



The Portrayal of Women in Pakistan feature Films Urdu and Punjabi (1988-1999) a Critical Evaluaton

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of women in Pakistan feature film Urdu and Punjabi (1988-1999). It is a critical evaluation of forty eight films. It explores the characters of women portrays in Urdu and Punjabi film of Pakistan. Using content analysis, as the portrayal of women in Urdu and Punjabi films is not reflective of true Pakistani women rather this portrayal presents a negative image of Pakistani women in the viewer's mind. These movies do not address the women's issues nor do they present solutions to these problems faced by Pakistani women. So far as the findings show that the portrayal of women in Urdu and Punjabi films are not free from male prejudices and these films do not portray the true social and political role performed by actual Pakistani women. The analysis shows that the portrayal of women in Urdu and Punjabi films is based on the assumptions.

Keywords: Urdu Punjabi films, women portrayal, visual communication, textual analysis, woman's character, women's issues.

Introduction

Cinema is an extraordinary entertainment medium and a superb storytelling machine. It is a powerful, stable and a perfect system of visual communication. It is a word-image combination which imparts presence and immediacy to the world. It promotes either reality truthfulness or unreality and total falsehood. Elsaesser and Buckland¹ rightly said that the combination of image, movement and sound is obviously something quite mysterious in its effect on human beings, almost magical..... Film is the most popular medium of entertainment. The films play a vital role in the construction of an organized society. This role becomes more important in a society having low literacy rate. Thus the film in Pakistan has become a popular and powerful medium of entertainment. Almost 20 films are produced annually in Pakistan. Most of the producers are of the opinion that this is a simple and low-cost medium that provide entertainment to the people who want to escape from their day to day worries. Therefore films are not taken as a creative source of critical thoughts rather it is taken as a temporary escape from the fever and fret of life. As the majority of the cinema going population is uneducated, poor and backward so they are highly affected by the ideology projected in these films. This affects more to those who migrate from rural areas to urban localities and feel themselves as unaccompanied and strangers.

Literature Review: Film and women are a significant and attractive field of research for the media experts as well as for the social scientists. Since our study belongs to the research

studies which aim to find out the image of women projected through the media and films. The survey of the literature on women and media brings out the fact that there has been an agreement all over the world that the images of women projected through the film tend to reinforce the traditional attitudes and often present a degrading and humiliating picture of women, which may be true for certain cultures and societies. Social scientists, researchers and international agencies working for the emancipation and welfare of women are aware of the fact that the image of women projected from film constitutes a major obstacle to eliminate the discrimination against women throughout the world, and is a main factor in preserving the traditional sexist attitude towards them.

According to the UNESCO Resolutions and the recommendation observed that there is a tendency in the media to project a stereotyped image of women, reinforcing traditional concepts of the roles of women, prejudicial to aspire for the improved status, rights and participation in society. UNESCO Symposium on Women in Cinema' held in St. Vincent². We the participants and the observers at the symposium, denounce the existing sexist images of women in the mass media and appeal to women all over the world to carefully examine and analyze these images and to realize that they are literally living in a world of man-made images which do not resemble real women, or deal fairly with the realities of the woman's experience.

At a national meeting of mass media communication researchers held in Caracas Venezuela³ the same critical accents were heard in various speeches and resolutions. Marta Colomina, Director

of the School of Communication, Zulia University, Venezuela, expressed if a woman is depicted by the media as poor, she must be beautiful; her beauty enhancing her status. The poor woman on film or television has only one preoccupation; how to keep the man she loves, love being the universal panacea that satisfactorily solves all economic and emotional problems. The Regional Seminar on Women and Media⁴ declared in the policy statement the media should be used more effectively in raising self awareness in women of their inherent and acquired capabilities and their roles in society as active participation in development. It further says, Vigilance must be exercised in monitoring the portrayal and depiction of women in media.

The Director General of UNESCO, while formulating the resolution for the World Plan of Action adopted by United Nation's World Conference of the International Women's Year⁵ expressed the Conference condemns the degrading exploitation of woman as a sex symbol and instrument of economic interest by certain media of social communication. He further stressed the Conference requests governments and responsible organizations to promote and encourage in the mass communication media of their countries, the projection of a dignified and positive image of women, diverting them of their role as vehicles for publicity and as targets for the sale of consumer goods, with a view to bringing about changes in the attitudes and ways of thinking of both men and women and their full participation in society.

The International Year of Women and the United Nations decade for Women brought out special efforts in the shape of researches, as well as seminars, workshops and round table discussions, to mobilize all forces in order to change this image and replace it by a truthful, honest and desirable representation of women, Sipla⁶. Spila Secretary General of International Women's Year in her opening speech at the Media Workshop for Journalists and Broadcasters referred the following three most common women's stereotypes: i. The dumb blond-a woman who is laughed at, by men for her lack of education and whose sexual endowments generally place her in the desirable but not marriageable category. ii. The nice girl-the virginal woman with whom the hero falls in love and marries. This stereotype has the qualities of a good servant: Cheerfulness, dutifulness and obedience to the desire of her husband. iii. The middle class working woman who seeks to free her from either of the previous stereotypes and who seeks through her work to reach parity with the males. This newly emerging image is identified as domineering, sharp tongued, unattractive and castrating. This image has emerged as a result of pressure from a growing number of the unsatisfied viewers; but is presented in a distorted way, which arouses more suspicion than sympathy for the women concerned.

The analysis of women's portrayal in films is closely related to Feminist research which has occupied a significant place in the postmodern research for the last two decades. It has contributed to the origin of various methodological ideas e.g. Standpoint,

positional and reflectivity as well as foreground critical inquiry into gender relations and society. Its main concern is to challenge the silencing of a woman's voice in society and research. It also challenges a narrow gendered kind of science which casts women in a passive and subordinate role which have become a cause of their exclusion from social science practices as they are considered emotional and incapable of reason.

Weiner⁷ offers three principles as a guide: feminist research involves a commitment to improve life chances for girls and women; it involves a critique of unexamined assumptions about women and dominant form of knowing and doing; it is concerned with developing equitable professional and personal practices. So it can be inferred that feminist research is a critical, political and Praxis-oriented research. Reinharz⁸ observes that feminist study is an approach and a perspective. It is to examine the unexamined and neglected perspectives of human life. It has a great impact and contribution to the development of many key methodological ideas. It commences many critical inquiries in gender relations and society. Reinharz⁸ has raised ten claims for feminist research. She observes that feminist research is not a matter of method but a perspective. It involves an ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship guided by feminist theory and it aims at creating social change. In the same vein, portrayal of women in films is analyzed from a feminist perspective.

Objectives of Studies: The outcome of the present research may initiate the Pakistani film producers to produce films free from male prejudices, mannish whims and wrong speculations regarding women. It may imprint the picture of women as hardworking, dignified and revered on the mind of the viewers. Keeping in view the results of the present study, government of Pakistan may postulate such policies which may be helpful in ending crimes and aggression committed on women earlier. Finally, the outcome of this research may create such an environment for more than fifty percent population of Pakistan where the Pakistani women by exhibiting their capabilities to the fullest, bring economic revolution in Pakistan. For this purpose, the media especially the film can be helpful in creating such a favorable atmosphere for the bereaved and suffering female community. The main objective of the present research is to analyze critically the portrayal of Pakistani women in Pakistani Urdu/Punjabi movies to view if our films are portraying the real status of Pakistani women or it is just a fictional construct.

Hypothesis: i. Pakistani Urdu and Punjabi feature films reflect the positive and the true picture of Pakistani women and these films address all the issues related to Pakistani women. ii. Pakistani Urdu and Punjabi feature films are free from Manish whims and prejudices further, the political and social role of Pakistani women is rightly projected in these films.

Research Question: The present study covers the answer of the following research questions regarding the portrayal of women. i. Is this portrayal reflective of unquestioned patriarchal assumptions that contribute to subjugate women? ii. Does the portrayal of women in Pakistani Urdu and Punjabi Films commensurate with the true picture of Pakistani women? iii. Does the political and social role of Pakistani women projected in Pakistani films coincide with their actual role in the society? iv. Whether the economic role being played by Pakistani women in agriculture sector is depicted in Pakistani movies or not.

Methodology

The form of inquiry what the films convey needs threefold distinction between theory, Method and analysis. Films are analyzed on the bases of their inherent form, content and structure. The aim of any theoretical perspective or theory is to highlight the invisible structure that orders and confers intelligibility upon films. Elsaesser and Buckland¹ say a particular theory enables the analyst to identify specific aspects of a film's structure, and to look at and listen to the films from the perspective of its own values.... The aim of theory is to construct different conceptual perspectives on films.

Each theory devised certain postulates and a hypothesis regarding the general nature of films. Whereas the term 'method' is concerned, it is used here simply to refer to procedural knowledge that provides tools for the analysis of films. Methods turn film analysis into an explicit, systematic, and a repeatable discipline based on reliable procedures. It avoids relying on intuition, introspection and hidden assumptions as cited in Elsaesser and Buckland¹. According to guideline devised by Elsaesser and Buckland¹ in their book 'Studying Contemporary American Films, a guide to movie analysis' I have used feminism as a theoretical perspective and textual analysis as a method to collect data and coding as a mode of analyzing data. Research design of the present study is as under.

Textual analysis as a research method: The present study would be qualitative and explanatory analysis of the movies. The researcher has employed research design of 'textual analysis' to encompass the research questions and hypothesis. The dialogues of the chosen films have been recorded and converted into text. Thus the data would consist of words, sentences, ideas and themes. So the present research requires intensive study of these dialogues-cum-texts to find out evidences as the dialogues contain ideas and themes of the producer. So no other method is suitable for the study than Textual Analysis.

Textual analysis is a technique for collecting and analyzing the contents of the text. This method of analysis goes back nearly a century. It has been used in many fields- literature, history, journalism, political science, education, psychology and so on. 'Textual analysis' an element of close reading is described by

Rockwell⁹ as exploring the question of the relationship between how we represent texts, how we see them, and our theories of textuality. Generally, textual analysis seeks to identify patterns within the text, such as concordance or unity, meaning and truth. The method of Textual Analysis enables the researcher to include a large amount of textual information and systematically identify its properties, e.g. the frequencies of the most used keywords (KWIC means Key Word in Context) by detecting the more important structures of its communication content.

Analysis: The female portrayal in Urdu and Punjabi films is based on masculine ideology about women. These masculine ideas are based on sexual desires. Although there are different dimensions of female character, the Urdu and Punjabi movies only show her from one aspect. Hence, the woman is presented in the light of traditional views of male-dominant society. According to the female portrayal in the Punjabi movies, different controversial elements are prominent in her personality. Simultaneously, she is strong and weak, prominent and hidden, wise and foolish. The most important thing is that in the form of mother, sister, daughter and wife she is either shown as very virgin and chaste or in the form of notorious gang leader, smoker, drinker, and prostitute she is shown very attractive. As a bad woman she is shown very clever, having all the vices of the world. She can fulfill her sexual desires even with her servants. She is very bold and aggressive enjoying the murders and assassinations.

Punjabi films portray the woman in a more horrible way than in the Urdu films. It is clear from the movie Hunter Wali¹⁰. There are twin sisters. The first is Bano a very gentle domestic girl. She is a very pious girl offering five times prayers and wearing full dress while the second daughter Bali is fond of roaming about in the village. She is adept in horse riding. She is fond of riding with a hunter in her hand that is why she is famous as Hunter Wali¹⁰. The heroines in the Urdu and Punjabi movies are either very shy, obedient, domestic and self-sacrificing or very vulgar. It is also prominent from the heroine of the movie Bakhtawar¹¹. Bakhtawar's mother died the day when Bakhtawar was born. Bakhtawar's aunt (Phupho) takes the responsibility of her nourishment. After the death of her Phupho, Bakhtawar is handed over to her father and step-mother. Bakhtawar's father considers her an ill-omen. He does not allow her to enter inside the house. She is only allowed to stay in the servant quarter. She serves her stepmother and father as a servant washing the dishes, sweeping the house, washing the dirty clothes etc. She is quite contented at her life and does not complain anybody against it. She has realized time and again that she is ill-omened girl being the cause of her mother's death. It is aimed that a shy and obedient woman bears all kinds of tortures even she is ready to serve as a maid in her own home. She faces all the hardships silently but when her husband says that her health is falling down and they should not indulge in love making, she comes in a short dress showing vulgarity and obscenity. It is shown that she can face all the hardships but if she is deprived of the sex

rights she becomes very aggressive and resists it. This is a negative portrayal of female.

The heroine of the Urdu and Punjabi films does not get big achievements in life rather she is fond of unnecessary and meaningless dances. The heroine of the movie Hunter Wali is the best example of such characters. Though she is the daughter of a rich Chaudhary has wealthy yet she does not any great thing in her life. She does not use the wealth of her father in a positive way. She could have got higher education by her father's wealth instead she is an illiterate and an ill-mannered girl. She could have gotten some high office if she had got education but she is only fond of horse riding. She is an expert rider. The people are afraid of her as she is very quarrelsome and haughty but it sounds very odd that when some vagabonds try to rape her, she is unable to some such act by using any fight or action. She becomes very helpless and disappointed after her rape. She wants to commit suicide after her rape. Further, it is very critical that she is in need of the help of a male (Umeri) to avenge vagabonds who raped her.

The heroine of the Urdu and Punjabi films not only performs any great deed but also she is the first one in the expression of love. Bali in the movie Hunter Wali is the perfect example of such characters. Umeri helps her to avenge the vagabonds that raped her. She is inspired by him and falls in love with him. She dances on a vulgar song in order to attract her lover. In the song she is clad in tight fittings. She takes the first step to express her love. The heroine of the Punjabi films is mostly presented as self-sacrificing sometimes for the parents and sometimes for the siblings or friends. It is clear from the films Dopatta and Miss Kelopatra. In the movie Dopatta¹², there are two friends who become dopata badly Behan (so called sisters). In the movie the husband of one friend kills the husband of the other friend who says to her friend that our friendship can only sustain if you also kill your husband. This kind of sacrifice in the real life is impossible. In the movie Niki jayi Han the two friends sacrifice their love for each other.

The heroine of the Urdu and Punjabi movies arouses the sexual passions of her lover by very obscene and vulgar affectations. It is clear from the movie Dopata¹². The heroine dances in a vulgar way to attract her lover. But the hero remains unaffected by her dances, then, she sings vulgar song mera mahboob muje aam ki tarah chusta hai (my lover sucks me as mango). During the song the camera remains focused on her breasts. Throughout the song the hero is shown unaffected by her sex-arousing tricks but at the end of the song he tries to make love with her, she shows some kind of so-called resistance. The hero is very aggressive at the end of the song and his way of love making is absolutely uncivilized ill-mannered

The heroine of the Urdu and Punjabi films is very sentimental and emotional. She does not have a tinge of shrewdness and rationality. The heroine of the movie Hunter Wali after her rape does not seek help of any law implementing authority or her

family members. She does not even tell her mother or sister about this tragedy rather she is very hasty in committing suicide. She does not think about the reason of her rape and how to deal with the vagabonds responsible for her rape in a logical way. Although she is not responsible for her moral laxity, she is raped by force yet she considers herself responsible for it which seems quite unreal and irrational. Furthermore, when her father reaches the mountain from where she is about to commit suicide, she does not tell her father that she has no fault of her own in her rape instead she requests her father to kill her so that her father may avoid the impending shame in the society. Her father also is very rash in killing her. He also does not consider the fact that his daughter is raped and he should do some consolation with her instead he is ready to kill her because she may be the reason of shame for him in the society. This gives a negative message to the viewers that the parents should not console with their daughters rather they should kill them.

The heroine of the Urdu and Punjabi films is either very sex-thirsty or very violent girl. As in the movie Wehshi Aurat, the heroine Bali is full of fire of youth. She is a fish out of water in search of love. She sings a vulgar song a mere mahya mere andar pyar di ag jal rye a, mere utay ishaq pani pa ta k a ag thandi ho sakay, haln k aj main khulay kapray paye ne fer v menu a ag sta rye a (My friend! A fire of youth is burning inside me, put some water to cool it down, and though I'm wearing loose clothes, yet the fire is very intense). During the song her friends throw water to her that makes her wet body and her clothes become stickier to her body and hence the parts of her body become more prominent. The idea of the fire of youth is portrayed in a vulgar way. In the song, the gestures of her arms show that she is embracing her love. We get an idea that such kind of female portrayal is due to the negative thinking of producers. They consider that a female starts burning in the fire of youth when she becomes a bit mature.

The heroine of the Urdu and Punjabi movies is not shrewd but superstitious. As in the movie Miss Kleopatra¹³, the heroine is haunted by a giant. The giant tells her that he wants to marry her. She does not fight with the giant instead seeks the help of the charms given to him by a charmer. The hero fights the giant and kills him. It is very prominent that a woman cannot kill a giant. It is only a man who has the power to kill a giant. The heroine of the Punjabi films is also attracted by the strong muscles of a man. As in the movie Kalay Chor¹⁴, the heroine Laachi is attracted by the strong muscles of Kabeera. She takes the initiative in the expression of love and stops him in the way. Her dialogue with Kabeera is as follows

Kabeera: tu menu kyun rokya ae (Why have you stopped me)?

Laachi: main tenu is layi rokya ae k tu mere nal ik raat guzaren (I have stopped you to beg at night spending with me).

Kabeera: dekh tere ch te mere ch boat farq ae (Look! There is a hell of difference between you and me).

Laachi: ek aurat ek mard di umer nalu nai balke oday mazboot bazuan kulun matsar hundi ae (a woman is inspired by the strong arms of a man instead of his age).

She is always ready to present her body to Kabeera. In order to attract him, she kisses her naked shoulders and arms. It is shown that she has a bad character while the man has the power to resist her sex-arousing tricks. It seems as if she was on a certain mission of forcing her lover by sobbing, sighing, making gestures and vulgar dances while the hero is shown as having any particular purpose of avenging his enemies. This kind of mission could also have been shown for a girl but she is given the task of alluring the hero.

The women of Urdu and Punjabi films are shown as a sex-product. She is presented by the villain to the men of authority (police officers) for getting some recommendations and approval. It is prominent from the movie *Kalay Chor*¹⁴. The drug dealer Saith Kali Das presents Neeli for sex to a police officer so that the police officer may not arrest the drug dealer and his notorious business may go on. She is wearing a very sexy dress in her lovemaking with a police inspector. When the police inspector resists her love, she says to him that ye aurat wo meva hai jo her dasterkhawan ki zeenat Banta hai (woman is the sweetest dish which is presented at every meal table). When the police inspector is not enticed by her, she sings vulgar songs Hye main Kha lye hari mirch, panda gya ve mera tirk tirk (I have eaten green pepper, my body is the pricking, I want to have some water). Her character shows that she is a sex-product used for exploiting the police officers and higher officers.

Conclusion

So far as hypotheses of the present study are concerned, the findings and evidence of the research analysis show that both of the hypotheses laid down in the chapter Research Methodology have been proved false. As the portrayal of women in Urdu and Punjabi films is not reflective of true Pakistani women rather this portrayal presents a negative image of Pakistani women in the viewer's mind. These movies do not address the women's issues nor do they present solutions to these problems faced by Pakistani women. So far as the second hypothesis is concerned, findings show that the portrayal of women in Urdu and Punjabi films are not free from male prejudices and these films do not portray the true social and political role performed by actual Pakistani women.

So far as the first key question regarding 'the unquestioned patriarchal assumptions' is concerned, the critical analysis shows that the portrayal of women in Urdu and Punjabi films is based on the assumptions that the male is more dominant, authoritative, powerful, good-natured and more intelligent as opposed to women who are naïve, cowardly, weak, lusty and prostitute. This stereotyping with women has been shown in these movies on every level. Women as a mode of mother, daughter, sister, wife and friend are portrayed as a passive,

dominated, humble, lusty, and helpless creature. These patriarchal discourses regarding the superiority of male and inferiority of female have been normalized and prevail in the society through the ways the woman are addressed, projected and portrayed in movies. The implication of these normalized prevailing discourses is that gender discrimination can be observed at every level in Pakistani society.

Concerning the second key question, the analysis shows that true Pakistani women do not have any match with the women of films. Actual Pakistani women are playing very active role in every walk of life and striving for the restoration of their political and social status but unfortunately in Punjabi and Urdu films, women have been divided into two extremes. They are shown very virtuous, sacred and idealized character or portrayed as playful, lusty prostitute. She is either portrayed as an angel or Satan. The average population of Pakistani women falls between these two extremes. The evidence of the critical analysis shows that a woman portrayal in Urdu and Punjabi films don't commensurate with the actual Pakistani women.

Whereas, the social and political role of Pakistani women is concerned, the findings prove that political and feminist movements are not projected in films. Though, there are number of N.G.Os and organizations which raise the voice of women and these organizations are connected to the political movements in the society but unfortunately, this wake up call for women's rights is heard in the society but in movies, it is totally silent. If the woman of the film wants to do some good in the society, she has to sell off her body to set right what is wrong with the system. No political and social will of the women is portrayed to highlight the women's issues in Urdu and Punjabi feature films. Instead, she is portrayed as a dancer, pros, madam of brothel house and the center of all evils. Even the liberal and non-conformists are considered as a playful and a lusty woman because they challenge the dominant normalized discourses that prevail in the society.

Whereas, the role of women in agriculture sector is concerned, it is totally ignored in Pakistani Urdu and Punjabi feature films. Pakistan is an agricultural country and most of the population of Pakistan lives in rural areas where the women work shoulder to shoulder with men and perform different activities right from sowing to cultivating crops. Unfortunately, their activities in the fields are totally ignored in the movies. In the agricultural sector, women are doubly colonized by their husbands and by their landlords or feudal and even their agricultural serfdom is not highlighted in movies. They are shown as helpless servitude busy in cutting fodder for cattle or milking buffalo with naked body to be exposed to the ardent lover. She is portrayed as loving mongered waiting for a young gallant to whom she wanted to be loved, embraced and married. She is portrayed as a dancing queen in the field of crops. In the fields, she is supposed to wear glamorous and sexy dress in place of a simple and rustic dress. Romantic and sexual illusions are attached with their movements during the activities in fields of crops.

On the basis of the findings of the research, I would like to make a few recommendations to the concerned organizations, agencies and authorities. The recommendations can be considered at two levels. i. At the policy making level by the; Federal and Provincial Ministries of Information and Broadcasting, Officials of the Central and Provincial Censor Boards and Vocal representative of the masses. ii. At the implementation level, by the; Writers and Actors, Film producers and directors, who are the technical hands behind the films and Viewers who help in labeling film, a success or a failure.

Recommendations: Following are the recommendations made for improving the image of women: The film should not always portray women sacrificing for the significant others, The film should not project the image of women who are emotionally dependent on others, so much that, if they are deprived, it becomes a matter of life and death for them, The image of women portrayed in the film should not be shown as ignorant unaware of her positive human qualities, The film should not glorify the fatalistic attitude adopted by women, The film should not always project women in passive and submissive role, The film should portray the image of women who can manipulate the circumstances according to their wishes and needs; instead of becoming the victim of the circumstances, The film should try to project the image of women who have inner human qualities, and is valued and respected for these qualities instead of their physical attractions and sex appeal, She should not be recognized only through the references of her counterpart. She must have her own identical, The women should not be projected with narrow and limited interests in life, The women should not always be shown as behaving at an emotional level, instead of rational level, Love and romance should not be the major assignment of the young women characters portrayed in the film.

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