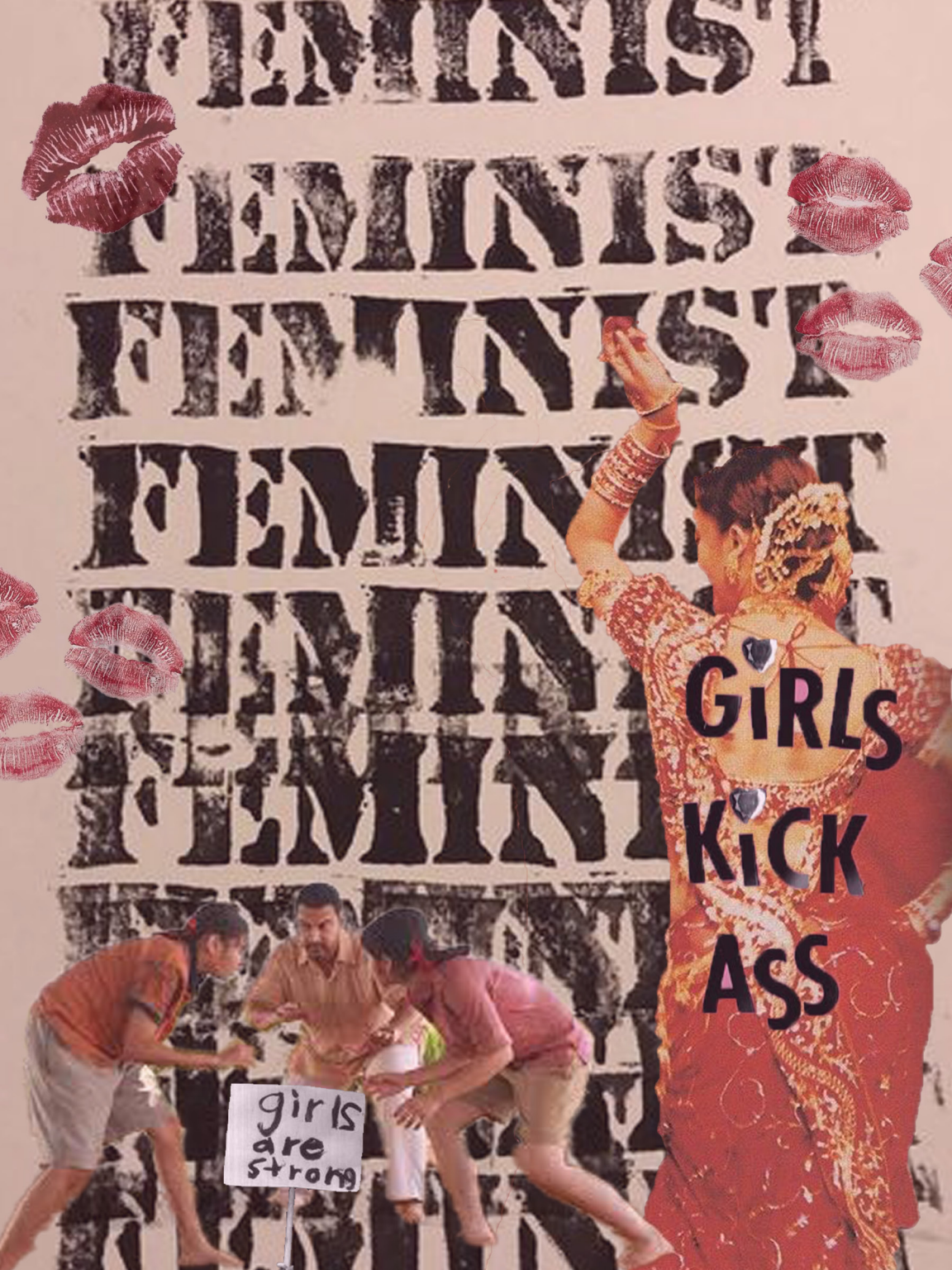




FEMINIST

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GIRLS
KICK
ASS

girls
are
strong

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Letter from the editor

This project takes what we learned about intersectional feminism and stereotypes and applies it to a movie industry we haven't yet looked at: Bollywood. Bollywood's name was inspired by Bombay (the former name of Mumbai which is where the industry is based) and Hollywood. Bollywood is just a part of India Cinema referring to only the Hindi-language films. In 2022 Hindi cinema represented 33% of box office revenue and is one of the largest centers for film production in the world. This project will take the reader through Bollywood history and the role women played in movies throughout different periods of history. It will then cover Indian/Bollywood stereotypes as well as intersectional feminism and how that applies to female characters in Bollywood movies. And then I will analyze four movies, one from each era of Bollywood history. These films will include Bollywood's first feature



film: "Raja Harishchandra." It will then move on to "Mother India," "Bhumika," and finally a widely talked about and studied film about women in the male dominated Indian wrestling industry, "Dangal." This project reveals that in every culture and every subsection of film women go through many hardships and barriers and face similar struggles. Bollywood is a reflection of Indian culture and Indian life but it also inspires Indian culture and Indian life so when women are represented a certain way on screen it also impacts the way they are viewed in society. Enjoy the zine!

XOXO,
Sadiya

Timeline of

Bollywood History

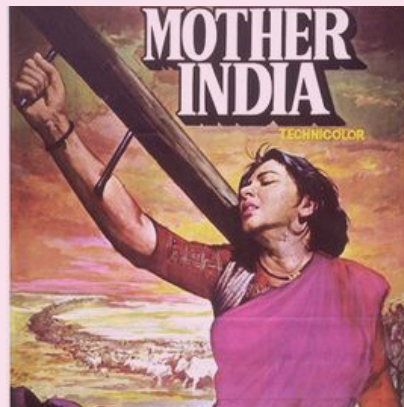


1913

Birth of Bollywood:
India's first full length
feature film, "Raja
Harishchandra."

Golden age: Women centric
films, strong female leads.
For example "Mother India."

1940s-1960s



1970s-1980s

Parallel cinema: In parallel
cinema, female characters were
often portrayed as strong, inde-
pendent, and assertive, chal-
lenging the conventional roles
typically assigned to women in
mainstream cinema. A popular
director at the time is Shyam
Benegal.

The contemporary era of Bol-
lywood, from the 1990s to the
present, is marked by commer-
cial success and global influ-
ences, with an evolving por-
trayal of women that reflects
both progress and ongoing
challenges, such as "Dangal."

1990s-present

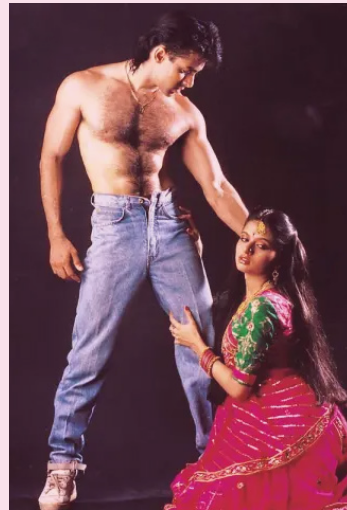


STEREOTYPES



Unrealistic beauty standards

Bollywood will often hire lighter skinned brown girls, with big beautiful eyes, perfect hair, and toned bodies. Creating an unattainable standard for Indian women.



Idealizing women

“Ideal women” in bollywood are portrayed as submissive, self-sacrificing, chaste, controlled and are normally wearing saris. Whereas the “bad women” are portrayed as individualistic, westernized wearing things such as jeans, and not sacrificing.



Objectification of women

Women in India cinema will often be reduced to objects of desire, doing huge dance numbers, half naked to impress their love interests. They are often depicted as decorative elements to enhance visual appeal.

Traditional roles

Traditionally women in bollywood are depicted as passive and dependent. Often playing love interests, wives, mothers or a symbol of the idealized women, placed in the movie to serve the emotional and narrative needs of the male protagonist. All these women look very similar.





Synopsis

King Harishchandra is teaching his son archery, and while hunting, he unknowingly disrupts sage Vishvamitra's yajna, releasing three powers. To appease Vishvamitra, Harishchandra offers his kingdom, and he, his wife Taramati, and son Rohitashva are exiled. Rohitashva dies, and Harishchandra seeks help for his cremation, but during her search Vishvamitra falsely accuses Taramati of murder. Harishchandra is forced to condemn her to death, but just as he is about to execute her, Lord Shiva appears and intervenes. Vishvamitra reveals it was a test of Harishchandra's integrity, restores his kingdom, and revives his son.

Feminism as seen in this feature

This film has a shockingly feminist lens and holds significance in the context of feminism. But, to back track just a little, the main girl Taramati was played by a male actor as the director could not find a woman to cast. Before he turned to hiring a man he looked for women willing to take this role from the sex work field. It's hard to say what this means, but I think it's fair to say that it means something because women were scared to act in a film because it had never been done before but men had no drawbacks. But on a more positive

note there is great representation of women especially for the time. The film's culmination, where Lord Shiva intervenes to save Taramati and restore the balance, can be seen as a symbolic endorsement of justice for women in oppressive situations. Harishchandra's willingness to follow dharma even when it demands the execution of his wife highlights the patriarchal expectations placed on men. However, the resolution suggests a reevaluation of the righteousness of these norms, reinforcing a feminist perspective on the need for equality and fairness in the treatment of both men and women. Another example of such is that women, like men, can uphold values such as truth, justice, and sacrifice. It suggests that moral integrity is not gendered but is a human trait. This counters the idea that women are merely emotional beings and reinforces the idea of women as autonomous individuals capable of making morally sound decisions.



Anna Salunke who plays Taramati is featured on the right.



Synopsis

This movie tells the complex and quite dramatic story of a mother, Radha who experiences many tragedies yet holds through with her values. She is considered “mother” of her village. Throughout the course of the movie her husband leaves her and dies, Her youngest son, mother-in-law, and infant die in a severe storm. At the end of the movie she shoots one of her two remaining sons to protect her village showing the priority of her moral values over her son. Yet throughout all of this, her integrity shines through and her strength as a women and leader in this town remains resilient.

Analysis

This film was inspired by two Indian pro-nationalist epics, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. In much research, Mother India is discussed in the sense of women and their role in Indian nationalism and India's post-colonial identity (India was free from British rule starting 1947 and this movie came out in 1957.) Some say that this movie created gendered stereotypes, linking Radha and thereforewomen as the face of the nation's struggle for independence and womens' struggles. Whereas other people saw this film as a driver of nationalism and female nationalism.

This movie also changed the way the mother character was depicted in Indian cinema. Mother's prior to this were depicted as dependent on their husbands as well as conformist to patriarchal social structures. This movie depicted Radha as an independant mother, breaking Hindu stereotypes. It also depicted the sacrifice of femininity and motherhood, with the shooting of her son for her village.

Personal thoughts

This movie was expected to release on August 15th 1957, the tenth anniversary of India's independence, but ending up getting released a few months later. With all my research on this film, I think this movie is quite complex. I don't think there is one way to see how feminism was portrayed in this movie especially because of the time period and the other underlying themes present in the film. I do think though, that is movie was very monumental in the history of Indian feminism and it's impact not only in terms of success in the box office but just on the history of India as a whole and women, nationalism and feminism in India. I don't want to get too much into it though because I think, it's important to have your own understanding of this film, and as a Pakistani woman the impact of the themes of this film are more personal to me.

Bhumika



Synopsis

Bhumika, based on the autobiography of actress Hanasa Wadkar, follows the life of Usha, a woman who rose to fame as an actress in the 1940s and 1950s. The film explores the actress's complex relationships, personal struggles, and the pressures of being a woman in a patriarchal society. Her journey is marked by her search for identity and independence as she navigates love, family and her career. Her struggles with relationships with men, mirror the challenges that Indian women face in the film industry and society at large. This film explores gender, identity and freedom.

Impact on Feminism

The film does two things, it makes aware the role of gender stereotypes but it also challenges them. There is not much to say that is different than what has been said in the films past. What I can say is that it is another movie that brings to light the issues in Indian class, caste and gender roles. Out of the hundreds of Bollywood movies that stereotype women and use them for aesthetics, it's extremely important to have films like these to balance out what people are seeing. It's also important to mention that people who don't know Indian culture, see these movies as a

representation of reality. So, having a true representation of female struggle and female roles in society is beyond important. One key example of a critique on gender in the movie is seen in Usha's marriage. Her marriage reflects how women are supposed to prioritize their families over their personal wants. The film does a good job of showing and critiquing the way in which women are often trapped in relationships that demand self-sacrifice and compliance. There is also an exploration of objectification and sexual autonomy because of her role as an actress. Fame brings exploitation, and this film shows how the women in the industry are commodified as objects of desire and things to just be consumed by the male gaze instead of as people. In this movie instead of being a passive victim of this exploitation which is how women in Bollywood are normally portrayed she asserts her agency within the confines of a patriarchal system.

DANGAL

Synopsis

Dangal tells the true story of two sisters, Geeta and Babita who's father pushed them to become wrestlers and inevitably won the gold for India at the olympics. The father was a wrestler when he was young and wanted sons to carry on his legacy and finish what he started. But, when his wife was unable to provide sons he decided he would train his daughters instead. This story does two things. One it shows women in India in a very different light, a light where they don't have to get married and can create their own stories. But, two it raises the question of if this is a true feminist film or if wrestling was forced upon them by the patriarch of the house enforcing nationalism on his daughters.

Impact on feminism

In the movie Geeta and Babita sneak out for a night to go to their cousin's wedding. They have a great time dancing and singing etc. but the cousin looks miserable. Geeta and Babita's dad busts them for sneaking out and they step away with the cousin and tell her how annoying their dad is and how strict he is. The cousin starts crying, explaining how lucky the girls are, that their dad is giving them a life and helping them

achieve something and that isn't marriage (she was only 14). This was very common for girls in India, the age has gotten older in modern day and it's less strict but it's still common. This movie is a rare glimpse at Indian cinema breaking gender stereotypes and showing that gender is not a restraint for them.

Opposing views

On the contrary how much does this movie stand up against gender stereotypes, versus play into the stereotypes but in a different form. The father is still holding a patriarchal position in the family, forcing his daughters to train at the crack of dawn, cutting off their hair when they misbehave, forcing them to at first fight with boys and not letting his wife interfere. Instead of forcing them to marry he is forcing them to wrestle. Is one better than the other, probably. wrestling gave the girls so many more opportunities than marrying would have. It's safe to say the representation isn't perfect but it is getting there and it is an immense level up from movies of the past. Also it's very likely the father would have forced his sons to do the same thing he forced the girls to do, had he had sons. So, overall this movie broke gender stereotypes like almost none other before it, in India. then

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