



# DEPICTION OF MALE DOMINANCE AND PATRIARCHY IN THE INDIAN CINEMA

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## INTRODUCTION

“Agar khoobsoorat ladki ko na chedho toh who bhi toh uski beizzati hoti hai” “Akeli ladki khuli tijori ki tarah hoti hai”. As observed in the above dialogues, the first one being from a movie called “Malamaal” which released in 1988 and the second one being from a movie called “Jab We Met” released in 2007 i.e. a span of three decades there seems to be minimal change in the mindset of the movie industry with respect to the concept of male dominance and patriarchy which makes us curious to learn and research about this topic.

## Our Research Objectives are: -

- 1) To understand the various aspects of male dominance
- 2) To correlate male dominance and patriarchy to Indian cinema
- 3) To understand the prevalence of male dominance behind the camera
- 4) To observe the changes male dominance and patriarchal society has undergone over the decades

## Reason To Select The Topic: -

As two 18 year old females, we strongly believe that male dominance and patriarchy still exists in the Indian society which eventually influences cinema. Since cinema has a wide reach, we believe that talking about societal issues like male dominance through cinema will create a bigger impact and therefore, we chose this topic. We believe that our thorough research with direct connection to the Indian Cinema which is the largest film producer in the world will help the common man understand the meaning of “male dominance” and “patriarchy” in reality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Film and cinema are huge forms of mass entertainment and is a wide-spread form of communication across all religions, states and people. It portrays personal dreams and stories, social concerns and imagination. The representation of gender roles in cinema has been a concern since decades and is unfortunately still prevalent. Cinema plays a huge role in formulating ideologies around gender and enforcing the ideas of male dominance and patriarchal society through gender stereotyping and lack of women empowerment.

“Male dominance and patriarchy is a social system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.” as defined by Collins Dictionary.<sup>1</sup> For example, In India, mostly, the father/male is the head of the family and always has the last say in any family matter. Another example is that a woman has to change her last name after marriage and the child also self-evidently takes the father’s last name. Since, Indian cinema is a reflection of Indian society, we clearly witness a great deal of male dominance and patriarchy in the movies. There are numerous other movies which portray male dominance and patriarchy.<sup>2</sup> In the early years of Indian cinema male dominance was usually portrayed physically, for example domestic-violence, rape, marital rape and dowry. In modern times, male dominance is also portrayed through mental and emotional actions by the way of holding back a woman’s career and women not having enough say in family matters. Even though there are movies being made about rape etc it is a fact that only one in every hundred films shows women in their own right. Most of the movies still portray women as sex symbols and are given minimal roles. Males are shown as strong, authoritative characters where as women are shown as mild, scared and always secondary figures. These gender stereotypes and patriarchal depictions are not only present in the characters/ roles that women are playing but are present in the entire narrative of the films. There are movies where in the entire storyline revolves under how the wife is being ill-treated or how the mother has no say in the up-bringing of her own child. This clearly proves that cinema is seen through a male perspective or male lens and they are given more importance in movies. On Wikipedia, on an average per movie a male character is mentioned at least 30 times while a female is mentioned nearly half as much which depicts that male roles are stronger and more centralized while women roles are not given as much importance. When male dominance and patriarchy are studied carefully with respect to Indian cinema we see how storylines are varying with the portrayal of various relationships between female and male characters, relationships between father-daughter, father-son, husband-wife etc. These relationships may not be the key storyline in every film but there is an underlying concept in mostly all Bollywood movies, even today. In fact, when it comes to the Bechedl test, created by Alison Bechdel most Bollywood movies fail. To pass the test, a film must have 1) at least two female characters, 2) who have names and speak to one another, 3) about anything other than a man. Despite the bar being set so low, very few movies pass this test. Even women centric Bollywood movies like Tanu Weds Manu Returns and Highway fail this test.

Seeing Indian cinema through a male lens does not stop with women getting smaller roles but also exploits women and portrays women as sexual objects as seen by the way of item songs. While most movies have their central characters as males, surprisingly more than half the posters have females on them as this “attracts” the audience.<sup>3</sup> Item numbers have become a marketing strategy for films as the woman plays a role of a seductress. The woman is being exploited and literally being treated as an “item” as illustrated by the term “item girl”. Sometimes, the item number would be even more popular than the movie itself. A typical item number consists of very offensive lyrics and a woman dancing to woo men. Even A-list actresses are performing these item numbers in highly budgeted movies today with A-list actors acting as spectators.<sup>4</sup> Here, the music industry comes into the picture. Women are not being given the recognition they deserve when it comes to playback singing, composing or playing an instrument for Indian cinema. Every year, the number of songs sung by female playback singers is declining. In fact, over the decades, instead of an improvement women are getting lesser recognition in the music industry than they did in

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<sup>1</sup> Gender Reflections in Mainstream Hindi Cinema- Nidhi Shendurnikar Tere (Junior Research Scholar)

<sup>2</sup> International Journal of Human and Cultural Studies (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Journal of South Asian Studies (2017)

<sup>4</sup> Hindustan Times (2018)

1960. When there is a duet between a male and female, the female is given lesser lines and is told to sing it in a tone that is not suitable. The explanation is that the songs go hand in hand with the script and storyline and since women do not have major roles and there are not too many women centric movies the requirement for a female backup singer is less. Thus this leads us to believe that the directors and producers need to portray women in a stronger manner and break the barrier that goes hand in hand with gender stereotypes.

Male dominance in Indian cinema exists even behind the scenes and casting couch. There are more male directors and producers in Indian cinema than females. Males are given more credibility and opportunity and it is a shame. Even in talk-panels etc in the film industry, there are usually 5-10 males while only 1-2 females. Even renowned female directors are not given as much recognition and credibility as males. There is a large gap between the first and second film a woman director directs because of lack of support and breakthrough opportunities which males seem to find easily. Indian audience is also hesitant and sceptical to watch movies made by women as they believe they are not good enough, even though at times they may be better as they may have a fresh outlook and fresh perspective. This gender stereotypical behaviour on and off screen exists across all states in India and all types of cinema for example, the south. Even in the south, women are facing discrimination when it comes to Indian cinema. Women directors and actresses, both are suffering due to male dominance and patriarchal society. There are examples where the woman director's equipment was being cancelled at the last minute and she had to fight with the producer to get it back and also instances where if there is a male and a female in a meeting, nobody is concerned about the female and her opinions. Thus, Indian cinema today, a reflection of society is completely sexist, and portrays male dominance and patriarchy in its entirety. In conclusion, Indian society and cinema is starting to make a conscious effort to break the gender stereotypes, but this is still a man's word and we think we're celebrating too early. We are taking small steps to do something about it, but a lot more can be and should be done.



Concepts from the Literature Review	Movies selected for the specific study	Analysis	Character Analysis	Order of appearance in the essay.
1. Storylines	Dil Waale Dhalania Le Jaayenge, Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham..., Mughal-E-Azam, Vidhaata	In this concept, we'd like to shed light over the storylines that depict male dominance and patriarchy throughout the movie.	This concept does not focus on any character in particular	1st
2. Relationships Between Characters	Daman, Patiala House, Secret Superstar	This concept sheds lights on the father-son, father-daughter, husband-wife relationships depicted in movies where the male head of the family is clearly dominating and has power over the other.	Gattu-Bauji (Patiala House), Insiya-Farooqh (Secret Superstar), Mauji-Father (Sui Dhaaga), Sanjay-Durga (Daman), Vinay-Ketki (Mrityudand).	2nd
3. Item Songs, Song Lyrics, Music Industry	List of offensive item songs/offensive lyrics:- Fevicol Se (Dabangg 2), Munni Badnam (Dabangg), Gandhi Baat (R....Rajkumar), Pinky (Zanjeer), Halkat Jawani (Heroine), Jumma Chumma (Jhankar), Tu Cheez Badi Hai Mast Mast (Mohra), Brown Girl (Honey Singh), Main Aayi Hoon UP Bihar Lootne (Shool)	Songs and song lyrics play a major role in Indian cinema and this concept highlights how offensive and derogatory songs and lyrics are shown in the Indian Film Industry. It also depicts male dominance that exists in the Music Industry of Indian Cinema.	This concept does not focus on any character in particular.	3rd
4. Behind The Screen	Casting Couch through movies like Fashion, Heroine and The	In this concept, we'd like to talk about how male dominance is	This concept does not focus on any character in particular.	4th

	Dirty Picture, Difference in Pay Scale.	not only depicted on screen in Indian Cinema but sadly, it is what goes on off screen too		
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## ESSAY

The portrayal of women in Indian cinema has been under key observance and has been the topic of discussion even amongst the industry itself as A-list actresses are finally speaking up about the sexist nature of Bollywood. This is now being backed with adequate proof and data. Indian cinema has been notorious in its portrayal and mistreatment of women thus depicting that cinema is still male focused and females have to take the passenger's seat. We wish to talk about these disparities that take place at the front end as well as the back end, i.e. on screen and also the casting and directing through some specific concepts namely, storylines and narratives of films, various relationships between males and females (father-daughter) etc, music industry and item songs and lastly the casting couch and backend.

The first concept that we are focussing on is "Storylines". Bollywood movies seem to follow a particular concept according to Forbes which is "*Take one handsome, heroic looking character, preferably played by an actor named Khan. Add a pretty girl with an antagonistic father. Mix them into a thinly plotted love story with lots of singing and dancing. Throw in a fight or two to cover up the lack of plot. Give the father an epiphany—whether logical or not—that our hero is suddenly the only one for his daughter. Conclude by bringing the lovers together in a Shaadi (wedding), with lots more singing and dancing at the end.*" The movies that we have selected focus mainly on how the head of the family which is a male has the final say in any family matter and there is a non-existent role played by his female counterpart or even his children in that matter which is patriarchy in its true sense. In old movies like Mughal-E-Azam(1960), Salim (Dilip Kumar) falls in love with Anarkali (Madhubhala) but his father does not approve of the relationship and thus the father imprisons Anarkali so that his son cannot marry her. In the movie Vidhaata (1982), the story revolves around Kunal (Sanjay Dutt) falling in love with Durga (Padmini Kolhapure) who is a slum-girl and Kunal's grandfather doesn't approve of their relationship and he threatens Durga and her mother to flee away or they'll have to face serious consequences. Durga and her mother flee to Goa where some men are sent by Kunal's grandfather to rape them. Even in a major blockbuster like Dil Waale Dhalania Le Jaayenge (1995) we clearly witness patriarchy as Simran's (Kajol) father forces her to marry Kuljeet (Parmeet Sethi) who according to the father is suitable for her. Even after the father realised that Simran is in love with Raj (Shah Rukh Khan) and wants to marry him, he still is adamant on her marrying the boy of his choice. In Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham (2001), we see how Yash Raichand (Amitabh Bachchan) who is the head of the family throws Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan), his son out of the house for the sole reason of him wanting to marry Anjali (Kajol) who did not come from a wealthy/affluent family. The one thing all these movies have in common is entrenched patriarchy that runs throughout the course of the movie.

Next, we would like to focus on the depiction of male dominance and patriarchy in Indian cinema represented by the various relationships between males and females. This concept depicts that male dominance does not only exist in a male-female relationship like a father-daughter relationship or a husband-wife relationship but it also exists between two males i.e father-son relationship. It also focuses on male dominance and its various kinds for example, physical and mental abuse which women/children face. The first relationship we have chosen to exhibit male dominance is the husband-wife relationship through the movie *Daman* (2001). In the movie *Daman*, Durga (Raveena Tandon) is married to Sanjay (Sayaji Shinde) and is subjected to physical and mental harm by her husband. He spent his night with Chameli, a prostitute. Durga continues to be tortured by her husband and after a drunken night, he rapes her. Soon Durga is pregnant and gives birth to a girl, named Deepa, but this only disappoints Sanjay and he shuns the child. Sanjay decided to bring Deepa who is 12 years and is married to an older man. When Durga protests, he viciously beats her. *Daman* In the second movie that we have chosen which is *Patiala House* (2011), we'd like to focus on the father-son relationship. In *Patiala House*, Parghat Singh Kahlon alias Gattu / Kaali (Akshay Kumar) who is living the life his father, Gurtej Singh Kahlon (Rishi Kapoor) chose for him. Gattu wished to follow his passion and become a member of the England team even though he knew his father would not approve. His father even threatened to commit suicide. Later in the movie, Gattu secretly starts playing for England with his entire family supporting him and helping him hide this truth from his parents but when his father finds out, he gets a heart attack and refuses to accept Gattu as his son. In this movie, we see how the father is controlling his son's life by not letting him follow his passion of playing cricket to the point where he disowns his son at a point in the movie. To shed some light on male dominance shown in the father-daughter relationship, we'd like to talk about the movie *Secret Superstar*(2017) in which Insiya Malik (Zaira Wasim) is a 15 year old girl who wants to pursue a career in singing but her orthodox and abusive father, is against it. The father is quite often shown physically abusing the mother by beating her with utensils and in one scene when Insiya gets a bad grade in her exam, her father breaks her guitar. To pursue her passion, she starts uploading videos on youtube by singing under a niqab so that she can hide from her father but at the same time try and do what makes her happy. This is a clear example of a dominating father shown in the movie who doesn't let his offspring make decisions for themselves and doesn't let his child follow his passion. Through these three examples, we see how male dominance is very frequently represented in the Indian Cinema.

For our third concept, we'd like to talk about a major part of Indian Cinema which is the music industry of Bollywood. Whether it is as background music, two-three songs or proper dance sequences. Most movies today, consist of at least one of these. However, the voices behind these songs has become increasingly male. Females are facing male dominance in this sector as well. The women are not being given as many opportunities as men. In fact, in 2017, there were almost double the number of songs sung by males than there were of females. In the 1960's every three out of four songs were sung by women but today only one out of every four songs is sung by a woman. For example, in 1958 Asha Bhosle sang almost 45% of all the releases that year which is almost impossible in today's age. It took Neha Bhasin (singer of *Jag Ghoomeya*, *Sultan*), 16 long years to make a breakthrough in the male dominated music industry where women always seem to get the raw end of the deal. It is also to be noted that most production houses are owned by males and are making male-centric movies which demand a male voice for playback singing etc. Moving on, we would like to talk about the so called "item songs" which outright speak of women as objects and defy them with their offensive and objectifying lyrics. Item numbers are featuring in movies since the early 1930's and are still prevalent as of 2018. A typical item song, is where an "item girl" is dancing in minimal attire so as to woo men. This usually has no connection with the plot of the film but is for entertainment purposes and to attract mass audience. The lyrics of these songs are extremely vulgar and offensive and victimise women throughout. For example, 'fevicol se' in *Dabangg 2* says "Main to tandoori, main to tanduri murgi hoon yaar, gatkale saiyan alcohol se" which disregards women and shows them in bad light. Due to item songs, men in reality believe it is okay to mistreat women as they are more dominant and have some sort of power over them. However, the Central Board of Film Certification is planning on improvising a ban on telecasting item songs on television etc which will hopefully work in favour of women.

We believe that there is more to Indian cinema than the end result that we can see on screens. The entire making process, casting couch, directing and crew also involves lack of women representation and prominent male dominance. This issue has also been addressed and accepted by various Indian actresses and we would like to discuss about how gender stereotypes is affecting cinema at the backend. Actresses like Kangana Ranaut, Kalki Koechlin, Tisca Chopra and many other actresses have gone on record to share their experience of the much discussed “casting couch” that exists in the film industry. Aditi Rao Hydari has gone on record to say *“how dare someone speak to me like that! For about eight months after the incident, I didn't get work”*. Not just Bollywood actresses but also Tollywood actress, Varalaxmi Sarathkumar shared her horrific experience in a statement posted on Twitter in which she mentions *“I was in a meeting when towards the end of the half hour meeting, he asked me, ‘So...when can we meet outside?’ To which I replied, ‘Regarding some other work?’. His reply was, ‘No no! Not work... for other things.’* In movies like Fashion (2008), Heroine (2012) and The Dirty Picture (2011), the concept of casting couch has been touched upon and Bollywood does unwillingly accept its existence in the industry. Patriarchy and male dominance trickles down from casting couch to the difference in pay of a female actor as compared to that of a male actor. According to Forbes, top actors in Bollywood earn almost five times more than A-list actresses, and the film industry including directors seem to have accepted this fact. In 2003, even Karan Johar complied to this norm and dropped Kareena Kapoor from Kal Ho Na Ho because she asked for equal pay as the male lead, Shah Rukh Khan. Preity Zinta ended up with the role and Johar and Kapoor had a fall out and did not speak to each other for almost a year. In 2015, Kangana Ranaut opened up about the same and said that her male co-stars are paid thrice the amount and it all happens discretely. She raises a point and says nobody can guarantee the success of a film, so how is it that males are still paid more than females for the same amount of work and effort. In 2017, Priyanka Chopra was told that “lead” actresses are replaceable, as they are secondary and are overshadowed by the male anyway. She said that she was told that, *“being sexy is our strength, which it can be, and it is, but that’s not the only thing we have.”* In conclusion to this concept, it is evident that the Indian film industry is majorly male dominated and the females have to face the brunt of it.

In conclusion, the portrayal of male dominance and patriarchy in Indian cinema has changed over the years. In earlier times the depiction was more of the physical aspect and dealt with violence and how a woman is powerless and is seen as nothing more than a wife or mother. In these days, along with the physical aspect even the emotional and mental aspect is depicted, example how the male thought process is given more importance than the female’s. As we observed, male dominance and patriarchy exists not only in Bollywood, but also in the south, music industry and casting couch or behind the scenes. While cinema is the reflection of society, it also acts a catalyst for enforcing the prevalent ideologies surrounding gender stereotypes. However, Indian cinema has taken a conscious step towards breaking the glass ceiling and is finally portraying women, in their own right. Women-centric films are now being produced for example, Queen, Pink, Mary Kom etc. That having said, Indian cinema continues to depict patriarchal societies and male dominance where male superstars make it big at the box office and have a larger than life appeal with the public. A few female oriented films does not make Indian cinema fair and just towards women, it is still very much a man’s world and thus it is the time the entire film fraternity joins hands to make a conscious effort to write, produce and portray women as strong, independent, respected and equal members of the Indian society.

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