood gave birth to the musicals film genre. Bollywood has seen a significant growth in the cinema and has also been criticized for its stereotypical and unconventional portrayal of films. It has marked its presence in the international platform with the success of *Slumdog Millionaire* and entered into a new chapter. Contemporary Bollywood sees a mixture of masala film and parallel cinema both. Not only

commercial success but also global impact has been a driving force for the industry (V, 2020).

"A number of Indian films from different regions are often included among the greatest films of all times in various critics and directors polls. Indian Cinema will be eternal as decades move on..." (V, 2020).

Gender In Films: Gender has two concepts, the biological gender and socially constructed gender. A text written by Gayle Rubin's in 1975 discusses "gender as sex/gender system, in which a social gender is described as enhancing the idea of biological gender, which in itself creates gender" (Ottosson & Cheng, 2012). Gender in films is important because it includes the subject that discusses the role of gender in relationships that defines the storyline or attributes of the characters. Films about gender could be about the meaning behind the identity of being a "man", "woman" or "other gender", the stereotypes related to them and the way they behave as characters or are expected to behave as men and women. Males in film are typically shown as strong and heroic, the ones who dominate the system and women are shown as damsels in distress like fairy tales and often stereotyped in films. With films changing the perspective of spectators over the years, films have begun to show women in dominating roles, the one who do not need men to stick around in protection of women or leading their lives as decision makers.

Sports In Films: The term 'sports films' is not usually used as a 'recognized' term but at least as a 'recognizable' category which can be referred to as those which have sport or sporting event or an athlete as a center focus of the film. David Rowe claims 'Sports Films' as a genre in its own right just as western, comedy, horror and science fiction. Ellis Cashmore further identifies it in sub genres: 'dramatical/biographical', 'documentary' and 'comedy/fantasy' sports films. Sports in films are empowering films and society by constructing and representing social identities and addressing social issues (Poulton & Roderick, 2008).

The way people perceive gender issues since some specific gender roles uplift and strengthen the images of men are influenced by gender representation in media. Movies tend to show the gender power structure when men are depicted as stronger sex. Although women in movies are shown as strong and independent, they cannot dissent the gender power structure. Many movies show women's strong depiction, however, their characterization largely depicts them as dependent and submissive, the one that requires man as a dominant role model or decision maker for her. (Alzahrani, 2016). There are many studies that are devoted to studying evolving feminism films. It has centered on both the upward effects where the content is structured through the actions of major filmmakers in gendered organizations presuming public preferences and downward effects where audiences respond to content and attitude are formed based on that (Yang, *et al.*, 2020) and thus the representation of gender in films is prescribed through social and cultural values.

Women in Sports Films and their Stereotypical Representation

Sports and motion picture industry grew independently, becoming symbolically linked by 'sports theme' feature film. Women featured in sports films have received mixed messages for their characterization and depiction like other genres. With socio-cultural perceptions of the society, their roles have mostly been "auxiliaries". They have been consistently included in sports films but with subordinate roles. They have rarely been casted as leads or heroines with enviable athletic prowess (Pearson, 2001).

Feminist critics criticized films and makers of the film for selling movies by portraying the "ideal" image of women as submissive, self sacrificing, chaste and controlled. On the other hand, women

with bad character is characterized as individualistic, westernized, sexually aggressive and uncompromisingly arrogant (Mukherjee, 2018). Female bodies in sports are portrayed and scrutinized in terms of level of sexualization and desirability. Traditionally women and women's bodies were held up as the rewards or spoils of victory in a sporting event. They are observed as overtly sexualized objects and divisionary spectacles but not as competitors, and if they are celebrated as sports persons, the obvious focus is shifted to the authoritative, patriarchal figures as "benevolent dictators" like Kabir Khan in *Chak De! India* and Mahavir Phogat in *Dangal* (Chakravarty, 2020).

Bollywood underwent a transformation with the films like *Lagaan* (2002) and *Chak De! India* (2007) that contributed greatly with sports drama. With *Chak De! India* as arguably the first women centric sports film in Hindi cinema, it inspires the audience as it brings together everything that a sport means to a player. These films not only inspire women to take up sports activities, but also give thought to male audiences as well (Vilvaraj, 2019).

Feminist Film Theory & Laura Mulvey

Feminist Film Theory came into being in the early 1970s. The aim of this theory was to understand cinema as a cultural practice to represent myths about femininity. Theoretical approaches were developed to critically study the image and signs of women in film with issues of female spectatorship. The theory criticized classical cinema for stereotyping representation of women on screen and also discussed women's cinema that allowed for representations of female subjectivity and desires. In the early years of feminist criticism, the films portrayed women as passive sex objects or fixed in stereotypes were considered objectionable distortions of reality which affected negatively on female spectators. Feminists called for positive image of women on screen which wasn't enough and with the advent of (post)structuralism, the understanding of women on screen demanded deeper understanding for its pernicious structures. Theoretical frameworks drawing on critiques of ideology, semiotics, psychoanalysis and deconstruction proved productive in analysing the ways in which sexual differences and sexuality are encoded in the visual and narrative structure of the films as the theory claims more than social reflection of the bodily image (Smelik, 2016).

Laura Mulvey, a filmmaker and feminist film critic, built a foundation of psychoanalytical Feminist Film Theory in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Her theory focused on the relationship between the spectator and the screen. The way film reflects and constructs the socially established interpretation of sexual difference which control images and erotic ways of looking and spectacle, it helps to understand what the cinema has been and how it has worked in the past while attempting to challenge the cinema with this theory. The psychoanalysis theory is helpful in studying why feminist film theory is appropriate here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the film form (Mulvey, 1989).

The aim of this study is to understand how Hindi Sports Films represent the character of sportswomen on the screen with the help of Feminist Film Theory. The study selects films which are women centric in nature and has maximum screen presence of female characters as sportswomen from 2007(the first) to 2021(the latest). The theory applied by the researchers intends to understand the perspective of these films playing a role in projecting female characters as sportswomen on the screen and criticize the film from a feminist perspective.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research is to study and analyse the representation of sportswomen in Hindi Sports Films with reference to parameters of the Feminist Film Theory.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

It was observed by the researchers that a lot of films are made in the sports genre and on sports players' lives. Hindi cinema has contributed quite a number of films in this genre and the result of women-centric sports films in comparison to male-centric sports films is not that bleak, but their representation on the screen varies in terms of gender. Through this study, the researchers intend to analyze the sports films from the eye of feminist film theory as there was a need to study this topic, understand the way films, especially sports films are made in Hindi cinema and their approach towards bettering the portrayal of sportswomen characters as sports players other than the object of sex, male gaze and action of the characters dictated by men in 21st century. This would help the research experts who work towards understanding and improving women's issues and their

representation on-screen. This would prove to be useful to the people of audio-visual communication, especially filmmakers and writers so as to improve the way they look and visualize the character of women while working on the character building. This study is helpful to any person who is studying sports, films, gender representation and feminist film theory.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers identified three parameters of Feminist Film Theory to study the research i.e., Narrative driven by men, Male gaze, Voyeurism and Narcissism. To fulfill this objective, the researchers use a Qualitative Approach, which includes coding, categorization and themes using content analysis method. Film narrative was coded based on spoken and written words, visual images, body language, gestures and expressions which were categorized, and represent the content in themes. The films were selected on the basis of maximum screen presence of sports women characters in films from the time period of 2007 (first women centric Hindi sports film) to 2021 (latest women centric Hindi sports film). The sampling type used for the study was a non-probability purposive sampling. This type of sampling technique was used as per the convenience of the researcher to fulfill the purposes that were relevant to the topic. A total of 12 Hindi sports films featuring women characters as sportsperson were selected out of which 10 films were chosen for analysis which centered women characters as sports players in films with maximum screen presence between 2007 and 2021. The films taken for the study were:

- *Chak De! India* (2007)
- *Dil Bole Hadippa!* (2009)
- *Mary Kom* (2014)
- *Dangal* (2016)
- *Saala Khadoos* (2016)
- *Saand Ki Aankh* (2019)
- *Panga* (2020)
- *Saina* (2021)
- *Skater Girl* (2021)
- *Rashmi Rocket* (2021)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Discrimination on the basis of gender

Amaljith, N.K., 2021 talks about the portrayal of sportswomen and how they are discriminated against on the basis of gender in their respective fields in selected sports films. The researcher says women who participate in sports are breaking

stereotypes by participating in a variety of sports because sports are not just for gents' games. Despite coming from rural middle class households, these characters create strong representations of sportswomen in movies. Even though the researcher focused on two distinct sports—boxing and cricket, respectively—the mindset of society has a significant impact on determining the support for female athletes in the field of sports because sports are associated with the agency of men. As a result, women face discrimination and are discouraged from participating in sports because they are seen as the less powerful sex in society. The researcher is successful in exploring the gender biases and women empowerment in these films.

Rajendran, 2017 writes an article which critiques the film *Dangal* from a feminist perspective by questioning the patriarchal vision of showing the film. The author criticizes the film *Dangal* for showing the film from male perspective to create attention of the audience while promoting feminism by Bollywoodization.

Ahad & Akgul, 2020 talk about the construction of women as sex objects, dependent, victims of male violence, obedient and peripheral. The researchers say that with their bodies being a subject of conventional category of discourse, women's bodies in *Dangal* and *Queen* (the subject here) are presented as objects of sight or are regulated by acceptable dressing in the social and cultural settings. The researchers, while talking about the convergence of women in Bollywood, studies their roles, stature, physiology, clothing, sexuality, framing within the screen and how the story is built up through narratives as indicators of women as agency of the society.

Women and their representation

Mukherjee, 2018 focuses on the representation of women in sports movies in the 21st century by empowering women roles on the screen through counter cinema. The researcher says that films like *Chak de India* and *Dangal* back women by male encouraging women to participate in sport and win it to glorify the accomplishment of the male protagonist, whereas, *Mary Kom* and *Dil Bole Hadippa* support women in their decision and encourage them to continue their sport as they are equal to that of men's status in the field of sports and otherwise.

Movies and Feminist Film Theory

Adhikari, 2015 aims to study the role played by Hindi cinema in its context with representation of women in Bollywood or Hindi movies with the help of early study of feminist film theory. The researcher analyses that Hindi cinema shows the conscious portrayal of women in films which is the mirror of Indian society because the image of the women is pictured as submissive, sacrificing, secondary and society oriented. The researcher critiques Indian society for its belief and film makers in their un-advancing, stereotypical, commercial approach of representing Indian women on screen.

Coykendall, 2000 studies study De Palma's 1976 film *Carrie* from a feminist perspective by elucidating the male gaze and female gothic of representing body cinematically. The author critiques De Palma's phallogentrism and the idea of scopophilia in films to the subject of the gaze of male agency and his desires. The researcher perceives gaze to be of different point of views based on different kinds of bodies. The researcher says that the film has been stereotyped as feminine but is narrated as masculine in literature.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The researcher has selected ten sample films for the study from the total population of twelve Hindi Feature Sports Films which featured female characters as sportswomen. The selection of these films were based on the amount of time sportswomen appeared on the screen. Films that featured female characters as sportswomen appearing on the screen for 50% or more than 50% of the total running time of the film were selected as samples of the film.

Total films featuring sportswomen characters were namely, *Chak De! India*, *Dil Bole Hadippa!*, *Mary Kom*, *Dangal*, *Sultan*, *Saala Khadoos*, *Soorma*, *Saand Ki Aankh*, *Panga*, *Saina*, *Skater Girl*, *Rashmi Rocket*. Out of these twelve films, *Sultan* (2016) and *Soorma* (2018) were not selected as sampled films due to limited screen time for sportswomen characters and these films focused on the aspect of masculinity and male protagonist's game. The remaining ten films were selected for further data collection. The data collected were of primary nature. This primary data were collected in the form of films from several streaming and video player platforms viz. Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ Hotstar, Zee5, YouTube, Telegram etc. The screen time of sportswomen characters were calculated manually

using a formula - Difference between the start and end time of the scene featuring sportswomen (with or without dialogue) was summed up together for a film.

Selected films focused on the femininity aspect of representation and showcased the female's game more. Selected films amount of screen time out of total screen time –

- *Chak De! India* - ≈ 108 minutes out of 149 minutes
- *Dil Bole Hadippa!* - ≈ 93 minutes out of 144 minutes
- *Mary Kom* - ≈ 101 minutes out of 119 minutes
- *Dangal* - ≈ 101 minutes out of 161 minutes
- *Saala Khadoos* - ≈ 69 minutes out of 109 minutes
- *Saand Ki Aankh* - ≈ 132 minutes out of 147 minutes
- *Panga* - ≈ 101 minutes out of 132 minutes
- *Saina* - ≈ 113 minutes out of 135 minutes
- *Skater Girl* - ≈ 62 minutes out of 108 minutes
- *Rashmi Rocket* - ≈ 109 minutes out of 129 minutes

Further these selected ten films are analysed and interpreted in detail that will highlight each point differently as each of these films are analysed based on content analysis schedule that includes words, visuals, texts, signs & symbols and song lyrics and are interpreted accordingly with the help of parameters and elements of feminist film theory.

Chak De! India

Kabir Khan coaches a national team of 16 hockey players from different parts of India and prepares them for the Women's World Hockey Championship. From fighting against the association for the World Championship to giving the final iconic speech of “*Sattar minute hai tumhare paas*” (You have seventy minutes in your hand), the film narrative is driven by Kabir's (male) character.

The film has generalized the ideal image of women in the society through these 16 sportswomen who face racism, sexism, victims of injured male ego and male subjectivity of patriarchal society. They are neglected in society and sports institutions based on their identity as women, sportswomen and even as “hockey” players. The first part of the film has mostly objectified, stereotyped, suppressed, discriminated and treated sportswomen unequal in the sports

sphere. Male characters in the film have tried to dominate and dictate actions towards women that portrayed the passiveness of sportswomen (women in general) on screen.

Simultaneously, sportswomen were of strong character and goal oriented. These sportswomen empowered each other and treated themselves as equal to sportsmen to be recognized as a sports player in the end. They were the decision makers of their own, like Vidya's (captain and goal-keeper) decision to follow her dream of playing World Championship over listening to her father-in-law to attend a family function as a priority or Preeti Sabarwal choosing World Championship above her marriage with Abhimanyu Singh (Indian cricketer), a marriage decision which was enforced on her and fixed without her permission.

Male characters disgraced other genders in the film. Right from passing the distasteful comments on women in the conference room to when Kabir defends women players from being attacked with a bat in a restaurant and says, “*Piche se nahi mardo ki tarah aage se lado... woh kya hai, hamari hockey mein chakke nahi hote*” which means fight like a man (who has guts) from the front... because our hockey does not have eunuch (cowards). Simultaneously, women in the film also disgrace other gender including women by shaming their character, identity, body and ethnicity. The scenes where Komal associates Balbir as *Saand* (bull), Balbir refers to Soimoi and Rani as *jungle* (wild), Bindia refers Kabir as traitor and projecting Vidya as Kabir's fling and questioning her integrity towards the team.

Characterisation of the protagonist coach Kabir is of a patriot, optimistic, believer of gender equality yet male privileged, decision maker (especially, guiding Vidya in defending the last penalty stroke against Australia), ambitious and the one who empowers women. Apart from women being characterized as weaker sex, other lead characters including Vidya Sharma and Preeti Sabarwal were ambitious, decision makers, passionate and determined. Characters like Bindia Naik, Balbir Kaur, Komal Chautala, Aliya Bose were however confident and privileged, narcissist, aggressive and portrayed female subjectivity through their characters. There were few more players including Mary Ralte and Molly Zimik (North Eastern), Nethra Reddy (Telugu), Soimoi Kerketa and Rani Dispotta (Jharkhand), who were collective victims of racism within the team.

Players Mary and Molly were objectified sexually in public. They were gazed at by men for their voyeuristic pleasure due to these players' ethnicity and following clothing culture. The camera moved in circular motion and emphasized on filming Mary's and Molly's body. On the contrary, Bindia's insecurity towards Vidya, intended to gratify coach Kabir in a desire to become captain of the team is projected to attract the male counterpart in the film.

Kabir is portrayed as the savior "messiah" of the women's team by preparing them for the World Championship and creating their identity as sportswomen. It reflects as these women needed someone to support them as players and give respect to their game. From a feminist point of view, it is portrayed as men are drivers of women's career, ambition and desire. Players who had pride of representing their states in the national team were driven by Kabir's sole vision of winning the championship. Although it has nothing to do with sports women's pride of representing their states, it has to do with the narrative that was constantly driven to Kabir's life, failure and his lure for success.

Defining gender roles for women in society is a reality of almost every household especially in India. Sportswomen were referred to managing household chores and subdued from playing hockey or wearing short clothes. The only time a sportswoman was reminded of her role as a player was when Gul's family pressured her to keep the family's head held high in Hockey due to her family's background in sports. Apart from that these sportswomen were treated with inequality and stereotyped as characters of women players.

The film has duly focused on empowering women and treating them equally, majorly after their match against India men's team. It is very common to witness the pool of appreciation after achieving something, be it for men or women, but in case of man, his success is regarded as satisfaction of his injured male ego, a standing support of family or women in his life or a desire to overcome the loss/failure of his own; whereas a woman's success is regarded to that of women's fight against the system of patriarchy in order to prove her identity and self worth on a path to fulfill her dreams.

The film is written and directed by men. This interprets the making of a film from male perspective that centered women players as

breaking stereotypes of the society and empowered female as well as male spectators in orienting sportswomen as equal to sportsmen. However, they are restricted to the actions of male in the film during the crucial hours of the game and decision making.

Dil Bole Hadippa!

Dil Bole Hadippa! is a 2009 film based on a village girl Veera, who dreams of playing cricket with countrymen. Rohan plays county cricket in London and returns to India to fulfill his father's dream of winning the Aman Cup (a cricket match played every year between India and Pakistan). Veera masquerades herself as a man "Veer Pratap Singh" (also Veera's brother) to fulfill her dream of becoming a cricketer and playing for her nation.

Veera is an ambitiously embodied typical Indian woman, who believes men and women are equal and women can give equal or better fight to men in their "gentlemen's game". On hearing the announcement for selection of Aman Cup, Veera turns up for selection but is unable to participate because it disallowed entry of women cricketers for selection process. This disheartens her and she gets an idea to pretend to be a man "Veer" to fulfill her dream. Veera as a man/Veer acts as a typical desi man, who objectifies and stereotypes women directly and indirectly. However, Rohan is an aggressive, ambitious man and a decision maker on his own. The time when he told Veera (Veer), "*Apna sapna pura karne ke liye tumne mera istemal kiya... aaj, apna sapna pura karne ke liye main tumhara istemal kar raha hu*" (You used me for your dream... today, I'm using you for my dream), that he dominates his decision making on sportswoman's life. His persona is modern and western but he is Indian by heart. The film that centers a sportswoman's dream turns up to accomplishing it into a man's dream and drives the narrative back to men.

The film portrays a confident and subjective image of women, who are ambitious and empowered as individual characters, but when they are generalized by society in the film, they become the victim of gender inequality, patriarchy and objectification. The character of women other than sportswoman (Veera) face male subjectivity, stereotype, voyeurism, fetishism, male gaze and are portrayed as object of sex and narcissist. Meanwhile, a sportswoman (Veera) masquerades as a sportsman (Veer) in the film, who being the part of a masculine society disgraces other men and women more than men. The film narrative

softens at the point when Veera's dream comes into picture but objectifies the identity of non-sportswomen.

Women in the film were subjected to actions dictated by men (or men like). Be it Veera returning to play as the last wicket batsman only when Rohan allows her, or the time when Soniya adapts typical Indian womanness (wearing a saree) to impress Rohan after Veer asks her to become Miss India (traditional), she also stops to seduce Rohan after Veer suggests her to find Mr. Chandigarh instead of Rohan. The characterisation of Veera is strong, ambitious and confident, whereas Veera as a man/Veer is charismatic, casanova and weak (in physical attributes as a sportsman). Rohan on the contrary, is stubborn and straight forward, he is portrayed as a balanced character who seemed focused and neutral most of the time.

Protagonist Veera as a sportsperson was a risk taker, leaves an impact as a strong individual sportswoman, who wants to be identified as equal as men (sportsmen). Her last speech when she questions the audiences' in the stadium about the gender disparity in cricket (sports), when other fields welcome women as equal in workplaces by stating examples of Sunita Williams, Kiran Bedi, Indira Gandhi and Jhansi ki Rani. That speech leaves an impact on all the spectators (society in and outside the film) and lastly identifies her as a sportswoman. Although the question of women unable to participate in the Aman Cup never came up by the officials, it was only shown once when the watchman asked Veera to leave as only men can play the sport of cricket (a game that shows masculinity of gents).

This was simply a representation for cinematic convenience that intentionally was brought into the picture instead of film showing Veera fighting for an equal space in the team by questioning the association or authority as cricket is not only a gentleman's game. It threw the light on the main subject when Rohan took Veera on stage and decided to reveal her identity, because it was Veera (a woman) who changed the game in the last overs. The film rather chose a different angle to it that was narrated from a male perspective and represented male subjectivity.

There weren't many scenes when the gender of women was treated equal in the sports sphere, however, women in general were empowered

several times in the film, mostly indirectly. Due to masquerading and consciousness of patriarchal society, men and women both have contributed to male gaze, voyeurism and narcissism, gender role and biases, characterisation, superiority of a gender (male or female) in different situations viz. bowling down to the Indian Goddess in the form of an idol, and oppressing women in the form of the human body at the same time. This film has promoted more of gender inequality than empowering women and uplifting them in society.

The narrative of the film is driven by male characters. It started with a dream of a sportswoman (Veera) and ended with the same sportswoman playing to satisfy male ego and fulfill the dream of the male characters (Rohan and Vicky). Women in general were objectified as a desire for male, especially in the songs of the film. The lyrics of *Bhangra Bistar* objectified women as stated:

"Punjabiya di shaan tu na jani, Punjabiya di kadar tu na jani, karle tu apni manmani, phir bhi banegi meri Rani..." (You don't understand Punjabi glory, you don't understand Punjabi honor, do whatever it is that you decide, even then you'll be my queen).

The camera movement in the film zoomed at revealing bodies and costumes of women that invited male gaze and voyeurism as a male spectator. Except the first song of the film *Hadippa* featuring Veera as a cricket enthusiast, every song in some or the other way was oriented to the desire for male characters including *Hadippa* (last song).

The film was written and directed by men that narrated the film from male perspective. The purpose of the film drifted from the subject of woman to man. The only time when the female character is identified as sportswoman is when she makes an entry and an exit in the film. Other than that, she has simply pretended to be men to be able to play cricket to fulfill her dream and that too sacrificed for a male character's dream.

Mary Kom

Mary Kom, a biopic sports drama based on the inspiring life of Indian boxer MC Mary Kom was released in 2014 after the 2012 London Olympics. The film is about Mary, who is three times World Champion, makes a comeback to win the title of World Champion for the fourth time after her pregnancy. She aspires to become a boxer instead

of an athlete and embarks her journey in international games.

Mary is a fighter, who is stubborn, courageous and embodied. She happened to be a daughter of a rice farmer who was a wrestler of his time. He wanted Mary to become an athlete and therefore invested in athletics that certainly didn't interest Mary as she grew up with a dream of becoming a boxer after she found a boxing glove in 1991 Kangathei riot in Manipur. She fought with her father, society and even her coach to do what she feels is right, hence was a decision maker of her own.

The film has a strong portrayal of sportswomen on-screen. Not only, protagonist share the maximum screen-space, but she was also represented as an empowered woman (sports player as well as mother) and was treated equally in her home and the sports sphere as a gender of women. It represents a confident, ambitious image of the sportswoman who owns her decision. However, the character of sportswomen faced several challenges, but the film projected as a problem solver instead of leaving the narration with a series of stereotypical societal issues. The scene where Mary's coach Mingko Singh warns her about the afterlife of a career oriented woman (here, sportswomen) after marriage, the film showed the protagonist making a comeback and breaking the stereotype of a married woman with kids. Although this is a real life story but writer put emphasis on male characters who played crucial roles in Mary's life (husband, coaches and father).

The film associates femininity with real life, where she can be an ambitious woman and a mother both. It promotes equality and empowers gender, race and culture of Manipur, India and celebrates the values of Mary as a sportswoman and her background. The film has objectified unidentified sportswomen, stereotyped their identity and discriminated on the grounds of ethnicity and gender by politicizing against the character. Referencing the scene when Federation committee head Sharma threatens Mary to ruin her career and other female boxers raise their voice in defense to support her. It has also shown passivity of women and male subjectivity, but it has graciously represented Mary's (female) subjectivity with a balance of her motherhood and boxing career.

Mary is represented as a strong, gutted (mother or no mother), ambitious, decisive and highly empowered woman who had ego and dealt with it with her hard work and determination. She never

underestimated her duties as a boxer representing her state or India and a mother. She also acknowledged her responsibility as an equal breadwinner after she delivered twins to run her family with Onler (her spouse) instead of burdening him with financial responsibilities. The film has very well served as a purpose of promoting sports as a full time career especially for sportswomen who give up or have to give up due to family and society pressure. It highlights at every stage that a man and a woman are equal in the society and collectively they grow together, supporting each other in every phase of life viz. Every time Onler supported Mary, before and after her pregnancy; Mary too supported Onler's dreams and respected his choices of being the first parent to their children.

The character of protagonist faced few typical standard stereotypes like Mary who appears in mask in the underground boxing match against Lalboi and the host identifies her as man says, "*Yeh hui na mardon wali baat*" (that's how you call it a man thing) and as soon as she reveals her identity the host stereotypes by saying "*Tereko yeh kitchen lagta hai kya?... Lalboi ladkiyon se nahi ladta*" (you think it's a kitchen or what?... Lalboi doesn't fight with girls). It portrays the role of a gender, how boxing is meant for men, and women can't box because her primary motive should be to marry and settle a family or how painting nails at any time of the day is the birthright of every woman.

Mary Kom is the story of Mangte Chungneijang Kom aka M.C. Mary Kom that drives the narrative only to Mary. The film is heightened with the emotions of Mary Kom as a sportswoman, who fights back against injustice, oppression, patriarchy, objectification, stereotypes and more. The film had no scope of male gaze, voyeurism and narcissism, however it once projected fetishism when Mary's mother jokingly told about her father bringing another Amma (mother) in absence of her. Other than that, the film has purely projected an empowering image of the sportswoman/women and other crucial characters in the film. The visual appeal of the film from clothing, body and camera movement point of view has been positive throughout. The song *Salam India* opens with a camera moving circular films of Mary's chiseled body as a boxer who is training rough after her pregnancy phase. Her character has mostly been shot from an eye level or low-angle to make the character look

dominating and powerful which the character certainly was.

The film was written and directed by men who drew the film from male perspective of how a modern progressive society gives equal importance to all sexes. The only time when the director showed a perspective from male dominant society was during the time Mary's father tried to suppress her from playing boxing as he believed, boxing is a men's game. Three writers and a director came together to build a character of Mary Kom on screen, which is challenging as the film had projected the character's front and backstory both and made sure the character's action spoke louder than her words.

Dangal

Dangal, a 2016 film is based on Mahavir Singh Phogat and her wrestler daughters Geeta Kumari Phogat and Babita Kumari Phogat as they went on to win medals for India in 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games. The film is about Mahavir Singh Phogat, who has four daughters out of these the film shows two of them marching on to become World Class wrestlers from India. The film centers the narrative of Mahavir's dream to win gold for India for which he makes his girls Geeta and Babita ambitious wrestlers since their childhood as he could not fulfill the dream of winning gold for India due to lack of family support.

Mahavir dreams to have a son whom he can train in wrestling and make him a representative from India. His beliefs followed the stereotypical belief of society as he never realized that no game is gender specific, and soon after he realized the potential of Geeta and Babita and found a hope that if not son, then his daughters will bring gold for India. A famous dialogue of Mahavir quotes, "*Maari chhoriyan chhoro se kam hai ke?* (Are our girls any less than boys?)" and fought against society to train them in wrestling. Geeta and Babita were the first female wrestlers from their village who first faced male wrestlers in *Dangal* and beat them. This gave Geeta-Babita an edge and they won sub-juniors, juniors, senior nationals as well as international one after the other.

The film has generalized the ideal image of a woman and role of women in society. From the importance of sons in a family to marrying off Sunita at the age of 14, the film has heavily criticized the very nature of womanhood and has often stereotyped, objectified, suppressed,

underestimated and sometimes oppressed too. The film has also represented women as the object of male desire, fetishes women's bodies, and has shown male subjectivity; this wasn't found in most cases due to the inclusivity of Mahavir and his wrestler daughters who were the center focus of the film where they were mostly shown training and playing and thus were limited to a geographical early phase. There was a portrayal of women as bad decision makers in life and were dictated by male action and decision making unlike Mary Kom, where Mary was the primary decision maker who most of the time was accurate and firm in her decision making. Two times when Geeta-Babita, especially Geeta, takes decisions on her own and fails terribly as she gets distracted and starts losing her international matches in the initial phase of her career.

The film has promoted gender equality and women empowerment from the start. When no one supported Mahavir in his decision, Mahavir kept his faith in his ambition to train her daughters and make them capable of something. Although the film was created from a male perspective, it hardly undermined the true potential of women as equal sports players and gave them identity. It wasn't Geeta and Babita who faced difficulty from the start, instead it was Mahavir who struggled the most in the whole process of Geeta-Babita's journey in making them international players and winning medals for India. It was him who faced the backlash, gender inequality and even patriarchy. Geeta and Babita mostly faced the filtered criticisms of the society that were mostly indirectly spoken to them.

The characterization of sportswomen is strong, confident, subjective and sometimes overconfident too. More than self ambitious, they were empowered and supported due to their early showcase of talent. They were decision makers but Geeta and Babita as decision makers weren't good enough therefore were backed by their father. Initially the character of sportswomen were described as a weak sex but eventually their hard work and natural game the character showed embodiment and competence equal to masculine gender. Three scenes when women competed and defeated men; the one when Geeta-Babita practice with Omkar and defeat him, the second when the song *Dhakad* plays and Geeta-Babita seems to defeating male wrestlers one by one and the third when Geeta beats Mahavir in a rebellious fight after returning from academy.

The protagonist Mahavir Singh Phogat was courageous, goal oriented, risk taker, hard worker, decisive and fully devoted to his work (i.e. playing or training his daughters) kind of man. He inculcated the same qualities in his children and made them match winners. The character of the protagonist inspires many sportswomen and other sports players and their parents to believe in their ambition and make the sports sphere gender neutral. His character also highlighted the problems faced by certain sports and especially sportswomen - the one where Mahavir goes to the state association board for funds to train Geeta for Nationals and is refused for the same due to lack of funds available for sportswomen. This throws a light on how sportswomen have to combat difficulties which are just not limited to society, but with a noble thought and spirit of climbing high these players and their family struggle and support their children throughout.

The film has promoted stereotypes in social as well as the sports sphere, from questioning and laughing at the decision of Mahavir molding his daughters into wrestlers, female wrestlers competing with male wrestlers, body shaming to underestimating them for being women wrestlers - an incident when the referee already decides the result of the match and asks Geeta to choose the wrestler (male) she wishes to "lose" from. Another scene when Geeta and Babita are trolled in school by other girls for wrestling say, "Since you have started wrestling, your walk has become manly." The ideal image of women is associated with femininity that according to society is being within limits, walking, talking and sitting like women (gentle, soft spoken and poised), if a woman does not follow these norms then she is addressed as other gender, typically men.

The narrative of the film is driven by the protagonist (male character). The film started with a dream of the male character "Mahavir" and ended with accomplishing his dream and satisfying his ego. His desire to win a *gold* for India with the help of his daughters, if not son, built the whole narrative of the film. There were times when the movie filmed the scenes that took back to the desire of the protagonist - the beginning of the film when he beats his fellow colleague, a state level champion at workplace; the scene where he is in his youth and plays a national final, to the time when Geeta wins her first gold at Commonwealth Games and looks out for her father as Mahavir feels proud and says, "*Shabaash*".

There were scenes when sportswomen were objectified. The male characters in the film voyeured, fetish, and gazed as spectators in the film viz. Audience objectified Geeta's body in *akhada* (wrestling arena), "she does look hot, must see the t-shirt doesn't get torn," another man added, "let it get torn!" Omkar (Geeta-Babita's cousin) fetishes women too and says, "She looks great," overtly indicating towards the Scottish player when she enters for the Commonwealth semifinal match against Australia. There is also an example of a woman (Geeta) obsessing about herself after she starts training in the National Sports Academy, grows her hair, tries to seek a man's attention in the academy, paints her nails and distracts herself by enjoying films.

The clothing and female bodies have been focused by a circular frame of the camera and a point of discussion in the film for quite some time. Especially when Geeta-Babita starts training in their childhood and society objectifies, stereotypes their clothing, gossip about them - a man says, "Mahavir has gone mad" another man adds further, "Not mad, he has become shameless, he is getting the girls to wear shorts and fight with boys."

The film *Dangal* is written and directed by male filmmakers and has been narrated from a male perspective. The purpose of this film drew towards the male protagonist's (Mahavir) desires and ambition instead of focusing it on women's struggle on an individual level more. The film however always gave female characters their identity as sportswomen and a liberty to make a decision in the climax scene due to cinematic convenience by politicizing the scene. Other than that, the film centered the male character and channeled women characters around him.

Saala Khadoos

Saala Khadoos is a 2016 fictional film based on a former boxer named Adi Tomar, who quits boxing due to underlying politics, goes to coach a fisherwoman Madhi to fulfill his dream of winning a medal through hers. The film begins with a press conference as Adi opens up about the biases of the management and displays a rash and rude attitude with the press. The film centers Adi as the protagonist and narrates the film from his perspective.

Adi was one of the greatest boxers of India during his time, but because of his attitude and behavior, the management used this as a weapon against him

over his talent to demolish his career as a boxer. After Boxing Committee Head, Dev accused Adi of false sexual harassment, Adi was transferred and coincidentally found a better talent than him and started training Madhi. Adi does everything to make Madhi an accomplished boxer. After failed attempts to keep Madhi away from Adi, finally Dev rejects Madhi's World Championship finals registration and Adi settles it with Dev by resigning as coach in exchange of registration. Both Madhi and Adi were of similar character like, embodied and courageous.

The film has portrayed a strong character of women in general, be it as sportswomen, mothers or working women. The film represented gender equality by showing women as major decision makers of their own, they were identified as sportswomen "sports players". The song *Jhalli Patakha* shows empowerment and female subjectivity. Although Madhi was embodied and empowered, she only desired to win the Boxing Championship after realizing Adi's efforts towards her. She was a free spirit and lived her life on her own terms. Despite Adi's effort in polishing her raw talent, she portrayed an overconfident character as she believed that she is the greatest boxer the training center has ever produced and is capable of training other boxers instead of their coaches.

The filmmaker did not look at the story above from a stereotypical point of view, it promoted gender inequality faced by men and women in the society by representing the gender role and stereotypical femininity of women in the society, oppressing and suppressing women, underestimating their abilities and portraying patriarchy by dictating male action. Not only it promoted men disgracing women, but also promoted women and society disgracing men (here, disgracing Adi). The scenes where Adi's character has always been questioned due to projection of his wrong image and he was often called "*tharki*" (lustful). The film has objectified women throughout by words, gaze and actions. In the opening when Adi loosely objectifies women in front of the committee, "Doesn't matter whom I sleep with, someone's wife or any prostitute, you mind your own business." They were portrayed as the object of males gaze and sexual desire, fettered, voyeured and even showed women who seek narcissistic pleasure and male attention. The song *Dil Mein Hua Ghotala* showed Madhi falling in love with Adi and trying to seek his attention. From then she starts doing everything

that Adi wishes, even if that means winning a boxing championship for him. Other than narcissism, the committee head, Dev attempted harassing Madhi sexually in train while returning from cultural exchange championship but Madhi stood against it and handled it on her own. One of the scenes where Dev fetishes Madhi's body through her images and objectifies her during the final conversation between Adi and him where he told Adi, "Is she so good in bed that made you come here to me?"

As the protagonist of the film is Adi Tomar, the characterization of the character is strong, aggressive, rude and has a rough way of handling things. The protagonist believes in talent and empowering it by any means viz. by nurturing the talent at his own expense or by training them roughly. At times, he also used his authority in bursting his anger out; the one where he thought Madhi intentionally lost the match because he rejected her proposal and whilst in anger he dragged Madhi from the neck and kicked her. On the contrary, Madhi as the lead female character, who portrayed a sportswoman character was aggressive, strong, courageous and embodied. She lived on her own terms but dreamt on others ambition viz. joining boxing after Adi deals to give her daily pay for training with him, joining national camp after her mother forced her to and winning the final match for Adi. Both these characters were somewhere similar in terms of their attitude and behavior but were different in setting an example. Madhi gave up everything so that she can fulfill the dream of Adi to win the championship, whereas Adi who dreamt of finding a talent to train him/her in boxing, gave up everything so that Madhi can win. This will impact the society, women who aspire to become boxers to work hard and dream big and make their own decisions.

The film has driven the narrative from the protagonist's point of view. His ambition to win the match for India to train a talent who can win for India, everything was connected to his life story. The film has portrayed a serious character who loosely stereotypes sportswomen because he knows that women boxers, if not trained well, are a wasted talent and will be dragged back to household chores. However, the narrative draws to how a male boxer who was punished due to underlying politics is victimized entirely and becomes desperate to make Madhi win because of her talent and Adi's ego seconds that. There is also a scene where Dev tries to finish Madhi's career

because she refuses to go extra beyond her talent to please him for selection ahead.

The camera movement has generally not voyeured or projected visual appeal by zooming on clothes or individual women's bodies. The only time when it did play with the camera was when Madhi did one hand push-up and Adi got impressed with her, that time the camera focused on Madhi's work-out and Adi's expressions simultaneously. Apart from this, women have mostly been objectified by words.

The film was written by a male (R Madhavan) as well as a female (Sudha Kongara) and was directed by a female. The film is inspired by many true stories that tried to project reality through cinematic convenience. The female writer who is also the director, Sudha Kongara, however tried to show a character like Madhi's where another woman like Laxmi (Madhi's sister) existed too who instead of supporting Madhi, felt insecure of her talent and inclination of Adi towards her. The writers displayed a straight forward and neutral character of Adi that creates an inspiration that no matter what the character does in personal life, his professional life is different and determined. The film however gives identity to female players and is delivered from a female and male perspective both.

Saand Ki Aankh

Saand Ki Aankh is a 2019 sports biopic based on former shooters Chandro Tomar and Prakashi Tomar, popularly known as Tomar Sisters. The film narrates the story of Tomar Sisters who decide to learn the skill of shooting at the age of 60 to empower their daughters and granddaughters and make them independent. Their willingness to learn something new lead them to compete in the shooting competition and they end up being the best shooters of their time and inspire other women in their village to voice their opinion and live for their dreams.

Chandro and Prakashi are sisters-in-law of a renowned family of *Sarpanch* (Chief of the village) in Johri village, Bagpath, Uttar Pradesh. The women of this family work in home as well as field both and men instead sit at home, smoke and control these women. Chandro and Prakashi are courageous and ambitious and dream to do something different in life but due to the limitations that were suppressed by the society on them affected their life physically and socially. But, something that they couldn't achieve, they

commit and strategize together to do it for their children (girls) to secure their future. After sacrificing their dream, they finally convince their men for Seema's and Shefali's shooting future.

The image of sportswomen in the film is represented as courageous, ambitious and highly passive who supported each other (women) internally. The characters empowered each other except Chandro's and Prakashi's husbands and the Sarpanch (Head of the family) who suppressed women and men too. Although Dr. Yashpal (coach) and Rambir (Prakashi's son) supported them and empowered their game, these sportswomen along with other women in the family fought together throughout. The scene where women wore medals as a part of the plan to confess about their game to men. These sportswomen were cultured yet modern, who are confident from within and believed in breaking the stereotype - a scene where Yashpal enlightened them with the shooting uniform, Chandro says, "It's time for women in skirts to break this cliché! This is our identity." The film has objectified women, suppressed, stereotyped them mostly and has portrayed a patriarchal and dictating image of men who were the decision makers most of the time and treated women unequally. The film has promoted women empowerment and gender equality, and demoted the historical cultural notion that followed the tradition like *ghunghat* (veil) and restricted their participation in a sport like shooting that is considered as "men's jewelry".

The characterization of sportswomen were of married and unmarried women whose actions were dictated by men as their fathers or husbands. The individuality of these sportswomen were of strong gut who dared to dream along with strong physical appearance. They were fearless and rebellious especially for their children and highly ambitious to achieve something and had shown female subjectivity throughout especially the times when they faced men viz. the time in train when men were eve teasing, when Vinod was ready to reveal their secret of shooting and the time when they stood-up in Panchayat against their husbands, with guns held in their hand to shut the mouth of these men.

The protagonists of the film were Chandro Tomar and Prakashi Tomar. These protagonists served a relationship where they challenged themselves to challenge Seema and Shefali and empower them for shooting. It was never their goal to learn the skill, but their natural talent made them excel from

the rest and inspired Seema and Shefali in learning the skill. Not only these two but their decision and tactics helped other women of the village in voicing their opinion and though they sacrificed their dream, their action inspired sportswomen and women in general to dream.

The scene where the panchayat is called to make a decision on sportswomen's game of shooting Chandro and Prakashi's acting to turn the decision in favor of their children was their victory at that moment as their husbands decided to let Seema and Shefali continue with the sport and restricted Chandro and Prakashi from doing so.

The film projected stereotypes several times in the film. From the start when women appear in *ghunghat*, women stepping outside the house without men guarding them, deciding what clothes are appropriate for women to wear in order to avoid male gaze to women being restricted from holding guns. These stereotypes projected reality of the orthodox society in the film, however it couldn't demote these stereotypes completely as it is a biopic but had attempted to break these stereotypes differently with the obvious option of hiding the truth to live the dream.

The film did objectify women in the film with a stereotypical notion of women being considered as a weaker sex and object of male desire. They were fetishized once when two men were eve teasing Seema and Shefali in the train. There is also a scene when the young Sarpanch asks the video player to play the condom social ad after sending women out of the common ground and contributing to male gaze and voyeurism.

The film *Saand Ki Aankh* rightly describes the title after Chandro and Prakashi agree to not being called Arjun because they will hit bullseye (*Saand ki Aankh*) instead of fish eye. The songs of the film are empowering and subjective to women's embodiment. The song *Uda Teetar* lyrics read:

"Main uda teetar laaungi re, jail ke bheetar laaungi re..." (I'll be a flying bird, I'll bring it inside the jail), the lyrics interpret that these sportswomen aim to hit the bullseye in future.

And other songs *Gold Gold* and *Yeh Womaniya* are equally empowering and ambitious. The film focused on Chandro and Prakashi's physical strength and projected their embodiment that is way more than that of men.

The film is written and directed by men and has been represented from male perspective. The

purpose of the film was focused on the protagonists, however the actions in the film were dictated by men be it in supporting characters to the protagonists or the antagonist characters in the film. The scenes where men restricted sportswomen from doing any "men activity" like shooting or the scenes where men like Yashpal, Rambir and the King supported women and encouraged them to participate. It was men who led the narrative not completely by actions but by dictating the action or by becoming the crucial decision makers. However, the film didn't center the male characters but their influence on female characters was strong enough to make the protagonists decide on what maximum these women can ask for, that was freedom and independence of their daughters and grand daughters at the cost of their own.

Panga

Panga is a 2020 fictional film based on a former Kabaddi player, Jaya Nigam, who after seven years of her marriage wants to make a comeback in Kabaddi and represent her nation at Asia Kabaddi Championship. Jaya was a former India team captain who had to leave Kabaddi due to her son Adi's premature delivery that resulted into weak immunity due to which Jaya decided to take care of Adi and therefore decided to do a nine-to-five job as a ticket teller and manage home.

Jaya is so attached to her game that she plays Kabaddi while sleeping and often kicks her husband. The film put emphasis on her life as a working woman, a mother and a wife. It portrays her routine life and shows how badly she misses playing Kabaddi. The time when Kabaddi has given so much to the nation but people hardly realize that or recognize Kabaddi players, disheartens her. A scene where Jaya says, "Why don't they make a game (video) on Kabaddi?" and further Adi replies, "One can make the game, but who will play?" Prashant, Jaya's husband who knows the importance of Jaya's sacrifice warns Adi not to pass a joke on three things - her husband, her son and Kabaddi. Jaya's craze and seriousness towards Kabaddi makes her realize her key to happiness. Subsequently, the film also showed her family and friends have constantly supported Jaya in her dreams.

The film has represented sportswomen characters as ambitious, confident, empowering and decision makers of their own. There were scenes when these women shared their opinion freely, without any stereotypical narrative associated with it.

Scenes where Jaya decides to continue her training after marriage tells her teammate that she doesn't need permission from Prashant for anything; Jaya deciding to continue to train after a month of fooling Adi and Meenu rejecting the marriage proposal for Kabaddi. The characters of sportswomen have been ambitious towards their dream no matter what and have shown a great character of sportswomen ship by thinking about the team and game first, supporting other women in their dreams, helping them anyway possible like Meenu and Nisha helping Jaya advance her game and Jaya's neighbour (lady) and her mother helped by managing Adi and Prashant in Jaya's absence. The film primarily focuses on the ambition of a married woman and a mother who wants to make a comeback in the Indian team and for that she is surrounded by such a supportive society that backs her ambition and makes it their own.

The film has only promoted gender equality, women empowerment and female subjectivity. There also have been scenes where the film often projected gender roles and role of a mother and limitations attached to it but the film answered it with a befitting reply to a mother/woman's ambitions that are no less than her duties towards her family, and that, she should also give some time to herself and her dreams by projecting reality, hence has demoted the notions of ideal image of women in the society. Although the film has somewhere treated the character of sportswomen as unequal in the sports sphere but that has only been done by women themselves. The scenes where Jaya questioned her state of being a selfish mother and choosing her dreams to she or other women underestimating her potential and at times Smita (current Indian team captain) disgracing Jaya and her duties as a homemaker and a sportswoman. The film has never made a point where men characters in particular questioned women's identity as sportswomen or addressed the norms of patriarchal society and asked women to follow them.

The protagonist of this film, Jaya combats her own fear i.e., from leaving her family to manage on their own and chasing her dreams, to dealing with her weakness - her speed and ankle hold, gets the solution to every problem of hers by following her passion with courage and by strengthening her strengths. The climax scene where Jaya gets her ankle caught in the last raid and makes a "The Tiger Chan" move that she named and helps in India winning the Asia Kabaddi Championship. The film leaves an impact on audiences as it

projects a collective effort of everyone surrounding Jaya and helping her accomplish her dreams, especially her husband, son and friend Meenu.

At times the film showed stereotypes in the film but did not hold onto those stereotypes instead broke these stereotypes right away. A scene where Jaya's team mate expresses "You are very lucky, Prashant lets you play Kabaddi after marriage too." Jaya replies, "I don't need Prashant's permission for anything." Also the time when Jaya and Meenu visit Mumbai for selection in the Eastern team and Jaya stereotypes the role of a mother says, "I am a mother and a mother can not dream. They neither have meaning nor any value," and further adds, "A mother has no right to dream and if I still dream, I am a selfish and cruel mother... I came here to test my limits, and this is the maximum I can push myself." However, Prashant and Adi convince her not to repeat her mistake again and follow her dreams.

The film has refrained from showing the narrative being driven by male characters in the film and has not objectified women characters in general. Neither on the grounds of voyeurism or narcissism nor on the grounds of male gaze, the film has entirely focused on the struggles of sportswomen mothers' afterlife and their ambition. The visuals of the film has mostly featured women's routine life in home and professional life including sports sphere and workplace. The songs of the film were empowering, be it *Jugnu, Panga (Title Track), Bibby* or *Wahin Hain Raste*.

The film was written by both male and female writers and directed by a female director who has also written the screenplay of the film from her perspective. The film has tried to engage the audience with real life situations of women after marriage and kids and has portrayed it with the life of a sportswoman character. It has emphasized on decisions of married as well as married women and their choices in life. From a feminist point-of-view, the film has eliminated the ideal structuring of women's character from a patriarchal prism or male subjectivity (role of women in society, male gaze and voyeurism and narrative driven by male characters) and has involved society's role towards women as equal contributor in the society as men in every field.

Saina

Saina is a 2021 sports biopic based on the life story of Indian Ace Shuttleer Saina Nehwal. The

story is based on Saina dreaming of becoming World No.1 since her childhood backed by her mother's dream of making Saina World No.1 shuttler because she couldn't continue badminton much after her marriage and kids and further dreamt to nurture her daughter into one. The film is narrated by Saina where she seems to be making a comeback after winning Commonwealth Gold Coast 2018 and while attending the press conference she gives due credits to her mother behind her victory.

Saina was born in a middle class Haryanvi family with big dreams, started training from her childhood backed by her parents at every step of her life. Her mother was the primary decision maker of her life who decided to enroll Saina in Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy Center in Hyderabad. She learns badminton at an early stage of her training and soon wins state and national junior titles, later goes on to win junior international and women's senior category internationally. Saina's strength and spirit comes from her mother as she answers in the press conference that her mother has a tough skin and the same blood flows in her veins as her mother started dreaming since the time she was in her womb. Saina's mother inbuilt this saying in her head, "You have to make a mark here!" and that led to Saina's stepping stone in the world of badminton.

The representation of sportswomen in the film has been in the purest form. The film has entirely represented women empowerment and gender equality through male and female characters both. Although there have been few scenes where a stereotypical representation and gender inequality has been projected but that has been limited to the few directions in the film that generalizes women's vision as a sports player and not as an ideal image of women. One of the scenes where Saina and Kashyap are in an argument after her conversation with Rajan about her inviting distractions in the form of love and says to Kashyap, "Why one doesn't ask Sachin questions on marrying at the age of 22, because he is a male player? I am a woman and therefore I can't do it, I can't have my love life." Although the scene portrays an unequal opportunity about sportswomen's love life, it certainly does not label women's identity to get married.

The film promotes female subjectivity and sportswomen desire to achieve their dreams. It has identified women as equal sports players

throughout the film, from the time Saina's mother is projected playing badminton during her pregnancy and beating her opponent to Saina bagging the title of World No.1. The film also promotes men and women supporting sportswomen and demotes gender inequality, patriarchy and male subjectivity. The film has entirely eliminated objectification of sportswomen and women in general on the screen. It has been careful with justifying the character of sportswomen on screen, despite the film being a biopic.

The characterisation of the protagonist Saina is courageous, strong, spirited and determined. She is not someone who is always decisive about her future and game, instead is more of a listener or a follower, but the only time when she takes the most difficult decision of her life is when she decides to leave Rajan's academy after Rajan stops giving her game the attention it required. Her decision was respected by her parents and she went on to win the World No.1 title. The character of the protagonist empowers women and their embodiment. A scene where Saina's new coach tells her that she is so much more to this sport and represents the hall of mirrors, and that this is the single most important thing that has happened to young women in this sport (badminton).

The film is driven from a female's point of view. Although the film tried to dictate action by man (Rajan) but that was an outright concern of a coach and not of a man. It narrated a female's desire (Saina's mother) to achieve the title of ace shuttler through her daughter and built the narrative of the protagonist based on her mother's desire. The film has not represented women as the object of male desire, nor has it voyeured or fetishized female characters on screen which portrays a clean and nearly an actual representation of a sportswomen on screen. Although the scenes in the film narrated Saina's struggle regarding her weight and being trolled in the society, but, it was only through her words, and it had never shown any character body shaming her directly.

The film was written and directed by men and has been shown from a pro-feminist male perspective. On the parameters of feminist film theory, the director and writers have evenly crafted the film from feminist point of view and have disregarded patriarchy, misogyny, objectification and any such feminist theory element that generalises the stereotypical identity of women on screen.

Skater Girl

Skater Girl is a 2021 film based on a village girl named Prerna Bhil who aspires to become a skater after she is introduced to the sport of skateboarding. Soon she learns the skill of skating and participates in the National Skating competition by going against her family's will and runs away from the marriage. Her talent and courage is rewarded by the Queen and gives her the identity of a sportswoman.

Hailing from a small village Khempur near Udaipur in Rajasthan, Prerna was always restricted from doing things that gave the identity of being equal in the society like going to school, helping her family financially, skating or marrying at her own will. Another woman named Jessica, an architect who visits her father's native place (Khempur), helps Prerna and other kids in pursuing skateboarding along with her friend Eric by making India's first and largest skatepark in the village and organizing a National Skating Competition. Prerna feels free spirited while skating and despite suppressing her, she decides to take a last and the most daring chance of her life.

The film conveyed a message of freedom for all by representing a character like Prerna who was unaware of the happenings of the world and never ambitioned to achieve something in future. It showed a strong and encouraging character of women in the society who were restricted from entering into men's world but they did. Queen, Jessica and lastly Prerna dare to change the society and accomplish their dream. The scene where Queen agrees to give her land to Jessica for a skatepark project after her empowering pitch that envisioned the future of young girls in the village. Jessica told the Queen that she knew in school, what she wanted to be but when she asked one of the girls (Prerna) about the same, the girl didn't know because no one ever asked her; and when she (Prerna) skates, she feels free, so if they don't give these girls a chance who will? In this film, women were the highlighting characters throughout that were empowered as well as restricted the most by society.

The film focused on gender inequality and stereotypes directly and indirectly. There was a lack of solution while addressing the issue of stereotypes and inequality faced by women in general like the stereotype of not entering a temple during menstruation, necessity of a male child to complete the family, Jessica and Prerna unable to argue with Prerna's father for her skating career,

Jessica not attempting to question the minister's male consciousness regarding her idea of opening a skatepark that minister thought was drawn from her father, brother or husband because it's difficult for world to think that a woman can envision something as this big. The film has also promoted the historical culture of wearing *ghunghat* (veil) and role of gender in society such as women as homemakers and men as breadwinners of the family. However, throughout the film the narration was focused on ambition of kids, especially Prerna's dreams and empowered her. Men and women both seem to be supporting the sportswoman in achieving her dreams and showed embodiment of women in general.

The film characterizes an under age protagonist who dares to dream, is prepared to marry off when she feels empowered to live her life to the fullest but is restricted by her family and the society due to her gender and caste. She is strong but suppressed by society, typically her father and is not a decision maker. The only time she decides what she wants is when she realizes and gives a last chance to skating and leaves the rest to her fate. Her character has shaped other characters in the film too, like her mother understanding her and her love for the sport and other women taking active part in the sport later.

The film focuses on the protagonist but the actions in the film are dictated by men, especially her father. Men have tried to control the actions of women in general, a scene where Prerna's father asks mother and Prerna to do what is told to them (household chores) instead of doing what's meant for men to do. The film has eliminated the aspect of objectification entirely. The film has focused on portraying the inequality of gender and caste, stereotype and women empowerment and has also identified women as equal contributors in the society if given a chance, but has not gazed or voyeured the character of women on screen.

The film is written and directed by women from a female perspective. However, the film has not questioned the issue of objectification in the rural setting, but has touched and addressed the issues of gender inequality and stereotypical society. It has indirectly addressed the issue of women in general in society as well as the sports sphere but has its emphasis on the protagonist's fight with her fear. It represents a real life situation of women in rural areas specifically and empowers every woman character in the film.

Rashmi Rocket

Rashmi Rocket is a 2021 sports and courtroom drama based on a runner named Rashmi, who is questioned on her identity of being a woman, gets banned from Indian Athletics Association for her androgynous characteristics. Rashmi files a petition for Human Rights Violation against the association and wins the case not only for herself but also other female athletes who faced an illegal gender test, and got banned or were forced to leave the academy after being tested with more testosterone in the blood that questioned their gender identity of being men or transgender.

Rashmi was born and brought up in Kutch and always believed in doing things of her own will. She was the decision maker and was always backed by her father. In 2001, Rashmi lost her father during an earthquake accident while she was chasing the finish line during her annual sports day. Since then she decided not to run ever in future. She grew up as a tourist guide. One day after meeting Captain turned Major Gagan, who witnessed her running speed that was not normal but brilliant, and convinced Rashmi to run again but this time professionally, she decided to do it for her father and mother Bhanuben. Rashmi wins district and state races and her talent is identified by the association. Although with few disagreements, the majority of selectors are in favor of Rashmi's selection in the Indian team. Rashmi struggles but gives competition to Niharika (Indian team captain, India's no.1 runner before Rashmi and daughter of Dilip Chopra, one of the selectors). Looking at her progress, Dilip politicizes to run a gender test, infringing Rashmi's Human Rights and politicizes with Priyanka, who accuses her of hiding her gender identity and calls the police to get her arrested illegally. Rashmi fights back legally after four months of the incident and gets justice.

The representation of Rashmi as a woman is of someone who is a decision maker, identifies every gender as equal, she is empowered and finds herself embodied irrespective of the gender. The film promotes gender equality and women empowerment, however the film is a courtroom drama, therefore the exchange of dialogues between both the advocates and judge represented gender equality as well as inequality. Women were oppressed along with a man once. The scene where Rashmi is slapped by the police inspector Sathe in the opening hostel arrest scene. Rashmi and other sportswomen who were victims of this gender test were often disgraced by words in the courtroom,

by the media and society, Rashmi was discriminated against on the basis of gender and was labeled as a man. The scenes where Priyanka often addressed her as men. The film also represented patriarchy where a man dictates action to his wife. Moreover, women in general are supported by men and women both, in society as well as in the sports sphere.

The characterisation of the protagonist Rashmi is strong, embodied and a decision maker. She is characterised as a daughter, athlete, wife and a mother-to-be in different phases of her life. Rashmi was always interested in dressing casual like jeans, t-shirts, shirts etc. which was associated with men dressing. Her physical characteristics were androgynous in nature that at times questioned her identity of being a women in the society as well as sports sphere for which she was banned from running in future. Other women in the film were also of strong character including supporting antagonist characters. The protagonist makes an overall impact on other characters in the film. From taking care of her mental health to fighting for other women irrespective of losing a chance to win the case, she has shown a great character especially the time when she decided to train during her pregnancy and not use her pregnancy as a weapon to win the case, inspires everyone related to the character in the film.

The film projected minimal stereotypes that were demoted in the film. The scene where Bhanu is not happy with Rashmi dressing in jeans, and finds it a cross dressing in general, Rashmi's father addresses the issue and normalizes gender cross dressing and equal rights of decision making for both Rashmi and Bhanu. In the same way, the film has also demoted the act of oppression irrespective of gender. The scene where a man hits his woman, orders his wife to go home in front of the panchayat and holds her hand in angst, at that time Rashmi slaps the man for his act. In a conversation later, Dr. Ejaz asks Rashmi "*Marna zaroori hai?* (Is doing violence necessary?)" Rashmi replies, "*Exactly, main bhi toh yeh hi keh rahi hu.* (Exactly, that's what I am saying.))" referring to the man hitting his wife. Rashmi and Dr. Ejaz Qureshi mutually agreed that violence must not be an option. However, the stereotypes projected in the film were of reality in nature and were not simply drawn for cinematic convenience.

The narrative of the film was not driven by men, it was women who were in the center from the start. Their identity was the whole point of narration in

the film. Although, the film at one point has voyeured the protagonist character with the camera movements focusing on her body and also featured the gaze of the male in the song *I am very Sorry*. Other than that, the film purely focused on the androgyny and femininity aspect of sportswomen. The visual appeal of the protagonist character portrayed an androgynous (popularly referred as masculine attributes in women's case) physical attributes at the time she was training or when she appeared in *ganjee* on the screen.

The story was written by both men and a woman and was directed by a man from male perspective. The film has emphasised more on the gender issue, gender discrimination, gender test, human rights violation along with sportswomen's ambition. It also addresses the gender bias happening in the sports sphere where male athletes are given more opportunities, more pay, better facilities and sponsorship than female athletes, along with the importance of gender tests and solutions to how these tests should be conducted and how the players should be treated before, during and after the test. The film has carefully and sensitively made the film on the grounds of feminist point of view and has empowered the participation of women and other genders in sports.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the films selected as samples for the study, the researcher has found similarities and differences out of content analysis.

Similarities

- Elements of feminist film theory were often identified in films that include gender inequality, stereotype, women empowerment, gender equality, patriarchy and objectification.
- The researcher identified parameters of male gaze, voyeurism & narcissism and narrative driven by men in the sampled films that objectified sportswomen and women in general on the screen.
- The films focused on promoting gender equality and women empowerment by breaking stereotypes and identified females as sportswomen characters.
- The films mostly denoted stereotypes by projecting them with a solution. These films sometimes didn't even focus much on stereotypes in the entire film.
- Both men and women have contributed equally in supporting sportswomen as well as disgracing them.

Differences

- Not all films have identified parameters of the study in the films. 40% to 60% of the films showcased male gaze, voyeurism & narcissism and film narrative driven by men.
- The rest of the films have avoided objectification of women and driving film narrative by men. These films mostly focused on empowering women's identity as sportswomen and have represented stereotypical reality faced by women in the society as well as the sports sphere.
- Films namely *Chak De! India*, *Dil Bole Hadippa!*, *Saala Khadoos* and *Dangal* were the films that were driven by men. The other films have shown female athletes as primary decision makers and protagonists of the film.
- Films namely *Panga*, *Saina* and *Skater Girl* have ignored the angle of objectification in the film. These films did not focus at all on male gaze, voyeurism and narcissism, instead gave primary importance to the ambition of female characters.
- *Dil Bole Hadippa!* is the film that was objectified the maximum whereas *Rashmi Rocket* was objectified the least.
- On being addressed as men or being associated with masculine characteristics, two films namely *Dil Bole Hadippa!* showcased sportswoman *masquerading* as a man (Veera cross dressing as Veer to qualify in men's cricket), whereas *Rashmi Rocket* focused on *androgyny* of the sportswoman character (Rashmi addressed as a man or transgender).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

After analysing ten films that featured female characters as sportswomen in Hindi Feature Sports Films, and observing these films on the ground of feminist film theory by Laura Mulvey and elements of feminist film theory, the researcher has arrived that representation of sportswomen either began with women empowerment and gender equality that portrayed the character of sportswomen as strong, ambitious, decision maker and embodied like the films *Saina*, *Mary Kom*, *Saand Ki Aankh*; or began with gender inequality, women considered as weaker sex or addressed to masculine characteristic, narrative driven by men or actions dictated by men like the films *Chak De! India*, *Rashmi Rocket*, *Dangal*, *Saala Khadoos*. The sampled films also showed the empowering female characters that started or made comeback after being mothers or mother-to-be with the films *Mary Kom*, *Panga*, *Saand Ki Aankh* and *Rashmi*

Rocket that projected the reality of the afterlife of mothers.

These films have projected women characters as unequal to men on the screen for 263 times and stereotyped 60 times in total. It has objectified women as the object of sex or fetishized women characters for 103 times along with treating women as passive to men and idealising patriarchy for 158 times in all the sampled films. The films did represent women as bleak and passive on the screen as compared to male gender, however these films have also contributed in representing female subjectivity and have empowered women on screen for the maximum of 358 times, followed by gender equality for 153 times in comparison to male characters.

Although the films were of sports drama, therefore more emphasis was given to sports and identity of sportswomen on the screen. Films like *Mary Kom*, *Saina*, *Saand Ki Aankh*, *Panga* and *Rashmi Rocket* were the films that featured female protagonists the most, not only in terms of screen space but also in terms of representation through dialogues and characteristics. But, taking the parameters of the study into consideration, 40% of the films projected male gaze on screen, along with 60% and 40% of the films projected voyeurism and narcissism respectively. These films also projected 40% of narrative driven by men out of ten films. In all, the study of these films mostly speaks on the ground of male subjectivity and narrates the film from male perspective.

From the study, the researcher concludes that the previous study that focused on objectification of women on-screen in films studied in the past has been evolving with time. Taking these ten films as examples, the direction and script of these films were created such, that showed a decline in the objectification of sportswomen and women in general in sports films from 2019 i.e. *Saand Ki Aankh* to 2021 *Rashmi Rocket* and represented the least of male gaze, voyeurism and narcissism. This is however expected from filmmakers to make such progressive films and show a better, empowering and more embodied side of sportswomen characters on screen. Along with it, films made after *Saand Ki Aankh* also showed women as major contributors as the narrative of the film was driven by women instead of men. Hence, the representation of sportswomen in Hindi Sports Film with reference to parameters of Feminist Film Theory is progressing and bettering on the grounds of narrative driven by men, male

gaze and voyeurism & narcissism. With a constant effort in filmmaking, the films can shape the future society towards equality and empowerment in reality more than fiction and influence young girls and women who aspire to be sports players and consider sports as a full time career.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDY

- Other language sports films can be studied to derive in depth and comparative data.
- Other than fiction, non-fiction or documentary sports films on female athletes can be studied.
- A comparative study on male and female centric sports films can be studied in Hindi Sports Films as the scenario of Hindi female sports films is not that bleak in India.
- A comparison of fiction and non-fiction films on sports films can be studied to analyse representation of sportswomen in two different types of films.
- Another approach or method can be used or added to this study to make this study more detailed and accurate. Eg: Interview method

SUGGESTIONS

- More films should be made on female athletes centering female characters as protagonists in Hindi cinema.
- The population of these films showed varied sports like cricket, hockey, wrestling, skating, badminton, shooting, boxing, kabaddi, track field etc. other sports must be taken into consideration while making the film.
- Society must be aware of the achievements of women so as to change their mind-set of male dominance.
- Actors who have been sports players in the past must be casted for sports films along with a non-athlete actor to contribute little with sports films in Hindi cinema as they can bring the reality of off-screen to on-screen.
- More films should be made from feminist point-of-view and must also consider importance of other gender in the film by being sensitive towards them while representing them on-screen.

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