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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Toxic Masculinity Portrayal in the movie “Animal”

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Abstract

Growing up with Bollywood films has significantly shaped our perceptions and expectations of everyday life. The portrayal of masculinity on the big screen has not only influenced men’s behavior but also shaped societal perceptions of them. Unfortunately, Bollywood has often depicted masculinity in toxic ways, influencing young men negatively. This paper explores how iconic dialogues like ‘Mard ko dard nahi hota’ or ‘Tu pehle mard banana seekh’ from 60s heroes have reinforced harmful gender stereotypes. Such portrayals might lead young boys to believe that showing emotions is a sign of weakness, and that they must constantly exhibit bravery. In contrast, films featuring actors like Ayushmann Khurrana offer a refreshing perspective, encouraging men to embrace their sensitivity and empathy. This paper specifically examines the controversial blockbuster “Animal,” directed by Sandeep Vanga Reddy. It questions the use of the term “Animal” for a human protagonist and its potential implications on societal perceptions. The film depicts Ranbir Kapoor’s character, a privileged son of a business tycoon (played by Anil Kapoor), who justifies his violent behavior as a form of seeking love and attention. The director’s portrayal of an ‘alpha male’ who uses violence as a tool of affection is deeply problematic, perpetuating toxic masculinity, violence, and sexism. Through an analysis of these themes, this paper aims to critique the harmful representations in the film.

Keywords: Toxic masculinity, Bollywood films, Sexism

It’s really disheartening how Bollywood films sometimes exhibit toxic masculinity in order to fetch money. This depiction often paints a wrong picture, making the audiences think that such kind of behaviour is normal. What’s even regretful is that, some of the noted actors and the

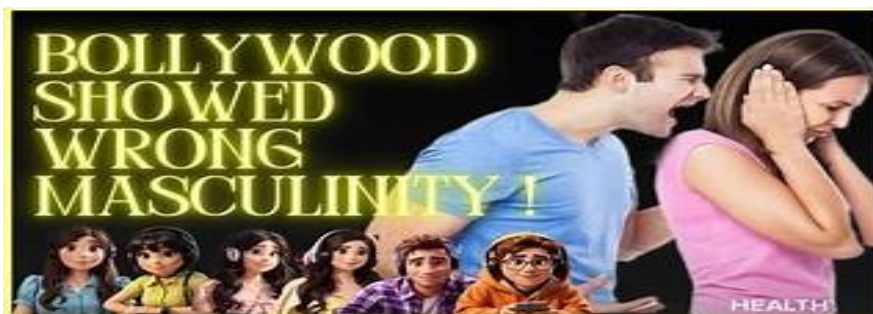
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film-makers go with the flow, only for the sake of box – office successes. The advancement of Bollywood has seen most of the heroes, kindly swaying around the trees and devoting songs to their heroines, battering everyone up in the neighbourhood in the name of vengeance. This kind of Bollywood hero takes care of every woman in his life so much so that these women seem unable to function without them. Now let's cipher some of the forms of masculinity:

The Angry- Young-man Figure

An absolute swift from the lover – boy carolling melodies in the arenas, the sphere of this guy, in the 1960's to 1990's, was loud, self- assertive and hugely toxic. Somebody who could be delineated as the ambassador of the angry young man persona is the Amitabh Bachchan or the Big- B, who sketched the tall, dark and handsome era. With movies like *Sholay*, *Deewar*, *Zameer*, *Trishul*, *Don*, *Coolie*, *Shahenshah* and *Agneepath*, he delivered charismatic remarkable performances but woefully as a lead character with anger issues? He neglected all other emotions except love, anger and revenge and preferably chose violence as a quick- fix to all his issues.



The other contemporaries include Sanjay Dutt and his myriad mobster flicks like *Khal Nayak*, *Vaastav*, *Baaghi*, where he was continually seen as the personification of galvanizing charm, rage, and force. In real life, he is known to be associated with the infamous 1993 bomb blast, which led to his imprisonment and nexus with different underworld gangsters. His life has famously been turned into the 2018 blockbuster film “Sanju” by Rajkumar Hirani, with his character played by the ace actor Ranbir Kapoor. Dharmendra also became prominent for his hostility on screen. Heroes essayed the characters of “sons” and “fathers,” yet they centered on being “macho,” battling crooks, offenders, and cheats.

The Gen- K

In the late twentieth century, the Khans and Khiladi ruled. They brought with them their own set of toxicities. Deceiving their significant others, sexism, handling females as objects was still typical and sarcastic to these kinds of men. Be it Govinda's classics where he was a compulsive liar or Salman's films like “No Entry” and “Biwi No.1” where lies were heartily welcomed. Even his household films showed mute women, outlined gender roles, and misogynistic jokes for comic relief. The public at that time accepted such cinema because men were dominant. Even one of his blockbuster movies, “Dabangg,” has a famous dialogue:

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“Thappad se darr nahi lagta sahab, pyaar se lagta hai,” which indirectly indicates the female lead of the film to beat her whenever her man wants but not love her.

Another toxic sketch in Indian cinema was Shahrukh Khan from the movie “Darr”. The character of Shahrukh obnoxiously falls head over heels for one of his classmates in college named Kiran. He writes poetry on blackboards, sings songs behind her but never has the courage to come up to her and tell her his feelings. He becomes so engrossed by her that even after her marriage to a navy officer played by Sunny Deol, he doesn’t stop stalking and harassing her. Even one of the popular songs from this movie has the dialogue: “Tu haan kar ya na kar, tu hai meri Kiran”, really interrogating the persona’s upbringing. Another of his blockbuster films is “Anjaam” where he plays a similar character. But we can set aside this man from the typical Bollywood macho characters for he has really essayed some of the well-written roles where it is portrayed that men are no more than normal human beings and they can cry too. Some such movies would be “Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi” and “Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham”. In “Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi”, Shahrukh plays a very mild, meek, and timid government employee with the usual mustache and oily hair, falls for Taani, who is his professor’s daughter. Taani, on the other hand, is a very daring and flamboyant kind of girl, but on the day of Taan’s wedding, news comes that his fiancé and his family are dead in a road accident and upon her father’s insistence is forced to marry Shahrukh. Suri is a very soft kind of a guy who feels for Taani and adores her. After marriage, Surinder realizes that Taani is overtaken by the loud, rash, flamboyant filmy heroes which Suri is not. So he asks his friend, Bobby, a salon artist to give him a complete makeover and here comes our metrosexual man, the “Raj” from the DDLJ or Bobby with swanky glasses, purely shaven, and tight outfits. This Raj becomes Taani’s dancing partner in Taani’s dancing school and slowly we realize Taani is overtaken by him. After some time, Taani feels she is in a loveless marriage and she wants to elope with Raj and Suri is tired of the constant role reversal of both Suri and Raj, his alter ego. So on the final day of the competition, Suri surprises Taani by coming in the form of Suri and dancing with Taani and Taani realizes that Suri is his Raj. The filmmaker Aditya Chopra gives a nice message anyone can be Raj from the mind and heart. Raj has nothing to do with the looks. In another movie “Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham”, Shahrukh is the adopted son of a high-class businessman Yashvardhan Raichand played by Amitabh Bachchan. When Rahul (Shahrukh) comes to know that he is adopted at the age of eight, he feels indebted to his family. Rahul has another brother from his parents named Rohan, played by Hrithik Roshan. Rohan is the biological son of the Raichand family. With a twist of fate, Rahul falls in love with Anjali (played by Kajol) who comes from a much lower social stature than him. Mr. Raichand, however, wants Rahul to marry Naina (played by Rani Mukherjee), one of his friend’s daughters. But having developed strong feelings for Anjali, Rahul goes against his father’s wishes and marries Anjali. Upon hearing this, the Raichand family disowns Rahul, and Rahul flees to London with Anjali and settles there. When Rohan, now a matured man, comes to know of this truth, promises that he will unite the family. He goes to London, finds his brother Rahul, and stays there hiding his

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identity. He even calls his parents in London and accidentally the Raichand family finds his long lost son Rahul and his family. Upon this reunion, Mr. Raichand realizes his mistake and is now ready to welcome both of his sons and their wives and families open-armed. The brothers also reunite. Karan Johar, the noted filmmaker, has given a nice message that men too can make mistakes and they can cry too.

The development of masculine characters happened at each decapod. But the idea of masculinity remained almost the same, every time introduced with some modifications. Men were still the ones the film revolved around and women were still the supporting characters. The aggression diminished but men were still continued to be essayed as the defender of women, who conducted them, freed them, executed valiant tasks for them and what not. Another idea was when rape was used as a plot-point. Here men rose to action and took vengeance for his vulnerable sister, wife, mother or any other woman. Some of the noted films which took this kind of plots were Shahrukh's one of the famous films "Baazigar" and "Hum Aapke Dil Mein Rehte Hain". In other movies, the protagonists were crossing borders and rescuing the heroine. Some of the famous movies with such plots are "Gadar" and "Veer Zara". Female sketches were just either daughters or beloveds with no career in such movies. Such films put unnecessary pressure on men to be heroic even when they are not accustomed to it and women as hushed and responsible objects.

Toxic and the Man-child

Toxicity occurs in all shapes in Bollywood and it never really went out of fashion. It casually changed over from a Rahul in "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" who doesn't accept Anjali till she looks every bit of a woman to an Ayan in "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil" who has a problem in accepting Alizeh as only his friend. The trait of toxicity continues with Shahid Kapoor's movies like "R... Rajkumar", where the song "Gandi Baat" became a rage and "Kabir Singh", a would-be doctor delivers a dialogue for his girlfriend that "Ye meri bandi hai". For instance, "Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani" shows at its core a man-child who only cares about his own goals and dreams and is ready to sacrifice even relationships and friendships for the sake of that. After that comes the new age uncountable Kartik Aaryan movies starting from "Pyaar Ka PUNCHAMA", "Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety", "Pati, Patni Aur Woh" where there are numerous ideologies where women are labeled as demanding, irrational, and gold diggers.



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Now comes the movie “Animal”, which begins with a famous theme that every child (especially the male one) wants to become like his father and criticizes it too in a sarcastic way. The film also critiques the abominable school system where a child is seen as a robot and cannot even share his/her emotions. Ranbir (the film’s hero), whose father is a noted businessman, is always unavailable for his kids, which made Ranbir crave his father’s intimacy even more. Instead of taking this absence normally, he develops a Gertrude-like father fixation syndrome that no psychiatrist in the world could fix. Ranbir’s mother even suggests, “Aisa kar lete hain, papa ka ek clone bana lete hain, ek papa ghar mein, ek factory mein.” Ranbir compares his dad to be his superhero or some king from the past like Henry VIII or George II, with the film making allusions to it. The director takes the concept of alpha-male from the histories of English literature, where mainly the Anglo-Saxon and medieval kings and knights who hunted, slept with women, and had several queens were considered alphas, and the rest, as the director says, are the poultry—a direct hint at toxic masculinity. The hero of the film says to the heroine, “... that you have a big pelvis, you can accommodate healthy babies,” which indirectly hints at looking at women as primarily reproductive creatures. On his dad’s 60th birthday, Ranbir cuts his hair, but when his father says, “You look good in long hair too,” he replies, “I will grow it again, papa,” exhibiting a father-worshipping psychiatric character.

Then the film moves to the past where we see a schoolboy (enacted by Ranbir) entering a college with a gun in hand to teach a lesson to the boys who harassed his sister. The film also critiques the law and order of this country against ragging and women’s safety, where a school-going boy feels compelled to take matters into his own hands. The film revolves around the same old Bollywood theme—that cousins and intimate family members double-cross to take away the rich man’s empire. The film’s hero almost murders and butchers all the enemies who try to take his dad’s empire. When Ranbir’s wife Geetanjali wears a sensual dress for her husband, he suddenly asks, “What’s the need for this after marriage and kids?” Such a sexist remark. Ranbir openly threatens to slit the throat of his enemy who attacked his dad. Ranbir even talks about slapping his wife when she accuses him of murdering so many people to take revenge on his father’s enemy. He even records their first sexual encounter without her consent. Ranbir pulls at his wife’s bra straps until it hurts her enormously over some issue. After she slaps him repeatedly for this, he applies balm. The director stated in an interview that men who love can both love and hurt extremely—such is his view of love. Even the hero speaks the famous line, “Shaadi mein na ek dar honi chaiye, pakad honi chaiye,” as he feels his marriage slipping out of control.

Then we have the entry of the film’s main villain, Abrar (played by Bobby Deol), who is dumb due to past trauma and is also one of Ranbir’s cousins. He is Islamic and has several wives and children. He brutally kills the messenger who brings news of his brother’s death and openly engages in sexual relations with all his wives together. The hero of the film has an affair with his heart donor’s fiancée and openly displays love bites from her to others. When his heart donor’s fiancée emotionally confesses that she was sent by Abrar to destroy him and his family,

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Ranbir tells her to come and lick his shoes. After Ranbir confesses to his wife, Geetanjali, that he had sex with Zoya to uncover his enemies' plans, she questions if this is the definition of an alpha male. Like all the usual female characters, she eventually forgives him. Ranbir openly slits Abrar's throat in their ongoing fight. Anil Kapoor, Ranbir's dad, finally accepts his parenting mistakes to his son during a heated debate between them. In the post-credits scenes, Ranbir (Abrar's another brother, who is a professional butcher in Istanbul) is seen as a clone of the film's hero, butchering everyone from the Swastik family to avenge his brother's death, while Zoya is unsure if she is pregnant with Ranbir's child or his clone's.

The Arrival of a New Man



To counterbalance the illogical toxic characters, there are some beautifully etched characters that were comfortable in their masculinity and challenged all the beliefs that men can't be involved in household chores, compassionate, accepting, and peaceful. Some notable instances of such characters include Jai Singh Rathore from the movie "Jaane Tu... Ya Jaane Na", Madhavan in the "Tanu Weds Manu" series, Vicky Kaushal in "Raazi". Imran Khan, in most of his movies, is very comfortable around strong women characters. Another special mention goes to Ayushmann Khurrana, who introduced the genre of middle-class men with real problems in mainstream cinema. The roles he played, characterizing men with erectile dysfunction, homosexual men, men with baldness, and men working in call centers, were astonishing. Thus, the evolution of character development in these primary heroes in movies conveys a positive message about the concept of masculinity.

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