

A Pilot Study on the Contribution of Women-Centric Hindi Films on Undergraduate Students' Perception of Emerging Educational and Social Trends: A Case Study of Sibsagar University, Sivasagar, Assam, India

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ABSTRACT:

Giving a deep insight about women centric films is essential for students as it provides critical understanding into gender representation, social dynamics and the evolving role of women in society. This study adopted a qualitative research design. It combined survey based data collection with thematic analysis to identify the list of popular women centric movies aligned with educational and social themes resonate with students of Sibsagar University. The selection of films for this study was conducted through a pilot survey among 113 students studying in the Department of Education, Sibsagar University, Sivasagar, Assam through incidental sampling technique where total 9 women-centric movies were found most viewed movies by the sampled students. So, those 9 movies were selected for the present study. A self-made unstructured interview schedule was used for this research study to know which specific women centric Hindi movies have had a significant impact on undergraduate students' perspectives studying in Sibsagar University on educational and social trends and how. It was found in this study that Women-centric Hindi films have had a notable impact on student perspectives, especially in areas of gender sensitivity, educational motivation and social justice awareness. These findings suggested a growing appreciation for socially conscious cinema among youth in semi-urban academic environments like Sibsagar University, Assam.

Keywords: Women-Centric Hindi Films, Undergraduate Students Perception, Educational and Social Trends, Suggestions.

I INTRODUCTION

(Theoretical Background and Justification of the Study)

Cinema was introduced to India in 1896 by the Lumière Brothers in Bombay. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, widely known as Dadasaheb Phalke and recognized as the father of Indian cinema, produced India's first silent feature film, *Raja Harishchandra*, in 1913. This landmark film laid the foundation for the Indian film industry. By the 1920s, cinema had begun to integrate into Indian social life. Hindi cinema, often categorized as popular art, both reflects and shapes Indian popular culture. Aimed at mass audiences, it offers a window into the dominant ideologies of the nation. Commonly referred to as Bollywood, Hindi

films have become a key medium through which Indian culture is showcased and interpreted. Over the years, they have captured the changing dynamics of Indian society more vividly than most other art forms. Mainstream cinema has had a strong impact on shaping public perceptions about various aspects of life. It not only influences society but also reflects it—acting as a mirror to social realities. Hindi films often highlight how themes like gender and sexuality are understood within the culture. While women in India and around the world have made significant strides and gained global recognition, achieving true gender equality in societal perception—particularly among Indian men—remains an ongoing journey. **(Gupta and Prakash, 2020)**

Women have experienced a significant shift in their societal image, moving away from the traditional role of self-sacrificing, passive figures. Today, they are portrayed as powerful, independent, and confident individuals who openly express a wide array of emotions—whether its love, anger, passion, frustration, pleasure, or joy—emotions that were once expected to remain hidden. Since cinema often reflects society, these changes in women's roles are clearly visible in films throughout the years. Bollywood actresses, in particular, have become more bold and expressive, moving beyond the sweet, simple, and conventional romantic characters they were once known for. **(Kumari, 2015)**

Women-centric films play a crucial role in giving voice to women's experiences and concerns. They shed light on a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from widely acknowledged problems like rape, dowry, and domestic abuse to subjects that are less commonly addressed, such as lesbian relationships, women's substance use, premarital sex, and extramarital affairs. Although some of these themes are relatively new to mainstream cinema, they reflect real aspects of society—as evidenced by evolving legislation, including recent updates to LGBT rights. These films not only centre on women's lives and struggles but also represent a significant and meaningful component of the cinematic landscape. **(Kaur, 2016)**

Female-led films have played a key role in shaping students' understanding of today's educational and social issues by portraying characters who demonstrate strength, empowerment, and a commitment to change. These protagonists highlight critical challenges such as inequality in education, child marriage, poverty, and the basic right to education. Through stories of young girls overcoming social and financial barriers in their pursuit of learning, such films inspire students to appreciate education and recognize the structural obstacles faced by many. These narratives not only raise awareness but also cultivate empathy, stimulate critical thinking, and foster a sense of social responsibility. By engaging with these powerful journeys, students gain a clearer understanding of the value of equal educational opportunities and the life-changing impact education can have.

The researcher selected students as the focus group for this study because they are frequent media consumers and are in a crucial stage of developing their social and intellectual awareness. As young and impressionable thinkers, students are influenced by the progressive narratives often presented in women-centric Hindi cinema, which challenge traditional norms and promote new ideas. Higher education students, in particular, are encouraged to engage in critical analysis and media literacy, making them ideal participants for exploring how films shape perceptions of educational and social issues. Their regular exposure to films and digital platforms also increases the likelihood of being impacted by themes such as gender equality, access to education, and bodily autonomy. As future leaders, educators, and change-makers, understanding how media influences their views is essential in assessing cinema's role in shaping the attitudes of the next generation.

In this research, 113 students from the Department of Education at Sibsagar University in Sivasagar, Assam, were interviewed using an incidental sampling method. The purpose was to identify which

women-centric Hindi films have significantly impacted students' perspectives on key educational and social trends and if yes, then how these valued movies can be introduced in the curriculum. The findings are intended to support the recommendation of integrating powerful narratives from such films into the academic curriculum. This initiative aims to foster students' holistic development—physically, mentally, morally, socially, emotionally, and intellectually—highlighting the broader importance of this study.

II REVIEWS OF RELATED LITERATURE:

The study titled *"Women-Centric Films: Are They Improving the Status of Women in Society?"* found that although the number of women-centric films in Bollywood has noticeably increased, societal attitudes have not evolved at the same pace. Survey responses revealed that while more people are watching these films, many still believe that women are often portrayed as mere objects of attraction. Interviews with participants showed that there has been limited progress in improving the actual status of women or significantly changing public perception. Some individuals also felt that female characters are primarily used to attract audiences and boost box office earnings, especially in multiplex cinemas. **(Mishra et.al. 2019).**

The study titled *"Impact of Women Portrayal in Bollywood Cinema among Youth of Jharkhand"* revealed that the youth in Jharkhand prefer films with strong and empowering female characters. The research concluded that a large portion of young people in the region perceive the depiction of women in Bollywood films as generally positive. Additionally, 50 percent of the respondents agreed that women-centric Bollywood movies have the potential to bring about social change. **(Das, 2022).**

The study titled *"Impact of Women-Centric Films in Triggering Social Change special focus on sensitizing and creating awareness among women"* highlighted their importance in educating and raising awareness among women. It concluded that although these films provide entertainment, they cannot be seen solely as a source of leisure. Rather, films as pointed in this study, expose critical and often taboo subjects like domestic violence, extramarital relationships, female foeticide, eve teasing, and other crimes against women, encouraging open conversations about issues that society usually keeps silent about. **(Kaur 2016)** It was further reported in a study that young students and employees were the major respondents watching more than Bollywood movies in a cinema hall **(Mandavia, 2020)**

All these studies highlighted that gaining a comprehensive understanding of women-centric films is important, as it offers critical insights into gender representation, societal structures, and the evolving role of women. Films often depict the challenges, successes, and diverse experiences of women, helping to dismantle stereotypes and promote gender equality.

After analyzing the reviews of related literature, it was found that very few studies had been conducted to know the influence of women-centric films on students perspectives and why and how to introduce the basic learning lessons of women-centric films in curriculum. Through analyzing such stories, students can better understand female perspectives, cultural traditions, and historical influences that shape women's realities. This, in turn, cultivates empathy, encourages critical thinking, and broadens students' perspectives, making the inclusion of women-centric films valuable in fields like literature, media studies, and social sciences.

III RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

This research study had the below mentioned research questions.

3.1 Which specific women centric Hindi movies have had a significant impact on undergraduate students'

perspectives studying in the Department of Education, Sibsagar University on educational and social trends and how?

- 3.2** Can women-centric Hindi films be integrated effectively into educational curricula to raise awareness of social and gender related trends?

IV SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

The specific objectives of this research study were-

- 4.1** To access the influence of women-centric Hindi movies on undergraduate students (studying in the Department of Education, Sibsagar University) beliefs and awareness regarding contemporary social and educational trends.
- 4.2** To give suggestions for integrating women-centric films into educational practices for promoting social awareness and critical thinking among students studying in the Department of Education of Sibsagar University.

V CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS USED:

5.1 Contribution: Contribution refers to the act of giving or adding something of value-such as effort, knowledge, resources or ideas- to a larger goal, project, and group with the intension of enhancing or supporting its success or advancement. In this present study contribution refers to influence of or impact that nine women-centric Hindi cinemas (found mostly viewed by the respondents of this study) namely Chak De India (2007), English Vinglish (2012), Queen (2013), Dangal (2016), Pink (2016), Tumhari Sulu (2017), Razi (2018), Thappad (2020) and Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl (2020) have on undergraduate students (specifically studying in the Department of Education of Sibsagar University) in their understanding of emerging educational and social trends.

5.2 Women-Centric Hindi Films: Women-centric Hindi films refer to films produced within the Hindi language film industry (commonly known as Bollywood) where the narrative is primarily focussed on female protagonists, their experiences and their perspectives. In this present study, women-centric Hindi cinemas mean commercially released Nine Popular Hindi language films ranging from the years of 2007-2020 mostly viewed by the sampled students of the present study.

5.3 Undergraduate Students: Undergraduate students are individuals enrolled in a post-secondary educational program that leads to the first level of academic degree typically a bachelor's degree. In this present study, undergraduate students are those individuals who are formally enrolled in the bachelor degree program of the Department of Education of Sibsagar University fall within the age group of 19-21 years.

5.4 Educational and Social Trends: Social and Educational Trends refer to the observable patterns, shifts and developments over time within society and education system that reflects changing values, behaviours, priorities and practices. In this present study, the researcher selected 6 dimensions as Educational and Social Trends after reviewing the related literature and after observing various women-centric movies of her own. These dimensions were (a) awareness on women-centric Hindi Cinemas (b) perceived educational value (c) Gender wise response trends (d) Influence on societal perceptions (e) Impact on academic discussions and projects (f) Films as medium of educational empowerment and reflection.

5.5 Sibsagar University: Sibsagar University refers to the higher educational institution located in Sivasagar, Assam.

VI RESEARCH DESIGN:

6.1 Selection of Films for the Study:

This study had adopted a qualitative research design. It combined survey based data collection with thematic analysis to identify the list of popular women centric movies aligned with educational and social themes resonate with students of Sibsagar University.

The selection of films for this study was conducted through a pilot survey among 113 students studying in Sibsagar University, Sivasagar Assam through incidental sampling technique where total 9 women-centric movies were found most viewed movies by the sampled students. So, those 9 movies were selected for the present study. Those movies were-

Chak De India (2007)
English Vinglish (2012)
Queen (2013)
Dangal (2016)
Pink (2016)
Tumhari Sulu (2017)
Razi (2018)
Thappad (2020)
Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl (2020)

6.2 Population of the Study:

The population of the present study consists of 200 undergraduate Arts students (approx.) studying specifically in the Department of Education of Sibsagar University, Sivasagar, Assam.

6.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure:

For the purpose of data collection and analysis, only those students who have been exposed to at least one or more women-centric Hindi films-identified through preliminary screening process are included as samples of the present study. That's why though there is a system of taking 30 percent of the total population, but for selecting the mostly viewed women-centric movies among students, the researcher took 113 students because by taking all these 113 students, the making the appropriate list of mostly viewed movies was made possible. So, 113 students were used as sampled students of this present study through Incidental Sampling Technique.

6.4 Tools for Data Collection:

6.4.1 Interview:

A self-made unstructured interview schedule was used for this research study to know which specific women centric Hindi movies have had a significant impact on undergraduate students' perspectives (studying in the Department of Education, Sibsagar University) on educational and social trends and how.

6.5 Collection of Data:

6.5.1 Primary Data: Survey method was used to collect the primary data from students.

6.5.2 Secondary Literature:

Academic literature on gender studies, film theories and cultural studies is consulted to establish a theoretical framework for the analysis. The literature aids in contextualizing the findings within broader

discussions on gender roles, representation and societal changes.

VII FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

SECTION A

SAMPLED STUDENTS RESPONSES TOWARD THAT SIX DIMENSIONS TAKEN FOR THIS PRESENT STUDY

7.1 Awareness of Women-Centric Hindi Cinemas

Out of 113 students interviewed, 94 students (83.2 percent) were aware of women-centric Hindi cinemas such as Queen, Kahani, Pink, Thappad and Chhapaak. These students could recall plots, themes and social trends addressed in these films. The remaining 19 students (16.8 percent) had limited or no exposure to such cinemas citing reasons like lack of interest or preference for regional or western content.

7.2 Perceived Educational Value:

Among the 113 students, 72 students (63.7 percent) stated that these films enhanced their understanding of important educational and social trends including women rights, gender issues, domestic violence, consent and education for girls. 41 students (36.3 percent) acknowledged the thematic importance of these films but felt they did not significantly impact their academic perspectives.

7.3 Gender Wise Response Trends:

Among the respondents, 67 were female (59.3 percent) and 46 were male (40.7 percent). Among female students, 60 out of 67 (89.6 percent) found women centric films highly relatable and empowering. Conversely, among male students, 32 out of 46 students (69.6 percent) recognized these films as important for promoting gender sensitivity with the depiction of male character in some films.

7.4 Influence on Social Perceptions:

A significant 78 students (69 percent) mentioned that watching women-centric films influenced their views on real-life social trends such as marital abuse, workplace discrimination, menstrual health and female agency. These students reported that such films sparked conversations among peers and family, thus broadening their socio-cultural understanding.

7.5 Impact on Academic Discussions and Projects:

38 students (33.6 percent) shared that they had referenced women-centric Hindi cinemas in their classroom discussions, presentations or academic projects. This reflects a moderate but meaningful integrations of cinematic content into academic context, especially in subjects like sociology, gender studies and Media studies.

7.6 Films as a Medium of Educational Empowerment and Reflection:

Out of total 55 students (48.7 percent) felt that these films provided a platform for female educational empowerment, giving visibility to trends often silenced in mainstream discourse. Films like Pink and Chhapaak were specifically cited by the students as powerful narratives that encouraged critical thinking and empathy.

SECTION B

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN-CENTRIC HINDI MOVIES ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS (STUDYING IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SIBSAGAR UNIVERSITY) BELIEFS AND AWARENESS REGARDING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL TRENDS.

Key Women Centric Hindi Films mostly Viewed by the Sampled Students, key Learning Lessons they

received from those movies and Educational and Social Themes described by these sampled students in this study:

Movie Name	Number of Students Influenced (out of 113)	Key Learning Lessons they received from these Movies	Educational and Social Themes in Women-centric Hindi Movies
Dangal (2016)	29	Women in sports, breaking gender norms, father daughter relationship, rural education, appreciation of female education and self-learning, especially in traditional households	<p>Educational Trends: Formal/informal sports training</p> <p>Social Trends: Patriarchy, Women in wrestling, Rural Women's Upliftment</p>
Chak De India (2007)	20	Team work, women's leadership, sexism in sports	<p>Educational Trends: Discipline, Team Works, Sports Education</p> <p>Social Trends: Unity in diversity, Women in Sports, National Pride.</p>
Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl (2020)	15	Gender equality in defence, breaking stereotypes	<p>Educational Trends: Military Training, Aviation Education</p> <p>Social Trends: Women in Male dominated Professions, Perseverance.</p>
Queen (2013)	12	Self-discovery, independence, emotional resilience. This film resonated especially with female students as a metaphor for emotional healing, independence and growth after personal setbacks.	<p>Educational Trends: Self-learning, Experiential Learning</p> <p>Social Trends: Women Empowerment Breaking stereotypes, Independence.</p>

Thappad (2020)	10	Domestic abuse, consent, redefining dignity in relationships, were powerful in altering views on consent, emotional abuse and legal rights.	<p>Educational Trends:</p> <p>Emotional Intelligence, Communication</p> <p>Social Trends:</p> <p>Domestic Violence, Women's dignity, Gender Equality.</p>
Pink (2016)	9	Consent, urban safety, legal awareness	<p>Educational Trends:</p> <p>Consent and Personal Boundaries, Legal Rights and Justice, Gender Sensitivity and Respect, Empowerment through Awareness</p> <p>Social Trends:</p> <p>Sexual Autonomy, Women Safety and Empowerment, Judiciary and Social Justice</p>
English Vinglish (2012)	8	Adult education, identity, self-worth, appreciation of female education and self-learning, especially in traditional households	<p>Educational Trends:</p> <p>Adult education, Importance of English in Society.</p> <p>Social Trends:</p> <p>Gender roles, Self-worth, Respect in Society.</p>
Tumhari Sulu (2017)	6	Middle class women's educational aspirations, work-life balance	<p>Educational Trends:</p> <p>Empowering through Self-discovery, Balancing Personal and Professional Lives, Uplifts women in non-traditional careers</p> <p>Social Trends:</p> <p>Women empowerment, Challenging Gender Roles,</p>

			Family Dynamics and Support, Respect for Ordinary Lives.
Razi (2018)	4	Patriotism, espionage, women agency	Educational Trends: Espionage, Political awareness, Social Trends: Sense of Patriotism, sacrifice, Internal Strength

Overall influence of women-centric Hindi movies on undergraduate students beliefs and awareness (studying in the Department of Education, Sibsagar University) regarding contemporary social and educational trends:

Aspects associated with these selected Women-Centric Hindi Movies reported by majority of the Respondents	Percentage of Student responding	Overall Influence
Awareness on gender equality	84 percent	Many noted shifts in societal roles and questioned traditional expectations. Felt inspired by women overcoming challenges. The students admired strength and resilience.
Empathy towards Women's Issues	78 percent	Most students felt inspired by portrayals of strength, resilience and independence. The students of this study have shown deeper understanding of gender discrimination and bias. Felt emotionally moved. Developed empathy for women's lived expectations.
Motivation for self-education	62 percent	Not just formal education, learning through life, travel and challenges was highly noted. The students of this study expressed desire to support and participate gender equality initiative.
Willingness to speak on social issues	55 percent	Students discussed how women deal with family, in-laws marriage and career balance. Started questioning traditional gender roles, appreciated non stereotypical portrays.
Interest in female centric cinema	70 percent	A frequent observation was the bold changes to gender roles. The students liked the movies aesthetically.

Life Decision influenced after watching some selected Women Centric Hindi Movies to some sampled students

Number of Students Responded	Favourite Film	Aspects Influenced	Life Decisions taken
01	Dangal (2016)	Determination and fitness.	Started exploring own purpose of life. Joined a career course and gave full dedication to that.
01	Chak De India (2007)	Determination and fitness.	Removed shyness and participated in institutional physical activity based competitions.
01	Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl (2020)	Gender equality in ambition	Take a small initiative to enrol in a career oriented course.
01	Queen (2013)	Independence, overcoming from emotional turmoil and gave another chance to her life	Had overcome from emotional difficulties, took a travel for change and have concentrated on studies again.
01	Thappad (2020)	Unhealthy boundaries in relationships, negligence, saw signs of subtle abuse	Took initiative to study about women rights.
01	Pink (2016)	Consent awareness, advocated against harassment	Got interest in knowing about women rights and things related to violence, harassment against women.
01	English Vinglish (2012)	Confidence and self-respect	Regained self-confidence. Gave priority to own life skills
01	Tumhari Sulu (2017)	Balancing roles	Started own beauty parlour
	Razi (2018)	Patriotism, courage under pressure, moral complexity, female agency, sacrifice for greater good	No distinct life decision was taken by the respondents in their personal lives after watching this movie

SECTION C**SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FROM THE SAMPLED STUDENTS FOR INTEGRATING WOMEN-CENTRIC FILMS INTO EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL AWARENESS AND DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING AMONG STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OF SIBSAGAR UNIVERSITY.****Overall Suggestions:**

The sampled students emphasized the importance of integrating women-centric cinematic topics into the academic curriculum to foster gender sensitivity and critical awareness among students. Recommendations of 13 percent student included introducing film studies modules that highlight female directors, writers and protagonists as well as analyzing the representation of women across different genres and cultural contexts. Two sampled students advocated for interdisciplinary approaches. They also encouraged the inclusion of contemporary and regional films to offer a broader and more relatable perspective.

Specific Suggestions:**Sampled Student 1 (Female, Age 20)**

Her favourite women-centric film is Queen. She believes the film fosters a sense of independence and emotional resilience, a narrative presentation especially among young women. She suggests integrating such films into classroom discussions particularly in subjects like political science or gender studies. In her opinion, discussing Rani's transformation can help other students reflect on their own journeys. She strongly agrees with this approach, rating it a five out of five, noting that it can empower female students to find their voice.

Sampled Student 2 (Male, Age 21)

The student resonates with Razi, especially the moral dilemma and courage of Sehmat. He recommends that the film be used as a case study in the classes of political science to discuss patriotism, personal sacrifice and ethical complexity. According to him, the movie can provide Engineering and Technical students a broader perspective on value and national service.

Sampled Student 3 (Female, Age 22)

She chooses Pink as her most impactful Women-centric movie. As a student, she finds its depiction of consent, justice and victim blaming deeply educational. She recommends integrating the courtroom scenes into the classes of Human Rights Education i.e. into the classes of Women Rights followed by debates or legal analysis assignments. In her views, Pink provides a cinematic entry point into real world legal conversations about women rights.

Sampled Student 4 (Male, Age 21)

He highlights Tumhari Sulu for showing how women balance family and ambition. He suggests using it in business ethics or human resource management classes or in the paper of management and administration to explore gender roles in the workplace. He believes such discussions can sensitize future professionals to the personal challenges their female colleagues might face.

Sampled Student 5 (Female 21)

Her favourite film is Lipstick under my Burkha. She says it challenges taboos around female desire, rebellion and identity. In her opinion, it should be included in papers like gender studies or media studies syllabi to provoke discussions on women's autonomy in conservative spaces.

Sampled Student 6 (Female, 20)

She admires English Vinglish for its portrayal of a homemaker's quiet journey of self-respect. As a student

of vernacular medium, she proposes using this film in reflective writing assignments in courses dealing with communications.

Sampled Student 7 (Female, 22)

She finds Dangal deeply motivating, especially the portrayal of women succeeding in a male dominated field like wrestling. She recommends using the references of this movie in physical education sessions to challenge gender bias in athletics.

Sampled Student 8 (Female, 19)

This student connects with Piku, particularly in how it reveals emotional labor and caregiving burdens on women. She suggests using this film in psychology or counselling classes to study family dynamics and the pressure women face as caretakers. She emphasizes that character driven films like Piku can spark profound discussions about mental health and gender.

Sampled Student 9 (Male, 24)

He chooses Thappad for its unapologetic take on domestic violence and personal; dignity. He recommends that the film be included in civics or political theory classes when discussing human rights, legal system, or gender justice. A follow up discussion or debate would be essential to extract its full educational value.

Sampled Student 10 (Female, 22)

She finds Kahani particularly inspiring because it portrays a woman navigating danger with intellect and resolve. She recommends it to be used in media literacy classes to analyze female representation and storytelling techniques. Films like kahani empower future female journalists by portraying strong autonomous female character in high-stake environments.

CONCLUSION:

The study revealed that women-centric Hindi films had a notable impact on student perspectives, especially in areas of gender sensitivity, educational motivation and social justice awareness. These narratives have served as powerful tools for reflection and conversation among youth. The interviews clearly indicated that women-centric Hindi cinemas play a significant role in shaping the understanding of emerging educational and social trends among students of Sibsagar University, Sivasagar, Assam. While the level of impact varies, the majority of students recognize these films as powerful tools for awareness, empathy and discourse particularly around gender based challenges in Indian society. These findings suggest a growing appreciation for socially conscious cinema among youth in semi-urban academic environments like Sibsagar University, Assam.

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