

The representation of gender in Bollywood film posters: A Semiotic Analysis

Alok Kumar Jha

Assistant Professor

Dept. of Mass Communication

Babu Banarasi Das University, Lucknow(U.P)

Abstract:

In entire India, films are made in different languages. Bollywood is India's largest industry which is located in Mumbai. Films are broad and powerful visual medium portraying Indian culture. For moviegoers, film poster or film banner is an integral part of their life. There is a lot to contribute to the poster of a film. It plays a vital role in attracting moviegoers to the cinema hall. In today's era of Internet, film posters have its own significance. Poster of a film portrays the image of the male and female character of the film. For this study, the researcher's aim is to find out how the film poster of Bollywood films portrays the image of male and female as a stereotype. By randomly selecting some posters of Bollywood films as a sample, the researcher found how the female character portrays as a sexual object, sexually harassed by the male character while the male character was shown as a hegemonic hood. In this study Barthian Visual Semiotics approach has been adopted, through which researcher analysed and interpreted the characters which were portrayed in the Hindi cinema's poster with the help of Goffman's theory of gender analysis.

Bollywood film posters portray the image of gender in stereotypes. Erving Goffman describes in his book *Gender Advertisements*, "*display and depiction of femininity and masculinity*" (Goffman,1976). Other researchers also studied on body images and its impact on advertising. These studies cover the diversified discipline from psychology to marketing. As discussed, the advertising on body image, the portrayal of gender in advertising, film poster is also an advertising or marketing tools for watching movies in theatre by the cine-goers. There are different types of medium, for instances television, cinema, advertisements etc. through which being portrayals of 'man and women' as well as making & shaping of image. As aforesaid mentioned the 'making and shaping medium' of image of gender; film posters also portraying and making and shaping the gender. In most of the advertisements, images of men and women are portrayed or is being portrayed as sexual object, vulnerable, weaker or dependent. In contrast, images of men are portrayed as self-dependent, with more confident, powerful, comfortable or in hegemonic-hood nature (Goffman,1976). All through the course of events film posters have marked as one of the significant mode or tool of film exposure. However, film posters or banner reacts the same as like other publicising material reacts. Every now and then it gets impacted by various craftsmanship developments and socio-social changes (Pinto and Sippy, 2008; Haggards, 1988; Shahid et al. 2015). Film posters being the most imperative sort of presentation and meaningful visual depiction of film in two estimations where it accumulates all the value and subject of a film in a singular static plane (Mazumdar, 2003; Uberoi, 2005, Shahid et al. 2015). The technique utilized in this banner research is illustrative investigation where it will isolate each visual that shows up on this banner at that point study the importance of each visual, what are the implications and signs (Persada,2019). Persada quoted (Persada,2019) Roland Barthes and Ferdinand de Saussure in his study- "In Barthes's theory, he developed semiotics into two levels of signification, namely the level of denotation and connotation. Then Roland Barthes groups the codes into five codes, namely hermeneutic codes, semantic codes, symbolic codes, narrative codes, and cultural or cultural codes"(Barthes, 1967). While "Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics isolates the visual into two implications specifically meaning and undertone, both depict the connection among signifier and implied, even despite the fact that every one of them depicts an alternate significance" (1990). Persada (Persada, 2019) have done the study by the two stages. In the first stage researcher have done the information assortment, where the information gathered from different sources identified with the keywords, and in this exploration, the information assortment takes from the Internet (Persada,2019). After the way toward gathering information done, at that point the information has been decoded accordance with the abstract speculations about Semiotics. After that, the image in the banner (film posters) has been divided on

the basis of some visual components' scales (Persada,2019). The significance making and influence of films poster depends upon the relationship made by diversified film posters (Shahid et al.2015). The significance of signs and implication are undoubtedly is relevant for mankind, as we can see this since our commencement of development (Faina, 2016). Faina Nicoleta has studied for searching out for inside and outside diagnostic analytical symbolism in pictures, to require focus and commitment to the subject (Faina, 2016). Apart from this, author of the current study also published a paper on '*portrayals gender in magazine advertisements*' which aim is to identification of mapping of gender for advertising of products or brands (Jha et al., 2017)

Portrayals of Gender in film posters

Goffman's gender display shows the trends and patterns of depiction of gender and it also can be understand as rituals as well as behaviour of gender. Also, gender display refers to societal understanding and their interpretation towards gender (Goffman,1976). Goffman makes the six codes that which shows the codes of gender. The six codes are Relative size, function ranking, the feminine touch, the ritualization of subordination, licenced withdrawal and body display (Goffman, 1976).

Portrayal of Masculinity in film posters

According to Goffman's analysis of gender, men are generally portraying in the various ways in advertisements such as an "*alertness and consciousness, up-standing , eyes open and looking in front of cine-goers, controlled and straight body, mean expression on his face, hands in pocket, looking serious , showing as confident, physically active, bravery and so on*"(Goffman, 1976 and Jha et al., 2017). As discussed earlier; film posters are also an advertising or marketing tools for attracting cine-goers in the theatres. In the manner men are portrayed in advertisements; similarly, men are also portrayed in the film posters (Goffman,1976).

Portrayal of Feminity in film posters

According to Goffman's analysis of gender, portraying of women in advertisements generally in this various ways, such as "*touching object and self- touching , lying down on the bed or floor, sit on the lap of the men, closing eyes, no alertness, often demented, helpless, erected body or body controlling by others, up-standing with an object or with a man for support, easily available, alluring ,high-spirited, inattentive*"(Goffman, 1976 and Jha et al., 2017). Also, it often gets to see that when the women are lying down on the bed or floor; men are up-standing over them. Actually, this depiction shows lower in ranking than men. In the manner men are portrayed in advertisements; similarly, men are also portrayed in the film posters (Goffman,1976).

Objective of the Study

To analyse the representation of gender in Bollywood film posters

Researcher analyses the current study on the basis of Goffman's six scales of gender display. Goffman's describes these scales of gender as following:

- (a)**Relative Size:** According to Goffman, relative size can be described as One way in which power, authority, rank, office- is mapping through the relative size. The concept of relative size refers when women are generally portrayed as smaller in Advertisements than men in terms of social weight. Goffman states that 'in the few advertisements where women are portrayed as taller than men.
- (b)**Feminine Touch:** According to Goffman, women are often depicted as just touching objects. Goffman argues that 'women are generally presenting goods or products for advertisement with utilizing their fingers and hands to hold or touch the objects'. This sort of portrayal shows that women are feeble, defenceless and so forth.
- (c) **Function Ranking:** Goffman describes function ranking as men are generally portrayed as an *executive role* while women are portrayed with *ordinary role*. This kind of hierarchical ranking depiction either in inside or outside of occupation frame.
- (d)**Ritualization of Subordination:** According to Goffman, ritualization of subordination refers to women's position. In this category, women are generally positioned as lying down on the floor or bent on a knee or showing women beneath the men. In this category, women generally posing with much closer to the ground or floor, rather than standing up and holding their bodies erect. These types of pose refer to women being less in control of oneself.
- (e) **Licensed Withdrawal:** In this category, Goffman argues that women are generally presence herself in dreamy

situation or showing as psychologically adrift while men are portrayed as in the present mood or situation (Goffman, 1976). For this category, women are not often involved in the scene. Usually, women are not paying attention towards the audiences or camera. Women depiction shows this withdrawal through their head or body away from the camera. In actual, women are not actively participating in the scene.

(f) Body Display: In this category, we can see the level of nudity of women or female model's body display (Kang, 1997). Goffman refers to this category for measurement of the level of nudity.

Methodology of the Study

For this study, researcher define the Goffman's scales of gender on the basis of semiotic analysis; That is, with the help of *sign, signifier and signified*. For the current study, researcher was randomly selected some Bollywood film posters, since 2000 to till date and analysed twelve film posters which were taken from the online search engine. For this study, methodologies have applied in two stages. In the first stage researcher was done the information assortment, where the information gathered from different sources, and in this exploration, the information assortment takes from the Internet (Persada,2019). After the way toward gathering information done, at that point the information has been decoded accordance with the abstract speculations about Semiotics and Goffman's Scale of gender. After that, the image in the film banner (film posters) has been divided on the basis of some visual components' scales (Goffman's Scale).

Semiotic Analysis of film posters

Semiotics refers to signs and images as components; the assessment of structures of correspondence, as language, signals, or dress. (Faina, 2016).

1. Relative Size



Fig.1

Fig.2

Image source: <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Table 1: Image source: <http://www.glamsham.com>

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman/Women	Low-confidence, Under Control of Man/Men, Feeble, Powerlessness.
Human	Man/Men	Powerful, own-control, Commanding
Object	Clothes, Naked Body	Sexuality, Vulnerable, Feeble, Powerful

Table 1 indicate Fig.1

Table 2

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Happy but under control of Men, Feeble, Dependent.
Human	Man/Men	Officer, Hegemonic-hood, Powerful, Own Control.
Object	Clothes	Sexuality, Ordinary, Executive

Table 2 indicate Fig.2

Above Table and Fig.1 & 2 shows that semiotic analysis of film poster, which is based on Goffman's scales of gender. On the basis of the semiotic analysis, the researcher found that the portrayal of women/femininity with no or low confidence, under control of men's, powerlessness and feeble. In contrast, the portrayal of men/masculinity with hegemonic-hood, self-control, powerful. In the frame of relative size, the depiction of women as sexual and

ordinary object while the depiction of men as executive and special form.

2 Feminine Touch



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Image source: <http://post.jagran.com>

Table 4: Image source: <https://www.behance.net>

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Touching object, Dependent, Neglectful, Not looking towards the camera or audience
Human	Man	Hegemonic-hood, Confident, Executive
Object	Shoes	For daily use Product, Part of life, slave

Table 4 indicate Fig.3

Table 5

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Touching object, Dependent, Neglectful, Not looking towards the camera or audience (Inattentive)
Human	Man	Full Confidence, Supportive, Looking towards the camera (Attentive)

Table 5 indicate Fig. 5

Above Table and Fig. 4 & 5 shows that semiotic analysis of film poster, which is based on Goffman's scales of gender. On the basis of the semiotic analysis, the researcher found that the portrayal of women/femininity as a just touching object, low confidence, inattentive, not looking towards the audiences or camera. In contrast, the portrayal of men/masculinity as a hegemonic nature, with full-confidence, supportive, highly attentive, looking towards the camera or audiences. In the frame of a feminine touch, the depiction of women is portrayed as slave as well as daily uses product like shoes which is negligible while the depiction of men as executive, worth and worthwhile which is attentive.

3 Function Ranking



Fig. 5



Fig.6

Image source: <http://www.santabanta.com>

Table 5: Image source: <http://www.boxtv.com>

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Women	Sex object, Ordinary, Under control of Men, Feeble, Dependent
Human	Man	Full Confident, Special, Self-dependent, Authority
Object	Clothes	Non-Executive; Sexuality, Executive

Table 5 indicate Fig.5

Table 6

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Women	Ordinary Objects, Under control of Men's, Dependent
Human	Men	Full confident, Executive role, Special, Self-Dependent
Object	Cloths	Non- Executive, Executive, Sexuality

Table 6 indicate Fig.6

Above Table and Fig. 5 & 6 shows that semiotic analysis of film poster, which is based on Goffman's scales of gender. On the basis of the semiotic analysis, the researcher found that the portrayal of women/femininity as an ordinary object, under control of Men's. In contrast, the portrayal of men/masculinity as full-confidence, self-dependent and special. In the frame of a function ranking, the depiction of women in non-executive form as well as sexual objects while the depiction of men in the executive and special role.

4. Ritualization of Subordination



Fig. 7

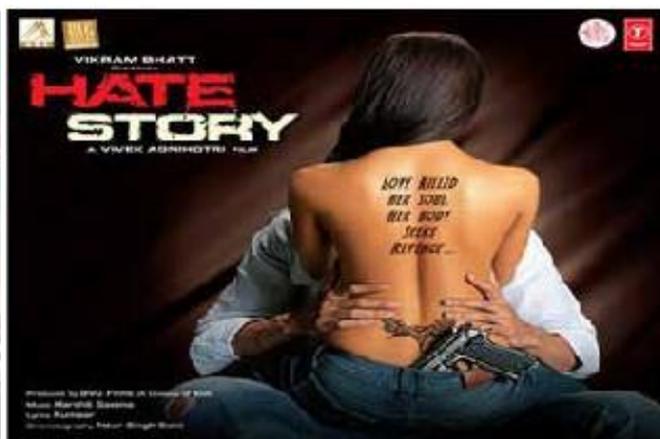


Fig. 8

Image source: <http://www.india.com>

Table 7: Image source: <http://www.india.com>

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex object, Easily available for sex, Oppressed, Ordinary, No control in oneself, Under control of Men's, Inattentive
Human	Man	Oppressor, Special, Attentive
Object	Clothes	Vulnerable, Decent, Non-executive, Executive

Table 7 indicate Fig.7

Table 8

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	No control over oneself, Under Control of Men's, Sex object, Easily available for sex, Ordinary, Oppressed, Dependent
Human	Man	Full confident, Special, Oppressor
Object	Pistol, Clothes	Male Sex Organ, Vulnerable, Decent, Non-executive, Executive

Table 8 indicate Fig.8

Above Table and Fig. 7 & 8 shows that semiotic analysis of film poster, which is based on Goffman's scales of gender. On the basis of the semiotic analysis, it was found that the depiction of women/femininity as a sex object as well as easily available for sex, no control over oneself, under control of men's, oppressed and ordinary object. In contrast, the portrayal of men/masculinity as a confident, special and oppressor. In the frame of a Ritualization

of subordination, the depiction of women is non-executive, vulnerable and easily available object as we can see that how woman lies on the table and sitting on the lap of the man while the depiction of men in the executive. Apart from this, we can see the representation of Pistol as Male Sex organ.

5. Licensed Withdrawal

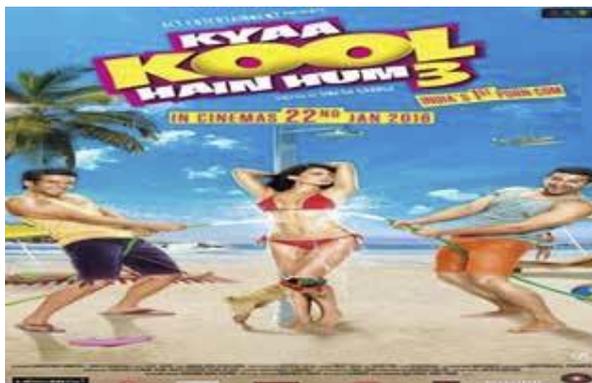


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Image source: <http://www.impawards.com>

Table 9: Image source: <http://www.indicine.com>

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex Object, No control over oneself, Inattentive, Looking dreamy/adrift, Powerlessness, Discharge, Dependent, No/Low confidence, Oppressed
Human	Man	Full Confidence, Self-dependent, Self-controlled, Powerful, In charge, Attentive, Oppressor
Object	Clothes, water pipe	Sexuality, Vulnerable, Casual, Male's sex organ

Table 9 indicate Fig.9

Table 10

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex Object, Under Control of Men, No control over oneself, Dependent, Powerlessness, Discharge, No/Low confidence, Oppressed, Inattentive, Hunt
Human	Man	Full Confidence, Self-controlled, Self-dependent, Powerful, In charge, Oppressor, Attentive
Object	Clothes, Evil Eyes Nail	Sexuality, Vulnerable, Hunter

Table 10 indicate Fig. 10

Above Table and Fig. 9 & 10 shows that semiotic analysis of film poster, which is based on Goffman's scales of gender. On the basis of the semiotic analysis, it was found that the portrayal of women/femininity as a sex object, no control over oneself, under control of men, powerlessness, oppressed, dependent and Inattentive or adrift mood (not looking towards the camera or audience). In contrast, the portrayal of men/masculinity as a full confidence, self-dependent, own control, powerful, in charge mood, oppressor and attentive (looking towards the camera or audience). In the frame of Licensed Withdrawal, the depiction of women as hunt, vulnerable, sex object while the depiction of men as hunter and oppressor.

6. Body Display



Fig. 11

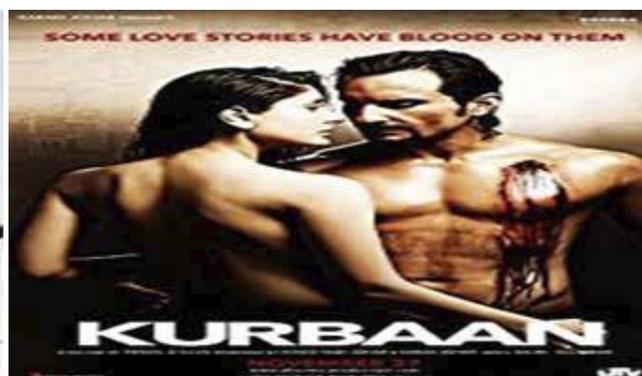


Fig. 12

Image source <https://www.storypick.com>

Table 11: Image Source <http://www.imdb.com>

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex object, Stereotype, Revealing, Sexuality, Seducer, Product
Human	Man	Full Confident, Self-dependent, Customer
Object	Lady shoes, Naked leg, Clothes	Daily use Product, High degree of nudity, Executive, Non-Executive, Vulnerable

Table 11 indicate Fig.11

Table 12

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex object, Stereotype, Revealing, Sexuality, Seducer, Product, Feeble
Human	Man	Full Confident, Self-dependent, Heroic and Powerful
Object	Naked lady's back, Naked men's chest, Bleeding chest	High degree of nudity, Product, Feeble, Vulnerable, Heroic and Powerful

Table 12 indicate Fig.12

Above Table and Fig. 11 & 12 shows that semiotic analysis of film poster, which is based on Goffman's scales of gender. On the basis of the semiotic analysis, it was found that the portrayal of women/femininity as a sex object, stereotype, revealing, sexuality, seducer, product and feeble. In contrast, the portrayal of men/masculinity as a full confident, hegemonic-hood, self- dependent, heroic and powerful as chest bleeding due to bullet. In the frame of a Body display, the depiction of women as product, feeble, vulnerable, non-executive while the depiction of men as executive, heroic and powerful, self-dependent. Apart from this, in both figure the naked body part has been displayed in foreground with high degree of nudity while the men are in background.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was found that depiction of femininity as a sexual object, stereotype, seducer, product, feeble, dependent, powerlessness, vulnerable, easily available objects while the depiction of masculinity as a hegemonic-hood, full confident, heroic and powerful, self-dependent, customer in film posters. In addition, on the basis of Goffman's scales of gender display, the researcher found that the portrayal of women/femininity in the form of no or low-confident, under control of men's, non-executive, ordinary role, daily use product, Inattentive, with high degree of nudity, hunt, oppressed, slave while the portrayal of men/masculinity in the form of special , self-controlled, executive role, hunter, oppressor, authoritarian.

References

- Barthers, R.(1967). *Element of Semiology*.New York:Hill& Wang. Retrieved from https://monoskop.org/images/2/2c/Barthes_Roland_Elements_of_Semiology_1977.pdf
- deSaussre, F. (1990). *Course in General Linguistics*. London:Duckworth. Retrieved from https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fulllist/first/en122/lecturelist2019-20/saussure_course_in_general_linguistics.pdf
- Faina,N(2016). *Signs: Semiotic Analysis of 2 Movie Posters*. Nicoleta Faina Creation. Retrieved from <https://nicoletafaina.wordpress.com/2016/02/05/signs-semiotic-analysis-of-2-movie-posters/>
- Goffman, E. (1976). *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper. Retrieved from http://www.publiccollectors.org/Goffman_Gender.pdf
- Haggards, S.(1988). *Mass Media and the Visual Arts in Twentieth-Century South Asia: indian Film Posters 1947-Present*. *South Asia Research* ,71. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/026272808800800103?journalCode=sara>
- Jha, A. K. , Raj, A. and Gangwar. R(2017). *A Semiotic Analysis of portraying Gender in Magazine Advertisements*. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Volume 22, Issue 5, Ver. 11 (May. 2017) PP 01-08, DOI: 10.9790/0837-2205110108
- Kang, M. (1997). *The portrayal of women's images in magazine advertisements: Goffman's gender analysis revisited*. *Sex Roles* 37, 979. Retrived from <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02936350>
- Mazumdar, R.(2003). *The Bombay Film poster*", *Seminar* (525), 33-41. Retrieved from <https://www.india-seminar.com/2003/525/525%20ranjani%20mazumdar.htm>
- Persada, S. I. P. (2019). *Semiotic Analysis of Gundala Movie Poster*, Conference paper at ICOBEST-HSS 2019, Published in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 391. Retrieved from <file:///E:/125931939.pdf>
- Pinto, J., & Sippy, S.(2008). *Bollywood Posters*. New York: Thames & Hudson. Retrieved from [file:///E:/TitleDesignInBollywoodFilmPoster%20\(1\).pdf](file:///E:/TitleDesignInBollywoodFilmPoster%20(1).pdf)

- Shahid, M., Bokil. P., Dharmalingam, U.K.(2015). Title Design in Bollywood Film Posters: A Semiotic Analysis, Conference paper Presented at IIS, Bangalore. Retrieved from file:///E:/TitleDesignInBollywoodFilmPoster%20(1).pdf
- Uberoi, P.(2005). The pain of love and the love of pain. In D. Blamey, & R. D'souza (Eds.), Living Picture: perspective on film poster in India (pp. 79-88), London: Open Editions. Retrieved from [https://books.google.co.in/books?id=ruUiBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA301&lpg=PA301&dq=Uberoi,+P.\(2005\)](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=ruUiBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA301&lpg=PA301&dq=Uberoi,+P.(2005))
- Alok Kumar Jha is Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Babu Banarasi Das University, Lucknow (U.P.), India