

How Objectification of Women has been celebrated in Indian Movie Songs or Item Numbers

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Abstract

As we raise a toast to the 100 years of Indian cinema, there are significant alterations that this industry has gone through. In earlier Indian Cinema, post-independence, the filmmakers got an opportunity to portray issues such as poverty, illiteracy, and gender inequality for the awareness of the common masses. One such issue was the "Representation of women" through the lens of Indian cinema (**Kamble and Santosh**).

With time, the industry flourished with women-centric roles, where the women broke the patriarchal bondages and gained a whole new perspective from the audience. However, this independence came at the cost of women commodifying their bodies to gain attention in the patriarch-dominated society and money-making. One such aspect of these roles came as "Item numbers" which are defined as the movie songs to present colorful dancing women through revealing and exposing clothes. For some, while the item songs are an expression of freedom, others believe that they objectify women in general.

This paper will focus on the objective of how Indian songs have changed with time in terms of women and their diffusion with music, clothing, and fashion for objectification. This report will also examine the upcoming trend of increasing demand for the item songs in Indian movies and how such forms objectify the female gender.

1. Introduction

Indian cinema is an important facet contributing largely to the socio-cultural factor of the country. It is seen as the most effective medium of communication to reach the masses.

Worldwide, the Indian cinema is most popularly known as "Bollywood". The growing economy has boosted the growth of Bollywood and the world's growing interest in the Indian economy has led to international exposure in the Bollywood cinema. The expectations from the Bollywood business and theatrical revenue are INR 12,000 crores by the end of 2024. Out of this, 80-85% of the revenue is contributed by the Indian market and 15-20% comes from the overseas market (**Choudhury**).

This continuous success of Bollywood is a matter of analysis in itself. There has been much research on Bollywood to understand its nature, how it works, and the culture behind it. But the research behind the origin of "Item Songs" in Bollywood, and their impact is limited.

The current study will aim to understand how a woman is a centre of objectification in today's Bollywood songs specifically item songs. Bollywood films, now for many years, have made use of the item dances highlighting a young female surrounded by a crowd of men for spectatorial entertainment even though these songs do not fit the summary of the main movie plot or the primary narrative

(Marron). Major established filmmakers are directing big-budget movies and use these dance sequences performed either by a heroine or other females that are crudely referred to as “item girls”.

Since these songs have become a key variable to the mainstream cinema, hence a critical evaluation of these songs represents my study. This study will also analyze many attendant variables like the male gaze, the nature of visual and behavioral-derived pleasure, and the celebration of the “use” and “abuse” of the female body through their onscreen visualizations.

2. Background and Literature Review

The Indian cinema has its unique historical value with pre set aesthetics and conventions. The Indian film industry began its journey in the early 20th century and produced its first film in 1913. After that, the cinema saw a rise in the several production companies producing either mythological or historically centered movies.

During the late 20th century, post-independence, the industry welcomed imports from Hollywood in the form of action and romance movies. It was post 1950 that the industry underwent a huge change and modern Indian films were born (Erum et al.). The earlier stories were replaced by the social-reformist plots which highlighted the ancient social practices related to women, such as dowry, polygamy, and prostitution. Driven by a basic desire to offer realism in the story, the films were less commercialized for the understanding of the common man.

It was post 1960, that Bollywood realized its need for “Masala Movies”, a mixture of genres including action, romance, comedy, and melodrama. The whole storlyline is punctuated by more than five songs and dance numbers at brief intervals. Such a potpourri still dominates Bollywood with some additional aspects.

2.1 Evolution of Marketing in Cinemas

The marketing technique to promote the movies has also undergone crucial shifts. The cost of marketing films is becoming a rising percentage of the production budget (Jain et al.). Both Indian and International markets are now highly competitive for film business. Here, a relevant marketing strategy determines the most lucrative films that will do a good business and will be termed as “Hit” or “super-hit/ blockbuster”. Thus the producers started packaging general entertainment in a single movie rather than being segmented into genres. This usually maximized box-office takings. There came the need to pre-release the trailer and promotional songs of the movie. This step took a new dimension with the emergence of social media and the Web. Releasing a teaser of the item number song highlighting the main features of the female body became a recent trend for the promotional activities.

2.2 Evolution of the Indian Movie Songs

“Bollywood movies come with melodious film songs”, this is now an accepted fact by the world. The song and dance numbers have become a prominent cultural and commercial item from their earlier days. According to Ameer, “Music” has always been associated with Bollywood and is one of the defining characteristics of the movies. The music is a part and parcel of the films and has been a prominent source of income for Bollywood throughout the years. The music in Bollywood is divided as

- The studio’s era, where the music was composed in a studio
- The music director’s era, a specialized person composing the music for the entire film
- The latest transition era, where film songs are combined with extra dance numbers performed by guest cast.

2.2.1 Emergence of Item Songs in Bollywood

Earlier, the movies songs were presented as the sequences that were carved into the film to push forward the story. But lately, these songs are basically used to attract more and more male audiences using the women in revealing clothes, loud lyrics and suggestive dances (**Manzar and Aravind**). Such songs are usually termed as “Item Songs”.

From what I have experienced with the film industry, I can safely assume that most of the audience in India watches the movies because of the two primary reasons:

- Firstly, some movies are very similar to people's personal lives thereby giving them a feeling of purgation and mental relaxation.
- Secondly they are totally different from real world and are created only entertainment purposes. Such movies are fitted with items songs.

Breakthrough: “Item Song” is considered as a song whose role is to attract the audience towards the movie and spread word of mouth. In most of the circumstances, the song would present itself as a dance number with a scantily dressed girl representing local city or village setting, and performing a dance which can be considered sexually suggestive along with dual-meaning lyrics. To generate publicity for the movie and ensure its commercial success is the ultimate agenda for this song. The origin of the term “Item number” in Bollywood is not known, but this term became popular with the song “UP Bihar Lootney” in the movie Shool in 1999. This song renamed Shilpa Shetty as the “**Item Girl**”, who was popular as a main actress at that time. It was likely that the word item was derived from the objectification of the actress who was dancing to please a group of men in the screenplay for this song. “Item” is known as a filmy Mumbai slang for a woman who attracts male attention (**Kabir**). This trend picked up after the huge success of the song and attributed to the further growth of the item song culture in Bollywood cinema.



In Picture: Shilpa Shetty turned “Item Girl” for the song “UP Bihar Lootney”

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Dh0HwU6q-8>

2.2.2 Progress of “Item Songs”

One can easily say that there was more skin show, suggestive dance movements, and double meaning compositions as we entered early 2000s. The movies were incomplete without an item number and the audiences waited for such songs. These songs were created to either introduce a character or towards the end credits. The budget for such songs were “Larger-than-life” and the producers left no stone unturned to market their songs with full pomp and show. This phase saw a canvas of songs growing to exorbitant levels (**Gehlawat and Dudrah**).

When Bollywood entered later 2000s, the heroines evolved along with the item song. This phase also saw changes in the thought process of audience with generations debating on the increasing objectification of the women in the movies. The cameramen used the entire zoom-in and zoom-out of the female torso, belly, lips, and hips. The marketing strategy evolved and centered on these songs. These songs suddenly became the life of the parties. Later in 2010, the songs lost their storytelling role. The screenplay was lost. The songs were fast and cut on the editing table. Increase in proximity became an intelligent part of the songs (**George and Sharma**).

Today, it is common for the actors and actresses to dress scantily and showcase their highly chiseled body along with prominent curvatures. The cameraman maintains the focus on their curves as compared to the eyes and smile of the dancers. The close-up shots are only defined by flat abs and chiseled torsos of both the male and female actors.



In Picture: Use of the camera lens to focus on the female body curvatures and skin-show in Item Songs

3. Theoretical Framework and Objectives

3.1 Objectification Theory of Frederickson and Robert (1997)

It has been lately observed that Bollywood songs and movies have been encouraging sexual objectification of women for a long period of time (**Mukhopadhyay and Banerjee**). Sexual objectification theory refers to the theory of treating the opposite sex as an object of sexual pleasure or as an object for use of any other form of personal pleasure. This specifically involves the beauty and appearance of females. Frederickson and Roberts developed objectification theory and postulated that women are subjected to sexually objectification and are treated as objects to be valued for its use by the male gender and the media (**Rotem et al.**). Objectification, by males, is currently treated as their socially sanctioned right to sexualize the opposite gender, regardless of age and status. Objectification theory has been a constant topic of debate and research with context of media ranging from movies, music, magazines, and even video games. It has been noted in the researches related to Bollywood music

that women are portrayed as sex objects in most of the songs and their only existence in some movies is to primarily please men.

With the concept of objectification, it can be generalized that women are never appreciated for what they achieve in life with their hard work. Rather, they are considered achievers through the support that they provide to the males and the family. One such aspect of this achievement is women's beauty that is used for objectification by the males. The females are commonly considered as the passive providers to the patriarchal mindset of the society.

3.2 The Theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey (1975)

Mulvey in her article "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" (**Media Studies**) stresses this bitter fact that women in films and songs are scrutinized and objectified through 3 kinds of spectator gaze

- The gaze of the male protagonist
- The gaze of the camera's eyes, cameraman usually a male
- The gaze of the male audience correlating with the male protagonist for their personal sexual desires.

Mulvey had her strong point of view on "Scopophilia". Scopophilia is defined as a voyeuristic kind of gaze that is aimed at the opposite gender. The concept of Scopophilia, as a major amusement in cinema, provokes a person to look at the other gender as an erotic object and find pleasure. Therefore, for this particular case of male gaze voyeurism, women are shown as passive sexual object and men are shown as active objects to absorb the sexual satisfaction under the hidden desires of patriarchy and male domination of the Indian cinema (**Conaway**).

Mulvey asserted that the female characters have no subjective significance in the movies. They are present for the spectacle of the male character and the audience. Mulvey also highlights the fact that the male audience never come to watch the male actor and is only excited to watch the female character, her clothes, and her dance moves. The male audience identifies themselves as the main character of the film, which is termed as a narcissistic voyeurism, and hence they take part in the objectification of the female protagonist character.

3.3 Objectives

Based on the above conceptual texts, it has been debated over the years about how female objectification has been celebrated in Indian cinema for the male gaze and how this trend has changed along its path. With the introduction of the internet and the evolution of the social media, this culture has taken new heights. Through this paper, we will

- Understand the changing scenario of the Indian Bollywood songs in the last 50 years (1970-2020).
- Analyze how Indian movie songs have celebrated the objectification of women in the last 50 years (1970-2020).

4. Methodology

4.1 Report Design

For my report, a descriptive method is chosen after carefully considering previous conceptual texts and methods that investigated the objectification of women in Indian movie songs.

4.2 Data Collection

Qualitative data is collected based on secondary sources. The secondary data is collected from previously documented information about how Bollywood objectified its female actresses in songs. The data will be collected from various online information, journals, blog articles, and previous studies to

understand the best fit of objectification theory.

We will select “All-time popular hit Item Songs” of the decade and revolve our analysis around those songs based on 3 major criteria

1. Screenplay and plot of the song
2. Lyrics/ Phrases in the song used
3. Clothing and Choreography

4.3 Data Analysis

Comparative data analysis will be done highlighting the above mentioned criteria for the Indian movie songs or the item numbers that grabbed the most attention by the audience. The data will be analyzed to

- Understand how the songs changed in their screenplay and plot design, whether they were relevant or not to the movie. The major lyrics of the songs will also be analyzed to find out this shift.
- Analyze how female objectification changed through these years in terms of fashion and clothing and how the choreography was used to objectify the woman in the song.

5. Data collection

5.1 1970-1980

a. Piya tu ab to aaja.....

Movie: Caravan (1971)

Song Style: Cabaret

Female Lead Dancer: Helen

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Helen who was considered as the item queen of the Cabaret Era of Bollywood. However, Helen also played a major part as the second lead actress “Monica” in the movie. She portrayed the character of a “vamp” that dances in the club and is visited by the lead actress Asha Parekh under the impression that her husband is having an affair with Monica.

The screenplay is in the setting of a club where Helen is the main performer. The song is a part and parcel of the main plot of the movie.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Piya tu ab to aaja....

Shola sa mann dekhke aake bujha ja...

Tann ki jwala thandi hojaye

Aise gale laga ja..

aa.. aa. Aha.. aa.. aa.. aha”

The song takes on a seductive approach with Asha Bhosle, the lead playback singer, breathing quickly at intervals.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Helen is dressed in a cabaret dress with bright colors, shimmer, and bold cuts. However, we can see that the body is fully covered. For legs, sheer stockings have been used and the mid-riff is covered via belt. In the second paragraph, however, Helen appears in short golden attire alongside the male dancer. The attire exposes her skin but the costume designer has used the trick of skin-colored coveralls for the dress.

The choreography is fast with the usual cabaret steps and speedy hip jerks. The actress used slide, pole, and floor to the best of her abilities.



In Picture: Helen's "Piya tu ab to aaja" Poster

View Full Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46GGxF_Bwhg

b. Salaam-e-ishq meri jaan....

Movie: Muqaddar ka Sikander (1978)

Song Style: Mujra

Female Lead Dancer: Rekha

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Rekha who plays the second lead actress "Zohra" in the movie and falls in love with Sikandar, the main actor. Zohra is a performer at a Kotha (Brothel) that gained popularity later in the 70s. Zohra dies in the end to save Sikandar. The screenplay is under the settings of a Kotha, where the aristocratic men come to feed their loneliness. It is a center of entertainment for men usually open at night. The female dancers were known as a "Tawaif" which was portrayed by Rekha.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

"Salaam-e-ishq meri jaan...

Zara kabool karlo

Tum humse pyaar karne ki...

Zara si bhool karlo

Mera dil bechaain hai.... Humsafar k liye..."

The song takes on a lonely approach where the lyrics highlight the hidden loneliness of a tawaif girl who is waiting for someone to love her. The lyrics reflect the main actor too who is portrayed as a loner in the movie

3. Clothing and Choreography: Rekha is dressed in a classical attire throughout the song which was the dress worn by Tawaifs at that time. Her head is covered as she portrays the role of a Muslim courtesan.

The choreography is classical "Mujra" dance style with lots of turns and rounds to showcase her beautiful assemble. The men are seated around her closer than in the club settings. There is a use of a lot of hand gestures to give meaning to the lyrics.



In Picture: Rekha as Zohra in “ salaam-e-ishq meri jaan”

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ii7oJYSf5M>

5.2 1980-1990

Disco station Disco.....

Movie: Hathkadi (1982)

Song Style: Disco

Female Lead Dancer: Reena Roy

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Reena Roy who played the role of Rosy in the movie as a lead actress. The song takes place in the carnival where the villain is supposed to be hidden and both the actor and actress go undercover to stop him from escaping. The song holds a pivotal role in the movie and gave the movie a push it needed in the music genre.

The screenplay is under the settings of a caravan/ mela where there is dance performance by disco dancers. The era was full of disco numbers with this song making a huge impact in the 80s.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Chodho chodho meri rahein...

Meri bahein... aaaaaaa....

Roko nahi logo mujhe

Thokarein khane do...

Gale lago... pyaar karo... par mujhe jane do...”

The lyrics reveal the hidden desires of the actress to meet the male lead but he hasn't come yet via the train as shown in the background of the settings. The people around the actress are holding and teasing her for being left alone. The lyrics also hint towards the other males offering themselves as a substitute for the male lead who is absent.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Reena Roy is covered head to toe in shimmering clothes with a tight blouse and tight leggings, a trademark of the disco era. However, with Indian influence, she has taken a shawl on her body to hide her curves.

Choreography is a discotheque style where the males surround the actress and push and pull her to groove. This era emerged with a huge number of background dancers following the main lead's steps.



In picture: Reena Roy in Disco Station

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CCgffxyDz4>

5.3 1990-2000

a. **Choli k peeche kya hai.....**

Movie: Khalnayak (1993)

Song Style: Rajasthani Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Madhuri Dixit

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Madhuri Dixit who also played the lead role in the movie as an undercover cop. She and the main lead enacted various scenes to catch the villain. This song was a part of such a screenplay.

The song is shot in a roadside bar where the villain often comes to enjoy his evenings. The lead actress masks herself as a regional performer and dances on this number to attract the attention of the villain and make her place in his troupe.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Choli ke peeche kya hai...

Chunri ke neeche kya hai...

Choli me dil hai mera..

Chunri me dil hai mera

Ye dil main dungi mere yaar ko pyaar ko....

Ku ku ku ku...”

The lyrics are directly provocative with the mention of heart that is covered by the blouse and the shawl. It is one of the most popular hit songs with the most controversial lyrics. The song is a bit ticklish and hides the double meaning related to the sexual body parts of a woman. Even the initial “ku ku ku” sounds sensuous.

3. Clothing and Choreography: This era exposed the mid-riff and the legs of the heroine in a seductive way where the power of hidden and the power of exposure played a dual role in the mind of the audience. The clothing became more suggestive and relative to the theme of the song. Madhuri Dixit is dressed in a traditional but shorter version of the Rajasthani style of Lehenga and Choli draped with a “good-for-nothing” dupatta or shawl. The colors used are bolder than the earlier songs.

The choreography mostly shows the chest and the hip movements on the beats. However, the actress performs the act in a shy manner to attract the male gaze and make them curious.



In Picture: Madhuri Dixit performing “Choli k peeche....”

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OXiqmUhB70>

b. Sexy Sexy Sexy mujhe log bole.....

Movie: Khuddar (1994)

Song Style: Stage Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Karishma Kapoor

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Karishma Kapoor who is the lead actress in the movie and a stage performer. This song is her introductory song in the movie where she witnesses a murder and meets the lead actor to provide evidence.

The screenplay of the song is written as a stage performance with background dancers and the crowd cheering for the actress. However, the crowd has majority of male audiences only.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Chehra main le jaun kahan...

Husn ko chupau kahan..

Romeo hazar aage peeche daude...

Sexy Sexy Sexy mujhe log bole...

Hi Sexy, Hello Sexy kyu boleeee.....”

The lyrics had direct seductive meaning where the woman is objectifying herself as a beauty. She praises her own body parts in the lyrics and is not waiting for the male approval.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Dressed like a true stage performer, Karishma Kapoor wears a short and shimmering red dress where the legs are fully exposed and leave no room for imagination.

The choreography uses the whole stage as a routine. The actress dances with fast hip-hop steps, and uses the floor and the platform to lie or sit during the choreography. Background dancers, both male and female, match the steps while the crowd cheers.



In Picture: Karishma Kapoor performing a Floor Choreography in “Sexy Sexy”

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ukmYuCkWNI>

5.4 2000-2010

a. Kajra re....

Movie: Bunty or Babli (2005)

Song Style: Nukkad Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Aishwarya Rai

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Aishwarya Rai who was a guest performer in the movie just for this song, Rani Mukherjee is the main actress and is completely absent from the song. The song is not part of the main storyline.

The song appears towards the end of the movie, where the two main actors are having a conversation in a nearby restaurant and suddenly the performance starts engulfing the two actors to perform along with the dancer.

The song is set up in a Nukkad-style street performance. From where it begins and how the actress appears suddenly, dance, and leaves thereafter has no clarity.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Meri angdayi na toote tu aaja...

Meri angadaye na toote.. Tu aajaa..

Kajra re kajrare tere kale kale naina.....”

The lyrics are simple where the actors are praising the black eyes of the actress. However, the lyrics have no relevance to the plot, and the dance, and provide us with no meaning whatsoever.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Aishwarya Rai is dressed in a small Lehenga and Blouse, which is typical for a roadside performer. However, she has no dupatta or shawl as a cover. The midriff, back, legs, and hands are fully exposed to the male gaze. The colors of the costume are bold with heavy makeup and minimal accessories.

The choreography uses all the provocative dance moves of the chest and the hips. Most parts are shot from the back to expose the backless blouse of the actress. The choreography is a mix of roadside moves where the steps make no sense and the body moves on its own to the lyrics and the music.



In Picture: Aishwarya Rai special performance for the “Kajra Re” song

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dsFQFCvVGU>

b. Beedi Jalaiyle...

Movie: Omkara (2006)

Song Style: Village Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Bipasha Basu

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Bipasha Basu who is the second lead actress “Billo” in the movie. She is a village performer and the girlfriend of the second male actor. The song is the part of the plot where the actress performs in front of the villagers to cause a rift between the village gangs.

The screenplay is set in an old rural village where the male villagers go to see item girls perform dance moves to their heart’s desires.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Beedi jaiyle jigar se piya.....

Jigar ma badi aag hai...

Aisa kaate ki daant ka nishaan chodh de..

Ye katai to koi bhi kisaan jod de.....

O billo, jaalim ka jod de makaan jod de”

The lyrics are seductive, and aptly suited to the rural settings. The lead actors also sing along with the actress while praising her body appeal to be able to burn hearts.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Bipasha Basu is scantily dressed in a roadside “Lehenga and Blouse” with bold unmatched colors. The blouse has become sleeveless and backless and can be considered a crop top with deep-cut necks. The makeup is bold with minimal jewelry.

Again, the choreography uses all the movements of the chest and the hips in a seductive way. Choreography is random where the actress is picked and rotated in the crowd for the pleasure of the male crowd. The main actor dances with the girl and glues to her on every beat. The choreography doesn’t connect with any word in the lyrics.



In Picture: Bipasha Basu in "Beedi Jalaiye" Song

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLJCtZK0x5M>

5.5 2010-2020

a. Munni badnaam hui...

Movie: Dabangg (2010)

Song Style: Village Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Malaika Arora

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Malaika Arora in rural village settings. The actress had no major role in the movie and just did a special appearance for the song. The song also has no major part in the movie and could have been avoided.

Munni is referred to as a local girl who is free-spirited and does what she likes. The actress refers to herself as Munni and dances with the two lead actors and the villagers.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

"Munni badnaam hui

Darling tere liye...

Ambiya se aam hui...

Darling tere liye

Tu item bomb hui. Darling mere liye....."

In the lyrics, Munni blames the patriarchal society for her defamation in the village and also calls them darlings. The lyrics depict the girl happily accepting her dishonor by men for the sake of their desire. The words used in lyrics like Zandu Balm describe the helplessness of the girl that she readily accepts to become an object of fulfilling male desire.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Again, the actress is scantily dressed with a deep-cut and backless blouse and a short skirt or Lehenga. The drapes are gone. The makeup is subtle now and accessories are minimized for maximum skin show.

The choreography is a lot of hip and chest movements as she dances along with the male crowd. No other female is shown in the dance except background dancers who have no relevance. Facial expressions are bold using the eyes and the lips to showcase the need of the women for male gaze.



In Picture: Malaika Arora as Munni in “Munni Badnaam Hui”

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn5hsfbhWx4>

b. Fevicol se...

Movie: Dabangg 2 (2012)

Song Style: Mujra Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Kareena Kapoor

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Kareena Kapoor who is acting as a prostitute in the setting of a modern-day Brothel. Kareena Kapoor plays no part in the movie and gave a special appearance for the song. The song does not correlate with the main plot of the movie. It is shown that the girl is dancing on her own and suddenly the main actor drops in and starts dancing on her tunes and sings along.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Mere photo ko seene se aaj

Chipkale saiyaan fevicol se...

Naain hum ladayeinge baby doll se.....

Laundiya pataenge miss call se...”

Kareena Kapoor portrays herself as the ultimate beauty of the brothel and hence asks all the men to glue her picture on their chest with Fevicol. She declares that she has beautiful assets and is extremely attractive that no man in the village can resist her. She doesn't wait for the male approval and commands even the police officers of the village to lose their sense in front of her glamour. In the lyrics sung by the male playback singers, the actors agree to whatever she is saying and define her as a beauty of a porcelain baby doll.

3. Clothing and Choreography: In the modern-day brothel settings, the “Mujra” attire has taken a short version. The blouse is small and deep cut and a long skirt is draped to show the legs of the actress. The makeup is bold with no accessories at all.

Again, the choreography is a lot of hip and chest movements with camera angles focusing on the curves of the actress as she moves along the music.



In Picture: Kareena Kapoor performing “Fevicol se..”

Watch Full Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE7Pwgl6sLA>

c. *Laila main Laila...*

Movie: Raees (2017)

Song Style: Night Club Performance

Female Lead Dancer: Sunny Leone

1. Screenplay and plot of the song: The song was performed by Sunny Leone who gave a special appearance in the movie. The screenplay is set in a nightclub open only for men where the main actor visits for some reason and the performance begins.

The actress is seen dancing with all the drunk men in the night and somehow involves the lead actor in the performance to make a connection. The song has no relation with the main plot, whatsoever.

2. Lyrics/Phrases used in the song:

“Laila main laila...

Aisi hun Laila

Har koi chahe mujhse ...

Milna akela”

This song is a remake of an old movie song performed by Zeenat Tamman in 1980 in a disco-style club setting. The modern-day version changed some of the lyrics to suit the screenplay and the music to alter the choreography. The actress is calling herself Laila and an epitome of such a beauty and desire that no man will want to share her with anyone else.

3. Clothing and Choreography: Sunny Leone is again dressed in a short blouse and tribal skirt showcasing her full legs, midriff, and back. She is wearing subtle makeup and hair accessories. The drape is nowhere to be seen.

Choreography is a lot more hip and leg movements with fast steps as per the music. The actress did a lot of acrobatic movements to show her body movement flexibility.



In Picture: Older and newer versions of the song “Laila main Laila”

Watch Full Video:

Old Song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1i_MwtbXezY

New song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95I5VaR7GeU>

6. Analysis and Results

My findings and analysis will be based on the objectives of the paper which were:

- Understand the changing scenario of the Indian Bollywood songs in the last 50 years (1970-2020).
- Analyze how Indian movie songs have celebrated the objectification of women in the last 50 years (1970-2020).

6.1 Understand the Changing Scenario of Bollywood Songs in last 50 years

From the study, we noticed that even in the cabaret and disco era of the 1970s the 1980s, the songs were placed in accordance to the plot of the main story.

1970 was the decade when the trend of a special song featuring the actress or the side actress was introduced that was meant for the pure entertainment of the audience but maintained a parallelism with the main plot. These songs were termed “Item Songs” in the movies. These songs were either meant to entertain the villain in his lair or they were present to delay the climax and thereby represent thrill. This era was considered a golden phase of the Bollywood music industry and is always cherished for its legendary songs (Kaur).

The era of late the 70s and early 80s shows the expression of both fast and slow songs. The culture of “Mujra” was portrayed in many movies and picked up the trend. The songs were melodious and are still remembered. The 80s showed a change in trend from melody to drum beats. The leads danced on fast numbers and the trend of shimmering tight attire started. The music and the lyrics were intimately connected to the storyline of the main movie.

The era of the 1990s showcased songs in a more fast and orchestrated manner. The songs had dance, lots of it. The songs portrayed celebrations on screen and romance became more fearless. The screenplay is presented by open flirting by the actors. Yet it didn't look jarring even when the proximity between the actors was increased. Towards the later 1990s, Bollywood songs grew exorbitant. This era also had television opening up to private productions, with the coming of VCR and cable networks (Lal et al.). The reach of the industry grew and so did the expenditure on the song's production increased.

In the songs of the early 2000s, it can be seen that the actress became more open to skin show, suggestive dance moves, vibrant colors, and double-meaning compositions. Some songs showed

connection to the story while the others were completely irrelevant to the plot. The songs were mostly present to entertain the audience and make money.

The songs were all shot with a larger-than-life budget. This phase saw a canvas of songs growing to an exorbitant level (**Gehlawat and Dudrah**). The proximity between the actors increased but the quality and the meaning of the lyrics decreased.

As we enter 2010, the item songs became more prominent but with a modern twist. It can be seen that the song was not developed keeping the screenplay in mind and it has no relation with the main plot of the story. The song lost its storytelling role. The actresses did a gymnastic like dance and the openness of male gaze and male desire was unreserved.

The camera angle zooms more towards the face and the curvatures of the actress. It can be seen that the item songs are now added to the movies to sell more tickets at the box office rather than adding more substance to the screen (**Jain**). The old charms of the item numbers have deteriorated in quality.

6.2 Analyze how the Music Industry celebrated the Objectification of Women in the last 50 years

Cary et al. suggest that the sexual objectification of a woman can occur via

- A visual representation of the actress's body, for example, the skin show, the camera angles on the body parts or scanty clothes or
- A behavioral representation of the female body, for example, suggestive dance movements, male gaze, or proximity.
- Also self-sexual-objectification by females as they encourage young men to believe that the male gaze and attention are invited.

Based on the objectification theory and Mulvey's notion of male gaze, the above finding shows a powerful demonstration of the relationship between a gazer and the gazed. The one who receives the gaze is often perceived as a sex object for the gazer. The gaze in the songs is specifically focused on the sexual body parts of the female rather than the eyes, smile, or the overall personality. The attractiveness of the female body and the skin show play an important role in the objectification process. The overall appearance of the actress during the dance performance "forms the heart" of the objectification theory (**Nagaraj and Ranganathan**).

It is evident from the above findings that

- Females are a subject of objectification more than the man.
- 60% of the music videos focus around the sexual impulses of the male towards the female.
- The revealing and provocative clothing changes with every decade showcasing the actress's bold curves and fair skin.
- Female artists have significantly objectified themselves than male artists in the recent era. They are singing their own praises without waiting for the male approval (e.g. *sexy sexy sexy mujhe log bole...*).
- The lyrics of the songs have taken a titular shift where the objects are being compared to the female body. (e.g. "*Main to tandoori murgi hu yaar...*" from the song *Fevicol*).

Objectification of women has been celebrated in Indian songs in every decade. Let us evaluate how it changed with every decade.

Theme	Subtheme	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
Visual Representations	Provocative Dress	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Skin Exposure	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Decorative Role/Essential Role	Essential	Essential	Decorative and Essential both	Decorative	Decorative
Behavioral Representations	Sexualized Dance Moves	Mild	Mild	Severe	Severe	Severe
	Expressions	Shy	Shy	Shy	Bold	Bold
	Male Gaze	Mild	Mild	Severe	Severe	Severe
Self objectification	Proximity to lead actor	No	No	Mild	Very	Very
	Self praise in the lyrics	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

7. Conclusion and Limitations

7.1 Conclusion

The current study reflected the way of how the female actresses are objectified in India by analyzing the changing trend in Bollywood songs in the last 50 years. In the recent trend of item songs, it can be said that obscene words and lewd remarks are frequent in the songs and are openly written and praised by the writers and the producers. Even the listeners have become used to such lyrics. Even after realizing the objectification behind these lyrics, the women in the song do not hesitate on performing on these indecent words. It is a crucial time to spread awareness amongst the young audience that females are not a subject of objectification and should not be treated as such in the songs. The director, producers, and writers should reflect on the content they create for the songs or the music videos, and provide substance to the female actresses.

This project sheds light on the debate that has been going on with a shift in the objectification of women from earlier times to recent times. It has been noted that the women in the earlier times were used as a medium to showcase the ill-happenings of society. The dance numbers were relevant and provided entertainment and mood-lightening therapies.

With a change in the women's attitude towards her, the actresses became more independent while choosing the role. The money-minded industry took a hit as women-centric roles, songs, and videos took shape. Now, in the current trend, objectification is celebrated by the woman herself where she feels proud of the beauty that she has been blessed with.

Even though society has become more modernized, our cinema offers us a platform to spread social awareness. Thus, the adult audience should be able to judge between entertainment and objectification. However, the problematic objectification of females should be delved further with other aspects of Bollywood too. Other categories of music can be explored too for further studies.

7.2 Limitations

- The study cannot be generalized with other songs and serve as a standard.
- The study is focused from 1970 to 2020 and is missing out on earlier songs and methods of objectification, if any.
- Cultural barrier acts as a limitation in such studies. Some people may find the songs lewd while other name it as an “upcoming trend”. The level of perception cannot be generalized.
- Indian music and movies are almost westernized with changing viewpoints and intermingled biases.

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