

**Whose Feminism Is It Anyway?**  
**The 'Empowered Woman' in Bollywood**

BY

PRATIKSHA MENON  
B.A., Mumbai University, 2004

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Zizi Papacharissi, Chair and Advisor  
Diem-My Bui  
Aswin Punathambekar, University of Michigan

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the support of my diligent professors, enthusiastic cohort and the benevolent administrative staff at UIC. I would like to take this opportunity to specially thank my advisor Dr. Zizi Papacharissi, for her on-point observations and encouraging words. You are such an inspiration. I am grateful to Dr. Diem-My Bui for her presence on my committee and for taking the time to hear me out. A big thank you to my fellow scholar Chad Van De Wiele, who has accompanied me on this Master's journey from the tiniest doubts to the biggest hurrahs.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Aswin Punathambekar whose valuable inputs and continuing guidance have helped in navigating my research curiosities.

This note would be incomplete without a mention of my dog Scamper, whose fluffy self kept me going during the writing all-nighters. Most of all, I am filled with gratitude towards my partner Shashank; the wind beneath my wings.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background.....	2
B. #BollywoodBasics.....	8
C. Gender Representation Through the Years.....	13
II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND RELATED LITERATURE.....	19
A. Postcolonial Frameworks.....	19
B. Postcolonial Meets Transnational.....	21
C. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.....	22
III. METHODS.....	30
IV. CASE STUDY: <i>PINK</i> .....	33
A. Preamble.....	33
B. What is <i>Pink</i> About?.....	34
C. The Taming of Minal.....	34
1. The male savior.....	37
a. Male allyship as resistance?.....	42
b. The savior gets a backstory.....	45
c. On-screen image and off-screen performativity.....	46
2. The courtroom as a potential site of resistance.....	49
a. The production of truth/power.....	49
1) The hysterization of Minal.....	50
2) Conversations on sexual consent.....	53
3) Patriarchal framings of women’s sexuality.....	55
D. Glimpses of Resistance: Falak’s Defiance.....	58
E. Conclusion.....	59
V. CASE STUDY: <i>QUEEN</i> .....	60
A. What is <i>Queen</i> About?.....	60
B. Making of the Idealized Indian Woman.....	61
1. Family, religion and the disciplined body.....	61
2. Queen of the private sphere.....	63
3. From private to public.....	65
4. The ‘other’.....	67
5. Beauty by the book.....	70
B. Resistant Agency or Hegemonic Agenda?.....	72
1. Rethinking resistance/Unearting nationalism.....	74
2. The righteousness of Rani.....	78
3. Dancing to the tune of the diaspora.....	80

**TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)**

<u>CHAPTER</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
	C. What Comes Next For Rani?.....	82
	D. Conclusion.....	83
VI.	VISIBILITY IS A TRAP.....	86
	A. What’s biopolitics got to do with it?.....	93
	B. Challenge not overthrow.....	94
	C. Of patriarchal panopticons and postfeminist politics.....	95
	D. Homogenizing feminism.....	99
	E. Concluding thoughts.....	100
	CITED LITERATURE.....	103
	LIST OF FIGURES.....	119
	VITA.....	120

## SUMMARY

Mainstream Bollywood has historically represented women within a few static categories be it as a signifier of national identity or as a caricature in the virgin/whore trope. The repurposing of these in contemporary women-centric cinema has arguably resulted in similar narrative messaging: the Westernized woman requires to be tamed and the traditional Indian woman deserves to be rewarded. These female-led films masquerading as tales of women's empowerment are often discussed in popular media discourses as feminist must-watch cinema. Observing that a majority of these are created and directed by male filmmaker, the thesis details the ways in which a particular postfeminist politics is refracted through a patriarchal lens when representing contemporary Indian women.

Applying a postcolonial feminist approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis, this thesis does a comparative study of the Hindi feature films *Pink* (2016) and *Queen* (2014), focusing on how feminist narratives of the Westernized woman differ from that of the non-Westernized woman. *Pink* and *Queen* focus on urban, middle-class women and feature the modern versus traditional tropes that are characteristic of contemporary feminist film. However, unlike the modern (Westernized) Minal of *Pink*, Rani the lead character in *Queen* is depicted as a traditional Indian woman, written within the parameters of what defines ideal Indian womanhood.

The analysis finds that while woman-centric cinema is typically understood as bypassing Bollywood genre conventions, the physical (and caste ideal) of whose stories are considered worthy of representation is not too different from the standard potboiler. Additionally, the invisibility of class privilege and the homogenization of the middle-class, that seem to restrict

Minal's narrative representation within negative discourses, while allowing Rani positive outcomes and a humanizing portrayal with place for complexities.

On first viewing, *Pink* comes across as a resistance of the rationalizing biopolitics of middle-class discourses that often link the modern, working woman to destruction of the hegemonic moral code of a unified Indian imaginary. But this quickly descends into essentialist tropes, as Minal is repeatedly punished: physically as well as psychologically. *Queen's* engagement with biopolitics carries the neo-liberal narrative forward. Rani is relatable as the transnational signifier of 'Indianness', a willing participant in the capitalist, paternalist and Hindu construction of the empowered woman. She embodies the compliant subject, a model of how biopower is harnessed through the institutions of family and religion.

A predominantly Hindu male-dominated media, which enables a homogenizing popular notion of feminism, helps establish these films as part of the nationalist cultural project aimed at being relevant on a global platform. The uncritical reporting of *Pink's* centering of Amitabh Bachchan and the simplistic comparisons of Kangana Ranaut to her character Rani, reflect how entertainment media largely regurgitates the messaging that is fed through publicity campaigns and press releases.

Through its analysis, this paper aims to direct the conversation towards a critical interpretation of films that tell women's stories but are not necessarily feminist. This is of particular importance in a nation where popular film often functions as a prominent site where discourses around what is permissible, especially when it comes to women's sexuality, are represented and normalized.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Currently the highest grossing Hindi film of all time *Dangal* (Khan et al. & Tiwari, 2016) is based on the real-life story of two Indian female wrestlers who made it big on the international stage. Without denying superstar Aamir Khan's ability to pull in opening weekend audiences, the film's worldwide box-office haul of \$300 million and counting (Abbasi, 2017), is being discussed as a remarkable feat in an industry where female leads are often little more than props in the male hero's journey. Echoing popular discourse, mainstream media reviews hailed it as a feminist victory (Chopra, 2017; Iyer, 2017; Masand, 2016). Set in rural India where the mere act of raising daughters to compete in a male-dominated sport is a huge step in resisting immanent patriarchies, *Dangal* is the story of a man who rigorously trains his daughters to win the gold medal that he never could. A few niche media outlets averred that in prioritizing the father's dreams over his daughters' autonomy, *Dangal's* narrative valorized a patriarchal essentialism in the guise of progressiveness (Patranobis, 2017; Rajendran, 2017; Chatterjee, 2016). The father's absolute control is further justified by the dramatized fictional arc of the film which depicts his older daughter's downfall largely as a consequence of the relatively liberal lifestyle she adopts when she moves away from his watchful gaze into the city.

The modern (often conflated with Western in popular South Asian imaginaries) woman who suffers for exercising her personal and/or professional agency is a trope that is common to many of the contemporary films of Bollywood<sup>1</sup> that are marketed as empowering. Selling patriarchy in feminist packaging, these movies tend to perpetuate the imaginaries of feminism

---

<sup>1</sup> The colloquial name for commercial Hindi cinema produced in India

that circulate in popular consciousness. Often monolithic, these stereotypes of what a feminist looks like (and behaves like), reflect the contestation between the Western liberal ideals of feminism and feminist representation in Hindi cinema. The differing mainstream and fringe reactions to *Dangal* as outlined above, also mirror the larger question of multiple feminisms in a transnational context where the cinematic manifestations of feminism often clash with the particularities of women empowerment within the nation's own set of gender norms and histories. This study examines how these tangled narratives construct versions of empowered womanhood on the big screen and in public discourse.

#### A. **Background**

The necessity of assessing these narratives critically arises from Hindi cinema's significant role as a medium of societal expression. Since Indian independence, Hindi cinema has functioned as an integral component in the formation of national identity (Viridi, 2003; Miller, 2015). The consumption of Bollywood movies cuts across demographics, embedding its ideologies into the larger Indian consciousness, often impacting the beliefs and attitudes of the public (Mishra, 2002). Be it the synonymy of light-skin with beauty in Bollywood which makes its way into matrimonial advertisements' desire for 'fair' brides (Parameswaran and Cardoza, 2009; Gehlawat, 2011; Jha and Adelman, 2009) or the noticeable slimming down of Bollywood heroines over time affecting body image among women (Kapadia, 2009), the cultural influence of Bollywood looms large. Popular cinema reifies gender norms, by reinforcing the gender roles created by a patriarchal society and by glorifying regressive gender performances under the guise of 'Indianness' (Viridi, 2003).

Reading women's portrayals in contemporary commercial Hindi cinema as a signifier of a modern nation's mediated relation with its colonial legacies and globalized present,



underscores the need for studying them as such (Hegde, 2011). Historically too, the narratives of female characters have played a significant role in imagining a unified nation resisting the influences of putatively foreign cultural ideals (Virdi, 2003). The idealized Indian woman is the keeper of the private sphere, conservatively dressed in traditional Indian attire and devoted to her family. The Westernized leading lady is usually 'domesticated' by the hero. The othering of the woman in Western attire, seemingly at home in the public sphere often accompanied by visuals of her smoking and drinking, has traditionally been set up as antithetical to the idealized Indian woman, reflecting the virgin-whore dichotomy.

Studying the ways in which the othering of women occurs in contemporary cinema lends a more comprehensive understanding to how the interaction of the global and local contribute to provincial versions of women's empowerment. The portrayals of the urban, upper-middle class characters who espouse Westernized values and mannerisms replace the previously overt alienation of the modern woman with more metaphoric narrative devices. Ostensibly empowered but often prey to punishment at the hands of the narrative, the modern woman is the faux feminist who eventually succumbs to the hegemonic understanding of good and evil in Hindi cinema. What makes this question of representation even more complex, is the subtle form of Western adoration that is visible in the aspirational liberation of the female lead who, more often than not, also subscribes to globalized heteronormative optics of desirability and upward mobility. Hegde (2011) captures it succinctly when she writes "This contestation is steeped within the historical and political trajectories of the nation and is most visible in the spaces of consumption and popular culture where narratives of desire, gender and commodity overlap in particular formations" (p.7). This prevents a neat categorization of these characters,

who reflect the sensibilities of a transnational modernity but are reflective of Indian traditions, colloquialisms and tropes peculiar to Bollywood cinema.

The increasing influx of independent cinema since the late 2000s has sparked a largely positive discourse among traditional and new media about the progressive leap that Bollywood seems to be taking into feminist cinema (Gupta, 2015). Contextualizing the renegotiation of women's representation within changing industry frameworks, there is a need to look at these films through a more critical lens. In most of these films featuring women in pivotal roles, the idea of *feminism* is portrayed through a culturally hegemonic male gaze (Sharma, 2017; Tere, 2012; Dasgupta, 1996). Without dismissing the advances made in women's representation in Hindi cinema, it is then crucial to understand these portrayals of feminism as judged by male standards, bound by the gender norms laid down by patriarchy. With male directors and writers at the helm of a majority of these movies, feminism usually gets appropriated not to *humanize* women but as a means of moral posturing while maintaining claims of increasing women's visibility. An understanding of exactly how "feminism is made visible and valorized..how it is co-opted by the state and the market" (Kommaraju & Raman, 2017, p. 895), is especially crucial given the global ascent of right-wing politics.

Women's stories are rarely just narratives of human conflict but tied in to larger questions. They often signify a Hindu nationalism which is continually resisting the cultural imperialism of the West, in an era where the domestic economy is linked to the larger global economy and integrated into transnational media flows (Viridi, 2003; Hegde, 2011). The organizing principle of this paper is how commercial cinema presents these interweaving narratives, reinforcing certain notions of feminism in public discourse.

Gender scholars who study post-independence Hindi cinema often situate their work in the postcolonial feminist paradigm. Postcolonial discourse is a polysemous field of study. Spanning the terrains of the subaltern, nationalism studies and work building on anticolonial theory, post-colonialism refers to the both the relationships shared by nations and their colonizers and the contemporary discontents of colonialism as reflected in the formerly colonized territories (Shohat & Stam, 2003).

Postcolonial feminist theory engages with questions of gender, challenging ideas of culture, power, and empire, even within traditional postcolonial thought (Lewis & Mills, 2003). Focusing on structural domination of women and the discursive suppression of their heterogeneity in cinematic representation, postcolonial discourses reveal the woman as a stand-in for the nation (Mohanty, 1988). They emphasize the portrayal of women as an embodiment of Indian culture, articulating it as a reaction to and an antithesis of Western colonialism (Viridi, 2003; Mankekar, 1993). Nationalistic discourses around womanhood are further interspersed with questions of class (Mankekar, 1999; Sharpe, 2007; Tere, 2012).

The postcolonial lens especially sheds light on how the oppression of women is couched in the unwillingness to separate women from their role as carriers of *Indian tradition*. Women's responsibilities as the flag-bearers of Indian culture allow for a convenient justification of the oppressive laws and mores being maintained in the country (legalized marital rape, unwillingness to talk about domestic violence) (Viridi, 2003). Diasporic studies of gender representation largely focus on how gendered narratives contribute to a sense of longing for India. Studies highlight how those narratives work to supplement the themes of women as victims of heteropatriarchy by presenting women characters who have sexual agency (Desai, 2004).

In this thesis, the postcolonial lens will be used as an entryway to understand the tropes integral to Hindi cinema and how these have been modified to accommodate global sensibilities. The paper contributes to existing postcolonial feminist scholarship by discussing the new ways of presenting old patriarchies in an industry that is simultaneously subject to nationalist sentiment and transnational relevance.

Post-colonial feminists have long stressed the need to study the problematic linkages of the West to the formerly colonized nations through a transnational lens (Kaplan & Grewal, 1999; Mohanty, 2003). Within the transnational framework, contemporary connections between the colonizer and the colonized are explored. If postcolonial literature looks at how the colonial past influences systems of representation, transnational media literature looks at how global media flows shape the relationship in the context of current technologies and state-actors. It is a useful analytical framework to study how media cultures and gender are understood in everyday life. Media flows in a global economy are usually led by the West, but result in the formation of a hybrid environment unique to the site where the media is being decoded (Shohat & Stam, 2003).

Transnational media frameworks, when adopted by scholars of multiculturalism and postcolonialism, do not accept the center-periphery model which centers Hollywood and posits world cinemas as the other, instead viewing them as nodes in a network, agents of nationalization to a global audience (Viridi, 2017; Hegde, 2011; Appadurai, 1990).

Incorporating Viridi's criticism (2017) that transnational studies of late have been undercutting the diversities of a national rubric in favor of a universal transnationalism, my study examines the particularities of the national within the transnational. This translates into acknowledging how the complexities of class, religion and caste tie in with India's transnational

trajectories, producing “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal as cited in Hegde, p.70). This framework allows me to account for the influences of globalization on the presentation, production values and the narratives of Hindi cinema. Drawing from transnational media literature, my study foregrounds a gendered view of globalization. This study is a reading of the ongoing interplay of tradition and modernity in a hybrid media landscape, contributing not only to an understanding of how filmmakers construct narratives of women empowerment but also how feminism is understood in popular media discourse.

To this end, I will be conducting a Foucauldian discourse analysis of selected contemporary film. By replacing the concept of ideology with discourse, French philosopher and theorist, Michel Foucault saw power as omniscient in determining how humanity defined the truths of everyday life. Foucault’s work on disciplined bodies and the role of the panopticon allows the contextualization of spatial frameworks in which postcolonial practices and representations exist even after the “formal end of colonialism” (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p.2). This study contributes to the conceptual framework of docile bodies, by applying it to the way in which Hindi cinema renegotiates women’s embodiment in private and public spheres within a transnational media environment.

Key to analyzing the replacement of a colonial hegemony with an upper caste Hindu hegemony, is Foucault’s contention that where power reproduces itself as domination it employs similar apparatuses, strategies, and mechanisms of control irrespective across different locations (hooks, 1992). This study contributes the idea of bio-power in postcolonial societies by delineating how Hindi movies valorize the mechanisms which the state uses to control the family unit (Ong & Peletz, 1995). Viewing the normative boundaries of popular cinema as the mechanism of societal control based on Foucault’s characterizations, we observe how disparate,

informally codified symbols and signifiers function to maintain the status quo in lieu of a central disciplinary authority (Naficy, 2003). Further, the prevalence of culturally specified legitimacies of idealized Indian womanhood become clearer when we apply Foucault's concept of the political technology of the body lending itself to a system of subjection of individuals by the culture they subscribe to (Lionnet, 2003). Using Foucault's understanding of power and governmentality, we can trace how transnational neo-liberal ideologies contribute to the simplistic view of a post-feminist world by masking the obvious hostilities to women in public spheres (Sharma, 2017).

Foucault, though heavily criticized for the Eurocentric focus in studying power structures and his view of the oppressed as a homogenous class, has nevertheless been a major influence on postcolonial theory (Loomba, 1998; Nichols, 2010). My study employs a modified Foucauldian approach that one that allows for a view of resistance that takes place through the imposition of Hindu hegemony in popular Hindi cinema.

This thesis dissects the ways in which central female characters in contemporary popular cinema embody the complex cultural politics of a formerly colonized nation, to better understand the resulting hybridized tropes particular to the neoliberal discourses precipitated by an increasingly connected world economy.

## B. **#BollywoodBasics**

The world's largest film industry in terms of production and consumption, Bollywood derives inspiration from Hollywood's production logics but retains inherently a distinct local cinematic esthetic (Thussu, 2008). Be it the vibrant song and dance numbers, the spreading of a very specific brand of Indian values through its narratives or even the stringent star system that drives economic logic, the idiosyncrasies of Bollywood set it apart from the North American

industry that inspires its colloquial name. Part of the Indian film industry, Bollywood is cinema produced in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai). Compared to the thriving regional cinemas that form part of the nation's film output, Bollywood arguably remains at the forefront in terms of global influence, box-office sales and visibility (Maheshwari, 2013). While critics are divided as to the levity of Bollywood as an epithet (Gehlawat, 2010), I will be using this as a term to signify the popular Hindi cinema that arguably dominates national discourse (Gopal & Moorti, 2008)

Bollywood as a field of critical inquiry has been growing exponentially, along with popular culture's increasing acceptance in academia, the gradual reimagining of the Hindi film industry as an upper-class pastime and the emergence of a substantial diasporic market for these films (Dwyer & Pinney, 2003; Ganti, 2012; Bandyopadhyay, 2008). Much of this inquiry is broadly located in what Bollywood stands for (Gehlawat, 2010), its place in global cinematic discourses (Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008) and its role in creating a specific worldview that is considered Indian (Chakravarty, 1993; Viridi, 2003). As a term, Bollywood evokes a multiplicity of meanings, as a simultaneous response to and a dismissal of the West (Viridi & Creekmur, 2006), sometimes mimicking Hollywood and other times seemingly parodic (Prasad, 2008; Waugh, 2001), pursuing global aspirations while proudly claiming a unique *Indianness* (Hegde, 2011). As an industry too, Bollywood is continuously working towards expanding its international footprint while offering a postcolonial vision of the "capitalist profit and pleasure" (Kumar, 2008, p.98) enterprise as perfected by Hollywood.

Emblematic of this vision is the typical Bollywood potboiler. A cornucopia of theatric and cinematic styles, these commercial outings rely heavily on melodrama. Within a running time of three to three and a half hours, the audience is taken through a gamut of genres usually romance, action and drama, interspersed with song and dance sequences. This *mélange* of

elements has come to signify the *masala* (spicy blend) film, arguably the nation's most well-known import and a glamorized vehicle of patriarchal narratives. Three of the key markers of a commercial Hindi film: heterosexual romance, musical routines and the 'family film'; function as cinematic plot devices which promote a hegemonic male worldview.

Heterosexual love stories form the underlying premise of the *masala* film. Whatever the overarching genre, the love story between the leading man and woman is centered or is an essential catalyst in fueling the film's central conflict (Dwyer, 2004). The archetypal romance in its attempts to accomplish the state's political reformativ/restorative function (Rajadhyaksha, 1999) glorifies regressive gender roles, rape culture and toxic masculinity under the guise of performing an authentic 'Indian culture'. From the wooing stage, which typically involves the leading man (referred to as the hero) physically harassing the leading lady (the heroine) till she agrees to go out with him to exerting possessiveness over her when she agrees, these forms of sexual violence are not only valorized as manly behavior but also rewarded by the heroine's reciprocation of the hero's love (Ramasubramaniam & Oliver, 2003). Influential in fostering notions of power, masculinity and violence in relationships among teenage boys (Poudyal, 2000), these movies simultaneously reify the submissive woman trope as something to be uncritically emulated. The repeated messaging of 'no means yes' contributes to the entitlement that characterizes male stalkers in real life who have been known to harm the women who reject their advances (Ravindran, 2001). The Bollywood romance by its very nature, is initiated by an expression of male desire. The storyline follows the hero's agentic persuasions, lending itself to his gaze, the creator's gaze (and by default the spectator's gaze) and the camera's original gaze, all of which are predominantly male (Mishra, 2002). The woman, who is the subject of his



desire, is reduced to a passive site of meaning making while the audience is actively engaged in identifying with the hero's desire for her.

“To talk of Bollywood is inevitably to talk of the song and dance sequence” (Gopal & Moorti, 2008, p. 1). Just as no genre is complete without the love story, no genre is complete without the song and dance sequence. Distinct from the Hollywood musical, these songs are in playback format where the actors lip sync to professional singers' voices which they accompany with a choreographed dance. If romantic scenes are intended to indulge the voyeur, the song and dance sequences which often break the film's structured narrative, are intended to elicit a sense of surrogate identification (Jha, 2003). Jha adds that these songs signify the disjointedness of the postcolonial nation while creating a space for the expression of a cohesive national identity. She emphasizes that these often situate female actors as non-agentic, thus leaving them out of the anticolonial resistance narrative except as passive observers. These are also a stand-in for sex scenes, where the heroine is an object of scopophilic gaze, unaware of the camera evoking her sexuality for audience reaction.

The songs form the most integral part of the film's pre-release marketing campaign, with filmmakers often investing huge moneys in them as a means of attracting the “bums on the (theatrical) seats” (Churamani as cited by Sidner, 2011). This is especially true of the ‘item song’ which are big budget numbers created for the sole purpose of promoting the movie, often not even part of the main feature at the time of exhibition. Shot and edited like international music videos, these songs are thus ‘items’ used to lure the audiences and the women who performs in these is objectified as the ‘item girl’ (Nijhawan, 2009; Kumar, 2017). In the 70s and 80s, the item girl was usually the villain's consort, or someone who was cast specifically for the purpose of this one song. The post-80s iteration of these constructs the item girl as a neoliberal

empowered woman who owns her sexuality, thus allowing the heroine to conveniently straddle the virgin-whore dichotomy without compelling the audience to choose between good and evil (Gabriel as cited in Govindan & Dutta, 2002, p. 187)

The liberalization of India in the 1990s and the subsequent official state recognition of Bollywood as an industry in 1998 paved the way for the production of the state approved 'family film' (Mehta, 2005). The diasporic population emerged as a valuable audience for Bollywood cinema (Desai, 2004). With the opening up of international markets, the family became an important element of the song and dance romance sagas, providing the dual appeal of making the non-resident Indian (NRI) nostalgic for his nation while incorporating his global aspirations of making it big outside of his country (Gehlawat, 2011; Mehta, 2005). Harking the NRI audience back to the 'good old days', the family film reiterated the woman's role as the keeper of the private sphere and the bearer of Indian culture as a symbolic resistance to Western norms (Virdi, 2003). In the attempt to universalize *Indianness* by repackaging Hindu traditions and rituals as a consolidated version of Indian culture, regressive gender narratives are reinforced by the family film (Punathambekar, 2005).

The male-dominated star system that sustains the industry, is yet another distinguishing feature of Hindi cinema (Karanjia, 1983). Content takes a backseat to the hero of the film when it comes to determining marketing strategies, screen time and wages (Ciecko, 2001). The film's value to distributors is measured by the hero's popularity among the audiences and box-office returns often seem to justify the hero's central place in all production decisions related to the film. This has resulted in a small cache of male stars who exert a disproportionate amount of power over the production, distribution and exhibition process. The underrepresentation of women behind the scenes further engenders a systemic lack of incentive to create well-written

roles for women, perpetuating the cycle of narratives glorifying masculinity and male protagonists (Viridi, 2003).

The female lead is the mandatory eye candy, rarely going beyond an accessory to the hero's noble pursuits (Ciecko, 2001). The leading man shapes his destiny (and that of the nation), overcoming hardships, winning respect and romantic love (Viridi, 2003). The leading lady is reduced to another feather in his cap, decorative in purpose; she is the object to be contested and claimed, sometimes a flimsy excuse to push forward his agentic narrative and always a cheerleader to his gainful endeavors. Devoid of any complex characterization, she is a stereotypical rendition of 'Indian womanhood' as defined by the cultural discourses of the time (Dasgupta, 1996).

### C. **Gender Representation Through the Years**

Popular cinema's representation of women has been determined by the spatio-temporal logics of the nation-state's agenda, the dominant ideas around gender norms and society's shifting relation with Western ideologies. It has little to do with social realities as experienced by women, thus serving to quell patriarchal anxiety about social change (Dasgupta, 1996).

Post-independence cinema fashioned 'new woman' tropes that nevertheless maintained their role in the domestic sphere (Viridi, 2003). Feminist thought was restricted to the upper classes and Brahmins; the ideal Indian woman continued to remain the cultural signifier of India as superior to everything Western. Drawn along a Victorian-Brahmanical axis, women's representation reflected an upper-class morality signifying a classist notion of purity (Ghosal, 2005).

The seventies and eighties saw a marked period of discontent in the women's rights movement. Even though India was governed by a woman prime minister and women were

occupying other important positions in the public sphere, Western notions of femininity and the emphasis on upholding 'Indian values' continued to oppress women (Ghosal, 2005; Gupta, 2015). The fight for the passage of the Uniform Civil Code<sup>2</sup>, an attempt to reduce religion-based gender discriminatory practices, resulted in relocating the woman as a nationalist symbol of tradition to a signifier of communal identity. The dominant religious rhetoric claimed that enforcing a uniform code would endanger 'cultural diversity' (Viridi, 2003). Women's equality, perceived as a Western construct, was equated with a loss of communal identity. The figure of the woman was thus used to stymie debates about community and class.

During this period Viridi (2003) highlights that the Hindi films featuring women protagonists began to gradually change. Initial changes were couched in larger conservative themes, perhaps fearing societal backlash (as with the Uniform Civil Code). Viridi contends that a few portrayals could be read as resistant, with the heroine resolving the climactic conflict or having children out of wedlock. However, these women were inevitably read as unworthy or suffered terrible consequences for their putative transgressions (Gupta, 2015). The dominant narrative of the woman who was revered for her victimhood and deified for her sacrifices, served as compensation for her subjugation at the hands of a patriarchal society (Viridi, 2003).

The 1980s marked a period of upheaval. Widespread protests against the verdict of the Mathura rape trial<sup>3</sup>, led to a surge in the women's rights movement (Viridi, 2003). The hostility to women working in jobs that previously only employed men, corresponded with a rise in the cases of violence against women (Gupta, 2015). Bollywood reacted to this with a spate of rape

---

<sup>2</sup> It is an ongoing debate within India to replace the personal laws based on religious customs in India with a common set of rules called the Uniform Civil Code.

<sup>3</sup> The Mathura rape case was an incident where two policemen raped a young tribal girl, Mathura in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. The public outrage after the Supreme Court acquitted the accused, led to amendments in Indian rape law via The Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act 1983 (No. 46).

and revenge melodramas. Though a clear departure from the victimhood narrative, the heroine was masculinized and eroticized as she avenged the loss of her chastity (Virdi, 2003). Her redemption now lies not in her sacrifice but in exacting vendetta from those who have taken away her patriarchally constructed 'honor'. The rape itself was not criticized as a consequence of male entitlement but as an assault on the Indian woman whose body was often likened to a shrine (Virdi, 2003). Once again, the woman is not humanized but placed on a pedestal and used to perpetuate Hindu patriarchal discourses. The increasing presence of women in the public sphere, ushered in the narrative's use of the Westernized lifestyle as an excuse for rape. While the victim might eventually get retributive justice, she is nevertheless punished for violating boundaries. These depictions were challenged by a small group of directors in the parallel cinema industry, who avoided making formulaic films and explored women's issues. While some of these films enjoyed a brief wave of success and critical acclaim, the majority of these were considered to be too intellectual for mainstream consumption (Dasgupta, 1996).

The globalization of the nineties seemed to be a backward step for women's representation in cinema (Agarwal, 2014). The stress on glossy production values accompanying the arrival of MTV in India, increased the likelihood that the leading woman was nothing more than a glamorous accoutrement for the hero (Govindan & Dutta, 2008; Gupta, 2015). With the transposition of MTV's overtly sexual visual culture onto mainstream cinema, the heroines were beginning to be more open about their sexuality and sexual desire. Exposing the state's discomfort with female sexuality, the censors usually opposed these expressions of desire but passed these movies after minor editing or with an A certificate (Bose, 2009). In this manner, the 'liberal new woman' explored her individuality within the constraints of the patriarchal boundaries (Oza, 2012). The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century wasn't too different. Though movies

kept pace with the changing times in depicting women who were no longer confined to their marital roles and as working professionals, the career women's stories followed a largely negative narrative arc (Gupta, 2015).

Overblown costs of filmmaking and globalization have led to the rise of independent cinema in the last few decades, making space for previously untold stories (Devasundaram, 2016). In the past decade, films dealing with women's issues or films with female protagonists have slowly been making an inroad into Bollywood's commercial film arena. Sharma (2017) contends that the revival of interest in women's representation is related to the neo-liberalism engendered by globalization. The West's increased engagement with Indian culture, necessitates a revision of women's role as a long-standing bastion of nationalist ideology. While these films still do not form the bulk of the movies being released on big screen, legacy studios are increasingly investing in producing these works allowing them the benefit of extensive marketing and media coverage. This translates into better visibility for these films, given that mainstream studios have more robust distribution networks and have the bargaining power to secure expansive exhibition opportunities. Most of these films are made on comparatively small budgets (approximately \$1.5 - \$4 million), allowing for an easier return on investment. Increasingly (albeit incrementally), Bollywood filmmakers seem to be in sync with the global conversation on gender disparity in the entertainment sector, in terms of their willingness to explore hitherto untold stories which focus on women's experiences.

This has sparked a largely positive discourse among traditional and new media about the progressive leap that Bollywood seems to be taking into feminist cinema. Gupta (2015) uses the case studies of *Queen* (Viacom 18 Pictures et al. & Bahl, 2014), *Kahaani* (Ghosh & Gada, 2012) and *Gulaab Gang* (Sinha et al. & Sen, 2014) to illustrate how Bollywood is reimagining the

woman by defying tropes that traditionally define Indian womanhood. *Queen* and *Kahaani* have been commercially successful endeavors offering their female protagonists multiple forms of identification that steer away from stereotypes. However, I argue that these depictions are not representative of the movies that are advertised as feminist. *Queen* and *Gulaab Gang* feature women who are not *tainted* by modernization, they are presented as traditional, in appearance and morality. Their triumph over gender norms is accommodated under Hindu notions of Indianness, given that they still adhere to certain patriarchal constructs even in moments of transgression. On the other hand, the urban woman who is a staple of the contemporary feminist movie, is usually Westernized and shown to suffer for violating the patriarchal codes of behavior. *Kahaani*, while undoubtedly a game changer, is about a woman's quest for her husband's murderer with the narrative placing her outside of an everyday urban setting where she would have to negotiate gendered expectations. Additionally, the very act of avenging her husband's death, provides the protagonist of *Kahaani* gendered justification to cross the boundaries of her role in the private sphere. It is pertinent to note here that all three movies mentioned by Gupta were directed by male directors, one of whom is no longer actively making films after sexual harassment allegations surfaced against him (Iyengar, 2017). Thus, my study will actively focus on films that are representative of the postfeminist discourses that populate contemporary Hindi cinema.

While it is definitely refreshing to see the silver screen pay attention to women-oriented films, there is a need to look at these 'feminist' films through a more critical lens. Chatterjee (2016) adds that "understanding the formation of gender under contemporary conditions of transnationalism requires attentiveness to an insidious partnership of possibilities and exclusions that makes it simplistic to think in terms of progress or regress" (p. 1179). With the global

circulation of postfeminist discourses, it becomes increasingly relevant and challenging to unpack these representations (Chatterjee, 2014; Dosekun, 2015).

Films of the previous decades featuring women protagonists were not claiming to be feminist, but reflecting the changing status of women & women's issues in society. The current paper focuses on contemporary cinema that markets itself as women-centric or feminist, but tends to promote a uni-dimensional vision of what a feminist looks like. I explore how this version works as symbol of resistance against Western cultural imperialism but also simultaneously embodies Euro-centric and Hindu patriarchal hegemonic ideologies. This feminist labeling is worth looking at because films influence the public discourse on feminism. This paper continues the research on gender representation, framing it within its ambivalent relationship to purportedly Western ideals. Reading their claims as resistance pieces within a hegemonic narrative, I examine to what extent the characters resist both Hindu & Eurocentric patriarchal hegemonies, while reinforcing either or. I will be analyzing these characters through postcolonial frameworks, exploring how postcolonial concepts are reimagined in transnational feminist portrayals. Applying Foucauldian discourse analysis to these representations, I argue that a conjunction of the normalization of gendered ideas through historical subjectivities, the discursive subjection of the female body to a 'naturally' determined destiny and the neo-liberal production of postfeminist portrayals as resistance narratives create a faux feminist who is representative of new patriarchies.



## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND RELATED LITERATURE

### A. Postcolonial Frameworks

The present condition of women in cinema, their claim to modernity and the resultant discourse around feminism cannot be theorized without an understanding of India's colonized past. A postcolonial framework not only allows us to analyze the role of women in nationalistic and anti-colonialistic discourses but also lends a historical perspective to existing power relations between the former colonizer and the decolonized subject (Desai, 2004; Shohat & Stam, 2003; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Traditionally excluded by male scholars in the discipline, the gendered nature of the colonized was raised by postcolonial feminist scholars (Lewis & Mills, 2003). They questioned the normative understanding of colonialism and postcolonialism, making visible the female subject as a signifier of the untouched pre-colonial space (Innes, 1994; Sharpe, 1993). Postcolonial feminist critique allows us to look at both: how colonial and postcolonial practices have shaped gender concerns as well as the extant material consequences of these practices (Lewis & Mills, 2003).

It is important to recognize the contribution of feminist scholars not only as a response to the overt exclusion of feminist work in the initial postcolonial canon but also as a reaction to the peddling of Western feminist ideals as the only and authentic feminism. Feminist scholars of color called for a revision of these ideals to include their diverse experiences and oppressions rooted in their specific subjectivities (Lorde, 1976; 1978; Wong, 1977; Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977/1978). Postcolonial feminist thought rejects the universalizing notions of feminism as presented by Western feminists in favor of an intersectional approach that considers the intersection of race, class and religious identities as important conditions informing representation (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Samuels & Ross Sheriff, 2008). In doing so, it

purposefully denounces as colonialism, the homogenizing Western readings of the Third World Woman as victim and the Western feminists as saviors (Mohanty, 1988). Loomba (1993) references writings on practices like *sati*<sup>4</sup> and the veil, which were constructed as oppressive in Western feminist literature but agentic in Indian nationalist writing. Lewis & Mills (2003) argue that this rallying cry of Western feminists against so-called oppression solidified these practices as markers of anti-colonial resistance.

These contradictions within feminist scholarship continue in contemporary questions regarding the nature of subjection and freedom, rendering them fraught with ambivalence. Spivak (1993) who positions the colonized woman subject as the subaltern whose true narratives are unknowable furthers this contradiction by the idea that the colonized may not be radically opposite to the imperialist. This opens the readers to the possibility that the colonized who were in relative positions of power often used the notions of Westernization and modernity to serve their own ends, thus making them complicit in their oppression while performing strategic resistances. Chow (1994) responds by saying that we may not know the ‘true native’ but we can conceptualize the epistemic violence that transforms the “pre-native” into a symptom of colonization. Carrying this forward in my paper, I argue that questions concerning the veracity of an authentic voice are not conceptually as important as reading how interweaving hegemonies and resistance narratives represent a purportedly authentic voice. Their subsequent categorization as progressive/regressive enabled by the convergence of neo-liberal practices with nationalist Hindu agendas, is what will help us in analyzing this particular vernacular of feminist representation.

---

<sup>4</sup> A practice wherein Indian widows (mainly Hindu) immolated themselves on their husband’s funeral pyre. This custom was made illegal in 1987 with the Prevention of Sati Act.

Framing cinema through a postcolonial lens enables us to view it from the perspective of how it engages with historical subjectivity and political ramifications of the same, thus avoiding a thematic categorization. Departing from colonial systems of power and knowledge, the postcolonial challenges the binary between the West & 'other' cinema (Ponzanesi & Waller, 2012). The center/periphery logic that privileges Hollywood as having a universal appeal, overlooking its monopolistic distribution practices and casts aside other cinema as *foreign*, engenders the need to study this cinema through a postcolonial lens. Within a transnational media framework, the postcolonial posits the various film industries as nodes in a network, in which gender is ideologically pivotal to the understanding of the power structures in these cinemas (Shohat & Stam, 2003; Khanna, 1998)

#### B. **Postcolonial Meets Transnational**

The postcolonial feminist lens allows us to look beyond the putative tradition-modernity binary, instead questioning whose interests are served by these manufactured concepts of modernity and tradition (Desai, 2004). The embodiment of cultural difference as proscribed by the modern's association with the masculine Western & the traditional's association with the feminine spiritual, forms the basis of understanding which anti-colonial practices are inscribed into filmic representation (Chatterjee, 1989). The growth of the South Asian diaspora as well as the emerging middle-class with its ties to global capitalism require a revisiting of these questions of tradition and modernity (Appadurai, 2000). The middle-class Hindu woman (who is mostly the face of modern feminist cinema) retains her materially privileged position that is policed by heterosexist, communal, classed and gendered discourses (Desai, 2004). With conditions necessitating the growth of a Hindu bourgeois anticolonial nationalism, it is easier to see the feminist representations falling prey to the boundaries required to further the nation-state's

agenda in an increasingly connected world. Drawing connections between postcolonial scholarship in the context of contemporary transnational media frameworks, helps analyze the the female lead's highly individualized, media friendly feminism which obscures historical struggles by positioning choice as a feminist act rather than a byproduct of feminist liberation (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). Projected as desirable but with complete bodily autonomy, these women's narratives typically center on heterosexual relationships and economic advancement that does not challenge existing capitalist structures (Zeisler, 2016). The markers of postfeminism can be said to circulate through transnational media flows, which makes it more complex and eschews its reduction to the status of Western imperialist conception (Dosekun, 2015). For its diasporic audiences, Bollywood's incorporation of transnational discourses, allows the culture industry to claim a modern relevance while simultaneously injecting traditional motifs into its narratives (Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Gehlawat, 2011).

As Grewal & Kaplan (2000) opine "the relationship between postcolonial and transnational studies is one of a specific feminist trajectory that has always focused on the inequalities generated by capitalist patriarchies in various eras of globalization" (para.5). They further emphasize how the postcolonial project delineates how nationalization homogenizes the female body, ignoring caste, class and regional differences to create a sense of uniting *Indianness*, in a transnational media environment. Thus, an understanding of postcolonialism is necessary in understanding the relationship between nationalization, both state-centred as well as cultural and the flow of global capitalism.

### C. **Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

To analyze how postcolonial and transnational media practices continue to undergird the discourses of gender representation, I will use certain Foucauldian concepts such as biopolitics,

disciplined bodies and the panopticon, accompanied by feminist interpretations of his work as outlined by a substantial body of feminist scholars (Bordo, 1988, 1993; Bartky, 1990, 1997; Butler, 1990, 1997, 2004; Spivak, 1985 and so many more). Though Foucault addresses the gendered body as a site for scholarly analysis only in his later works, from *The History of Sexuality* (1976) onwards, his work on power/knowledge is an important tool in examining the processes of disciplinary control and normalization of gender discourses that have led to the subordination of the female subject (Amigot & Pujal, 2009). His explicit emphasis on the historical context as a site of analysis for discourse, linking it to social practices and power relations, is conducive to the postcolonial framework of study. That the very existence of feminist scholarship is necessitated by the need to question existing status quos and intellectual hierarchies, makes Foucauldian discourse analysis a valuable ally in deconstructing power structures.

As outlined earlier, the postcolonial female subject embodies anticolonial resistance in mainstream cinema. Using Foucault's concept of disciplined bodies (Bordo, 1993), we can map how the leading lady in postcolonial cinema was disciplined to internalize the private sphere as her domain of existence. In personifying a nationalistic (anti-imperial) ideology, the ideal woman adhered to a certain set of Hindu norms that not only defined her but also deified her for being a sacrificial figure. On the other hand, the woman who crossed these boundaries was punished for her transgressions. By analyzing this mechanism of reward and punishment through a Foucauldian framework, we can explore the processes of self-subjection and self-discipline. Eschewing a reliance on essentialist elements and instead directing attention to the historical processes that produce such ways of knowing, Foucauldian analysis allows us to locate how the various modes of power such as class, caste and religion interact with gender to create 'properly'

disciplined bodies. Postcolonial feminists have thus applied Foucault's concept of genealogy, which accounts for the constitution of discursive subjects over time, to overcome his work's "problematic indifference to sexual difference" (Butler, 1990, p. xii). This avoids the homogenization of the oppressed under the colonial gaze (Alexander & Mohanty, 1995; Lorde, 2003; Anzaldua, 1987). The postcolonial 'Other', can be contextualized by applying Foucault's discourse analysis to the production of, if I can be so audacious as to say, the technologies of 'Indian womanhood'. The discursive creation of an 'Indian womanhood' largely ignores the regional, caste, class, linguistic and religious diversity among the colonized peoples, in order to promote a unified national identity. Studying how these ontologies influence the contemporary representation of leading ladies on screen, is thus suited to a postcolonial feminist analysis based on Foucauldian fundamentals of power and knowledge.

The disciplining of women through an over-determination of their reproductive functions, defining their sexuality can be viewed through Foucault's conceptualization of biopower (1976). Crucial to the development of a capitalist society, cinematic glorification of woman's role as mother and the limited representation of women as sexualized selves, serves to legitimize the patriarchal control of the means of production (Foucault, 1976; Amigot & Pujal, 2009). The disciplining of women's bodies simultaneously constitutes symbolic anticolonial resistance and maintains the masculine-subject/feminine-object position within power structures. Applied to a transnational context, Foucault's explanation of how relations of power at different social levels converge to create global effects of domination can be used to examine the circulation of patriarchal power (Sawicki, 1991).

In response to these global 'states of domination', Foucault's later works emphasized that power can only be completely understood in light of the resistance to it (1982). Foucault

understands resistance as struggles against the privileges of knowledge, the government of individualization and the homogenizing representations of certain groups of people. However, power to him is heterogeneous and temporal, never completely determining, always leaving space for unexpected and unarticulated strategies of resistance. This resistance, nevertheless, exists within the networks of power, which illuminates the tension between self-subjection and the oppressor. Even a departure from a normative identity is viewed as an expression of freedom. They overrule the binary assumptions of the disciplinary body as radically opposite to the exercise of power, but attribute some agency to the oppressed in allowing an ability to exercise freedom (McNay, 2013). This freedom may have emancipatory potential but could at the same time be complicit with the systems of power to achieve certain ends, depending on the body's particular subjectivity. Given the different subjectivities that arise out of the different inequalities within the heterogeneous constructions of "woman", Foucault's theory has potential to read the discourses of these diverse resistances within their historical contexts.

This is precisely what makes Foucauldian theories of governmentality important when reading today's postfeminist discourses in cinema. Postfeminism has been a dominant theme across popular culture portrayals of women since the late nineties-early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Lotz, 2001). These representations depict a universe where feminist arguments are no longer necessary, a universe where the female leads are largely "a male producer's fantasy of feminism, which manages simultaneously to exploit and to deplore, to arouse and to moralize" (Shalit, 1998, p. 30)

The neo-liberal engendering of postfeminist discourses positions Foucauldian discussions of resistance in a unique place to read the potential of resistance within these portrayals as well as detect the workings of hegemony (Butler, 2013). In postfeminist discourses, instances of

subjection coexist with the exercising of agency, which brings us to the larger question of whether the subject's self-production can be seen as an act of complicity or one of resistance? (Foucault, 1982; Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). In recent years, the operation of different regimes of power (familial/national/global) have colluded with the neoliberal development of new technologies of the self, toward the institutional appropriation of feminist discourses which requires analysis of resistance that are not located on a binary (Amigot & Pujal, 2009).

The basic Foucauldian take on power is that it exercises itself in places that are not overtly political, coinciding with the fundamental feminist conceptualization of the 'personal being political.' This makes it ideally suited to the analysis of cinema, which is often co-opted as a state tool. The circulation of power in the everyday immanent practices of cinema, the gaze, the normative considerations of the gazes, the inclusions and exclusions of the gaze coincide to set up an environment that suggest a value neutrality while showcasing societal norms that abide by Foucault's rules of discourse (De Lauretis, 1984; Foucault, 1971). The film industry functions as a Foucauldian 'state of domination', a historically patriarchal institution, where the panoptical male voyeur finds a place within the consciousness of most women who are constantly subject to his gaze and judgement (Bartky, 1997).

One of Foucault's most unexplored ideas is the relation between the different techniques of governmentality and the technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988/1991). This study sets out to understand contemporary feminist representation, by analyzing how women are presented within hegemonic strictures in the production of their own subjection while simultaneously resisting the implications of this subjection through certain practices of self. Women constantly create new spaces from which they react/resist based on their own notion of "autonomy" and "power" which



is very dissimilar from the masculine subject with his “operative will” (Viridi, 2003, p. 126). This study looks at how transnational discourses intersect with the national, informing the postfeminist representations in commercial Hindi cinema.

I will be conducting a critical discourse analysis of selected Hindi films from 2010 to the first half of 2016. The focus will be on films that were marketed by the makers as women-oriented films and were written about in the media as feminist films. The study will locate these films in a transnational context but with an understanding of national socio-political and historical discourses. I will be accompanying the textual analysis of the films with a discourse analysis of the marketing strategies and media coverage of those films. As my main case studies, I will be looking at *Pink* (Sharma et al. & Roy Chowdhury, 2016) and contrasting it with *Queen* (Kashyap et al. & Bahl, 2014), to study the how feminist narratives of the Westernized woman differ from that of the non-Westernized woman. Both films were marketed as women-centric films, written about in the media extensively and were discussed in online public discourses with regard to their feminist underpinnings.

Released in 2016, *Pink*, was a courtroom drama centered on the contentious nature of sexual consent. The film was not only critically acclaimed but also set the box-office cash registers ringing (Masand, 2016; Shekhar, 2016; Veticad, 2016; Koimoi.com Team, 2016). While the presence of legendary Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan definitely helped in generating pre-release buzz, post-release the film’s content ignited national conversations in the media about sexual violence against women (Groves, 2016; Menon, 2016; Kaushal, 2016). Among the several other awards it was nominated for and won, it bagged the prestigious National Film Award (2017) for the Best Film on Social Issues. The film was invited for a special screening at the United Nations headquarters and also screened for the police department

of the state of Rajasthan as part of sensitivity training towards sexual assault victims (Express Web Desk, 2016; PTI, 2016). Set in urban India, *Pink* is representative of the films marketed as feminist, in that it focuses on urban, middle-class women, it is directed by a male and it features the modern versus traditional tropes that are characteristic of contemporary feminist film.

Through a textual analysis of *Pink* & a study of the mediated discourses surrounding the film, I hope to uncover how the hegemonic understandings of feminism engage with the resistance narratives to represent Indian womanhood. Additionally, I examine how the concepts of biopolitics and power are negotiated when it comes to women's embodiment and agency.

I will follow this up with a comparative textual analysis of the film *Queen*. Like *Pink*, this film too was a critical and box-office success (Masand, 2014; Sen, 2014; Pal, 2014, Koimoi.com Team, 2014). *Queen* continues to be touted in the media as one of the most feminist films to come out of Bollywood and is a fixture on feminist website listicles (Kapoor, 2015; Kamath, 2014; Pal, 2014). The film won several high-profile awards including two National Film Awards (2015), Best Hindi Film and a Best Actress accolade for lead actor Kangana Ranaut. The film did wonders for Ranaut's rollercoaster career, catapulting her into the big league and paving her way toward lead roles in female-centric films such as *Revolver Rani* (Chadha et al. & Srivastav, 2014), *Simran* (Kumar et al. & Mehta, 2017) and *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi* (to be released in 2018). Like *Pink*, *Queen* is the story of an urban, middle-class woman, directed by a male and reflective of the virgin whore tropes. However, unlike the modern (Westernized) women of *Pink*, Ranaut's character in *Queen* is depicted as a traditional Indian woman, written within the parameters of what defines ideal Indian womanhood. Her liberation comes through her decision to travel solo to Paris, thus opening her to the experiences of a modern woman. I chose *Queen* as a comparative to *Pink*, as the former outlines the ways in

which the narrative treats a non-Westernized Indian woman for exercising agency, the hegemonic understandings of feminist liberation as well as the resistance narratives, depicted through her representation. Through a comparative textual analysis of these two films, accompanied by a discourse analysis of their marketing strategies and media coverage, I hope to understand the difference that ‘Westernization’ of the character makes in terms of narrative treatment of the female lead and the media discussion around these films.

My discourse analysis is driven by feminist, postfeminist and postcolonial and transnational theory and work in this area. It is further focused by Foucault’s understanding of power and biopolitics. Thus, the following questions emerge and are pursued through an examination of these texts:

How do the film narratives contribute to hegemonic understandings of feminism as they apply to realities of Indian womanhood? Do these narratives leave room for counterhegemonic interpretation or resistance narratives to emerge? Further, how are these discourses engaged in the popular press? Do hegemonic and resistance narratives interact to promote a postfeminist narrative? What vision of feminism do these postfeminist narratives promote? Finally, how are biopolitics and power negotiated across the texts examined?

### III. METHODS

Discourse refers to “a set of interrelated texts and the practices of their dissemination, production and reception, that brings an object into being” (Parker as cited in Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p.5). The interrelated texts that are being analyzed in this study include: two full-length Hindi language feature films, their individual marketing campaigns and mainstream media coverage. In order to understand how cinematic texts and popular press collectively engage in influencing perceptions of feminism, this study analyzes data by studying the movies’ content, the publicity materials as well as the press’ framing of the movie. How social reality is produced through the shared cultural meaning of these discourses along with the relationship between discourse and reality, is what this study sets out to explore (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, the texts being analyzed in this study are not only the cultural signifiers on screen but also their framing by various stakeholders.

The two sample films, *Pink* and *Queen*, were chosen from among the population of 60 films that were marketed as women-oriented, between the years 2010 – 2016. These films will follow the guidelines of qualitative discourse analysis as outlined by Fairclough (1995, 2000) and van Dijk (1997). These were purposively sampled to reflect how the hegemonic and resistance narratives engage with depictions of agency for both sets of female leads, the modern leads of *Pink* and the traditionally characterized female lead of *Queen*. The goal was to work from a sample that was typical of the contemporary postfeminist representation in three salient aspects: urban, middle-class and Hindu. Both the movies will be watched repeatedly, so as to note down themes and discover patterns of thematic significance. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which cultural hegemonic themes are deployed through the female protagonists. The texts will also be assessed as to how they define female empowerment and the ways in

which postfeminist assumptions are written into the discourse. The physical appearance of the lead, her relationship with the male characters, the depiction of stereotypes and social situational contexts will be noted. These texts will be analyzed through a postcolonial feminist reading of the Foucauldian concepts of biopolitics, disciplining of bodies, governmentality and technologies of the self. These will be used to map out how power structures inform the sociocultural meaning making process of decolonized subjects in a transnational context. This will be done through an analysis of representational processes, both verbal, non-verbal and visual as the language in any text is “simultaneously constitutive of (1) social identities, (2) social relations, and (3) systems of knowledge and belief” (Fairclough, p.55)

Further analysis focuses on the discursive power of film and how the ‘Bollywoodization’<sup>5</sup> of ‘culture’ engenders certain notions of feminism in public opinion. For this, we will go through mainstream media coverage and elements of the films’ marketing campaign including trailers, posters, behind-the-scenes videos, interviews with the cast and crew, publicity events and gimmicks. This will include pre-release and post-release coverage. These will be assessed for postfeminist empowerment narratives.

Using Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) constant comparative method of analysis, each of the texts will go through three phases of coding. First, the overall themes in gender representation will be identified and coded according to thematic significance. Second, each theme will be evaluated according to the postcolonial framework. Third, Foucauldian concepts will be applied to the critical discourse analysis of the texts, simultaneously establishing patterns and analyzing them. Part of the grounded theory methodology, the constant comparative system of simultaneous data collection and analysis, will enable to the creation of a strong theoretical

---

<sup>5</sup> Coined by scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2003) to denote how cinema renders itself as a powerful tool of the neo-liberal State to promote certain ideas of belonging, citizenship and cultural kinship.

foundation while systematically organizing data (Glaser & Strauss as cited in Papacharissi & Fernback, 2008, p. 357)

In the following sections, I will analyze *Pink* and *Queen* as two distinct case studies. In doing so I will identify the distinct themes that point to the hegemonic ideas as related to contemporary women's representation as well as the potential opportunities for resistance. In the final section, I apply Foucauldian concepts along with postcolonial feminist frameworks to a comparative discourse analysis of the dominant themes across both case studies.

#### IV. CASE STUDY: *PINK*

##### A. Preamble

On December 16th, 2012, 23-year old Jyoti Singh Pandey walked out of her Delhi house never to come back. Repeatedly gang-raped in a moving bus, Pandey's assailants brutalized her to the point that they pulled out her intestines. One of the rapists later claimed that they had to "teach her a lesson" because she had fought back (Singh as interviewed by Udwin, 2015). According to him, the rape was inevitable because she was out at night wearing the "wrong clothes" and was not "good". His confidence in the righteousness of their violence was amplified by his lawyer's line of reasoning that Pandey "left her morality in the house when she came out without a husband or a brother" (Sharma as interviewed by Udwin, 2015). For the modern woman, the experience of navigating the public sphere is inextricable from the hostility she faces for crossing the boundaries of the private sphere. If she dares to resist the manifestations of that hostility, she has further crossed the boundaries of a socially constructed sense of Indian morality which justifies any kind of retaliatory action against her.

The gendered double standard that disciplines women into subjugation by punishing them for functioning and exercising agency in the public sphere, is one of the central themes of the feature film, *Pink*. In the aftermath of the 2012 gang-rape, *Pink* was one of the several films that focused on the nature of urban violence against women (Chatterjee, 2016). The movie's portrayal of how patriarchal power is exercised through discourses of shame, reflects society's antagonistic attitude towards the modern, working woman. Written and directed by an all-male crew, the film also reiterates certain hegemonic discourses that bypass the subjectivities of a possible feminist resistance narrative. The following analysis of the film as well as the accompanying media coverage, examine the ways in which women's empowerment is refracted

through a hegemonic patriarchal lens and how this reproduces a version of feminism that fits in with a populist narrative rarely raising larger questions around systemic oppression.

B. **What is *Pink* about?**

Flatmates and friends Minal , Falak and Andrea are young women living and working in the city of Delhi. The film opens with them returning home in a cab late at night, appearing visibly disturbed. In another part of the city, an injured man, Rajveer is being rushed to the hospital by his friends. Through disparate conversations the audience learns that Minal is responsible for Rajveer's injury. Appalled by Minal's refusal to apologize to Rajveer for attacking him with a beer bottle, Rajveer and his friends threaten her, kidnap and assault her. When she finally registers a police complaint against them, Rajveer uses his influence as the nephew of a powerful politician to get her arrested on charges of prostitution and attempt to murder. The rest of the film is a courtroom drama, wherein Rajveer's lawyer accuses the women of attacking Rajveer because he and his friends thwarted the women's attempts of soliciting themselves. Minal insists that she attacked Rajveer in self-defence because he continued touching her inappropriately in spite of her refuting his overtures. During the court case, Minal, Falak and Andrea are humiliated by the prosecution's and witness' usage of various gendered societal norms as a means of character assassination. In the end, their lawyer Deepak Sehgal, turns the court case in their favor, successfully convicting Rajveer and his friends. What actually transpired on the night of incident is played out during the end credits, allowing the film to test the audience's own biases.

C. **The Taming of Minal**

The smoking, short-skirt wearing and tattoo-bearing Minal is to a large extent the 21st century version of the Westernized Hindi film heroine of the 60s and 70s; her construction as



such is key to recognizing the parallels between the domestication of the latter and the negative narrative treatment of the former. Reading Minal's character through a Foucauldian lens, we can see the processes of discipline and punishment enact themselves through the choices she is allowed to make within the 'modern woman' stereotype she presents and the retribution for those choices.

Early on in the film, the audience is introduced to the three roommates, sitting at the back of a cab, late at night looking visibly disturbed. When the cab misses a near collision with a truck, Minal angrily berates the driver and insists on sitting next to him to ensure his alertness. This establishes her as the alpha, who in spite of her anxiety and fear, has the presence of mind as well as no qualms in raising her voice at an unknown male, something that could get you killed in an urban Indian metropolis such as Delhi (Menghani, 2015). Through previous scenes, we know that they are having a rough night having been involved in an encounter that resulted in someone getting injuriously hurt. Yet, Minal chooses to move away from the comforting intimacy of her friends in the backseat because she does what she thinks needs to be done to get them home safe. Minal's brave navigation of the public sphere serves as another representational marker of her modernity.

Minal further transgresses the traditional patriarchal script of what is considered appropriate behavior for middle-class women by negotiating her existence in the male-dominated urban nightscape (Erbentraut, 2015; Sharma, 2017). As a professional dancer, Minal often works late nights. She stays in a rented accommodation with roommates, even though her parents live in the same city. We catch a glimpse of her hanging her lingerie to dry in her apartment wherein the camera quickly scans over revealing shots of a polka-dotted bra and zebra-striped underpants while a middle-aged man stares from a balcony across. These choices too, exemplify how

Minal's 'modern woman' is symbolically stereotyped through the male gaze via the mundane act of drying clothes. The central conflict in the film stems from a night of her attending a rock concert with her flatmates (the three of them in conjunction will henceforth be referred to as Minal et al.). Post the concert they go out drinking with Rajveer and his friends whom they barely know. All of which are not in line with the popular imaginary of the traditional Indian woman. Embodying an insolent resistance to the norms that middle-class women are held accountable to, Minal requires to be transformed into a *docile body* who is no longer a threat to the ongoing hegemonic ideology (Foucault, 1991).

The historical conflation of the gendered body as a signifier of anti-colonial nationalism presages that the Westernized Minal be othered by the narrative. The film's unquestioning perpetuation of this ideology is showcased early on, when Falak's lover Javed tells her that he expected Minal to accompany Rajveer and his friends back to their room for drinks but not her. He justifies this to an infuriated Falak by saying that he can either be "truthful or liberal." This reflects multiple *common truths* (Foucault, 1991) typical of middle-class Indian society: a woman exercising personal agency is an ideological question not a material reality, truth is antithetical to liberal ideals and women who fit in certain preconceived notions of liberalism are considered to be easy bait.

This instance could have been used as an opportunity to question this prevalent social construction of a modern woman as 'bad'/liberal when men's agency is exempt from value judgement. But the scene ends with no response from Falak to his statement, implying that the filmmaker understands conservative societal thought as common truth whereas liberalism is merely a colonial import. With right-wing reasoning gaining social currency worldwide, popular culture can serve as an accessible critique. But when mediated representations, especially the

ones which are considered woman-centric, sacrifice a woman's agency at the altar of conservatism; the potential for resistance is muted in favor of hegemonic beliefs. These beliefs function as the disciplinary forces, the rejection of which result in punishing consequences for those who dare. In *Pink*, the disciplining primarily takes the form of patriarchal authority and the discursive technologies of the courtroom. Through physical assault, ongoing public humiliation and in denying Minal the agency to tell her story, *Pink* punishes her with subrogated representation and negative narrative treatment.

### 1. **The male savior**

For a film that claims to be based on the lives of three women, the narrative is rarely told from their perspective; often centering the patriarch of the film, lawyer Deepak Sehgal played by veteran superstar Amitabh Bachchan. The courtroom episodes *happen* to them; with the exception of one pivotal scene, the female characters do not exercise agency or influence the narrative. Even while the overarching message is one that revolves around rape culture and the contentiousness of consent, the narrative conveys these through Sehgal, who often functions both as the camera's surrogate and the audience stand-in.

Let's start with the initial publicity materials. Movie posters are usually among the first paratexts<sup>6</sup> of a film that the potential audience encounters. Among other things, this allows for audience interpretation of who the protagonist of the film is and the genre conventions by which they can expect the protagonist to operate (Gray, 2010). *Pink's* official poster is arguably dominated by Bachchan's vehement visage front and center, cutting an imposing figure while the leading women are relegated to half the size allotted to him (Figure 1.).

---

<sup>6</sup> Taken from Jonathan Gray's definition of paratexts as marketing materials such as posters, trailers, etc. which not only amplify but also contribute to the meaning making around a film (2010).



Figure 1. Official poster of the feature film *Pink* (2016)

The strategic casting of Bachchan, among a crew of relatively unknown actors, guaranteed media interest in the movie and a decent initial weekend at the box-office. Bachchan's solo interviews and event appearances formed a substantial chunk of the film's promotional campaign. Even within ensemble interviews, Bachchan was often the focus holding forth on everything from the film's story to the gendered nature of the wage gap in the entertainment industry (NDTV, 2016). A majority of the news headlines framed *Pink* as Bachchan's film, focusing on his persona over the woman-centric subject. By publicizing the film through traditional marketing approaches that privilege the saleability of the male star over the narratives of the women characters, the producers along with the media sustain the hegemonic discourses that inevitably aggrandize the male lead while ignoring the very same marginalized voices that the film claims to represent. For both the producers and media, the economic imperative guides the marketing formula, resulting in what is the easiest way to garner

eyeballs. The industry (and media) attribution of poor showing of women-oriented films at the box-office to gender rather than conceptual or execution weaknesses or even lack of marketing budgets, encourages the reproduction of hegemonic discourses that position the male lead as the most consequential element of the film (Ciecko, 2001). By centering Bachchan in the pre-release publicity campaign, the film foregrounds the supremacy of the patriarch. In doing so, the stage is set for the necessity of a male to legitimize and authorize any conversation around the ‘woman question’<sup>7</sup> (Chatterjee, 1987).

While piggybacking on an actor’s stardom is an age-old pre-release marketing tactic, the on-screen action too is often constructed from Bachchan’s perspective as Sehgal. His house is situated opposite the women’s apartment, his panoptic viewing position controlling the way in which the audience perceives the women’s actions and movements (Gaines, 1984). This is further reified by Sehgal’s almost omnipotent presence in several pivotal scenes that do not involve him except as a spectator. Whether it is Minal getting arrested on false charges or Andrea coming back home late at night, the camera captures these women from his perspective. He is shown as looking into their balcony, so much so that the women draw their blinds out of discomfort. While this could have been developed as a critique of the male gaze, inviting the audience to see how society’s patriarchal views objectify women, the story arc emphasizes Sehgal’s watchfulness as his reasoning to fight the women’s case in court. Sehgal’s role in redeeming the women automatically constructs his invasive gaze as a justifiable action for the greater good.

---

<sup>7</sup> A term popularized by South Asian scholar Partha Chatterjee in his essay *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question*. In the essay, Chatterjee applies this term to the concerns and considerations of nineteenth century middle-class men pertaining to women’s position in an Indian society that was trying to present itself as modern as an anti-colonial nationalist project. The ‘woman question’ in this context reflects the concerns and considerations pertaining to women’s position in contemporary Indian society.

Shoojit Sircar, the film's creative producer, writer and self-admitted ghost director<sup>8</sup> defends Sehgal's voyeuristic behavior as a narrative device introduced merely to create an atmosphere of mystery around the character (Bachchan as interviewed by Shahriyar, 2016). However, by privileging Sehgal's gaze over that of the three women who are being subject to emotional and physical violence, the narrative consequently reduces the audience's ability to empathize with the women's relation to the discourse, as the spectators see what the governing gaze (Sehgal's) sees.

The sense of entitlement assumed by Sehgal's gaze is only confirmed by the movie going forward, as he plays the champion of the women in court. The narrative thus justifies his intrusive gaze as essential in creating a positive outcome for these women. It is key to note here that for Foucault, the gaze itself does not imply subjectivity, but it is the subject's internalization of the gaze that completes the act of subjectification (1996). By excluding women from the authoritative vision, *Pink's* narrative hands the power to interpret the women's experiences to the patriarchal figure of Sehgal, rendering the female subject's relation to her discourse insufficient (Silverman, 1984).

For instance, Sehgal's introductory scene in the film takes place the morning after the incident with Minal and Rajveer. Out on her morning run, Minal stops to stretch in the neighborhood park. She suddenly feels the presence of someone watching her and sure enough, when she looks up, Sehgal is staring at her from a bench, a few feet away. Contextualizing this moment within the narrative framework of the film, this paternalistic gaze could be read as Sehgal's intuition that something was disturbing Minal or that he was watching out for her.

---

<sup>8</sup> When asked in an interview whether he had ghost-directed the film, Sircar replied "I am the creative producer. You've seen my credit as the writer of the film. How can you take the director in me and throw him away? I have directed films before... Yes, I have interfered hugely, rigidly, adamantly, but for the good of the film."

Both of which, contribute to the formation of the patriarchal subjectifying-position. The audience is invited to empathize with him rather than with Minal. The prioritizing of Sehgal's gaze over Minal's interiority, ossifies the dominance of the patriarchal gaze rather than the woman's lived experience of being violated (Butler, 1999).

When Minal is kidnapped by Rajveer's friend in a moving car, shots of Minal's ordeal are juxtaposed with shots of Sehgal's anxiety over the course of the evening after he sees her being taken away. The screenplay moves from Minal being molested and threatened in the moving vehicle to Sehgal pacing around his house, while attempting to reach out to the cops to locate her. This includes a scene of Sehgal berating a top cop for his incompetence; a showcase for his righteous anger. The narrative focus is thus divided. In attempting to build Sehgal's character on-screen, Minal's horrific experience at the hand of her captors is diluted. Her subjectivity is subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego (Mulvey, 1975).

Applying Yar's (2002) concept, that vision as a technology of subjectifying power is accompanied by auditory and tactile forms of disciplining, to cinematic representation, Sehgal's interjections into the women's lives can be read as such. It must be noted that Sehgal and the women are strangers to one another, right until the time that he offers to take on the responsibility of defending them in court. Prior to this Sehgal in his narrative function as a motif of the paternal savior, only interacts with the women to remind them that they need to "be careful." He saves a distracted Falak from being hit by an auto rickshaw and intones "Be careful" while the camera focuses on her face. Composed as a high angle shot, the camera's perspective confers a position of authority to the person who is speaking, reifying his position as a savior and his paternalistic behavior as self-evident<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> Falak is distracted because she is worriedly texting somebody about her fears over Rajveer's threats to destroy them. This scene (possibly unintentionally) mirrors a woman's lived experience where dealing with the patriarchy is

When Sehgal visits Falak and Andrea to offer his services as Minal's defense lawyer, the first thing he says prior to entering the door is "I told you to be careful." This is also the scene where Sehgal officially meets them for the first time; his face in partial shadows serving to cinematically reinforce a reverence towards the speaker. The film itself goes on to showcase how these women find themselves in undesirable situations because they have not followed the gendered norms and are thus represented as not "being careful.". For instance, Minal gets kidnapped following a phone call where she calls Rajveer's friend Ankit a coward. Falak is fired from her job after a doctored, sexually explicit photograph of hers is sent to her employer after she protests against Rajveer's disrespectful language to describe Minal. In this manner, the narrative centers the paternalism of Sehgal as necessary and his authority as immanent, downplaying the issues of emotional and physical violence against women.

a. **Male allyship as resistance ?**

As a lawyer who fights against societal double-standards imposed on women and an advocate of the three women unjustly put on trial, Sehgal is coded as a male ally (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach and Stark, 2003). This represents the possibility of resistance through Sehgal potentially questioning his own complicity in a system that benefits men and/or using his privilege as an upper-class Hindu male to ensure that the women's voices are given priority in discourses on sexual violence. The narrative allows for neither. Sehgal's character perpetuates certain aspects of women's oppression by positioning himself as the voice of the women, contributing to the hegemonic discourse that positions masculine rationality as authoritative (Mumby and Putnam, 1992).

---

such an inherent part of her day that she is occupied by the emotional labor of dealing with that situation. Male privilege allows men to forego such labor, thus making it more likely for them to engage in self-development.



Sehgal visits Andrea and Falak unannounced after he watches Minal being arrested. So far in the film, Sehgal's only interactions with any of the women has been to stare at them & the incident above with Falak where he tells her "to be careful." When Sehgal visits the girls' apartment, Falak and Andrea do not know anything about him, including the fact that he is a lawyer. Yet without introducing himself, he demands that they show them the FIR, which they do unquestioningly. Sehgal offers legal advice and leaves. This scene on many levels shows the taken for grantedness of the superiority of male rationality. Sehgal does not feel the need to introduce himself, expecting the women to invite him home and share their personal struggle with him. The women do not question him or who he is, which the narrative justifies by showcasing them as desperate and distraught. The scene itself focuses on Sehgal's confidence and the women's willingness to confide in him without so much as questioning who is, the man who till yesterday came across as a voyeuristic neighbor. The audience who has already been privy to Sehgal calling the police when Minal was abducted knows him to be a "good man". These discourses of masculine rationality, feminine emotionality and audience's prior knowledge of Sehgal work together to construct the immanent superiority of male authority. The morning after Sehgal's first official meeting with the women, he appears for the first time in his lawyer's garb. He knocks at their door, looks at them for a moment & leaves. At court, he gives them a date for the hearing, asks them to sign the affidavit & then leaves. His communication with them is restricted to this. This is the motif of many scenes, where Sehgal tells them what to do without informing them what he is doing, why he is doing what he is doing or why they need to do what he tells them to do. In this way, Sehgal while depicted as a male ally shares a relationship with the women wherein he operates from a position of power over them rather than forging a

collaborative alliance, rendering the women as marginalized participants in their own destinies. Thus harmful to the very cause they claim to espouse (Edwards, 2006).

This is most obvious in the scene where Falak and Andrea visit Sehgal after their first day in court. They indicate a lack of clarity about the legal terms they heard during the day, which he, instead of explaining what it means, adds more jargon to the conversation. This implies disinterest and incompetency on part of the women, who show no inclination to understand it, while further reinforcing not only Sehgal's superiority but justifying the lack of explanation/communication between the two. Falak nods along and affirms what Sehgal has to say. When Sehgal asks them who was the lawyer working on Minal's bail plea, Andrea replies "some Kumar". With their roommate in jail, the women not being able to remember their lawyer's name or even concerned about the legal terms, this reinforces the notion of the law as being a male domain with women not only leaving things to the dominant male, but also as blindly trusting and least interested. Additionally, Andrea, is from the Northeast of India (a point she brings up later) which has politically and historically been left out of mainstream narratives of India. These kind of scenes further perpetuate a marginalization of the people from the Northeast. On multiple occasions, the women assert that they are "normal working girls."; which works not only as a narrative justification for their infantilization but also reinforces classist perspectives. The assumption "normal working girls" would not have the intellectual wherewithal to comprehend legal terms or the tenacity to deal with legal procedures contributes to a further aggrandizing of the patriarch as decision-maker and authority. The subtextual denigration of sex workers and blue-color laborers exemplifies the stereotypical notions that "normal working girls" are not likely to be involved in criminal incidents of sexual assault.

Towards the end of this scene, Falak starts crying and asks Sehgal for reassurance, even though this is their first meeting. The discourse continues to normalize a patriarchal worldview by constructing masculine behaviors as rational and normal by othering women's behaviors (Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Sehgal's positioning as rational man (as opposed to female emotionality), establishes him as a strong figure which is compounded by the long-time construction of Bachchan's on-screen image as a savior of society (Ciecko, 2001).

Over the roll of the end credits, we hear Bachchan's baritone recite a powerful poem '*Tu khud ki khoj mein nikal*' which can be understood in the film's context as an ode exhorting women to revolt against society's norms. The film thus concludes by excluding the woman's voice from a narrative pertaining to her subjectivity. The voice-over as an extra-diegetic narrative device represents power rising from the field of the Other, it is assumed to be all knowing (Silverman, 1990). The capacity of the male subject to be represented in this way aligns him with authoritative knowledge; the symbolic patriarch. The disembodied voice renders the phallus in indisputable possession of the scene, male subjectivity as the final discursive power.

b. **The savior gets a backstory**

Besides Sehgal's overarching omnipresence, the narrative characterizes Sehgal as suffering from depression, implying his wife's terminal illness as a cause. Possibly intended as a character flaw that could potentially influence the outcome of the courtroom case, this manifests in instances of Sehgal being mentally absent in the courtroom and not completely involved in the proceedings. This allows the audience to attribute his general demeanor to his depression; thus reducing the certainty of him winning the case and adding an element of thrill to the narrative. It is relevant to note that in spite of his depression, he is presented as overall more stable and clear than the women on the stand. He arrives at thoughtfully articulated

analogies that point out the societal double-standards faced by men and women navigating the public sphere, while the women rarely make any strong arguments. They merely reply to the questions asked to them by the lawyers and are either depicted as crying or lashing out in anger. The narrative implies that even a depressed man is more believable/has more authority to comment on the case than the women who had to undergo what they did. Sehgal's depression which could have functioned as a character quirk contributes to undermining the feminist quest of this project. The women do not engage with his depression, not even to question whether he is fit enough to take on their case. The issue here is not the construction of a perfect ally, but that in creating him as a multi-dimensional human being, the film does not bother to develop the women's engagement with his depression or document their reactions to his depression. Yet another way in which he is centered; he is important enough to have a backstory but the way in which this affects the women is never discussed from the woman's perspective. Additionally, by giving him a backstory, the lack of backstories for both Minal & Andrea is even more glaring. The three female protagonists are contextualized and largely defined by their reactions to the incident with Rajveer, nothing more. The choice to write a full-fledged male character in a film that dissects violence against women, contributes to the homogenous construction of "women."

c. **On-screen image and off-screen performativity**

To understand how Bachchan as an actor functions as a parallel text to *Pink*, it is necessary to briefly go over Bachchan's career at the peak of his success. In the 1970s and early 80s, Bachchan came to symbolize the angst of the common man, whether against the system or fueled by some personal slight. The masses identified with the rebelliousness embodied by his roles and Bachchan earned the moniker of Angry Young Man. Equipped with

scathing dialogues and packing in the punches, Bachchan's action films were responsible for establishing him as a pan-Indian hero (Mishra, 2002). These films relegated women to the periphery, who often existed only as token love interest and/or a cause for him to avenge (Naheem as cited in Mishra, p. 138). *Pink*'s courtroom narrative which relies largely on Bachchan's man-vs-system persona, similarly ends up ignoring the female protagonists' perspectives. In order to capitalize on the expression of righteous anger that Bachchan became famous for, his courtroom outbursts are glorified at the expense of the women who are often in tears. This valorization of masculinity undermines any attempt at feminist resistance by legitimizing the discourse on women's agency through the approval of the patriarch.

The representation of Bachchan as an ally on screen is arguably inseparable from his positioning on women's issues off-screen. As ambassador of the government's *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* initiative that seeks to empower girls through education and end gender discrimination in the country and the country's United Nations ambassador for the girl child, Bachchan performs allyship through his representation as a champion for gender equality, in itself an act of power (Foucault as cited in Martin, 1988, p. 9). The filmmakers utilized this discursive image of Bachchan during *Pink*'s publicity campaign where Bachchan was provided with several avenues to speak out against injustices against women including sexual assault and violence (IANS, 2016). One of the film's most written about promotional efforts was Bachchan's letter to his granddaughters on the occasion of Teacher's Day<sup>10</sup>, which happened to fall a few days prior to the film's release. In this letter Bachchan in his capacity as grand patriarch of the family wrote to his granddaughters an ostensibly empowering message of doing whatever they pleased instead of being tied down by what society says. He emphasized that society would try to enforce

---

<sup>10</sup> Teacher's Day is an annual celebration of teachers in India which falls on September 5th.

boundaries on them as women, but they needed to set an example by making their own decisions. He starts off this letter by saying that they carry a “valuable legacy” on their shoulders, that of their illustrious grandfathers. The letter mentions nothing about the women who play a significant role in raising them who are arguably better situated to guide their daughters through the structural sexism that they would have faced through their lived experiences as working women. This exclusionary narrative speaks to Bachchan’s brand of allyship as reeking of benevolent sexism (Becker et al, 2011). Subtle sexism has been shown to maintain gender inequality by increasing women’s complacency with the status quo and decreasing the possibilities of collective action (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005, Jost & Kay, 2005, Ellemers & Barreto, 2009), effectively reproducing hegemonic practices under the garb of resistance. Problematizing this further is Bachchan’s insistence that this was not a promotional tactic for the film but something he did because he “wanted to” thus blurring the lines between Bachchan’s character and his real life role as patriarch. This merging of identities works to normalize the patriarchal operations of power that constitute male allyship.

In the recent past, Bachchan has displayed his unwillingness to speak about sexual violence, when refusing to comment about the horrific rape of an 8-year old child by calling it “disgusting” and asking the media “not to rake it up.” The denial to engage in a constructive discussion on sexual violence in spite of his influence and position vis a vis gender discrimination, reiterates that for Bachchan allyship is merely performative. Rather than using his privileged position to question society’s treatment of disadvantaged groups, Bachchan perpetuates an opportunistic feminism, that exists for movie marketing purposes. This indicates how the powerful are complicit in maintaining the status quo by strategic silence, by defining empowerment on male terms. This is dangerous because when men are viewed as allies against

sexism their efforts against sexism are seen as more legitimate than women's and could impact long-lasting change in the way society sees women, especially one as influential as Bachchan (Drury and Kaiser, 2014).

Male allyship can only function as a resistance narrative when it is uncoupled from the hegemonic savior narrative, alternately positioning them as complementary partners. A feminist representation is one that emphasizes collaborative solidarity over rationality (coded as masculine) that fights for humanization while simultaneously acknowledging difference (Mohanty, 2003).

## 2. **The courtroom as a potential site of resistance**

By choosing to situate the decisive second half of the film in the courtroom, the filmmakers choose to engage with the hegemonic practices of an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1970). The presumed 'neutral' foundation of the law serves to uphold bourgeois upper class male ideologies of 'right' and 'wrong' (Foucault, 1980; Finley, 1989). This delineates the law as a "regime" of truth (Foucault, 1980, p. 112), "diffused and consumed" via the institutions of the courtroom which empower it to establish these truths as self-evident (p. 131). The film, in attempting to question the gendered nature of social norms, ignores that basic discursive *truths* pertaining to women's sexuality are made acceptable by legal language and procedures. The "hysterization" of Minal on trial, uncritically constructs her subjectivity in the deployment of sexual power/knowledge hegemonies (Hengehold, 1994, p. 92). The key dialogues that explain sexual consent are simplified at the peril of ignoring certain social contexts. The narrative's potential for representational resistance is restricted by its wilful functioning within the hegemonic discourses of the courtroom.

a. **The production of truth/power**

Rajveer and his friends' attorney, prosecutor Prashant Mehra, opens his argument by claiming that women these days weaponize laws pertaining to rape and dowry to exact revenge against innocent men. He builds his case against Minal and her friends on this premise, arguing that they are prostitutes falsely accusing Rajveer of assault because he refused to comply to their solicitation demands. Sehgal, shaken out of his reverie by the judge to deliver his opening statement, offers a muted response to Mehra about how the police does not have a case against Minal. Stuttering, almost sounding unsure, Sehgal lists the cases against Rajveer and his friends. Never quite refuting or even addressing Mehra's claims of women misusing the law, Sehgal's weak opening argument serves as an affirmation of these claims. These echo the claims which are often used by Men's Rights Activists<sup>11</sup>, in order to challenge the gains made by the women's liberation movements (Basu, 2016). No exercise of power, for instance the systematic positioning of women as second-class citizens, can survive without being legitimized by societal discourse (Foucault, 1980). The belief that there are many perjurious cases of dowry and rape, provides justification for anti-feminist retributive actions. By allowing this go to uncontested, the film continues to perpetuate these stereotypical beliefs as 'objective' truths stated in a 'neutral' courtroom (Finley, 1989).

1) **The hysterialization of Minal**

The uncommunicative nature of Sehgal's relationship with his clients, Minal, Falak and Andrea, remains constant throughout the trial. This lack of empathy and collaboration between them is especially glaring during the witness testimonies. The witnesses Mehra calls to the stand answer confidently. The testimonies appear well-rehearsed, they are

---

<sup>11</sup> Taking their cue from the Western men's rights movements, these activists believe that custody, dowry and rape legislation favors women over men. They want to overturn these.



rarely intimidated by the line of questioning directed at them and there is no sign of hesitation from their side. This is in stark contrast to the women's testimonies, which is reflected in their shock at the questions being asked (both by Sehgal and Mehra), their confused expressions when Sehgal does not cross-question most of Mehra's witnesses and their outbursts (sometimes tearful) during court proceedings. Minal et al. are surprised when Mehra interrogates them with assumptions that are an attempt to shame them, arguably something Sehgal could have prepared them for. In characterizing Sehgal's relationship with Minal et al. as taciturn at best, the narrative prioritizes his specular and linguistic authority over the subject at hand.

The hysterization of women has often been utilized as a tool in the circuits of sexual power/knowledge (Foucault as cited in Hengehold, p. 92). The 'reasonability' of the man on trial for rape is *a priori* assumed unlike that of the woman testifying against him (Hengehold, 1994, p. 96). It is Minal's credibility as a victim of sexual violence and her subsequent representation as a 'reasonable' member of society that are at risk within the court's structure of questioning. Not only does the text avoid critically engaging with the manner in which trials of sexual assault position women as hysterical it also contributes to the gendered subjectivity, undermining its possibilities for feminist resistance.

Minal et al.'s frustration at being unable to explain why they did certain things and why they did them a certain way often leads them to interject during court proceedings which results in them being admonished in turns by Sehgal, the prosecution's lawyer and the male judge. The increase in self-doubt that accompanies a victim of sexual assault is usually conveyed in the ambiguity of their testimonies. The pathologization of this uncertainty by the prosecutors often deny women communicative agency (Hengehold, 1994). Minal et al.'s outbursts further serve to justify Sehgal's authority to represent them without any input from them. Applying Silverman's

assertion on the use of the female voice in cinematic representation, “The semiotics.. obliges the female voice to signify lack, isolates the female subject from effective political action, prevents her from making investments in a new social order, and guarantees that she will remain in the same place” (1990, p. 321), we can see how the hysterization of woman is used to support the dominance of the patriarch’s perspective. While it appears that Sehgal is not obliged to inform the client of his strategies, Minal’s protests against the accusations leveled at her fall outside of what is permissible behavior according to the court. The trial process thus *disciplines* Minal by forcing her to elaborate her story based on institutionally prescribed guidelines and *punishes* her for attempting to gain control of her story in any other way. This tends to reinforce societal notions of women’s anger as unreasonable while simultaneously downplaying their trauma within the court’s discourses of *rationality*. Thus, the public form of the private violence inflicted upon Minal attributes an “inadequate, hysterical subjectivity” to her while positioning Sehgal’s, Mehra’s and the judge’s discourse as stable and reasonable (Hengehold, 1994, p. 94). Foucault emphasizes, “the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing” (1978, p. 62). The sexual assault trial thus assists the establishment of male subjectivity as coherent and authoritative - by positioning the women as hysterics.

As outlined earlier, the narrative justifies Sehgal’s relationship with Minal et al. in various ways, including his suffering from depression. With his eventual victory in the courtroom, his rationality is valorized especially since the women are represented as barely keeping it together. This further solidifies the idea that the ‘emotional’ woman cannot be trusted to exercise agency and the ‘rational’ man (even when diagnosed with a mental illness) is authorized to make decisions on her behalf. This is in keeping with the individualistic nature of

capitalist discourses as opposed to the collaborative imperatives of postcolonial feminist resistance.

## 2) Conversations on sexual consent

One of *Pink's* most timely interventions into the national conversation on women's equality has been about the nature of sexual consent. Ambiguity and contradiction inform not only the Indian constitutional rights about sexual rights but also popular discussions about consent (Datta, 2016; Gupta, 2016). The narrative's treatment of consent acknowledges this problem as observed in Falak's potent final testimony. Frustrated with the continuous false allegations (and presumably lack of rebuttals) that the three of them are prostitutes, Falak angrily bursts out, each utterance rising in crescendo "*Haan! Theek hain! Theek hain! Theek hain! Theek hain! Theek hain! Theek hain! Liye hain humne paisa.* (Yes! Fine! Fine! Fine! Fine! Fine! Fine! Fine! We took money from them). Falak tearily adds that Minal changed her mind after taking the money and withdrew her consent, repeatedly saying "no". She points out that Rajveer ignored Minal's pleas and continued touching her inappropriately. Falak then turns to ask the judge if that is acceptable according to law. Falak is completely in control of the narrative, even preventing Sehgal from interjecting multiple times. Having shifted the conversation from the prostitution accusations to one squarely focused on consent, the film represents a rare moment in Hindi cinema where a female protagonist engages directly with the politics of consent. In doing so, the narrative deconstructs the power relations at play when the question of consent comes into being. It reminds the audience that no matter what the relationship, there should be no assumption/expectation of sexual activity unless there is explicit consent. In a country where the existence of 'marital rape' is an ongoing debate, repeated conversations about consent are much needed. Falak, in conveying the primacy of her will, while

disregarding the societal stigma that accompanies her confession of being a sex worker, resists patriarchal hegemonies. Shame, which has often been used as an instrument of gender oppression, makes place for a feminist reclamation of sexual agency (Viswanath, 1997).

*Pink* however gives up a compelling opportunity for a feminist reading of consensual sexual relationships. “No means no” thundered by Deepak Sehgal became one of the most popular catchphrases from the film. Not discounting the film’s focus on consent, the discursive simplification of the ambiguous nature of consent exemplifies the binary reasoning of Western discourses. By establishing that non-fraught communication such as “no means no” are a standard for sexual consent, the statement ignores how the active production, reproduction and negotiation of meaning in any given situation defines consent (Harris, 2018). During the trial, we learn that Minal et al. befriended Rajveer and his friends at a concert through a common friend. They hang out after for dinner and drinks. They all then head to a hotel room rented by Rajveer. Through the trial, the girls are slut shamed and accused of being prostitutes on the basis of “Would any ‘decent girl’ go out drinking with people she just met?”, “Would any decent girl go into the room of men she just met?” and so on. Sehgal eventually uses this as an example of gender-based discrimination, by pointing out that men’s characters are not judged by the same standards as women’s are. While this is a crucial point, this discourse actively ignores discussion on the communicative complexities of similar situations wherein even in the absence of a stated “no” consent can still be inferred (Harris, 2018). The film does not look at consent as a shared collective responsibility but puts the onus of avoiding unwanted sexual advances on the woman. This is exemplified by questions wherein Sehgal asks Minal whether she had an uneasy feeling while hanging out with Rajveer and his friends. She replies “No. We felt safe with them.” On one hand, Sehgal repeatedly tries to prove the absurdity of different behavioral norms for men

and women, yet he continues a line of questioning that normalizes the discourse on victim blaming and women being responsible for their own safety. This minimizes the public conversation about the power dynamics that make consent political; the internalized expectations of men (and women) that render the man's wishes more important than the woman's desires.

### 3) **Patriarchal framings of women's sexuality**

Just as the legal conversations on consent are shaped by a male worldview, so are the definitions pertaining to women's sexuality. "Are you a virgin?", Sehgal asks a visibly aghast Minal. This dialogue which is included in the trailer and was widely touted in media coverage, is followed by a charged line of questioning where Sehgal interrogates Minal on her sex life. An unprepared Minal answers these voyeuristic questions, which include questions like: "At what age did you lose your virginity?", "Did you have sexual relations with all of them (her other boyfriends)?", clearly meant to titillate the masses. In this scene, Sehgal attempts to establish that just because woman is sexually active it does not compulsorily imply her willingness to sleep with any man. The intent of the filmmaker to sensationalize this issue, is evident in the way Sehgal poses these questions. Besides forcing her to elaborate intimate details in a courtroom, where her subjectivity is continually being called into question, the framing of these queries is intended to cause discomfort to *her*. They are posed in a tawdry manner, which instead of clearing the societal taboo around pre-marital sex, there is an attempt to sensationalize the taboo for maximum shock value.

In the process of dismantling stereotypes about women who are sexually active, the narrative inadvertently further legitimizes the heteronormative social construction of virginity. The structure of reasoning in the courtroom dictates what concepts count as acceptable and what count as unjust, thus functioning as form of power/knowledge (Hengehold, 1994). In this case,

the narrative simultaneously attacks the falsity of the virgin/whore dichotomy while perpetuating the hegemonic notions of virginity. The narrative treatment of the scene adds further ambivalence to the narrative's possibilities for resistance by forcing Minal to excruciatingly detail (in her father's presence) what was different in her consensual sexual experiences from her experience with Rajveer. The sense of violation endured by Minal on the stand, is a casualty to the melodramatic effect of the scene.

The archaic patriarchal syntactic practices used to define and normalize women as sexual objects in legal language are left unchallenged. The defense's establishment of the case against Rajveer as "outraging the modesty of a woman" reflects a man's understanding of women's nature and women's experiences-women refracted through the patriarchal lens - rather than women's own definitions (MacKinnon, 1983). Within the conservative discourses of the courtroom, there is little space to challenge the immanent logics of modesty, wherein sexual assault is inherently read as crime against honour not as one of violence. Modesty has traditionally been linked to a woman's honor which is more often than not tied in with her body. The objectification of women through the concept of modesty positions her most valuable asset as her body and the woman as a primarily sexual being. The boundaries drawn by legal language around modesty, makes it a patriarchally created discourse sustained without women's input. It adheres to a paternalistic and historically oppressive moral code that was intended to shame women. Sehgal, as the patriarch permitted to participate in the unfolding of the discourse chooses to maintain the status quo (Foucault, 1972). Just because he is male, does not imply that he cannot be feminist but instead of reaching for radical redefinitions of 'modesty', the narrative allows him to fall back on precedent thus reflecting a phallogocentric conservatism.

Law and legal language construct subjectivity, adequate rationality and definitions of violence which together function as a technology of gender (Hengehold, 1994). This rationalized, hegemonic masculinity replaces the violence of colonial hegemonic masculinity, thus constructing a facade of neutrality even within its highly gendered practices. At various points, the judge interjects to ask the “relevance” of certain details that Sehgal asks for. Minal’s story is thus not *hers* but determined by what the law terms relevant (Smart, 1989). The law thus forces women to redefine what is significant enough in their testimony to count as a successful allegation.

Within this *theater of punishment*, Minal is othered in her representation as a ‘modern’ woman (Foucault, 1991). Thus, Minal is produced and reproduced by the courtroom discourses which are considered as “common truths” about the ‘modern’ Indian woman (Foucault, 1991). She pays the price for crossing her boundaries both of the private sphere and what is deemed ‘civil’ behavior for women within the public sphere, both through narrative treatment and unidimensional representation (Sharma, 2017). Her othering is complete when Sehgal’s individualistic decision making process wins the case for her and she is rendered non-agentic in the determination of her fate. The irony of her being legally targeted for her so-called ‘modern’ behavior through a judicial system based in Western liberal thought, highlights the problematic nature of feminist representations through a patriarchal lens. Nationalism’s selective appropriation of modernity, allows ‘Westernization’ of the male ‘outer’ sphere but insists on the female ‘inner’ sphere as a vessel of tradition (Chatterjee, 1987). The media interviews of the filmmaker echo this thought when they bring up the fact that women are unfairly judged for the same things that men do, without identifying that liberal ideals are a default for the Indian male but considered antithetical to Indian womanhood.

The film contributes to the normalization of these misogynistic proceedings, losing the chance to critically assess the trial of a woman's sexuality at the hands of a patriarchally constituted institution. By staying within the hegemonic discourses around sexuality, the film undermines its own attempts at resistance.

D. **Glimpses of Resistance: Falak's Defiance**

Minal's roommate Falak represents a relatively traditional version of Indian womanhood. Attired in Indian wear, soft spoken and working a 9-to-5, Falak is positioned almost in opposition to Minal. She is showcased as cautious; initially asking the belligerent Minal to apologize to Rajveer so as to minimize any potential harm to them. The narrative rewards Falak for her behaviour, she is the means by which the disciplined body is vindicated.

Minal's representational subjectivity is constructed by the negative consequences of her actions. She survives an assault attempt by Rajvir, after which she is threatened, kidnapped and assaulted. This is followed by her arrest, her humiliating trial in court wherein she is forced to elucidate in detail her intimate sexual relationships. Her depiction is within the discourse of her as 'Westernized' woman. She does not exercise any agency in the court proceedings and her attempts to resist are shut down in keeping with courtroom practices. She is thus "spoken" of, she does not speak. Falak, who starts off as the mild mannered voice of reason, firmly admonishes Rajvir for calling Minal a b\*\*ch. Her fear does not come in the way of her loyalty. Even after Rajvir ensures that she loses her job, Falak is a supportive friend to Minal. As outlined above, Falak is also the one who directs the narrative to the pivotal issue of consent. The narrative also features Falak's affair with Javed, a divorcé. So, while Falak and Minal are both involved in the Rajveer incident and faced with the possibility of being kicked out of their apartment by his friends, the narrative strictures placed on Minal are not placed on Falak. Falak



is allowed to evolve into a complex character, she is humanized and to a certain extent avoids the stereotypes associated with the 'traditional' portrayals. The narrative not only punishes Minal with negative outcomes but also situates her squarely in context to this incident. In contrast, Falak is not framed by the negative outcomes and is bestowed multiple possibilities for resistance, however minimal.

E. **Conclusion**

*Pink* is a powerful film on multiple levels. It addresses the rarely featured subject of sexual consent. The narrative interludes featuring an ironic 'Manual for Women' highlight the gendered inequities prevalent in society especially the social norms that only women are expected to adhere to. The antagonistic stereotyping of women who do dare to cross the boundaries of acceptable behavior, is reflected in Rajveer's friends' conversations. The narrative however refracts these issues through a patriarchal lens, as observed through the centering of the patriarch's ego over the women's subjectivities, the uncritical representation of hegemonic discourses in the courtroom and the overall othering of Minal and her friends in a story that is primarily theirs. In particular, the Westernized Minal is punished for exercising her agency. Her suffering, both material and psychological, coded as the consequence of the choices she makes - choices which fulfil the stereotype of the Westernized woman. One might argue that these are somewhat realistic depictions of the urban working woman in contemporary Indian society but assessing a film's potential for resistance through that argument means a complete denial of film as an artificial construct replete with the power mechanisms that influence representation.

The film's mediated status as feminist cinema hinges on two aspects: featuring women in the lead and kindling the discussion on sexual consent (which is positioned as a woman's issue). But mere representation is not resistance, especially when certain hegemonic practices and ideas are uncontested.

## V. CASE STUDY: *QUEEN*

### A. What is *Queen* about?

Rani (played by actress Kangana Ranaut), is jilted by her fiancé, Vijay the day before her wedding. A brokenhearted Rani (the name translates to mean queen) decides to go on their pre-booked European honeymoon by herself. Having led a sheltered life thus far, Rani is exposed to varied lifestyles through the people she meets and the myriad experiences she has. From her adventures with the rambunctious Vijaylakshmi in Paris to some unlikely shenanigans with her three male roommates in Amsterdam, Rani finds herself in unimaginable situations. After an initial adjustment period fraught with mishaps, she begins to morph into a bolder person even enjoying her solo trip. All of a sudden Vijay lands up in Amsterdam and asks her to consider marrying him. The newly confident Rani rejects him as she eagerly sets out on a path to self-discovery.

While most contemporary women-centric Hindi feature films are set in the city, *Queen* is one of the few to depict its protagonist in the mould of the traditional Indian woman as represented in commercial Hindi cinema. As discussed earlier, such representations imply specific discursive understandings associated with them such as passive, sacrificial, adhering to the norms of a Hindu patriarchy where the woman is the keeper of the private sphere indifferent to the material (read as Westernized) sphere of the public (Virdi, 2003). Since Rani checks all these boxes, this paper outlines how *Queen* treats Rani's empowerment narrative, focusing on her cinematic construction as the idealized Indian woman, the choices she is allowed and the consequences of those choices.

As a comparative case study to *Pink*, this textual and discursive analysis of *Queen* uses a conceptualization of Foucault's "modes of objectification" (1991, p. 7) when delineating i) the

technologies of power that underlie Rani's construction ii) how Rani's positioning within the normative power/knowledge discourses of society contributes to a positive empowerment narrative iii) the subjectification of Rani as created by the interplay of resistance narratives and hegemonic practices. The two following sections map out how representational politics determine the 'technologies of Indian womanhood' specifically highlighting how subscribing to the hegemonic patriarchal script rewards the character's mechanisms of resistance (as opposed to Minal's treatment in *Pink*). This chapter specifically discusses only those portions of the film that are of relevance compared to *Pink*.

## B. Making of the Idealized Indian Woman

### 1. Family, religion & the disciplined body

Even before the opening credits roll, the filmmaker formulates a vivid image of Rani's socio-cultural environment. The introductory mise-en-scène features the festive atmosphere of a typical, upper middle class, bustling, North Indian, Hindu wedding: strings of marigold flowers adorning the pillars, women practicing their dance moves for the *sangeet*<sup>12</sup> ceremony, the father of the bride deftly supervising the ongoing decorations while simultaneously on the phone cajoling invitees to attend. Rani, the bride hugs her grandmother, affectionately insisting that she get her *mehendi*<sup>13</sup> done along with Rani's. Occupied by dance practice, her grandmother says she will do it later, asking Rani to go ahead and get hers done which Rani obeys without argument. From the audience's very first introduction to her, Rani's construction as the idealized Indian woman, who is respectful, obedient and close to her family, is firmly set in motion.

---

<sup>12</sup> It is one of the several ceremonies in a North Indian Hindu wedding. A typical sangeet involves an evening of song and dance. Sometimes the families prepare specially choreographed dance sequences for the ceremony.

<sup>13</sup> In this ceremony henna is applied on the bride's hands and feet usually by an expert.

This construction is cemented through her voice-over during her *mehendi* application, her thoughts running at a mile a minute. Rani's musings range from nervousness about her 'first night', a conventional Bollywood trope that indicate a bride's first time having sexual intercourse is on the night they get married. To gratefulness at getting married, which she expresses through the religious phrase *Jai Mata Di*, which translates into 'praise be to god'. Less than five minutes into the movie, Rani has been established as 'good' along the discursive binaries characteristic of Hindi cinema logics. Understood by the gaze of the Hindu patriarchal panopticon, she is the docile body, disciplined by the rationalizing technologies of the heteronormative family structure, religious belief systems and contextual self-subjection. She also ponders over her father's pride at getting her married, joyously reflecting on how the flamboyance with which he has decorated his shop is being compared to that of an ornately dressed-up bride. The idea that women are property; analogous to objects that require to be maintained and flaunted, is glorified. Her perspective on becoming a bride as one of her achievements, gratified by what it means for her father reflects the internalization of the patriarchal viewpoint. These intermingle with concerns about her mother not being dressed up for the *mehendi* and why her brother is not clicking pictures for her to upload on Facebook. The mention of Facebook suggests a touch of modernity to Rani's character possibly rendering her representation relatable especially to a transnational audience, even while invoking a nostalgia for the traditional.

Rani's characterization is further underscored by filial piety. When Vijay tells her that he no longer wants to marry her, one of Rani's initial reactions is dismay at informing her parents and immediately asks him whether he has told his parents. She eventually ends this conversation with the declaration that he should not speak to her any further but explain himself to her parents. Rani's response stems from the deep-rooted cultural importance that the Indian society places on

the family as an institution where most important decisions such as marriage are negotiated (Desai and Andrist, 2010). In this manner, subjectification allows the docile body to internalize the unwritten rules as part of “one’s own thoughts, one’s own conduct” (Foucault, 1991, p.11) wherein autonomous agency is not viewed as separate from institutional agency. At the same time, this should not be confused with the lack of power. In this situation, Rani is invoking the power of familial relations, which she views as a more likely way to a favorable solution. Thus, there is a complex machinery of agency, power and ideology at play here which does not lend to an easy oppressor/victim analysis.

## 2. **Queen of the private sphere**

Prior to Rani’s European sojourn, she is primarily portrayed at home or helping out at her father’s sweet shop in keeping with the anti-colonial nationalist construction of the private sphere as the domain of the respectable, middle-class woman (Chatterjee, 1987). The rest of the scenes showcase her at college studying Home Science, which in itself functions as a motif of ‘feminist nationalist’ aspirations<sup>14</sup> (Hancock, 2001).

She first meets Vijay at her father’s shop, when Vijay’s parents who are family friends are catching up with her parents after years. While the parents move away to engage in personal conversation at a nearby food stall, Vijay’s mother asks him to stay behind and enjoy the sweets. Here he strikes up a conversation with Rani who is managing the counter. Her first conversation with Vijay is thus socially sanctioned. Even her platonic conversations with a member of the opposite sex are with a man her parents know, whose family they are comfortable with and in a familiar environment where they are a stone’s throw away. Oblivious to his flirtation, Rani

---

<sup>14</sup> The introduction of home science as a subject in Indian universities was part of an upper-middle class nationalist project to reinstate the home as a site of modernity and the woman running the home as the signifier of anti-colonial nationalism.

responds politely enough to his questions. She becomes visibly uncomfortable when he flatteringly compares her to a sweet dish and walks away from the conversation. This points to another indicator of a Rani's construction as a 'good' Indian daughter, one who could claim a premium value in the upper-caste Hindu marriage market where innocuous relationships with the opposite sex can diminish the woman's desirability as a wife (Desai & Andrist, 2010). Ignoring her indifference towards him, he stalks her outside her college where she continuously rebuffs him. After four years of unsuccessful attempts on Vijay's part, she finally agrees to go out with him. Through this performance of morality, the narrative furthers her as representative of idealized Indian womanhood while simultaneously showcasing these values as the catalyst of her personal agency.

When Rani does go out on her first date with Vijay, she is chaperoned by her younger brother Chintu. The practice of a male relative of the family accompanying a woman when she steps outside of the house is steeped in institutionalized patriarchies that primarily attach respectability to the woman stepping outside of her putative domain of the private sphere<sup>15</sup>. It is worth noting that there appears to be an 8-10 year age difference among them. When Vijay asks her if Chintu goes wherever she does, Rani insists that Chintu only accompanies her wherever their parents send him, implying that she has informed her parents about their date. We see that she rarely steps out of the house without her little brother in tow. Even as a pre-pubescent kid Chintu assumes the figure of her protector by virtue of being a male, threateningly going "Oye" at a man who tries to hurry Rani up at the bank. These instances are framed as comedy; his gateway into toxic masculine behavior played for laughs. Normalized by Rani's willing

---

<sup>15</sup> One of the rationales that was echoed by Jyoti Singh's Pandey's rapists and their lawyer for raping her was that she was out with a man who was not her father, brother or husband which according them was the sign that she was not of good moral character.

acceptance, these representations trivialize the controlling of the gendered body by patriarchal practices. Even when she decides to venture to Europe, her mother mutters that it would be a good idea if she took her brother with her.

Rani's subjectification in the private sphere, is a key factor that contributes to her construction as an idealized woman. The private sphere as her designated domain, functions as a technology of power, increasing the productive force of her body (in terms of submitting to the heteropatriarchal script) and diminishing it as a utility (in terms of political obedience). When she declares her intention to go to Europe by herself, she is resisting the hegemonic controls that have functioned the rationalizing technologies of her life. I argue that her organic compliance with the hegemonies that relegate women to the private sphere, pave the way for a resistance narrative that roots for her as opposed to punishing her. When her father presses her about whether she must go on this trip, she says she wants to but not against his wishes. The resistance narrative is embarked upon with permission from the patriarch of the family.

### 3. **From private to public**

We can locate the origin of Rani's resistance as her desire to explore the public sphere, to make the giant leap out of the protective panopticon of her parents' household to the unfamiliar cultural terrain of Western Europe. So far, Rani as the docile body has been under the disciplinary control of the private sphere. When she does land in Paris; her initial experiences are marked by hesitation, anxiety and uncertainty . She gets into a cab at the airport and can't pronounce the name of the hotel she needs to get to, which results in an embarrassing interlude between her and the cab driver. Later at night, a starving Rani ends up at a restaurant where the waiter rattles off the menu descriptions in French to her dismay. Too intimidated to ask him to explain it in a language she understands i.e. English, she randomly orders a dish which turns out



to be a whole fish, intact head and all. Bothered by this sight, she tries to eat only the cherry tomatoes on the side but the fish eye pops out. She runs out of the restaurant in horror and shame. Her difficulty in navigating the public sphere extends to her apprehension in crossing the road or asking other tourists to click a picture of her. The narrative draws Rani simultaneously as a sympathetic figure as well as a comic one. The ambivalence created by this tragicomic treatment of Rani's inability to maneuver public spaces obstructs any questioning of the systems of control that account for her reactions. Instead, it calls for an individualization of Rani and her situation. Her choices are perceived as attached to her identity rather than within the logics of the idealized Indian womanhood she represents and the power/knowledge nexus that explain it.

On one of the nights, Rani walking down an alley back to her hotel is accosted by a thief who tries to steal her bag. Rani refuses to let it go, even when he pushes her down to the ground. After a few minutes of physical struggle, he gives up and runs away. She later attributes her tenacity to her Delhi background which alludes to the street smarts that are associated with growing up in a city with a high rate of petty crimes. Her definitive comment that "he will know not to mess with *someone* from Delhi again" clearly avoids making a gendered statement. The deliberate de-gendered Rani does not serve as a threat to the status quo. The refusal to accept the gendered component of the power dynamic between the male thief and her reflects the film's reinforcement of neo-liberal notions of feminist empowerment. The unwillingness to acknowledge the gendered subject is yet another mechanism of patriarchal control (Sharma, 2017). This is a resonant theme even in the media interviews where the cast and crew evade the topic of *Queen* being a woman centric film (Ranaut as interviewed by Time Out India, 2014; Bahl as interviewed by Zoom, 2014).

Post this incident, the film transforms the sympathetic Rani to one ready to herald her own resistance narrative. Shaken up as she is, the previously withering Rani is on the cusp of discovering an unseen side of herself. While Rani's previous experiences were directed as tragically awkward, her encounter with the thief is emotionally charged. The narrative's contrasting treatment of these, indicates her inability to maneuver the public sphere is to be considered as comedy but when the situation is dire, Rani is more than capable of rising up to the occasion. The narrative's valorization of this incident as the turning point in Rani's resistance works to obscure her earlier difficulties in Paris engendered as they were by her upbringing. By attributing the positive narrative outcome of Rani's resistance attempt to her particular experiences growing up in an urban setting in India, the resilience trope associated with the idealized Indian woman is established.

#### 4. **The 'other'**

Foucault's idea of *dividing practices* as a mode of objectification posits that through the process of social categorization, human beings are objectified via a social and personal identity (1991). For the idealized Indian woman to be 'idealized' the presence of the Other is expedient. The women that Rani encounters on her trip are always represented in opposition to her.

The most salient of her experiences abroad are with Vijaylakshmi, a multiracial woman who works at the hotel Rani stays at. Her first encounter with Vijaylakshmi occurs soon after Rani enters her hotel room. Hearing a commotion Rani rushes out to the balcony, to see an almost naked woman in the balcony adjacent to hers shouting French abuses at a man below. The camera allows us a good look at Vijaylakshmi, a tall, dusky, sensuous looking woman, wearing a shirt that is almost entirely unbuttoned and lacy pink underwear. She offers Rani a cigarette and

and disgustedly tells Rani that she had only five minutes to fuck and when she told the man he had a small penis he left. Constructed as an object of male gaze, Vijaylakshmi is as far as it gets from the conservatively clad Rani. The smoking, promiscuous, uninhibited woman who speaks her mind is a representation against which Rani's idealized Indian woman stands out in stark contrast.

On a video call with Rani, her family spots Vijaylakshmi, dressed in shorts and a top with a plunging neckline. Rani's father and her younger brother Chintu are barely able to contain their lust, ogling at her through the screen. Capitalizing on the audience's scopophilic instinct, Vijaylakshmi is the exoticized other, designed to be sexually objectified. She bends down to the level of the table on which the laptop is placed so as to talk to Rani's family better, consequently allowing Rani's family (and the spectatorial gaze) a closer look at her cleavage. The narrative plays this situation to comic effect, with the grandmother commenting “*Ohhh yahaan toh adult film chal rahi hain. Chalo enjoy*” (I see there is an adult film going on here. Enjoy!). When Rani's mother expresses concern that Rani has made this 'kind' of friend, Rani defends Vijaylakshmi by saying “*Achhi ladki hain, thodi hippie type dikhti hain*” (She is a good girl, she only looks like a hippie but she is not). The free-spirited independent, Vijaylakshmi needs to be qualified as 'good' because she presents herself in a certain way that is incongruent with conservative Indian views of what a 'good' woman looks like. Rani's quick insistence that Vijaylakshmi is not a 'hippie' stems from the negative connotations in popular culture of the hippie woman as extremely liberal, sexually active and emblematic of an 'evil' Western culture. Consequently perceived as morally deficient, the hippie can thus be understood from Rani's mother's perspective as an inappropriate, possibly dangerous influence on her virtuous daughter.

Related but separate from Vijaylakshmi's positioning as the sexualized other, to a certain extent, is her position as the demonized other.

Spending time with Vijaylakshmi, Rani takes baby steps towards doing things she would not have considered doing before. For instance, when they go shopping for Rani, she is uncomfortable with the relatively revealing clothes that Vijaylakshmi picks out for her in the store. A few days later when the two of them are getting a street portrait painted of themselves, Rani observes Vijaylakshmi taking off her jacket and follows suit by unbuttoning her sweater. Even while Rani is resisting the hegemonies that dictate her mindset of what constitutes appropriate dressing, she still retains her sartorial conservatism in a long flowing skirt and blouse. Brief moments like these are woven into the narrative, signifying that the idealized Indian woman aspires to modernity without sacrificing her innate moral code.

Fulfilling the stereotype of the 'other' with a heart of gold, Vijaylakshmi helps Rani out in sticky situations and becomes her shoulder to cry on. The night before Rani leaves for Amsterdam, both of them are standing side by side equally mesmerized by the Eiffel Tower. This scene works to convey that no matter how different they are as people, they are essentially two human beings both looking for beauty in their lives. But the next morning before Rani gets on the train, she advises Vijaylakshmi not to drink and sleep around as much, emphasizing that Vijaylakshmi is still the Western other while Rani is the idealized Indian. Rani's concern for Vijaylakshmi can be read as a *dispositif*<sup>16</sup> of subjugation which also functions as an assertion of the moral superiority of the Indian culture.

Vijaylakshmi asks Rani to deliver a package to her friend Roxette in Amsterdam. Unbeknownst to Rani, Roxette works for a club in a red-light district. Already scandalized by the

---

<sup>16</sup> A mechanism/knowledge structure by which power is exercised on the body.

bra-and-garter clad Roxette, Rani is even more shocked to hear Roxette speak in chaste Urdu. Roxette reveals herself to be Rukshar, a Pakistani woman who tells Rani that she works as a pole dancer/sex worker because that is the only job she could get during the recession and she is responsible for her family's bills. Rani sincerely asks her why she cannot take up another job. In this case, concern as a *dispositif* of subjugation, serves to obscure Rani's class privilege. The narrative in its continued reinforcement of Rani's 'purity', another requirement in the characterization of idealized Indian womanhood, uses this scene as another opportunity to put Rani on a pedestal and other the working woman.

Rani's friend back home in India, Sonal, is positioned in opposition to Rani in the brief moments she appears on-screen. She is usually dressed in figure hugging tee-shirts, sports a nose ring and is seen as encouraging Rani to respond to Vijay's overtures. These dividing practices distinctly shape Rani's personal and social identity as different from the women she has significant interactions with. The docile body as represented by Rani has been created through the conjunction of power relations such as her family's religious beliefs, resultant rigidity of gender roles and her consequent subjectification at the hands of these hegemonies.

##### 5. **Beauty by the book**

The trope of the idealized Indian woman is not completely satisfied unless she meets the Brahmanical/Eurocentric standards of beauty, fair and slim figured (Thapan, 2004). While the exact origins of colorism in India are historically obscure<sup>17</sup>, the representations of light skin as a signifier of virtue and beauty persist along with its association to a higher caste status (Parameswaran and Cardoza, 2009). Not only does Rani fulfil these requirements but her women

---

<sup>17</sup> the debate being whether the perceptions of light-skinned superiority arose in pre-colonial times or were influenced by the British (Glenn, 2008)

counterparts in the film are of a noticeably darker hue than her. Rani's desirability across cultures is validated by her attractiveness to the men she encounters in Europe. An Italian restaurant owner in Amsterdam only refers to her as "pretty girl/pretty lady" whenever they run into each other. Her Russian roommate Oleksander is also attracted to her.

The purposeful casting of a slender-bodied actress is evident in director Vikas Bahl's brief to the film's costume designers that Rani's character "doesn't know she has a beautiful body and she wears clothes to cover it and never to reveal her figure" (Manushi and Rushi, 2014, para. 4). This also reveals the construction of the idealized Indian woman to be such that she is conventionally good-looking but does not flaunt her good looks. This lack of awareness about her desirability is couched in the discourses of simplicity. A word used many times by the film's cast and crew to describe Rani, 'simple' arguably echoes popular culture's mantra that an attractive woman's insecurity about her looks renders her even more attractive to the male gaze (Rebolini, 2014).



Figure 2. A desolate Rani in Paris

This specific construction of Rani is key to understanding the trajectories her narrative takes; specifically her embodiment of nationalist hegemonies even while actively participating in the reconstruction of her subject position. Postcolonial readings of Hindi cinema delineated how women's representation as stand-in for the nation focused on the valorization of sacrifice, submissiveness and domesticity. The next section examines, through the idealized figure of Rani, how contemporary cinema reproduces this anti-colonial nationalism as a transnational feminist empowerment narrative and how it implicates Rani's attempts at resistance.

#### B. **Resistant Agency or Hegemonic Agenda?**

Nationalist ideologies are deeply enmeshed within the technologies of power that operate in the domestic sphere. If Western thought has been considered to dominate the material/public sphere, in response nationalist ideas laid siege to the spiritual/private sphere (Chatterjee, 1987). The dividing practices of nationalism distinguish the private sphere as a location from which modernity as well as moral superiority over the colonists is enacted. In this section, I argue that Rani engages in acts of resistance while simultaneously promoting patriarchal nationalist agendas which she has internalized.

Early on in the film, Vijay's reasoning behind his refusal to marry Rani, is framed as Western modernity's inscrutable conflict with Indian traditionality. Just back from a year-long stint in London, Vijay says that his lifestyle has changed and he does not think the conservative Rani would be right for him any more. His straightforward approach to this break-up which culminates in "And we'll be friends... we'll stay in touch" is a departure from the melodrama that is associated with such situations in Hindi film; Vijay conspicuously taking his cultural cues from Western norms in similar situations. On the other hand, Rani is pleading with him while mildly crying, upon which he tells her not to create a scene. A majority of the conversation from

Vijay's end is in English, while Rani's responses are almost entirely in Hindi. When she leaves the coffee shop where they were having this conversation, Vijay wipes away the crumbs of her henna from the table. This symbolic brushing away of a motif that signifies tradition, narratively emphasizes that from Vijay's point of view that there is no place for tradition where there is modernity. His Westernized attitude and behavior make him the designated villain responsible for the central conflict of the film. His insistence on "let's be practical" while Rani is visibly upset, reinforces his Westernized rationality in opposition to her Indian emotionality. The following dialogue encapsulates the tension between a dynamic globalism and an immutable traditionalism:

Vijay: *It's just that my life has changed yaar. A lot of things have changed. For me it's all about travel, business, meetings. Bahut tough ho jaayega yaar tumhaare liye.* (It will be very tough for you to adjust.)

Rani: *Kya.. kya change hua hain? Kuch change nahin hua hain. Main toh same hoon.* (What has changed? Nothing has changed. I am still the same me.)

Vijay: *That's what! Tum waisi ke waisi ho. Wohi toh.* (That is the problem. You are still exactly the same.)

The Western's dismissiveness of the traditional is a key factor, besides her father's explicit permission, that narratively justifies Rani's agentic decision to go on her European honeymoon. Rani's docile body is permitted agency as a reward for following the heteropatriarchal script of a good Hindu daughter and for her symbolic function in the perpetuation of the nationalist ideology.



1. **Rethinking resistance/Unearthed nationalism**

Sharma (2017) makes two important claims that are pertinent to this paper. First, that Rani's resistance narrative which unfolds in a foreign country (as opposed to domestic territory) automatically accrues a nationalistic tone. She negotiates her power by spreading the hegemonic Hindu script in a Western space. Embedded in her resistance are the very hegemonies that render women's bodies as inseparable from the markers of nationalism. This sort of embodied nationalism exemplifies the Foucauldian notion of power not as fixed entity that solely oppresses but a dynamic one that operates through the disciplined bodies. The second claim that Sharma makes which is related to but separate from the first one is that Rani's ability to forge new power relations when she is out of home boundaries is a transformation that is only acceptable precisely because she is not within the physical territory of the nation. The nation here is contextualized beyond its geographical boundaries as a keeper of culture.

She argues that

“constructing Rani's empowerment abroad is in fact a medium for re-conceptualising private and public spheres and reinstitutionalising indigenous patriarchies transnationally, for even abroad Rani is not free. She is both an agent for and a victim of reconstituting middle-class, nationalist ideologies. For this reason alone, the film is about subjection rather than empowerment.” (p.1)

While I agree with Sharma's arguments about Rani as a stand-in for the nation during her experience abroad, I posit that subjection and empowerment do not lie on a binary. The politics of Rani's agency can be read as an interweaving narrative of resistance and hegemony, sometimes acting simultaneously. The construction of agency is dependent on the cultural and ideological location of the embodied subject (Hegde, 1996).

While Rani is seeking Vijaylakshmi out at a nightclub, a performer enthusiastically spritzes Rani in the mouth with alcohol, giving Rani the liquid courage to shed her inhibitions. A drunk Rani opens about her life thus far to Vijaylakshmi and anyone else who will listen. While rueing her life, she questions why bad things are happening to her even though she has not indulged in bad behavior like the convent school girls who kept shortening the length of their school skirt. She follows that with a warning to Vijaylakshmi to stop ruining her life (presumably from the sleeping around, smoking and drinking). There will be terrible consequences, she slurs threateningly. Rani views herself as beyond reproach having adhered to the gendered norms of the middle-class and rationalizes that Vijaylakshmi is sure to suffer the negative ramifications of her Westernized lifestyle; one that is not bound by those norms.

The highlight of the film, this is also the scene featured in the promotional trailer. It is a hilarious and humanizing insight into Rani, reflecting her contradictory emotions. Punchy anecdotes that offer the audience glimpses into her upbringing are peppered with cultural references familiar to anyone growing up in middle-class India of the nineties. This scene is illuminating as Rani alternates between feeling terrible for herself and, presenting herself as morally superior. An audience favorite, this scene when read in context of the entire movie, showcases how Rani has purposively imbibed the logic of the disciplinary technologies that construct the docile body. Rani is very conscious of her identity as the 'ideal' Indian woman and details with pride how she has always obeyed the rules, leading her to conclude that she does not deserve to be punished in the way she is being now (being jilted, coming for her honeymoon all by herself, feeling lonely). The *common truth* that the idealized Indian woman is ordained to have positive consequences of her compliance with the hegemonic nationalist agenda echoed by Rani, is supported the film's narrative hereon.

In her inebriated state, Rani starts dancing on the road. She performs a routine in front of a taxi driver who barely glances up from his phone even as Rani gyrates close to him. This illustrates Sharma's argument that the narrative allows the docile body to break its subjection and behave outside of its internalized disciplinary constraints only because this is socially acceptable in her current cultural space i.e. Europe (2017). There is no sense of danger to her here either from inhabiting the public sphere late at night or from deviant behavior in front of a male stranger, both of which would be concerns back home.

The events of this night are a turning point in the film, from where on Rani starts to enjoy her European vacation. These exemplify to a large extent the complexities of Rani's resistance narrative. At the start of Rani's night at the club, the things that happen to her are completely circumstantial; she does not get drunk out of her own volition. The resultant monologue and spontaneous dance on the road, reflect the two components that problematize her agency. One, it is a resistance based in nationalistic ideas of right and wrong; two it is a resistance acceptable because it is out of the physical boundaries of the nation. Nevertheless it can be read as resistance from the subtle coercion of the disciplinary technologies that define Rani's personal and social identity. Resistance can be understood here not as a complete rebuttal of hegemonic belief systems but as the dominated subject's active negotiation of power relations (Hegde, 1996; Haynes and Prakash, 1991).

The nationalistic underpinnings of Rani's resistance are not restricted to her moral stances on the West. At an Italian restaurant, Marcello the owner notices that Rani is only picking at her food which upsets him. On being prodded by him, she comments that the dish needs a few more ingredients, mentioning the common Indian spices used to flavor dishes. He gets mad and explains to her that this is Italian cuisine not Indian. Rani avers that the Indian

version of Italian food is the best. Later on, Marcello challenges her to cook and sell her food at a sailing competition, as a way for her to prove that she knows food better than him. Rani's *golgappa*<sup>18</sup> stall does extremely well pulling in a bigger crowd than the other food stalls forcing Marcello to acknowledge that Indians know how to cook best. He insists that Italians are still the best kissers. She replies that Indians are the best at everything. When he asks her to prove it, she kisses him and says "Only for India!"

In this manner, the narrative overtly promotes Rani as an agent for nationalism even while taking her resistance narrative ahead. This incident marks not only the first time she earns wages but also her first kiss. It can be reasoned that in both cases, she is provoked to do so, thus allowing her to exercise agency while adhering to her class prescribed gender role which does not approve of initiative in the public sphere. When she does exercise agency, she does it to prove the nation's superiority whether in the arena of food or kissing. She follows the patriarchally appropriate scripts of femininity while also finding her voice and forging new relationships with the cultural space that is the public sphere.

Watching Oleksander create protest art on the walls of their hostel room in Amsterdam, she says she too wants to leave her mark on the world. The scene segues into a flashback which showcases Vijay forbidding her from getting a job because he is displeased with the idea of her being out of the house all day. His first response to her when she asks him if she can work is to ask her what her father's opinion is and she says that her father has deferred the decision to Vijay. Going back to Rani's acceptance of Marcello's challenge, we see that she is initially reluctant to do so agreeing only when she rationalizes it as a 'job'. Connecting this rationalization to Vijay's disapproval of her as a working professional explains that she took up

---

<sup>18</sup> A spicy Indian street food

the challenge not out of being competitive, because that would be antithetical to her ‘good girl’ representation, but because it presented itself to her as a job. Foucault (1991) deliberated that human beings use technologies of dominance and technologies of self to understand and control themselves. The nationalistic ideologies (technologies of dominance) that have shaped her identity, manifest in her hesitation in navigating the public sphere but also serve to undergird her agentic action (technologies of self) such as taking up the food challenge and winning it. The interdependence of these technologies helps us understand the complexity of Rani’s agency. While operating within these technologies of dominance, she is now able to exercise personal and professional agency (technologies of self) which she had previously acquiesced at the bidding of the male authority figures in her life. Gregg (1993, p.177) opines, “it is by negotiating among multiple and contradictory subject positions that women create room for the contestation of meaning, opposition and change.”

## 2. **The righteousness of Rani**

While I have touched upon the Rani’s sense of moral superiority in some of the sections above, here I would like to focus on how Rani retains her claims to a righteous identity while getting to exercise agency in situations that the patriarchal rules of female conduct would not ordinarily allow her to.

The narrative does this primarily by following a pattern of placing Rani in ‘sinful’ spaces because of others’ choices. Her presence in the Parisian nightclub is thanks to Vijaylakshmi; her visit to Amsterdam’s red-light district is thanks to Roxette/Rukhsar. When the time comes to leave the nightclub in Amsterdam, she finds that Oleksander who usually drives is drunk. She nervously takes the wheel, thinking back to the time that she took driving lessons from Vijay, where he constantly berated her and eventually told her that she should just stick to commuting

by public transport. Cut to the present, she not only drives through the streets of Amsterdam confidently, but now that she is in charge, drives Oleksander, Tim and Taka (her Japanese roommate) to the church. The narrative circumstances give her an opportunity to exercise her agency as well as assert her moral superiority by choosing to go to the church.

The church as Rani's location of choice is additionally relevant because earlier in the film Oleksander leads her to a casino under the pretext of taking her to the church. Here she turns out to be a pro at gambling which we see is a result of her gambling experiences, an integral part of the North Indian Hindu celebrations of the annual festival of Diwali. In this manner, the narrative not only justifies the unlikely event of her gambling at the casino, but also represents her as acing the situation while providing a nationalistic foundation for her to do so.

Her relationship with Vijaylakshmi can also be seen as one of the ways in which the narrative underlines Rani's moral superiority. The ambivalence that characterizes Rani's resistance is nowhere as pronounced as in Rani's takeaway from their friendship. The French-Spanish-Indian Vijaylakshmi works as a housekeeping employee. She is revealed to be born out of wedlock and typifies the liberated woman trope in several ways. She drinks, smokes, wears revealing clothes and loves to party. She is an independent, single mother who is sexually active and has no qualms about it. She speaks her mind and does not seem to care what anybody else thinks of her. The power dynamic between Rani and Vijaylakshmi is reminiscent of the nineteenth century nationalistic reimagination of the middle-class woman who was positioned as superior to "the common, low-caste, low-class women who were 'coarse, loud, sexually promiscuous, quarrelsome, and devoid of any superior moral sense'" (Chatterjee as cited in Sharma, 2017, p. 3). An argument can be made for Vijaylakshmi's portrayal as an opportunity for the audience to discover alternate subject positions they can identify with. However, this is a

limited opportunity because even when the narrative constructs Vijaylakshmi in a positive manner, Rani's construction is flawless which eventually results in Vijaylakshmi's representation as less than. For Rani, her interactions with Vijaylakshmi are eye opening, to the extent that she is exposed to a kind of lifestyle which she has never interacted with before. But beyond acknowledgement that people different from her are also 'good people', Rani's engagement with Vijaylakshmi's way of living is cloaked in ambiguity. She seems to rationalize that Vijaylakshmi's agentic behavior is a function of the culture she lives in and does not question the disciplinary technologies of Indian (Hindu) culture that make such a life unthinkable for her. Instead out of affection for Vijaylakshmi, Rani reiterates her own moral codes, trying to get Vijaylakshmi to see the error of her own lifestyle. While Vijaylakshmi simply laughs Rani off at most times, in their last scene together Vijaylakshmi has abandoned her revealing Western attire for Rani's *kurta*<sup>19</sup> and jeans. Rani's middle-class beliefs about the proper role for women is unchanged, even as she is shown to accept those unlike her.

### 3. **Dancing to the tune of the diaspora**

Music and song in Hindi cinema have not only been used to signify sincere emotion but also to heighten the emotional connect between the character and the audience (Sarrazin, 2008). Arguably the music of *Queen* was one of the strongest pre-release attractions of the movie (Talreja, 2014; Thakker, 2014; DNA Web Team, 2014). On Rani's second day out in Paris, the non-diegetic song *Badra Bahar* (translated to rain cloud) plays over visuals of Rani walking around, her desolation heightened by the sight of lovers. The lyrics of the song can be translated to the following:

---

<sup>19</sup> An Indian garment similar to a tunic

*Oh rain clouds, go tell him of the girl who grew up  
 In dad's yard, under the shade of mango tree,  
 the beloved of father's house,  
 she is brought up carefully,  
 my.. my.. doll of childhood.*

The nostalgization of her sheltered life under the paternal gaze through music functions as another means by which the narrative glorifies the docile body. On a macro-level, the lyrics can be understood as a paean to India, which is coded as loving and warm as opposed to the impersonal, heartless ways of the West. In this manner, music is used to evoke a nationalistic longing in the diasporic audience.

Insertion of the nationalist agenda in Hindi cinema, whether by means of nostalgizing rigid gender roles or asserting the cultural superiority of India, has been a popular means of attracting the diasporic Indian audience since the late 1990s (Mehta, 2005). In this regard, *Queen* perfectly fits the bill. Towards the end of the film, Rani's character has metamorphosed into a signifier of transnational modernity without compromising on her 'authentic' Indianness.

Her shapeless kurtas have given way to more fitted sleeveless outfits but are long enough to not to be coded as Western exhibitionism. She later laughingly reveals that the sleeveless *kurtas* she picked up in Amsterdam were actually a made in India, something she did not realize till after she purchased them. She is modern but not too offensive to traditional sensibilities, even subconsciously picking out the national from among the international. Her curly hair is now straightened but still long in keeping with traditional Indian femininities. Her transformation also implies that even though she has been born and raised in a middle-class Indian environment, she has adapted harmoniously to her new surroundings.



When Vijay meets her in Amsterdam, he comments on how “modern” she has become. He is surprised that his supposedly conservative fiancée has made male friends abroad and is on first name terms with a waiter at the café they meet at. Referring to her three male roommates, he tells her that because he has lived in London he knows how weird foreigners can be. The narrative reveals his modernity to be superficial, while Rani’s modernity which is strongly rooted in her middle-class beliefs is the one that allows her to forge meaningful relationships across borders.

C. **What Comes Next for Rani?**

When Rani goes back to Delhi, she meets Vijay again this time to return his engagement ring that she had been holding on to thus far. The climax of the film showcases her walking out of his house confidently, sporting a beatific smile. Intended to signify that Rani has walked out of this relationship on her own terms, the film leaves the story open-ended with no indication of what Rani has in mind for her future. By leaving the ending ambiguous, the film refuses to clarify whether Rani is able to take her resistance narrative forward either personally or professionally, especially now that she is back in India. Presumably Rani’s ‘freedom’ at home is still undergirded by the disciplinary technologies that defined her existence pre-Europe. Throughout, the film’s narrative makes it pretty clear throughout that Rani’s moral sense of self-control and cultural predisposition to self-regulation are completely interiorized. She exemplifies the neo-liberal subject where she ‘freely’ chooses a life of developing a sense of responsible self-hood (Rose, 1996). Beyond that, the progression of Rani’s agency does not seem to hold any significance to the film’s agenda, prioritizing the politics of individualism over any potentially feminist representation.

#### D. **Conclusion**

*Queen* is one of the more rare women-centric projects that focus on the non-English speaking, traditionally constructed woman. Additionally commendable for being a comedy with a female lead, *Queen* conceptualized Rani as an eminently watchable, complex character. However, her immense likeability derived largely from her narrative idealization and the hilarity derived from her lack of self-awareness are problematic from a feminist perspective.

Arguably it is Rani's construction as the idealized Indian woman as determined by the patriarchal gaze allows her to exercise agency. In Foucauldian terms, the compliant docile body is implicitly rewarded for its submission. Internalizing the hegemonic ideologies of the Hindu middle-class and spreading the nationalistic agenda across borders, permits Rani the liberty to resist, however limited. She gets to veer from her normalized subject position as an obedient daughter and explore a side she probably did not know existed: drinking, dancing in a discotheque and rooming with three members of the opposite sex. Additionally, the narrative grants her a dignified break-up with the man who rejected her, meaningful memories of her Europe trip and cherished friendships. Her story may have started on a negative note but her resistance yielded positive outcomes. In a nutshell Rani's complicity in hegemonic class practices, as an agent and a docile body, legitimizes her resistance narrative.

*Queen* opened to critical acclaim with Rani's character as the universal darling of the critics. Her likeability often enough was attributed to her not letting go of her identity (Kamath, 2014) or her managing to make it on her own terms (Jayaraman, 2014). Given that the media is disproportionately Hindu, the omission of class-based critique is not surprising (Hegde, 1996). This is often more out of an ignorance of caste/class privilege rather than an purposeful

exclusion but it occurs fairly often especially since Hindi cinema has normalized and homogenized these middle-class values as authentic Indian values.

A narrative that entertainment media latched on to were the parallels between Rani's character and Kangana Ranaut's journey from small-town India to the big, bad world of Bollywood. Ranaut an industry outsider with no influential connections, made it big in an institution that runs on nepotism. In her early days of becoming an actress, Ranaut was often derided by members of the media and the film industry for her strong regional accent and her discomfort with speaking in English, among other things. Notably, Ranaut differed from Rani in many visible ways, overlooked by an entertainment media always on the look out for convenient comparisons. At the age of fifteen she ran away from home against her parents wishes, was estranged from them for them<sup>20</sup> and lived-in with a married actor who was old enough to be her father<sup>21</sup>. But Rani's story being more palatable, a majority of the media gave in to the temptation of blurring the narratives. The media's conflation of Rani's character with Kangana's personality, seemed to be the easiest way for them to gloss over their past reporting of her and reconcile imagined incongruencies between Kangana's 'unruly woman' and the idealized Rani.

Based on the analysis in this section and the previous one, in the next section I use the concepts outlined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to examine how the differences in the construction of Rani and Minal specifically shaped each of their resistance narratives. Connecting this with the politics of contemporary feminist representation in commercial Hindi cinema, I reflect on the co-opting of feminism by the neo-liberal production logics of the Bollywood culture industry. Lastly, I go back to my original questions on the meaning of hegemony, resistance, agency and power within the context of Indian womanhood as represented

---

<sup>20</sup> She reportedly reconciled with her parents in 2015, a year after *Queen*'s release.

<sup>21</sup> His actual daughter is the same age as Ranaut.

on the silver screen. The inquiry generated from these case studies is not intended to be a resolution but to encourage a more critical reading of women-centric narratives that permeate popular culture.

## VI. VISIBILITY IS A TRAP

Mainstream Bollywood has historically represented women within a few static categories be it as a signifier of national identity or as a caricature in the virgin/whore trope. The repurposing of these in contemporary women-centric cinema has arguably resulted in similar narrative messaging: the Westernized woman requires to be tamed and the traditional Indian woman deserves to be rewarded. These female-led films masquerading as tales of women's empowerment may only be about 5% of Bollywood's total feature film output but are often discussed in popular media discourses as feminist must-watch cinema. A predominantly Hindu male-dominated media which enables a homogenizing (if not downright simplistic) popular notion of feminism helps establish these films as part of the nationalist cultural project to be relevant on a global platform.

While *Pink* and *Queen* are only two of the films that focus on the lives of their women protagonists, the demonization of the Western and/or the aggrandization of the non-Westernized seems to be a stand that many of them take. *Ki and Ka* (2016), *Inkaar* (2013) and *Heroine* (2012) are a few examples of the former while *Ishqiya* (2010), *Tanu Weds Manu* (2011) and *Bobby Jasoos* (2014) fall into the latter bracket. What can be gleaned from a postcolonial Foucauldian analysis of two films does not apply in its entirety to all of contemporary women-centric with some of these films featuring complex women characters that provide an opportunity for multiple forms of identification. This paper should be seen as an insight into some of the systemic issues that influence the narratives of supposedly feminist cinema.

The case studies focused on the particularities of two different types of cinematic constructions of the contemporary female lead, the Westernized Minal and the traditional Rani. This section compares the two based on the observations made in the previous two chapters. The

aim is to discussing the dominant themes that contribute to their narrative outcomes and what these themes indicate about the notions of resistance, agency, hegemony and power as represented on film.

Studying cinematic representation as a form of discipline in which ideological concepts such as those of nationalism, feminism and justice are conveyed through audiovisual metaphor, this study delineates specifically how it ‘makes’ empowered women as an exercise of power. Situating the female lead as the object as well instrument of its agenda, the operation of this disciplinary power can be broken down into three steps: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination which culminates into the examination (Foucault, 1991b).

According to Foucault, “the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation” (1991b, p. 189), which in this case is the privileged view of the camera lens that disciplines not only by what it reveals but also by what it chooses to conceal. The heterogeneity of the Indian woman is produced by the intersecting discourses of class, caste and religion as well as by physical features such as skin tone, body size and shape (Mohanty, 2005). Who gets picked to play the empowered woman in question is more often than not the fair-skinned, slender-bodied, Hindu actor. A majority of the female leads also play Hindu women, mirroring the societal centering of the middle-class, upper caste Hindu woman as the default feminist (Gupta, 2016). Taapsee Pannu who plays Minal and Kangana Ranaut who plays Rani, both epitomize this mindset. While woman-centric cinema is typically understood as bypassing Bollywood genre conventions, the physical (and caste ideal) of whose stories are considered worthy of representation is not too different from the standard potboiler. Even prior to the stage of *hierarchical observation*, the narratives of certain types of women are privileged over others. Bollywood’s continuing tradition of disproportionate representation of those who

exemplify Victorian/Brahmanical countenance contributes to the invisibility of those who do not fit the bill.

Coming back to the case studies of *Queen* and *Pink*, it is **the invisibility of class privilege** and the **homogenization of the middle-class**, that seem to restrict Minal's narrative representation within negative discourses, while allowing Rani positive outcomes and a humanizing portrayal with place for complexities. Both Rani and Minal are coded as middle-class, Rani primarily through her values and Minal through others' judgement of her lifestyle. While class is an economic category, the social norms associated with it are what hold currency in filmic representation.

I argue that one of the major representational distinctions between Rani and Minal, their differential economic status and the possibility of its influence their adherence (or lack thereof) to the middle-class moral code is ignored by the narrative. There are several economic indicators that Rani is *upper-middle* class. Her father owns a shop and she lives with her family; they own not an apartment but a one-storey house in Delhi with several rooms and a courtyard. Her travels in Paris and Amsterdam are paid for by her father. While in Europe she has a working mobile phone and a functional laptop. She travels quite a bit by cab, hardly ever by public transport. She also does not hesitate to shop, buy gifts or try out upscale restaurants. But the narrative does not emphasize this characterization of Rani, choosing to focus on her identification as middle-class through her internalized sociocultural attitudes and resultant behavior. This is successfully reflected in the number of media discourses that include a reference to her as middle-class generally in connection with her worldview. The invisibility of this privilege constructs her as a sympathetic subject as well as renders her accessible to the multiplex audience who are primarily upper-middle class. The likelihood of her character's evolution as an affirmative empowerment

narrative cannot be separated from her privileged upbringing or that of those who create and consume these films.

Contrast this with Minal who works as a dancer, which does not even fall into the traditional 9-to-5 category. It can be safely assumed that she comes from a *lower-middle* class background since the educated, upper-middle class woman is integrated into the global corporate economy almost by default, in keeping with the respectability politics of the new Indian femininity (Radhakrishnan, 2009; Deshpande, 1993). Unlike Rani, Minal does not have the privilege of an all expenses paid subsistence in her parents house and lives with her flatmates in an apartment typical of a middle income housing colony. By virtue of this, she has already defied certain conventions of what is considered normative middle-class behavior according to its historical origins located in the upper end of the class spectrum (Chatterjee, 1987). If Rani's class privilege is invisible, Minal's agency as a function of class are invisible. Inferring from the above, the problematic of feminist representation can be delineated on two levels: i) in emphasizing Rani as middle-class, there is an erasure of her economic privileges which allow her certain choices ii) the representational homogenization of middle-class as through the lens of cultural identity ignores the economic necessities that underline Minal's choices.

This erasure and ignorance is largely reflected in the media coverage, as well. The question of class hardly ever arises in mainstream articles about film, but when it did come up in relation to the above movies - it was more pronounced in the coverage of *Queen*. In *Pink* when the characters mention a couple of times that they are "normal, working girls", they are implying their fidelity to middle-class moral values rather than underscoring their economic status. The media's hesitation to apply the term middle-class to the women of *Pink*, comes across as their



fear of identifying with the unruly<sup>22</sup> Minal as a possible representative of the class who have long been associated with the shaping of nationalist ideologies (Chatterjee, 1987). The choice to associate the term middle-class with hegemonic cultural norms and avoid the economic prerogatives that define it, leaves out a vast swathe of middle-class urban women. At a very basic level, the films become party to the larger globalist capitalist nationalist project of imagining a narrowly specific Indian middle-class as the face of transnational modernity on the world stage.

Stemming from this logic of representation, is the *normalizing judgement* that Rani and Minal are subject to. Rani's contentedness to stay in the realms of the private sphere implies class status and superiority (Banerjee, 1989). Her agreeable subordination to male authority in the guise of the private sphere, deems her as a normalized docile body. The working class woman is stigmatized because she lacks the patriarchally approved stamp of the private sphere and its machinations (Sangari and Vaid, 1990). The conservatively dressed Rani who braids her hair, sticks to wearing the simplest makeup and speaks primarily in Hindi exemplifies the nationalistic representation of an ideal woman. Even when she metamorphoses into a 'modern' version of herself during her stint abroad, she retains her conservative style. The difference between post-independence cinema's idealized woman and Rani, is that the narrative emphasizes this as Rani's *choice*. The neo-liberal framing of individual choice as empowerment and the accompanying framing of Rani's choice as within the boundaries of a conservative nationalism, play into an idealized Indian womanhood trope suitable to the current imperatives of a globalized popular culture. By letting her narrative play out as a tale of evolving self-hood rather than as a signification of systemic inequities, she is de-gendered to a considerable extent. Besides Rani did

---

<sup>22</sup> As derived from Kathleen Rowe's characterization of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival woman in *Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (2011). The unruly woman is one who defies societal expectations of how women should behave.

not embark on her solo exploration of the public sphere out of her desire to do so; Vijay's rejection of her provided the necessary provocation for her to defy the script. This narrative justification allows her to be a lovable character who is lauded for her agentic actions.

But Minal is the woman who speaks too much, speaks her mind, who dresses up to the nines, daring to sport a dark red shade of lipstick. From the get go, she is defined by her abrasive modernity and later on in the film by her oppression. The *normalizing judgement* subjects her to a whole array of *micropenalities*: of behavior (disobedience), speech (insolence), body ('incorrect' attitude) and of sexuality (impurity, indecency) (Foucault, 1991b, p. 194). For her nonconformity to the unwritten gender-based hegemonies of class, she is drawn as an agonistic character. The lack of narrative provocation for her behavior on the night of the incident and the following adverse consequences for all three women, evaluates her exercise of personal agency as brazen. Her unwillingness to participate in the formulation of self as a *docile body* punishes her by restricting her character to a uni-dimensional arc. While Rani was the universal darling of the film critics, Minal received no such empathy. A majority of the reviews focused on Pannu's acting skills rather than a sense of connect with her character.

The subsequent narrative *examinations* of both women, extending as they did from the perspective of a Hindu, bourgeois panopticon, can be understood through the concept of the gendered gaze. Reminiscent of the colonially developed Indian middle-class defining the 'nationalist feminist' in the nineteenth century, these *examinations* speak to a historical complicity between the upper-middle class Hindu men who led the social reform movements and the colonizer (Sangari and Vaid, 1990). Rani, who embodies the intersection of performative Hindu womanhood and globalized capitalist neoliberal discourses of 'choice feminism' is the contemporary representation of this complicity, between the current right-wing populist

sentiment and Western cultural imperialism. Her overt religious predilections are integral to her subjection; the narrative rewards for her compliance function as a ceremony of her *productive objectification* as a subject.

Minal who can only be read as Hindu through her surname, does not embody any of the performative aspects of Hindu womanhood thereby not meeting the expectations of the disciplinary frameworks that guide this *examination*. She is reduced to a sexual object/victim subject to the patriarchal discourses of the courtroom and is gradually stripped off any control over her situation. Her problems arise from her agentic actions. She has to be saved from the negative consequences of her choices rather than be empowered to take decisions that derive from her subjectivity.

Whether it is the narrative's decision to distance religion from the unruly woman or the narrative's logic that a woman who distances herself from hegemonic religious ideology will consequently be unruly, is up for debate. What is certain though is that the distancing of Minal from her being a Hindu as opposed to Rani's embrace of her religious identity, also determined their potential for resistance narratives.

Tradition and modernity are both colonial constructs saddled with patriarchal ideologies. To better reflect the realities of Indian womanhood, cinema needs to think outside of these binaries and stop working towards a monolithic idea of what an empowered woman should look like. Critical framing of how social relations, socio-economic hierarchies and cultural *common truths* reproduce putative ideals of 'woman' would be a step in the right direction. The temptation to sensationalize women's empowerment narratives as 'realistic' portrayals should be avoided in favor of highlighting underlying structural inequities. Aiming to move beyond the

scopophilic gaze of the camera, feminist representation above all is about showcasing women as people, across the depth of their lived experiences.

A. **What's biopolitics got to do with it?**

On first viewing, *Pink* comes across as a resistance of the rationalizing biopolitics of middle-class discourses that often link the modern, working woman to destruction of the hegemonic moral code of a unified Indian imaginary. Minal's refusal to apologize for her attack on Rajveer offers us a quick peek into the potential for resistance as embodied by the urban woman who wishes to reclaim her agency in an androcentric culture. But this quickly descends into essentialist tropes, as Minal is repeatedly punished: physically as well as psychologically. Deepak Sehgal's co-optation of her resistance and the gendered nature of legal reasoning, reduce Minal to a bystander in her own story. Moreover, Sehgal's climactic courtroom victory is a direct outcome of him locating a lie in a witness statement rather than an impact of his dramatic monologues highlighting gender discrimination. This serves to reiterate the systemic treatment of women's material oppressions less as reality and more as moralistic abstractions up for debate. The power may have been symbolically restored to Minal (cue 'woman power' poetry recitation over the end credits) but the unfolding of the discourse around the morality of the Westernized woman is still controlled by the patriarchal figure: be it Sehgal on screen or the creative team behind the scenes.

*Queen's* engagement with biopolitics, as explained earlier, carries the neo-liberal narrative forward. Rani is relatable as the transnational signifier of 'Indianness', a willing participant in the capitalist, paternalist and Hindu construction of the empowered woman. She embodies the compliant subject, a model of how biopower is harnessed through the institutions of family and religion. The *dispositif* of shame, nationalistic pride and a largely de-gendered sense of self legitimize Rani's acts of agency. The structural functioning of biopower interacts with her

resistance to certain repressive technologies of power, representing it as self-liberation. At the same time, her representation as someone who never really lets go of the internalized hegemonic ideologies that define her personal identity, she is depicted as wielding influence over those she interacts with. Vijaylakshmi and Oleksander, both of whom do not subscribe to the moral imperatives that Rani does, see in her an innocence that is refreshing. Capitalizing on this *dispositif* of ‘purity’ Rani functions as an agent of a particular nationalist, neo-liberal biopolitics. On the back of this, she elevates herself from victim to victor to an exemplar. *Queen* forces us to look beyond simplistic ideas of resistance, power and agency. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Rani exhibits how the operation of biopower can enable complex forms of resistance, which cannot be neatly categorized within the traditional discourses of agency or hegemony. Here lies the space for creative acts of resistance or what Foucault terms as *practices of freedom* (Foucault, 1991b).

Asymmetries of power formulated by cinematic representations of the marginalized obligate us to study discourse that produces a historically specific meaning of agency and a particularly located sense of self.

#### B. **Challenge not overthrow**

While the dominant narratives of *Pink* and *Queen* may not engage with counter-hegemonic ideas in a way that represents postcolonial feminist goals of dismantling patriarchal structures, I would like to highlight certain secondary themes that challenged aspects of hegemonic thought.

*Pink*'s strongest deployment of resistance was in the form of secondary character Falak's characterization and courtroom monologue. Admittedly the predictability of Falak, the most ‘traditional’ of the three women, being the one with the most developed backstory slightly eclipses the counter-hegemonic potential of her narrative. But her representation as a Muslim

woman, neither subscribed to any of the reductive tropes that are used to portray characters as ‘good Muslims’ nor did her religious identity define her. By doing so, *Pink* avoided the trap that most well-intentioned films fall prey to - tokenistic portrayals of the sole Muslim character.

*Queen*, had more of these counter-hegemonic moments, though Rani is never fully removed from the legitimizing power of nationalist discourses. Within these parameters, Rani’s baby steps towards exploring the cultural space of the public sphere, facing her fears of kissing/driving and gradually gaining confidence in the joy of her own company, are all acts of agency. Even if the film’s climax does not establish Rani as taking charge of her own journey, *Queen* allows us to imagine an alternate future for her.

The narrative’s commentary on the dichotomous thinking of Indian men who expect their wives to exhibit modern traits in public but unquestioning obedience at home is another minor counter-hegemonic plot point. Vijay’s attraction to Rani’s superficial accoutrements of modernity captures the global aspirations of the middle-class man succinctly.

While the counter-hegemonic narratives are few and far between in these two films, their existence within the narrative is not to be discounted. The room for multitudinous interpretations within filmic discourses also needs to be considered.

### C. **Of patriarchal panopticons and postfeminist politics**

Any postfeminist tones of women-centric films should not come as a surprise, given that over 75% of the writers and directors that create them are male. While having a majority-male team at the helm of a film about feminist representation seems counterintuitive for obvious reasons, I will use this space to critique how the patriarchal panopticon perpetuates postfeminist assumptions that influences popular imaginaries of feminism through my learnings from *Pink* and *Queen*.

In Minal's case, the assumption of postfeminism comes through primarily in the employment of a male lawyer as the legitimizing voice in deconstructing the gendered discrimination that she faces. His legal arguments based on exaggerated rhetoric implies a self-evident understanding on his part of the lived experience of an urban, working woman. That the uncritical omnipresence of a paternalistic gaze, attitude and the valorization of his paternalistic instincts seems to imply that feminist resistance is not needed when there is a supportive patriarch who espouses the cause.

The vision of feminism that these postfeminist narratives promote, not only ignore the heterogeneity of Indian women which the paper outlines in detail but also reduce the feminist protagonist to a prop. *Pink* and *Queen* (through Vijaylakshmi and others) encourages the trend of viewing the feminist woman as a Westernized threat to Indian social norms. She is judged as a free-spirited, independent woman who will sooner or later regret her choice to be so. Her choice and agency are constantly negated. *Queen*, especially promotes an individualistic empowerment that threatens nobody, nor the institution of family or the status quo fostered by nationalist discourses. She represents the face of the postfeminist world, showcasing that the collaborative tenets of feminism are not required for liberation, one only needs to work on the technologies of self.

The verbal disavowal of these films as feminist projects both by the filmmakers and the female leads, when their entire marketing campaign says otherwise reflects a opportunistic commoditization of feminism, a phenomenon that exemplifies the postfeminist media market where feminist ideology can be reduced to a tee-shirt slogan. The fear of their film being branded feminist, stems from the long-held notion that these kind of 'issue-based' films will alienate the Indian audience. Ranaut herself admits that she did not think the mass audience was "so

evolved” to enjoy a film like *Queen* (Ranaut as interviewed by Guha, 2014). When asked if this is a good time to be a female actor in Bollywood, she overturns the meaning of the question by saying that “films shouldn’t be made for men/women/children... the protagonist is just a machine.” Her subconscious connection between being a female actor in 2014 and films being targeted at a particular gender, echoes the industry’s fearful imaginary that female-led films are only popular with a female audience. The idea that women’s stories are niche is a deeply interiorized dehumanizing logic that guides this postfeminist evasion of structural inequities between male and female leads.

Interestingly when Ranaut is asked a similar question by a French television channel, she brings up the “strong current of feminism” in *Queen*, asserting that this is a great time to be a female actor in Bollywood and even agrees with the interviewer that she feels a personal responsibility to play roles that empower women (Ranaut as interviewed by Harrison, 2015). The completely contradictory stance that Ranaut takes in this interview reiterates the misconception of feminism as an elite Western discourse that is only acceptable/attractive when spoken about in a Western cultural space. This typifies the postfeminist commoditization of women’s empowerment motivated purely by economics. This also parallels Sharma’s (2017) contention with *Queen*’s narrative that Rani’s resistance is deemed acceptable only because it takes place outside the boundaries of India, in a Western country where these acts of agency are normalized. This possibly also explains the paucity of movies based on rural women. The perception that rural women are not identified as feminist and are not as saleable, is of no use to the postfeminist project.

An ensemble interview of the principle *Pink* cast (titled as *Why Amitabh Bachchan Agreed to do Pink*) saw Bachchan weigh eloquent on the gendered wage gap in the industry, in



spite of the entire female cast being present (Bachchan as interviewed by NDTV, 2016). Instead of using his valued voice to highlight the pay disparities in Bollywood, he focused on a film in which he got paid way less than the female star. It happens both ways, he offered as his input on the wage gap. The *Pink* team achieved peak postfeminism when Bachchan tweeted the following picture to commemorate a year of the film's release. Who needs women when the men are woke?



Figure 3. Screenshot of Amitabh Bachchan's tweet.

Women are at the margins of the production and creative processes in Bollywood (Bhushan, 2017). An increase in women directing women's films shows a marked difference in the way women are showcased, a departure from the homogenized visions that all-male teams usually foist on the audience. That the liplock in *Queen* was suggested by Ranaut (Bahl as interviewed by Sahgal, 2014) is but a small example of why women should have a bigger if not the primary say in the portrayal of women.

Paraphrasing Foucault, the panoptic modality of power aims for the most efficient exercise of disciplinary technologies on the lines of these three criteria: "to obtain the exercise of

power at the lowest possible cost”, to optimize the effects of this social power to its maximum productive potential and to link this optimization to “the output of apparatuses within which it is exercised” (1991b, p. 207). Analogizing the patriarchal gaze that dominates women’s representation on film to the panopticon, one can trace:

i) how the dominant feminist representations that imply the existence of a postfeminist world permit a neo-liberal construction of the empowered woman. This simultaneously allows a claim at feminist cinema without requiring investment in bringing the diversity of women’s lived experiences to the forefront, hiring more women behind the scenes or dismantling the boys club that is the film industry.

ii) The postfeminist film projects simultaneously allow the male filmmakers to lay claims to progressivism while presenting their homogenous, neo-liberal vision of feminism as the definitive feminism.

iii) This ‘progressivism’ is then touted as an indication of the filmmakers viability as players in globalist capitalist transnational circuits. An image that works in conjunction with the ruling right-wing state’s agenda to mobilize this modernity in pursuit of invoking a cultural nationalism among the Indian diasporic audience (Bhattacharya, 2008).

#### D. **Homogenizing feminism**

The mainstream media continues to eulogize most women-centric cinema as feminist. Reductive understandings of feminism, a desire to project themselves as progressive, the ascent of neo-liberal agendas in the newsroom and the mere paucity of women-centric cinema, contribute to hasty labeling of films as empowering to women. The uncritical reporting of *Pink*’s centering of Amitabh Bachchan and the simplistic comparisons of Kangana Ranaut to her character Rani, are just two of the examples of how entertainment media largely regurgitates the

messaging that is fed through publicity campaigns and press releases. In a star-led industry where press access is largely determined by the star himself (sometimes but rarely *herself*), interviews often border on the sycophantic with very few journalists bothering to go beyond descriptive questions on the film being promoted at the time. The rise in entertainment news portals has further enabled the stars to reach a mass market pre-release as they do bulk interviews with several portals at once. This allows them reach out to a bigger audience with lesser effort and reduces the avenues for critical journalism from expert industry correspondents.

This often means phenomenon such as the production of films on women's representation by men or the subordination of women being maintained through these neo-liberal feminist subject representations, is not even questioned in the mainstream media. The media is complicit in the ideological framing of empowerment as couched in neo-liberal patriarchy, serving to benefit the larger nationalist agenda while permitting the pretense of concern about women's subjectivities.

#### E. Concluding thoughts

“We must constantly ask... what is at stake (when)... implicit understandings of gender are being invoked and reinscribed”(Scott, 1986, p. 1074).

While the ostracizing of the Western and the glorification of the traditional is a well-researched subject among feminist scholars, my paper looks at the form that this dichotomy takes in a contemporary context. This paper examines how this is enacted and justified through the conjunction of *productive* and *repressive* technologies of power in cinema that claims to be feminist. Analyzing gender representation through a postcolonial reading of Foucauldian concepts, this study attempts to move beyond a qualitative content analysis into the political *sine qua non* underlying these narratives.

This study is not intended to comment on what the films should or should not have conveyed. Instead, it aims to direct the conversation towards a critical interpretation of films that tell women's stories but are not necessarily feminist. This is of importance in a nation where popular film often functions as a prominent site where discourses around what is permissible especially when it comes to women's sexuality are represented and normalized. Within the neo-liberal narratives emerging from showbiz, these discourses find themselves at the mercy of the zeitgeist but their systemic roots remain unchallenged. Future research could focus on audience readings of these films, taking into consideration economic and social heterogeneities of the filmgoing public. How do these film's ideological messages connect to the experiential, is another avenue that has not been explored much. An understudied area is the institutional marginalization of women working behind the scenes in Bollywood, especially considering the existing divisions of labor and systems of production.

Going back to the preamble, the lawyer defending Jyoti Singh Pandey's rapists indirectly blamed Bollywood for her rape by rationalizing, "They left our Indian culture. They were under the imagination of the filmy culture under which they could do anything" (Sharma as interviewed by Udwin, 2015). The idea that Bollywood representations are the benchmark for the extent of possibilities for a woman in a metropolitan city such as Delhi, indicts the postfeminist nature of film representation versus the realities of a patriarchal culture that valorizes the boundaries it places on women. Sharma added "We have the best culture. In our culture there is no place for a woman." Whether it was due to English being not being his primary language that led to this statement we will never know, but proof is this truism lies in the hostility towards women in public spaces and the idea that such women do not exemplify a superior 'Indian culture.'

As a feminist media scholar, I stand with the claims of esteemed scholars such as Laura Mulvey, Jyotika Virdi, Tania Modleski, Sumita Chakravarty and many more that film as a coded artificial construct has a considerable ability to criticize, question and illuminate the workings of power in capitalist society. Exclusionary and reductive visions of feminist representation need to be critiqued especially at this moment in time when popular conversations around film and television are seemingly incomplete without a mention of gender politics.

In the process of conducting my analysis and documenting my research, I have become aware of my own privileged gaze as a Hindu scholar working in first world academia. The attempt has and will always be to unpack my own privilege especially while contextualizing questions of power, agency and resistance. The tendency to adopt the dominant Western and/or Hindu panopticon gaze as neutral is one that I hope to keep in check as it comes in conflict with the driving principle of an intersectional feminist future.

### CITED LITERATURE

1. Abbasi, M. (2017, September 23). Aamir Khan's Dangal Becomes the Highest Grossing Bollywood Film in Hong Kong. *India.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.india.com/showbiz/dangal-hong-kong-box-office-collection-the-aamir-khan-starrer-becomes-the-highest-grossing-bollywood-film-in-hong-kong-2493088/>
2. Agarwal, R. (2014). Changing Roles of Women in Indian Cinema. *Silpakorn University Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts*, 14(2), 91-106.
3. Alexander, M. J., & Mohanty, C. T. (1995). *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*. Routledge. Althusser, L. (1971).
4. Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*, 171-74.
5. Amigot, P., & Pujal, M. (2009). On power, freedom, and gender: A fruitful tension between Foucault and feminism. *Theory & Psychology*, 19(5), 646-669.
6. Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, culture & society*, 7(2), 295-310.
7. Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization* (Vol. 1). U of Minnesota Press.
8. Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands. La frontera. The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
9. Bandyopadhyay, R. (2008). Nostalgia, identity and tourism: Bollywood in the Indian diaspora. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 6(2), 79-100.
10. Banerjee, S. (1989). Marginalization of women's popular culture in nineteenth century Bengal. *Recasting women: Essays in colonial history*, 127-79.
11. Banet-Weiser, S., & Portwood-Stacer, L. (2006). 'I just want to be me again!' Beauty pageants, reality television and post-feminism. *Feminist Theory*, 7(2), 255-272.
12. Bartky, S.L. (1990). *Femininity and domination*. New York: Routledge.
13. Bartky, S. L. (1997). *Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power* (pp. pp-61). na.
14. Basu, S. (2016). Looking through Misogyny: Indian Men's Rights Activists, Law, and Challenges for Feminism. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 28(1), 45-68.

15. Bhattacharya, N. (2008). Romancing Religion: Neoliberal Bollywood's Gendered Visual Repertoire for a Pain-Free Globalization. *Tracing an Indian Diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations*, 346-67.
16. Bhushan, N. (2017, May 21). How Female Filmmakers Are Transforming Indian Cinema. *HollywoodReporter.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-female-filmmakers-are-transforming-indian-cinema-1006036>
17. Bordo, S. (1988). Anorexia nervosa: Psychopathology as the crystallization of culture. In I. Diamond & L. Quinby (Eds.), *Feminism and Foucault* (pp. 87–118). Boston: Northeastern University Press.
18. Bordo, S. (1993). Feminism, Foucault and the politics of the body. In C. Ramazanoglu (Ed.), *Up against Foucault: Explorations of some tensions between Foucault and feminism* (pp. 179–202). London: Routledge.
19. Bose, N. (2009). The Hindu right and the politics of censorship: three case studies of policing Hindi Cinema, 1992-2002. *The Velvet Light Trap*, (63), 22-33.
20. Brah, A., & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I A woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 75-86. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss3/8>
21. Bunting, Annie. 1992. Feminism, Foucault, and law as power/knowledge. *Alberta Law Review* 30(3): 829-42.
22. Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge
23. Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford University Press.
24. Butler, J. (1999). "GENDER IS BURNING: QUESTIONS OF." *Feminist film theory: A reader*, 336
25. Butler, J. (2004). Bodies and power revisited. *Feminism and the final Foucault*, 183-194.
26. Butler, J. (2013). For white girls only?: Postfeminism and the politics of inclusion. *Feminist Formations*, 25(1), 35-58.
27. Chadha, R., Crouching Tiger Motion Pictures, Ahuja, N.T. & Mittra, R. (Producers) & Shrivastav, S.K. (Director). (2014). *Revolver Rani* [Motion Picture]. India: Wave Cinemas Ponty Chadha, Moving Pictures, Tigmanshu Dhulia.

28. Chakravarty, S. (1993). National Identity in Popular Indian Cinema 1947–1987. *Austin: U of Texas P*. Chatterjee, P. (1987). *The nationalist resolution of the women's question* (pp. pp-233). Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.
29. Chatterjee, P. (1987). *The nationalist resolution of the women's question* (pp. pp-233). Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.
30. Chatterjee, P. (1989). Colonialism, nationalism, and colonized women: The contest in India. *American ethnologist*, 16(4), 622-633.
31. Chatterjee, Suprateek (2012, November 17). Looking for screen time. *HindustanTimes.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/regional-movies/looking-for-screen-time/story-ANe91Kjt6YrUPv7X7TqujJ.html>
32. Chatterjee, Suprateek (2016, December 29). “New Bollywood” Is Being Held Back by Its Male-Dominated Star System. *Buzzfeed News*. Retrieved from [https://www.buzzfeed.com/suprateekchatterjee/dangal-and-the-well-intentioned-but-misguided-feminism-of-ne?utm\\_term=.ecK88J5AOx#.xyNmm8y5Q1](https://www.buzzfeed.com/suprateekchatterjee/dangal-and-the-well-intentioned-but-misguided-feminism-of-ne?utm_term=.ecK88J5AOx#.xyNmm8y5Q1)
33. Chatterjee, Sushmita (2016). ‘English Vinglish’ and Bollywood: what is ‘new’ about the ‘new woman’? *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(8), 1179-1192.
34. Chatterjee, T. (2014). Size Zero Begums and Dirty Pictures: The Contemporary Female Star in Bollywood. *SYNOPTIQUE: An Online Journal of Film and Moving Image Studies*, 3(1), 1-29.
35. Chatterjee, T. (2017). Rape culture, misogyny, and urban anxiety in NH10 and Pink. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-17.
36. Chopra, A. (2017, January 17). Wins, hands-down: Dangal review by Anupama Chopra. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/movie-reviews/wins-hands-down-dangal-review-by-anupama-chopra/story-V7dOE6m9ePjh3foF65asdJ.html>
37. Chow, R. (1994). Where have all the natives gone? In A. Bammer (Ed.), *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (pp. 125-151). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
38. Ciecko, A. (2001). Superhit hunk heroes for sale: Globalization and Bollywood's gender politics. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 11(2), 121-143.
39. Collective, C. R. (1977). 'A Black Feminist Statement' (pp. 210-18). na.
40. Copjec, J. (1989). The orthopsychic subject: Film theory and the reception of Lacan. *October*, 49, 53-71.
41. Dasgupta, S. D. (1996). Feminist Consciousness in Woman-Centered Hindi Films. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 30(1), 173-189.



42. Datta, A. (2016). Another rape? The persistence of public/private divides in sexual violence debates in India. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 6(2), 173-177.
43. De Lauretis, T. (1984). *Alice doesn't: Feminism, semiotics, cinema* (Vol. 316). Indiana University Press.
44. Desai, J. (2004). *Beyond Bollywood: The cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film*. Routledge
45. Desai, S., & Andrist, L. (2010). Gender scripts and age at marriage in India. *Demography*, 47(3), 667-687.
46. Deshpande, S. (1993). Imagined economies: Styles of nation-building in twentieth century India. *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 25(26), 5-35.
47. Devasundaram, A. I. (2016). *India's New Independent Cinema: Rise of the Hybrid*. Routledge.
48. Dissanayake, W. (Ed.). (1996). *Narratives of agency: Self-making in China, India and Japan*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
49. Dosekun, S. (2015). For western girls only? Post-feminism as transnational culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 15(6), 960-975.
50. Drury, B. J., & Kaiser, C. R. (2014). Allies against sexism: The role of men in confronting sexism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 70(4), 637-652.
51. Dwyer, R. (2004). Yeh shaadi nahi ho sakti! ("This wedding cannot happen!"): romance and marriage in contemporary Hindi Cinema. *GW Jones & K. Ramdas (Eds.)*, 59-90.
52. Dwyer, R., & Pinney, C. (2003). Pleasure and the Nation: The History. *Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India, London, School of African and Oriental Studies*.
53. Erbrant, J. (2015, September 30). Indian Woman Are 'Loitering' At Night To Prove A Powerful Point. *HuffingtonPost.com*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-loiter-indian-women-public-space-pri\\_us\\_560b0568e4b0af3706de6c50](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-loiter-indian-women-public-space-pri_us_560b0568e4b0af3706de6c50)
54. Express Web Desk. (2016, November 26). Amitabh Bachchan's PINK to have special screening at United Nations. *IndianExpress.com*. Retrieved from <http://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/amitabh-bachchan-pink-to-have-a-special-screening-at-united-nations-4396582/>

55. Fabiano, P. M., Perkins, H. W., Berkowitz, A., Linkenbach, J., & Stark, C. (2003). Engaging men as social justice allies in ending violence against women: Evidence for a social norms approach. *Journal of American College Health*, 52(3), 105-112
56. Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold
57. Fairclough, N. (2000). Critical analysis of media discourse. In P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media studies: A reader* (2nd ed., pp. 308-325). New York: New York University Press.
58. Finley, L. M. (1989). Breaking women's silence in law: The dilemma of the gendered nature of legal reasoning. *Notre Dame L. Rev.*, 64, 886.
59. Foucault, M. (1971). Orders of discourse. *Information (International Social Science Council)*, 10(2), 7-30.
60. Foucault, M. (1976). *Histoire de la sexualité, I: La volonté de savoir* [The history of sexuality. Vol. I: The will to knowledge]. Paris: Gallimard
61. Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon.
62. Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.cc.uic.edu/stable/1343197>
63. Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault* (pp. 16-49).
64. Foucault, M. (1991a). *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. University of Chicago Press.
65. Foucault, M. (1991b). *Discipline and Punish*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
66. Foucault, M. (1991c). *The Foucault reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow.
67. Foucault, Michel (1996): Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–1984, Sylvère Lotringer (ed), Lysa Hochroth & John Johnson (trans), New York: Semiotext(e).
68. Gabriel, K. (2002). Designing desire: gender in mainstream Bombay cinema. *Translating Desire: The Politics of Gender and Culture in India*. B. Bose, ed, 48-81.
69. Gaines, J. (1984). Women and representation. *Jump Cut*, 29, 25-27.
70. Ganti, T. (2012). *Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry*. Duke University Press.

71. Gehlawat, A. (2010). *Reframing Bollywood: Theories of Popular Hindi Cinema*. SAGE Publications India.
72. Gehlawat, A. (2011). The Gori in the Story: The Shifting Dynamics of Whiteness in the Bollywood Film. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, (26).
73. Ghosal, S. G. (2005). Major Trends of Feminism in India. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 793-812.
74. Ghosh, S., & Gada, K.K. (Producers) & Ghosh, S. (Director). (2012). *Kahaani* [Motion picture]. India: Boundscript Motion Pictures
75. Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). Grounded theory: The discovery of grounded theory. *Sociology The Journal Of The British Sociological Association*, 12, 27-49.
76. Glenn, E. N. (2008). Yearning for lightness: Transnational circuits in the marketing and consumption of skin lighteners. *Gender & society*, 22(3), 281-302.
77. Gopal, S., & Moorti, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi song and dance*. U of Minnesota Press.
78. Gopinath, G. (2005). *Impossible desires: Queer diasporas and South Asian public cultures*. Duke University Press.
79. Govindan, P. P., & Dutta, B. (2008). From Villain to Traditional Housewife!: The Politics of Globalization and Women's Sexuality in the "New" Indian Media. In A. Kavoori & A. Punathambekar (Eds.), *Global Bollywood* (pp. 180-202). New York University Press.
80. Gregg, N. (1993). Trying to put things first: Negotiating subjectivities in a workplace organizing campaign. In S. Fisher & K. Davis (Eds.), *Negotiating at the margins: The gendered discourses of power and resistance* (pp. 172-204). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
81. Grewal, I., & Kaplan, C. (Eds.). (1994). *Scattered hegemonies: Postmodernity and transnational feminist practices*. U of Minnesota Press.
82. Grewal, I., & Kaplan, C. (2000). Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Feminist Practices [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v5i1/grewal.htm>
83. Groves, D. (2016, September 25). Amitabh Bachchan hails the 'Pink' revolution as women's rights thriller reigns again in India. *Forbes.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dongroves/2016/09/25/amitabh-bachchan-hails-the-pink-revolution-as-womens-rights-thriller-reigns-again-in-india/#39cd99f32c9c>

84. Gupta, A. (2016, July 26). Why Aren't We Talking About Sexual Consent in India? *FeminismInIndia.com*. Retrieved from <https://feminisminindia.com/2016/07/26/sexual-consent-in-india/>
85. Gupta, H. (2016). Taking action: the desiring subjects of neoliberal feminism in India. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 17(1), 152-168.
86. Gupta, S. (2015). Kahaani, Gulaab Gang and Queen: Remaking the queens of Bollywood. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 13(2), 107-123.
87. Hancock, M. (2001). Home science and the nationalization of domesticity in colonial India. *Modern Asian Studies*, 35(4), 871-903.
88. Harris, K. L. (2018). Yes means yes and no means no, but both these mantras need to go: communication myths in consent education and anti-rape activism. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 46(2), 155-178.
89. Haynes, D., & Prakash, G. (1991). *Contesting power: Resistance and everyday social relations in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press
90. Hegde, R. S. (1996). Narratives of silence: Rethinking gender, agency, and power from the communication experiences of battered women in South India. *Communication Studies*, 47(4), 303-317
91. Hegde, R. S. (2011). *Circuits of visibility: gender and transnational media cultures*. NYU Press.
92. Hengehold, L. (1994). An immodest proposal: Foucault, hysterization, and the "second rape". *Hypatia*, 9(3), 88-107.
93. Honneth, A. (1995) The struggle for recognition: on Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity. In *The Fragmented World of the Social*. Albany: SUNY Press
94. hooks, b. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, London: Turnaround.
95. IANS. (2014, January 3). Queen song London Thumakda: Kangana Ranaut's electrifying wedding number will make you dance. *BollywoodLife.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/queen-song-london-thumakda-kangana-ranauts-electrifying-wedding-number-will-make-you-dance/>
96. IANS. (2016, November 11). Sexual violence largely ignored by film industry: Amitabh Bachchan. *IndianExpress.com*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/sexual-violence-largely-ignored-by-film-industry-amitabh-bachchan-4370524/>

97. Innes, C. L. (1994). Virgin territories and motherlands: Colonial and nationalist representations of Africa and Ireland. *Feminist Review*, (47), 1-14.
98. Iyengar, A. (2016, September 2016). Pink's climax was changed, reveals Tapsee Pannu in an EXCLUSIVE interview! *BollywoodLife.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/pinks-climax-was-changed-reveals-tapsee-pannu-in-an-exclusive-interview/>
99. Iyengar, A. (2017, April 6). Vikas Bahl accused of molestation, OUSTED from Phantom Films. *BollywoodLife.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/vikas-bahl-accused-of-molestation-ousted-from-phantom-films/>
100. Iyer, M. (2017, January 25). *Dangal* Movie Review. *Times of India*. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/movie-reviews/dangal/movie-review/56102623.cms>
101. Jamkhandikar, S. (2016, September 22). Interview: Shoojit Sircar. *In.reuters.com*. Retrieved from <https://in.reuters.com/article/shoojit-sircar-pink-film-bollywood/interview-shoojit-sircar-idINKCN11S132>
102. Jay, M. (1994) *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press
103. Jha, P. (2003). Lyrical nationalism: gender, friendship, and excess in 1970s Hindi cinema. *The Velvet Light Trap*, 51(1), 43-53.
104. Jha, S., & Adelman, M. (2009). Looking for love in all the white places: a study of skin color preferences on Indian matrimonial and mate-seeking websites. *Studies in South Asian Film & Media*, 1(1), 65-83.
105. Kamath, S. (2014, March 8). Queen: She rules. *TheHindu.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/features/cinema/cinema-reviews/queen-she-rules/article5764153.ece>
106. Kapadia, M. K. (2009). *Body image in Indian women as influenced by the Indian media*. Texas Woman's University.
107. Kaplan, C., & Grewal, I. (1999). Transnational feminist cultural studies: Beyond the Marxism/poststructuralism/feminism divides. *Between woman and nation: Nationalisms, transnational feminisms, and the state*, 349-363.
108. Kapoor, A. (2015, April 28). 11 Reasons Why Queen is the Most Feminist Film of Recent Years. *Vagabomb.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.vagabomb.com/10-reasons-why-Queen-is-the-most-feminist-film-of-Bollywood-yet/>

109. Karanjia, B.K. (1983). The star system: 'Another kind of nonsense, another profound humanity?' In A. Vasudev & Philippe Lenglet (Eds.), *Indian cinema superbazaar* (pp. 84-88). New Delhi: Vikas Publishing.
110. Kaushal, S. (2016, September 18). Five Ways Bollywood's Feminism Needs to Change. *HindustanTimes.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/amitabh-bachchan-s-pink-five-ways-bollywood-feminism-needs-to-change/story-wOkpNetxLKOAH49opSyhcN.html>
111. Kavoori, A. P., & Punathambekar, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Global Bollywood*. NYU Press.
112. Khan, A., Rao, K. & Roy Kapur, S. (Producers) & Tiwari, N. (Director). (2016). *Dangal* [Motion picture]. India: Walt Disney Pictures, Aamir Khan Productions, UTV Motion Pictures
113. Khanna, R. (1998). The battle of Algiers and the Nouba of the women of Mont Chenoua: From third to fourth cinema. *Third Text*, 12(43), 13-32.
114. Koimoi.com Team (2014, April 13). Queen makes more than 450% profit post 6<sup>th</sup> Friday | Box Office Collections. *Koimoi.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.koimoi.com/box-office/queen-makes-more-than-450-profit-post-6th-friday-box-office-collections-2/>
115. Koimoi.com Team. (2016, September 25). Pink makes over 100% profit at the box office. *Koimoi.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.koimoi.com/box-office/pink-makes-over-100-profit-at-the-box-office/>
116. Kommaraju, S.A., & Raman, U. (2017). Indian millennials define feminism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 17(5), 892-896.
117. Kumar, A. (2017). Item Number/Item Girl. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40(2), 338-341.
118. Kumar, B., Kumar, Kumar, K., Singh, S.R., & Agarwal, A. (Producers) & Mehta, H. (Director). (2017). *Simran* [Motion Picture]. India: T-Series, Paramhans Creations Entertainments, Adarsh Telemedia.
119. Kumar, S. (2008). Hollywood, Bollywood Tollywood: Redefining the Global in Indian Cinema. In A. Kavoori & A. Punathambekar (Eds.), *Global Bollywood* (pp. 79-96). New York University Press.
120. Lewis, R., & Mills, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader*. Routledge.
121. Lionnet, F. (2003). Feminisms and universalisms: "Universal Rights" and the legal debate around the practice of female excision in France. *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader*, 368-380.

122. Loomba, A. (1993). Tangled histories: Indian feminism and Anglo-American feminist criticism. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 12(2), pp.271-278.
123. Loomba, A. (1998). Colonial and postcolonial identities. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 91-145.
124. Lorde, A. (1976). *Coal*. New York, NY: Norton.
125. Lorde, A. (1978). *The Black Unicorn*. New York, NY: Norton.
126. Lorde, A. (2003). The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. *Feminist postcolonial theory: A reader* (pp. 25-28).
127. MacKinnon, C. A. (1983). Feminism, Marxism, method, and the state: Toward feminist jurisprudence. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 8(4), 635-658.
128. Maheshwari, L. (2013, October 29). Why is Bollywood such a powerful industry? Mumbai provides an answer. *Indiewire.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.indiewire.com/2013/10/why-is-bollywood-such-a-powerful-industry-mumbai-provides-an-answer-33491/>
129. Mankekar, P. (1993). National texts and gendered lives: An ethnography of television viewers in a north Indian city. *American ethnologist*, 20(3), 543-563.
130. Mankekar, P. (1999). Brides who travel: Gender, transnationalism, and nationalism in Hindi film. *positions*, 7(3), 731-762.
131. Manoshi and Rushi. (2014, March 14). Queen's designer duo on how they got absolute wrong fit jeans for Kangana. *IndianExpress.com*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/play/queens-designer-duo-on-how-they-got-absolute-wrong-fit-jeans-for-kangana/>
132. Masand, R. (2014, March 7). Class act. *Movies That Matter*. Retrieved from <http://www.rajeevmasand.com/reviews/our-films/class-act/>
133. Masand, R. (2016, September 16). Pink is Gold! *Movies That Matter*. Retrieved from <http://www.rajeevmasand.com/reviews/our-films/pink-is-gold/>
134. Masand, R. (2016, December 23). Benefit of bout. *Movies That Matter*. Retrieved from <http://www.rajeevmasand.com/reviews/our-films/benefit-of-bout/>
135. McNay, L. (2013). *Foucault and feminism: Power, gender and the self*. John Wiley & Sons.
136. Mehta, M. (2005). Globalizing Bombay cinema: Reproducing the Indian state and family. *Cultural Dynamics*, 17(2), 135-154.



137. Menghani, S. (2015, July 17). Delhi: 19-year-old girl stabbed 35 times for protesting against eve teasing dies. *News18.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.news18.com/news/india/delhi-19-year-old-girl-stabbed-35-times-for-protesting-against-eve-teasing-dies-1021836.html>
138. Menon, P. (2016, September 20). Pink is a rare Bollywood film that goes beyond gender even while championing feminism. *Firstpost.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/pink-is-a-rare-bollywood-film-that-goes-beyond-gender-even-while-championing-feminism-3012586.html>
139. Miller, J. R. (2015). The World and Bollywood: An Examination of the Globalization Paradigm. *Anthós*, 7(1), 5.
140. Mishra, V. (2002). *Bollywood cinema: Temples of desire*. Psychology Press.
141. Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist review*, (30), 61-88.
142. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Zubaan.
143. Naficy, H. (2003). Phobic spaces and liminal panics: Independent transnational film genre. *Multiculturalism, postcoloniality, and transnational media*, 203-226.
144. NDTV. (2016, September 15). Amitabh Bachchan On Why He Agreed to Do *Pink*. *Ndtv.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.ndtv.com/video/entertainment/ndtv-special-ndtv-24x7/amitabh-bachchan-on-why-he-agreed-to-do-pink-431411>
145. Nichols, R. (2010). Postcolonial studies and the discourse of Foucault: Survey of a field of problematization. *Foucault Studies*, (9), 111-144.
146. Nijhawan, A. (2009). Excusing the female dancer: Tradition and transgression in Bollywood dancing. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 7(2), 99-112.
147. Ong, A., & Peletz, M. G. (Eds.). (1995). *Bewitching women, pious men: Gender and body politics in Southeast Asia*. Univ of California Press.
148. Oza, R. (2006). *The making of neoliberal India: Nationalism, gender, and the paradoxes of globalization*. Taylor & Francis.
149. Pal, D. (2014, March 7). Queen Review: Kangana Ranaut is pitch perfect in a fabulous film. *Firstpost.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/queen-review-kangana-ranaut-is-pitch-perfect-in-a-fabulous-film-1423165.html>



150. Papacharissi, Z., & Fernback, J. (2008). The aesthetic power of the Fab 5: Discursive themes of homonormativity in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 32(4), 348-367.
151. Parameswaran, R., & Cardoza, K. (2009). Melanin on the margins: Advertising and the cultural politics of fair/light/white beauty in India. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 11(3), 213-274.
152. Parameswaran, R. E., & Cardoza, K. (2009). Immortal comics, epidermal politics: Representations of gender and colorism in India. *Journal of children and media*, 3(1), 19-34.
153. Patranobis, S. (2017, May 18). The father's values make me vomit: Chinese feminists are bashing Dangal. Retrieved October 22, 2017, from [http://www.india-forums.com/forum\\_posts.asp?TID=4848621](http://www.india-forums.com/forum_posts.asp?TID=4848621)
154. Phillips, N. & Hardy, C. (2002). What is Discourse Analysis? In N. Phillips & C. Hardy (Eds.), *Discourse Analysis* (pp. 2-18). SAGE Publications, Inc.
155. Ponzanesi, S., & Waller, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Postcolonial cinema studies*. Routledge.
156. Poudyal, R. (2000). Alternative Masculinities in South Asia An Exploration through Films for Schools. *IDS bulletin*, 31(2), 75-78.
157. Prasad, M.M. (2008). Surviving Bollywood. In A. Kavoori & A. Punathambekar (Eds.), *Global Bollywood* (pp. 41-51). New York University Press
158. PTI. (2016, November 4). Big B's Pink to be screened to Rajasthan police to sensitise them towards women. *DeccanChronicle.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/entertainment/bollywood/041116/big-bs-pink-to-be-screened-to-rajasthan-police-to-sensitise-them-towards-women.html>
159. Punathambekar, A. (2005). Bollywood in the Indian-American diaspora: Mediating a transitive logic of cultural citizenship. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(2), 151-173.
160. Radhakrishnan, S. (2009). Professional women, good families: Respectable femininity and the cultural politics of a "New" India. *Qualitative Sociology*, 32(2), 195-212.
161. Rajadhyaksha, A. (1999). The Judgement: Re-forming the "Public". *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, 32, 34-52.
162. Rajadhyaksha, A. (2003). The'Bollywoodization' of the Indian cinema: cultural nationalism in a global arena. *Inter-Asia cultural studies*, 4(1), 25-39.

163. Rajendran, S. (2017, January 3). A man who forcibly chops his daughter's hair: Is 'Dangal' feminist or patriarchal? *The News Minute*. Retrieved from <http://www.thenewsminute.com/article/man-who-forcibly-chops-his-daughters-hair-dangal-feminist-or-patriarchal-55176>
164. Ramasubramanian, S., & Oliver, M. B. (2003). Portrayals of sexual violence in popular Hindi films, 1997–99. *Sex roles*, 48(7), 327-336.
165. Ravindran, V. (2001, September 10). Victim of whims? *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/2001/09/10/stories/13100691.htm>
166. Rebolini, A. (2014, July 14). Let's Stop Singing Songs About Women Who Don't Know They're Beautiful. *Buzzfeed.com*. Retrieved from [https://www.buzzfeed.com/ariannarebolini/stop-singing-songs-about-women-who-dont-know-theyre-beautifu?utm\\_term=.cp6LnP4AxE#.po7p8xORzY](https://www.buzzfeed.com/ariannarebolini/stop-singing-songs-about-women-who-dont-know-theyre-beautifu?utm_term=.cp6LnP4AxE#.po7p8xORzY)
167. Rose, N. (1996). Governing "advanced" liberal democracies. *The anthropology of the state: A reader*, 144162.
168. Sahgal, Geety. (2014, March 21). Kangana Ranaut's Queen benefited from positive word of mouth: Director. *IndianExpress.com*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/play/kangana-ranaut-queen-benefited-from-positive-word-of-mouth-director/>
169. Sahgal, Gita and Yuval-Davis, N. (1994), 'The uses of fundamentalism', *Women Against Fundamentalism Journal*, 5, 7-9.
170. Samuels, G. M., & Ross-Sheriff, F. (2008). Identity, oppression, and power: Feminisms and intersectionality theory. *Affilia*, 23(1), 5-9.
171. Sangari, K., & Vaid, S. (Eds.). (1990). *Recasting women: Essays in Indian colonial history*. Rutgers University Press.
172. Sarrazin, N. (2008). Songs from the Heart: Musical Coding, Emotional Sentiment, and Transnational Sonic Identity in India's Popular Film Music. *Global Bollywood*, 203-222.
173. Sartre, J-P. (1969) *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. London: Routledge.
174. Sawicki, J. (1991). *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, power, and the body*. Psychology Press.
175. Scott, J. W. (2007). Gender as a useful category of historical analysis. In *Culture, society and sexuality* (pp. 77-97). Routledge.
176. Sen, R. (2014, March 7). Review: Kangna rules in *Queen*. *Rediff.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.rediff.com/movies/report/review-kangana-rules-in-queen/20140307.htm>

177. Shankar, A. (2014, October 9). The Indian Film Scene Diversifies Even As Bollywood Dominates. *npr.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2014/10/09/354808515/the-indian-film-scene-diversifies-even-as-bollywood-dominates>
178. Shalit, R. (1998, April 6). Canny and Lacy: Ally, Dharma, Ronnie, and the betrayal of postfeminism. *The New Republic*, pp. 27-32.
179. Sharma, R., Kalloccikal Basheer, H., Lahiri, R., Kuma, S., Sircar, S. (Producers) & Roy Chowdhury, A. (Director). (2016). *Pink* [Motion Picture]. India: Rashmi Sharma Telefilms Limited.
180. Sharma, S. (2017). Transnational Publics, Nationalist Ideology and the ‘Woman Question’ in Hindi Cinema: The Film Queen (2014). *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 1-15
181. Sharpe, J. (1993). *Allegories of empire: The figure of woman in the colonial text*. U of Minnesota Press.
182. Sharpe, J. (2007). Gender, Nation, and Globalization in Monsoon Wedding and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge. In *Global Migration, Social Change, and Cultural Transformation* (pp. 37-57). Palgrave Macmillan US.
183. Shekhar, M. (2016, September 14). ‘Pink’ – Movie Review. *Mid-Day.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.mid-day.com/articles/pink-movie-review-bollywood-amitabh-bachchan-taapsee-pannu-rating/17610155>
184. Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (1994). Unthinking eurocentricism. *Multiculturalism and the media*. London Routledge.
185. Shohat, E., & Stam, R. (Eds.). (2003). *Multiculturalism, postcoloniality, and transnational media*. Rutgers University Press.
186. Silverman, K. (1984). Dis-embodiment of the female voice. *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, 137.
187. Sidner, S. (2011, April 8). The secret behind Bollywood’s success. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Music/04/08/bollywood.playback.singers/index.html>
188. Sinha, A. & Deo, A. (Producers) & Sen, S. (Director). (2014). *Gulaab Gang* [Motion picture]. India: Alumbra Entertainment
189. Smart, Carol. 1989. *Feminism and the power of law*. New York: Routledge.

190. Smith, P. (1988). *Discerning the subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
191. Spivak, G. C. (1985). Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism. *Critical inquiry*, 12(1), 243-261.
192. Spivak, G. (1993). Can the subaltern speak? In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (pp. 66-112). Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
193. Tere, N. S. (2012). Gender reflections in mainstream Hindi cinema. *Global Media Journal*, 3(1), 1-9.
194. Thapan, M. (2004). Embodiment and identity in contemporary society: Femina and the 'new' Indian woman. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 38(3), 411-444.
195. Thussu, D. K. (2008). The Globalization of "Bollywood" – The Hype and Hope. In A. Kavoori & A. Punathambekar (Eds.), *Global Bollywood* (pp.97-113). New York University Press.
196. Time Out India. (2014, March 12). *Kangana Ranaut on life after Queen*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsmLS1uRycM>
197. van Dijk, T. A. (1997). Discourse as interaction in society. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction* (pp. 1-37). London: Sage.
198. Vetticad, A. (2016, September 16). Review 430: PINK. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://annavetticadgoes2themovies.blogspot.in/2016/09/review-430-pink.html>
199. Viacom 18 Motion Pictures, Kashyap, A., Motwane, V., Mantena, M. (Producers) & Bahl, V. (Director). (2014). *Queen* [Motion Picture]. India: Phantom Films.
200. Viridi, J. (2003). *The cinematic imagiNation [sic]: Indian popular films as social history*. Rutgers University Press.
201. Viridi, J. (2017). A national cinema's transnational aspirations? Considerations on "Bollywood". *South Asian Popular Culture*, 15(1), 1-22.
202. Viridi, J., & Creekmur, C. K. (2006). India: Bollywood's global coming of age. *Contemporary Asian Cinema: Popular Culture in a Global Frame*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 133-144.
203. Vishwanath, K. (1997). Shame and control: Sexuality and power in feminist discourse in India. *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, 313-28.

204. Waugh, T. (2001). Queer Bollywood, or 'I'm the Player, You're the Naive One': Patterns of Sexual Subversion in Recent Indian Popular Cinema. *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*.
205. Wong, N. (1977). *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park: Poems*. Berkeley, CA: Kelsey Street Press.
206. Yar, M. (2002). Panoptic Power and the Pathologisation of Vision: Critical Reflections on the Foucauldian Thesis. *Surveillance & Society*, 1(3), 254-271.
207. Zee Studios, Jain, K. & Pitti, N. (Producers) & Krish (Director). (2018). *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi* [Motion Picture]. India: Kairos Kontent Studios
208. Zeisler, A. (2016). *We were feminists once: From riot grrrl to CoverGirl, the buying and selling of a political movement*. Public Affairs.
209. Zoom. (2014, March 3). *Queen | Kangna Ranaut & Vikas Bahl exclusive interview* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJbL82P74pM>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

<u>FIGURE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
1.	Official poster of the feature film <i>Pink</i> .....	38
2.	A desolate Rani in Paris.....	71
3.	Screenshot of Amitabh Bachchan's tweet.....	98

## VITA

- NAME: Pratiksha Menon
- EDUCATION: B.A., History, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, India, 2004  
 Master's Diploma in Mass Communication, Pune, India, 2006
- TEACHING: Department of Communication, University of Illinois at Chicago,  
 (TA) 2016-2018
- PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP: National Communication Association
- CONFERENCES: The Joke's On You: Hillary Clinton as the memetic monstrous feminine. Presentation forthcoming at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Utah, November, 2018.
- Feminist Representations in the Television Show Archer. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Dallas, November 2017.
- Toxic love: An intersectional reading of familial relations and romantic gaze in popular Bollywood cinema. Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Communication Association, Dallas, November 2017. Principle Author: Dr. Ishani Mukherjee
- Bollywood's Leading Ladies: Feminist Representations through a Patriarchal Lens. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Midwest Popular Culture Association, October 2017
- PUBLICATION: Menon, P. (2017). Book review: This is why we can't have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture.
- NON-ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: Freelance Communications Consultant, Mumbai, India, 2012-2016  
 Client Servicing Manager, Nine Winds Media, Mumbai, India, 2010-2011  
 Associate Producer, Bloomberg UTV Business News, Mumbai, India, 2008 - 2010  
 Reporter, Times Now Global Broadcasting, Mumbai, India, 2006-2007  
 Editorial Intern, Star News Television Channel, Mumbai, India, 2006