

Polarities in Gender Representation- Kabir Singh and Thappad

Dr Namarta Joshi

Associate Professor and Head

Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication,

GNDU Regional Campus,

Jalandhar-144007

Abstract

For millions of years, the battle for gender supremacy threatened the world, even though both were born as human beings. The advantage has mainly been with the males, though the equation has changed temporally and geographically. Struggle for rights has been the central force of this tussle. Media as a reflection of society has not been left untouched by these perspectives and has unabashedly sided with power, except for a few lone voices. Cinema has not been any different though due credit attributed to it for social change. Films, in India, have become integral to its culture, as also in changing the image of women in society. Stereotypes reinforced but in the modern times, the representations have changed, and filmmakers have experimented with them, ranging from toxic masculinity to extreme feminism, as the recent films like Kabir Singh and Thappad have shown. The present study deals with these polarities of representation through deconstruction and discourse analysis of these two films.

Keywords: Masculinity, Feminism, Hierarchy, Representation, Chauvinism.

Introduction

From times immemorial, genders have been locked in the struggle for power and the whole gamut of economic, social and many other dimensions centred around this struggle, with the triumph oscillating from one side to the other throughout the globe. However, primarily, our societies have been male-dominated, with women marginalised to its peripheries and suffering the consequences of this repression. Women have been at the receiving end of the rod in most of the cases. This divide exists under various nomenclatures like gender discrimination or sexism.

Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Sexism can affect anyone, but it primarily affects women and girls. It has been linked to stereotypes and gender roles and may include the belief that one sex or gender is intrinsically superior to another. Extreme sexism may foster sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence. (“Sexism”, n.d.)

Not only in India but most of the other countries as well, women are the targets of such extreme sexism as the spiralling crimes rate against them shows. However, government, non-government organisations and media, along with many social reformers, have worked assiduously to create awareness and gender sensitisation among the masses. An NCRB report (2017) sheds light on these crimes, Crimes against women constitute murder, rape, dowry death, suicide abetment, acid attack, Cruelty against women and kidnapping. 'Cruelty by husband or his relatives' accounts for 27.9 per cent of the crimes against women. Majority of the cases are filed under this IPC section shedding light on the high prevalence of domestic violence in the country. (Nirandhi Gowthaman, 2019)

In recent decades, gender studies have become part of academic discipline and have proceeded so far as to include queer studies as well. The increased and widespread focus on the subject may be one of the factors in some of the causes leading to skewed gender representations in art, literature and other spheres, with both positive and negative implications for the society.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are

- 1) To understand the concept of masculinity.
- 2) To explore the concept of feminism.
- 3) To analyse the narratives of films Kabir Singh and Thappad in the context of gender studies.

Research Methodology

Films have a visual text, and a pictorial quality, which carries the meaning and the interpretation of it and so are easily adapted to a deconstructed analysis as envisaged by Derrida for literature and arts. Derrida himself felt deconstruction challenging to explain and complicated. However, it does project critical questioning and multiple layering of text as well as the use of tools like semiotics, psychoanalysis and structuralism. (Booth Douglas, 2006). For the present study, two recent films, Kabir Singh and Thappad deconstructed. A detailed discourse analysis of the two selected films has been undertaken in the light of masculinity and feminism related text in the form of plot, as also the language used in the films concerning the society in which they occur. The context and the connotative content assumes importance in the present study.

Review of Literature

Meghna Mehra (2019) in her article, 'The Many Masculinities of Bollywood: 1960s To The Present', takes a journey down the history of Bollywood, from Angry Young Man to the metrosexual youth to discuss various types of masculinities represented in Hindi Cinema and the changes that have occurred over the decades in this portrayal.

Jasbir Jain and Sudha Rai (2015) in their edited book, *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema*, explore the image of women in both mainstream and parallel cinema, in the context of a traditional patriarchal set up in India and how they struggle towards self-identity, through stereotypes. The book talks not only about the contemporary cinema, along with the changing trends in techniques and even spectatorship but also about regional cinema as well.

Aybike Serttas and Hasan Gurkan (2017) in their study, *The Representation of Masculinity in Cinema and on Television: An Analysis of Fictional Male Characters*, talk about the stereotypical portrayal of male characters in Turkish cinema and television which reinforce the what an ideal man should be. The gender roles are compartmentalised and women shown in subservient positions.

Masculinity

Gender roles assigned to the sexes compartmentalised, and any digression frowned. Not only women but even men bound by the rules of masculinity, which is ingrained into their mind from birth, blue versus pink dolls versus guns. From childhood, these stereotypes are enforced and more often than not by the women themselves as mothers or sisters. As the age progresses, they become attitudes and beliefs, translating into the behaviour of the males. The image transferred from generation to generation. So, masculinity is primarily a social construct rather than a biological factor.

Even though gender experienced as intensely personal—and internal facet of our identity—masculinities produced and reproduced through the course of our daily interactions as well as within the larger institutions of society. (Kimmel, Bridges, 2011)

Masculinity studies (Connell, Kimmel) have been relatively recent initiative and explores different dimensions of the gender roles, especially those of males. Hegemonic masculinity talks of the hierarchical structures that define the masculinities, from one end of the ladder to the other, powerful to marginalised. The definition of masculinity then differs across the social structure. This plurality forces one to deal with each masculinity differently. For instance, hegemonic masculinity represented in the film *Aakrosh* (1980), which is a study on downtrodden man, whose voice heard in a scream after murdering his sister to save her from the clutches of depraved men.

Masculinity portrayed in films as describing the "traditional" man to objectify women, to be driven by sex, emotionally repressed, self-reliant, as well as avoid all facets about femininity. Rather than seeing a man cry on film, instead, see them "turn violent or present an extremely stoic exterior." ("Masculinity in Films", 2018)

Toxic masculinity, on the other hand, looks at the negative behaviours leading to aggression, dominance and the consequent implications for the society. This kind of masculinity is socially destructive and perpetuates a regressive behaviour. It impacts not only women but affects the men also psychologically, as they struggle to keep up with their image, leading to domestic violence, rapes, including marital rape and other dominating traits.

Terry Kupers defined toxic masculinity as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence. (Salter, 2019)

The problem accentuates when such behaviours are adopted as role models and accepted without demur through opinion-makers and in the contemporary times, through popular media like films, which more often than not are reflections of the Indian society. From the he-man and angry young man and even before that, the concept of masculinity and femininity have had stereotypical representations in Indian cinema with little concessions in the name of progressiveness.

Heroes have had a clear run as the pillars of the medium, both within and without, with heroines ligated as mere embellishments or eye candies under what Laura Mulvey described as a male gaze. As early as 1949, in *Andaz*, Mehboob Khan blames modern, educated and independent-minded heroine for being open and friendly with a male character, which may be construed by the society as being characterless and for which she must repine. Heroes may have their flings, pre and extramarital affairs, they may stalk in the name of wooing, even go to the extent of kidnapping to get the girl and the girls will have the typical Stockholm Syndrome, falling for the hero, hook, line and sinker. As far as females are concerned, it is the vamps in Hindi cinema who do flirting or smoking or drinking and so on and if the heroine does so, she has to be redeemed. Very clearly stated in Karan Johar's *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), supposedly modern cinema, that tomboyish girls, who win at games from heroes, are not wife material unless they don a more traditional avatar. Poo in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001) sheds off her diva avatar for a salwar suit one. Males are the protectors of the virtue and honour of women of the household, and they only are capable of keeping at bay all glances that dirty their 'honour'.

Many heroines and heroes killed in the name of honour and for choosing a mate of their own, recent Dhadak (2018) being an example. Being a 'mard' is a constant refrain of the male protagonists, and self-reliant females are frequently labelled as shrews to be tamed by men or develop complexes, where women have to withdraw and suffer in guilt as in Abhimaan(1973), where the husband cannot take the success of his wife. Until Pink (2016) the standard dialogue in Hindi films was "Aurat ki Na mein bhi unki haan hoti hai" or "Hasee to fasee" or "Admi rote nahin". Coercion translated into consent. Then, being queer was being a caricature in most of the films. It was something to be hidden in the closet. In earlier films, nobody even dared to deal with the subject. If one were to heap indignities on a person, it was him called a 'namard' or 'hijra' or 'wearing bangles'. Rapists empathised with to the extent that in Anil Kapoor- Juhi Chawla starrer Benaam Badshah(1991) the solution to rape and other forms of violence is suggested as reform and marriage by the victim, with all the love showered on him. This debilitating relationship exists not only at the level of sexual relationships but in other relationships as well, father, brothers, uncles and other male members of the family and society. Dabang series seeks to glorify corrupt law enforcers. Gentlemen rejected in favour of immoral Romeos, as in Rehna Hai Tere Dil Mein (2001). It is this aspect of masculinity which is under the scanner of the present study. The audience could not accept macho man Salman Khan in more emotional roles like Bajrangi Bhaijaan(2015) or Tubelight (2017).

These indicate that being a 'man' is a real sign of being superior to others and lures one into thinking that such a status is exceptionally desirable. As far as the trajectory of such hegemonic toxic masculinity goes, any delineation from these norms seen as emasculating which makes the male characters 'lesser men' subjected to various forms of social punishment such as public shaming, being looked down upon, outcasted etc. (Bardan, 2018)

Kabir Singh (2019)

Kabir Singh is a remake of Arjun Reddy, Telugu film by the same director, Sandeep Reddy Vanga and was a blockbuster hit at the box office. The hero's entry scene proclaims him as an addict, masochist male. He smokes and drinks and indulges in sex at the drop of a hat, with or without consent as when the girl whom he is trying to have sex with, asks him to leave. He asks her to undress at gunpoint. He uses his students and friends to release his sexual frustration and ultimately, has to use ice to cool off his libido. He drinks before a critical surgery, which his nurse prepares for him. He has named his bitch after his beloved, Preeti, for whom he cares more than any human being. In the flashback, he is in Medical College and playing football for his college, where the teams clash, using gender-related swear words and obscene gestures,

justifying it all with the statement that football is a violent sport. When the Dean of the College asks him to manage his anger, if he has to be a good doctor, Kabir refuses to apologise for his behaviour saying that he is what he is, choosing instead to leave college.

Nevertheless, before that, he meets Preeti. The entry of the heroine is a pointer to her attitude through the film. In line with other girls, like a herd of cattle, with eyes on the ground and no sound, like automatons and Preeti is in white attire, pure and virginal. It is love at first sight and brands the girl as his property forever. This he declares to the college, Meri band hai, or Kabir's interest, so everybody is told to stay off-limits as there are other girls aplenty.

He pairs her off to a plump looking girl saying that healthy girls are more loyal. He coaches her personally, instead of letting her attend classes. He has become her local guardian. On Holi, everyone is instructed not to colour her except the hero, and when the rivals dare to do so, they are beaten black and blue. Kabir Singh has such mercurial temper that for a broken glass by the maid he chases her away like a maniac from the building. Preeti is injured, so he shifts her to boys hostel, in violation of all rules. The exciting thing is how everyone, friends and juniors fall in line for everything he does. How everyone caters to his whims is a big question.

Kabir Singh is not just a portrayal of a brash and badly behaved man. It also plots the story in such a way that every other major character adjusts for and accepts Singh's flaws and even forgives him. In the end, he emerges a winner. The film not only absolves Singh of the abuse and mistreatment he metes out to women, but it also reunites him with his girlfriend Preeti, who returns to an abusive relationship at the end of the film. (Divya Arya, 2019)

It is also a comment on the audience that identifies with characters like Kabir and his brand of misogyny that the film was a box office success. It is a disturbing trend for the women of India and elsewhere when the audience applauds or acquiescence with such violence. As an aside, all the swear words used are gender-based, mother**** or sister****.

The next step to hostel shifting is 'most naturally sex', while his fellow hostelers only crib and the hostel warden is a meek, little man, who does not dare question him. They continue meeting and getting physically intimate, even when he moves on to do his Masters degree, travelling to and fro, until they caught romancing by her father, on the terrace of her own home. This is no college romance, he brashly declares. He tries convincing her parents but is unable to do so, gives an ultimatum to her slapping her on the street when she is clinging and begging him for philosophical thought. The patriarchy steeped in the social system that Preeti's young, teenaged brother also uses his friends to frighten off Kabir. Men of the house take decisions regarding a girl's marriage, and she accepts it without demur. The decision that Preeti had taken

after marriage taken before it, but she says that she was banking on Kabir to come and rescue her. Women frequently portrayed as damsels in distress, and men are knights in shining armour. Back home on the eve of his elder brother's wedding, he locks himself down with a dose of alcohol and morphine. During his unconscious state, Preeti is married off. Getting up when he hears about it, he again creates a ruckus at her house, refusing to accept her marriage and also gets thrown out by her father and relatives and later his own. Next few months are his complete Bohemian, dissipated existence of booze, drugs and sex, even when his friends try to reason with him to move on. So, the standard way out in a tragic situation or loss of love in Hindi films for men is liquor and sex, and for women, torn. He directly proposes a sexual arrangement to his patient, who is a film actress but stomps off at the name of love. Later, he is involved in a medical scandal, as he performs a necessary surgery in an inebriated and drugged state and his medical licence suspended for five years. He is turned out by his landlord and returns home to attend his grandmother's funeral. Here, he catches a glimpse of a heavily pregnant Preeti in a park and decides to take her away with him even if the child is not his, only to learn that the child is his own. That she had left her husband three days after the wedding, and she makes it clear that she did not let the other man touch her. Misunderstandings resolved to unite them in marriage.

Kabir Singh seems to be a modern-day Devdas but with a spirit and aggression, which the old age hero lacked. Girls are available on call to these men. Even a renowned actress gets down to ironing his clothes. Promiscuousness is an answer to rejection in love, while women conditioned to remain loyal as Preeti does. He calls her not my love but my woman, *meri bandi*, objectifying her in the most degrading way. Though Kabir is supposedly intellectually superior, as the Dean suggests, he would rather have lesser marks than become a person like Kabir. Moreover, as Indian films go, even if the hero were not so educated and brilliant, the result would have been the same. Dialogues used in the film are examples of toxic masculinity that is inherent in the patriarchal society, demeaning womanhood; the propriety rights understood over the other sex, as masters over slaves.

Feminism

Feminism is an ideology that seeks equality of sexes in all spheres, despite differences in mental and physical capabilities. It calls for equal opportunities. Since beliefs and ideologies are conditioned by the society and get translated into actions, attitudes and behaviour, for feminism to be adopted one will have to struggle against centuries of embedded beliefs and implant a new one. However, this name has already altered individual perceptions and already

veering towards post-feminism. In straightforward words, MacKenzie Lee defined feminism as You deserve to be here. You deserve to exist. You deserve to take up space in this world of men. (MacKenzie Lee, nd). In the feminist movement, different waves have succeeded each other, from pioneers to bra burners to #metoo campaign. Women had to struggle throughout history to get small concessions, which were easily available to men as a matter of right, including right to education, vote and even movement.

Feminism itself was a radical concept for men and difficult to accept. However, Radical Feminism is the extreme form of this philosophy which instead of focusing on equality of genders, directs towards the elimination of patriarchy as one concept goes, The main difference between radical feminism and other branches is that they did not concentrate on equalising the distribution of power. Instead, they focused their efforts on eliminating patriarchy by transforming the entire structure of society. More specifically, they wanted to get rid of traditional gender roles. (Daborah Teasley, nd)

In India, the status of women has been extremely contradictory, from reverence for female energy to objectification and every crime against them taken as a routine. The Indian Constitution grants equality before law and opportunities without discrimination to gender but the implementation of laws related to women leaves much to be desired. Nominal representation in the political system, pay disparity, exponential rise in crimes against women are still the order of the day. On an individual and collective basis, the striving for equality continues as well as its repercussions. As mentioned before, media has contributed a lot in dealing with this problem, though it has been accused frequently of stereotyping, objectifying and other negative representations, reflected in the society. Films are just a segment of this media.

Feminism and films

From Duniya Na Mane(1937), some bold statements made by Hindi cinema but such voices have been exceptions rather than the rule. There has always been a stereotypical reference to women in films, in all relationships and characterisation like the mother, sister, wife and friend, almost in the fashion of a caricature. Questions of self and identity are rare, and their existence in films is more of an appendage and for visual pleasure. Hunterwali Nadia was a novelty imported from abroad. The fiery princess in Aan(1952) has to be tamed. Therefore, any representation of women who rebel is acclaimed and heralded as revolutionary. The idea of liberated women has more often than not interpreted as booze and bed in many Hindi films. Women in Indian cinema are born with certain assumptions, ranging from cult movies to

celluloid blockbusters like Sholay to more modern fashion. They are portrayed either as damsels in distress or demented feminists or simple belly-shaking glam dolls whose sole ambition is to attract the attention of the male gender. In many Indian films, it is a common trend to insert 'item numbers' which bear no rational connection to the film in any ways but with an assumption that the film is easily associated. ("The Depiction of Women", 2018)

Women will always need the protection of men, and if they are self-sufficient, they are either alter egos as in Seeta Aur Geeta (1972) or vamps as in numerous films. Women who drink and enjoy deemed to be "available' as we hear in Pink(2016). Many also need the agency of males to fight their battles in films like Dangal (2016) or are urban upper class centric. At the other end of the spectrum were women who became dacoits as in Bandit Queen (1994) or castrate men for crimes against them or their families, as in Zakhmi Aurat (1988). Films like Saand ki Ankh though takes feminism into India's hinterland. It is the world without men for liberated women, whether it is Arth(1982) or Queen (2013). This rejection is women's answer to societal oppression spanning centuries. Rarely do we see some balance in this gender war. Exploring female sexuality and identity in films like Rihaee (1988), Fire (1996) or Lipstick Under My Burqua (2016) is a recent phenomenon. However, as the reactions to these films show that many sections of the society are not ready to accept the change.

Thappad

The feminist movie, Story of sisterhood and many other titles hailed Thappad, where interestingly and unlike Kabir Singh, the box office returns were low. Most of the reviews of Thappad have praised the film for the issues it has raised.

Anubhav Sinha's latest release takes you through a roller-coaster ride of various elements of gender microaggressions and deep-rooted patriarchy that breaks the barriers of the societal divide, entitled men, undisputed power structures, degraded relationships, the loneliness of ageing parents, unapologetic man-child, marital rape – all of them, almost effortlessly. (Bhuvneswari, 2020)

However, in a way, Thappad has touched the other end of the debate about gender war. Thappad seems to be a convoluted tribute to feminism. From the credits to all characters savouring orange candy as an indulgence, dreaming of independence or naturally nostalgic, seems to be a quick start to the theme. The first dialogue of the film is, Why to marry when we are happy without it, by Swati, the girlfriend of Amrita's brother on a bike in a flying pose on a bike. Similarly, happy is Nethra Jaisingh, in a few stolen moments outside marriage with a male friend, feeling the wind outside a car window. The beginning is relatively sedate and

calm, seemingly happy, with Amrita routinely going through all household chores, attending to an unwell mother in law, sending off husband to the office and then also going to a neighbour's house for teaching dance.

Moreover, she does not object to that and submits to all kinds of demands of the household, supporting her husband in his ambition for a promotion and move to London, for which he is oblivious to everything else, working late into the night as she dreams of a house with a blue door in London. She fully supports his ambition. Husband is kind of dependent on her for even minor things like running the printer or getting the file. They care for her too as she scalds her hand, they ask her to let the maid do the work and apply ice on her hand. She cuddles with her husband during moments of intimacy. That promotion does get through, and a party to celebrate it. However, a phone call telling Vikram that he has to report to a boss in London contrary to what had been decided earlier, upsets and frustrates him to the point that he demands an explanation from his boss at the party and as all try to calm him, including Amrita, who tugs at him, he slaps her in front of everyone. That is where the slide in their relationship begins.

Her lawyer also does not have a perfect marriage because her husband does not give her credit for any of her successes instead attributes them to his and his father's name and reputation. Amrita's maid lives in an abusive relationship, with her husband getting drunk and beating her at the drop of a hat.

The 'Thappad' occurs at a time when Vikram is in a volatile temper for the career-related problem when she is pulling him away. That is the defining moment. Amrita goes into a shell as everyone rallies around her, though her mother in law talks about the incident being 'Ghar ki baat'.

Amrita vents her anger in the hectic cleaning of the house. Her routine remains unchanged, silently. There is simply no communication. Vikram tries to placate her the next morning and justifies it, saying that he had emotionally invested in the company. At this time, the comment of Dia Mirza's character. It takes little effort to make relationships but challenging to maintain them is pertinent in many respects. The equations have changed overnight. In one shot, it is the husband who is cuddling her with her back turned to him. Vikram takes her out to dinner, trying to win her over. She never discusses the issue with him even before leaving the house and interestingly, stocks the groceries before leaving. Even the brother raises this issue of non-communication, but Amrita asks for more time. Vikram calls at her parent's home. He says that he had not put any conditions at the time of her marriage. He even asks her to slap him if it satisfies her. She even accuses her in-laws indirectly that they did not teach him better

as her parents had taught her, with the example of her mother in law before her, whom she reveres as her mother. He tells her that he will do whatever it takes to keep the family together and files for restitution of conjugal rights. Her lawyer feels that her reaction may appear to be unreasonable to many, but she contends that she just wants to be happy. Ironically, the song that follows is, Hai o Rabba, Naio lagda dil mera. Mother and the brother, Karan, wants her to compromise and give Vikram a second chance. Nethra's husband is more proud of her beauty rather than intellect and rapes her.

Meanwhile, Vikram and his mother are not able to cope up with the household chores. Nethra advises Amrita to think again about divorce based on irreconcilable differences. Subodh, Vikram's friend, expresses that a little bit of physical violence is an expression of love. However, the lawyer advises out of court settlement and dialogue. Amrita's mother in law collapses with low blood pressure, and the servant calls Amrita. Amrita admits to Vikram that she does not love him any more. Amrita believes that to expect her to move on is unfair. Amrita takes care of her mother in law even when they are fighting for divorce. When Amrita goes to her room to get some papers, Vikram asks her what is not hers and that she is projecting herself as a sweet person, but she has turned his world upside down. Vikram files false charges against her. When her pregnancy test turns positive, she immediately goes to Vikram to announce it. He is happy and asks her to consider for child's sake, but she once again refuses to say that she does not love him any more. Father supports her, saying that we do everything thinking we are right but that we realise only later whether we were right or wrong. If she feels secure and she is not just obstinate, she could go ahead. Vikram asks a neighbour to give false testimony, but she refuses. Vikram offers house and alimony in return for sole custody of the child, but that vociferously contested by Amrita and her lawyer. Vikram tells her that his mother is praying for their child and has arranged pooja for them. Amrita says she never intended to take the child away and dares him to press more charges against her. On her part, Amrita too presses charges of domestic violence and outraging woman's modesty to get a mutual divorce and joint custody of the child, after which Vikram has to sign the papers. Amrita attends the pooja and shows concern for mother in law. Amrita is apologetic about getting married into a wealthy family, though she never thought of becoming a housewife. She confesses he loved her very much, but that love was for a wife, not an individual. She considers never forgiving all of them because they sided with Vikram. She also knows that Vikram is going to love their child more than her. Mother in law says that the fault lies with parents who do not teach boys that physical violence is not their right and asking girls to remain silent. Vikram goes to London. Karan apologises to Swati and swears to become a better person. Nethra leaves her home and starts afresh without

Priyal. Sunita refuses to work and hits back at her husband. Vikram returns to India when divorce granted. He feels sorry to her as he never apologised to her when he thought I love you was enough. He would earn her love now.

Some questions are bound to crop up. As Sreemoyee Piu Kundu asks

What if Pannu had slapped a domestic abuse case from the word go, instead of pussyfooting around an incident that violated her space and rights and human dignity? Why did she continue being docile and meek? Why did she never question how her husband had always treated her like a glorified maid, even as the comparisons are made, through the film? (Kundu, 2020)

Feminism is not something that awakens at the spur of a moment or a single incident. It is something ingrained or an attitude that you are not servile and do not take unreasonable behaviour for granted. That is the problem in Thappad. Her decision looks imposed, jarring as compared to her earlier behaviour, where she is almost pampering her family to the extent of putting the breakfast in her husband's mouth like a child going to school. She is not a good cook. Her mother in law says that her mother had abused her in law and husband, but we do not see her abusing Amrita anywhere. We did not hear any objection from the family when she goes off to teach dancing to a neighbour's daughter. She admits she was a housewife by choice. On the other hand, Vikram is a go-getter and immersed in his job and spending sleepless nights for his presentation and promotion. She also is excited about the shift to London and a house with a blue door. When a promotion comes, they are ecstatic. The phone comes amid the party and everything changes.

Though his boss stresses that he would never have slapped him, but the question is hypothetical. This is no excuse for a slap. There never is but a divorce based on that seems too far fetched, even as a child is also involved. Self-respect is as necessary for one as a soul. However, one must also understand the institution of marriage, on the other hand, which is being undermined in modern times, as the growing rate of divorce cases shows. Communication is imperative in any relationship, more so among a husband and wife. A thin line separates self-respect and ego. One objection is to Vikram not putting his apology in words though he does try to convince her to move on and get her back and in the last scenes, he thought saying I love you was enough, which for Amrita, obviously it was not. The kind of support she gets from everyone around her is heartwarming, and the issues in the film are also aptly raised, except for the logic of the central character. Well, her maid and lawyer have more reasons to seek a divorce than her and no doubt, they are incredulous. Many dialogues of the film are pregnant with feminist undertones. Reading between the lines give them another perspective and interpretation.

A single slap opened her eyes, then why was she sleepwalking through her marriage. Why did she compromise on all the demands made on her earlier and why is she apologetic getting married into a more affluent household?

Chabad has been in a line of many trendsetting women-centric movies like Queen, Pink or Mardaani and others. So, a race for 'feminist' movies is on. However, whereas other movies are consistent to the theme, Thappad does not seem to be so. It is veering more towards radical feminism where the world can do without men and women are happy being alone.

Sudhir Vanga, the Director of Kabir Singh, gave the following statements,

if you do not have the liberty of slapping each other, then I do not see anything there,

- Kabir had a reason to slap her,

- If you cannot touch your woman wherever you want — it is not unconditional love, there are many conditions. (Patel, 2019)

The counter statements in Thappad.

Conclusion

Kabir Singh and Thappad, the two movies under consideration, show two polarities of gender representations in Indian cinema in the contemporary times and therefore, have won box office or critical acclaim but may be difficult to digest in reality. While Kabir Singh portrays an extreme form of masculinity, which may perhaps occur but seems exaggerated, at least the subservient female does not conform to the image of the modern, educated woman and how the world surrounding him caters to his form of masochism. It does not form a very positive ideal role model of a male for the audience already living in a world off spiralling crimes against women. Thappad, on the other hand, goes in for a very conflicting version of feminism, combining mute acceptance of male domination as well as sounding a bugle against patriarchy, again functioning in a society already in turmoil as far as personal relationships are concerned, parents, siblings, spouse or children. The question is that have the filmmakers gone too far in both the cases in putting forth their convictions, whereas the solutions lie elsewhere. What are its implications for society is debatable.

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