ENTERTAINMENT TO EXPLOITATION: A PSYCHO-ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN FILMS/CINEMA

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Abstract- Cinematic films are considered popular for image portrayal of different genders. The study is based on the objectification of female characters and their effects on the recent issues of sexual violence against women in India. The analysis and findings are based on the objectification theory, male gaze theory and Feminist theory. The study reveals that sexual objectification of women in the selected films is stereotypical and they are mostly portrayed as sex object or item for male gaze. The study concludes that the sexual objectification of women can evoke unhealthy social and physical instincts in viewers and provoke the chances of sexual violence.

Key words- Objectification, sexual object, erotic, psychoanalysis, male gaze, scopophilia.

I. OBJECTIFICATION TO SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION

Sexual objectification is the treatment of a person just as a body, an experience of being treated as a body which is predominantly presented as an object for the pleasure of men or predominantly for the consumption of male gaze (Fredrickson, &Roberts, 1997). Treating a person as an object is a painful phenomenon rather than a problematic issue which can cause destruction of positive image of women in society. It's a bitter reality of time that films are selling sex but not the messages. In films women are not portrayed as human being but as an object which is an item for the sexual satisfaction of male gaze and men desires. Therefore, it's a common perception that the sexual objectification of women body reflects the cruel reality of patriarchal world that women worth is actually in her body appearance and sexual functions (Szymanski et.al. 2011). For the sake of scopophilia, women are taken just as bodies or for their body parts, to give pleasure to male gaze. Sexual Objectification is a kind of oppression which women face either through employment discrimination or sexual harassment or violence.

Objectification of women is actually a denial of subjectivity and emphasizes on the reality that women's feelings and experiences are not important but their body is. Objectification of women is to prove that their ownership is belonged to some men. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) emphasizes on the cruel effect of sexual objectification which leads the women towards self-objectification, due to which women start to objectify themselves and want to be assessed on their looks. Due to these objectification women get obsessed of eating disorders and many health problems. While on the other hand sexual objectification provokes the instinct of sexual harassment, sexual assault and other violent acts such as rape which according to the sexual objectification theory of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) is the worst impact of sexual objectification of women in films. In the background perspective of frequent rape cases and acts
of sexual assault in India, the sexual objectification of women in films could be one of the major causes of sexual violence against women in Indian society.

II. BACKGROUND OF INDIAN CINEMA

India is a big country in south Asia which is considered as one of the highly populated country in the world. Women are more than 50% of its total population in the country. In Urban as well as in rural areas of the country, women are proving their constructive role and progress in different fields of their personal and professional lives. At the other hand India has been rated as the worst country for women, after the brutal incident in December, 2012 when a young female student was sexually assaulted and gang raped in a public bus. In the largest democratic country of this world, one woman is raped in every 20 minutes in the country. According to Indian National Crime Record Bureau Statistics, sexual violence crimes against women have been increased to 71% since 2010.

Indian films industry which was started in 1931 with a small budget film is now reported at the end of 2010 as on the top of the list of the countries which have highest annual film output, followed by Nollywood, Hollywood and Chinese film industry. In 2011 the annual revenues of Bollywood films have been reached to 1.86 billion dollars which is expected to be increased to 3 billion in 2016. Bollywood films are seen in more than 90 countries all over the world where Indian films have great market value. Bollywood is considered influential in shaping the behaviors and mindsets in India. Men perception of women is being guided by their portrayal in the films which are viewed in every class in the Indian society. The sexual objectification of women has a negative impact on society. Rather these films are affecting the

minds of people in India where 70% people are living in conservative rural areas where exposure to sexual relations is strictly monitored by social norms. Similarly, the Bollywood films are sabotaging the progress, which women are making to have equal rights and opportunities by struggling on feminist grounds.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF OBJECTIFICATION AND MALE GAZE

The present study has been done under the theoretical framework of Objectification theory of Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) and Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of Male gaze. The findings have been discussed under the feminist theory to investigate patriarchy as the root cause of sexual objectification and sexual assault of women in films and in society respectively. Sexual objectification is the treatment of a person just as a body, an experience of being treated as a body which is presented as an object for the pleasure of men or predominantly for the consumption of male gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). It is actually the concept of reduction to body parts; that a person who is identified with her body parts but not as herself. Presenting someone as an object as if that person lacks the skill of speaking. They are just supposed to listen to men and have to follow patriarchy quietly, without speaking. Moreover, women are objectified through their appearance. Objectification is to transfer humanity to the status of an object. Women are never taken for their achievements in their lives but for the achievements they get through the pleasure they give to male gaze from the objectification of their body or body parts in films. Women are objectified not only for men desires but also according to the patriarchal beliefs of men to look at women as passive towards them.

Women before 1970's were portrayed more in family relations but after 1970's the concept of extra-marital relationships came which change the image of women from family member to a sex object in films or cinema. The real objectification of women could be seen obvious during the last few decades and especially after the wide use of internet and social media, the sexual objectification prevailed rapidly (Rothman; Stephen & David, 1993). It's a bitter fact and reality that women have overlapped workforce more than men during the last few decades in America but women portrayal in American films is still stereotypical which is just focused on physical portrayal of women in cinema.

The most objective and controversial analysis of sexual objectification of women image comes from Laura Mulvey's highly influential articles. Mulvey (1975) has targeted the political patriarchal approach of male dominant society which portrays women in films with a desire of pleasure of male gaze. Through her article, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema", Mulvey stresses on this bitter fact that women in films are portrayed through three kinds of spectators' male gaze. The women are sexually objectified first of all from the male gaze of male protagonist and then from the male gaze of camera's eye and lastly from the gaze of male spectator who identified himself as the male protagonist who also likes to gaze at female protagonist as an object for his sexual desires. Mulvey has a strong argument about her point of view is that the major amusement of cinema is 'Scopophilia'.

Scopophilia is a voyeuristic kind of gaze which is aimed at other people or genders. Therefore, the scopophilia provokes the instinct of a person to look at some other person as an erotic object to get pleasure. Therefore, for this pleasure of male gaze, women are shown as passive sexual object and men are shown as active to absorb that sexual satisfaction under the hidden desire of patriarchy or male domination. Mulvey speaks out that women characters have no important place in films except as an object which is presented as a spectacle for the male character in the films and also for audience which is watching that film. Mulvey asserts that male viewers or men never want to watch male character as a sexual object. The forceful reason is the second kind of amusement offered by films is 'narcissistic voyeurism' that is to watch or suppose oneself in the ideal character and to be identified as the main character of the film. Therefore, male viewers always like to identify themselves with the main male protagonist character and they also like to take the main female protagonist character as a subject of their desiring gaze or as a sexual object for them.

More probably women are shown in ways that spotlight on their sexual accessibility, passiveness, and reliance on other people – they are motherly or domestic lady. At the same time sexualized, or too frequently portrayed as sufferers or victims of society and indirectly targeted by patriarchy. According to Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) through the sexual objectification by giving an ideal image of women, now the focus of audience is more on physical appearance of women rather than on her mental skills or on what she is as a human being. Therefore, it is an "invisible camera" which portrays every kind of image of women on media; either it is sensually colorful image or a picture of a submissive member of the society.

Cinematic films prove to be a valuable source to analyze the sexual objectification by the male dominance in the patriarchal society. Likewise, Ayob (2008) traces that women in Indian films are used as a commodity which is meant to be used by the male consumers for their scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) or male gaze instead of epistemophilia (the desire to know). As the main targeted audience is suspected to be men therefore women are portrayed under the

heavy influence of patriarchy and their presence is controlled by male-domination. Therefore, feminist

always complains that sexual objectification of women is done as per demand of male audience and for male gaze.

First thing to be discussed is patriarchal ideology behind the film texts to highlight the subordination and sexual objectification which provokes sexual violence against women. Therefore, under the umbrella of Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) Objectification theory and Laura Mulvey (1975) Male gaze theory, the data analysis has been done in the perspective of feminist theory.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The method of qualitative interpretive textual analysis has been utilized. The selected data is examined through the following Sexual Objectification Indicators: 1. Characterization. 2. Costumes and Body movements. 3. Male gaze; Camera framing

The most popular films of 2011-12 have been selected from Indian (Bollywood) films that are produced by female producers and they have got worldwide popularity and viewership. The first selected film is Dirty Picture (2011) which is also produced by a female producer named Ekta Kapoor. This film has earned record money within few months of its release. A number of women rights organizations protested against the objectification and exploitation of women in this film.

Dirty Picture is a story of a young girl named Silk, who wants to be a movie actress. She is not very beautiful and attractive in her looks but she uses her body as a mean to attract the producers for getting some roles in the films. At the same time, she plays sexually erotic roles to get popularity and success in her career as an actress. At last she finds out that people just see the women body as an object for their sexual satisfaction.

The main character of Silk in the movie dirty picture has been shown as an object for the sexual satisfaction of male gaze. She is a young girl with very ordinary looks but she gets roles in films when she offers herself as an object for the sexual desires of producers and leading male characters in the film. Her low neck sexy costumes which shows busty figure to attract the male gaze. Her body movements add with the sexy desires which prove that her character is just objectified as a body. The male gaze theory of Mulvey fits here with the notion that the body parts of Silk are just shown through the camera angles and camera framing which show the male gaze from three dimensions; from the view of male protagonist, from the view of camera lens and from the eye of male spectator who look at the female character by taking her just as an object for her sexual desires. The costumes she wears and the way she presents herself before the male characters is also meant for the patriarchal politics and male fantasy. Throughout the storyline and plot of the film, the character of Silk has been presented for the entertainment of male desires and also under the heavy burden of patriarchy. Throughout this film it has tried to be make sure that women can go far to get success in their life and therefore they use their body as a sex object to get their goals in this patriarchal world. The representation of women in this film has been criticized by many critics that this film has not only damaged the image of women in the society but also has given the men, a worst kind of temptation to use women as an inferior object for the satisfaction of male sexual desires. Therefore, this kind of films could also be taken as responsible for the damaged image portrayal of women and increase in rate of sexual assault and rape incidents in the different regions of India where women are under the strict control of patriarchal domination.

The second selected film is Jism 2(2012) which is also a popular film, produced by Pooja Bhatt, a very controversial female producer, who has been highly criticized for her films on different controversial issues in India. She has always been criticized for her films, produced on sexual objectification of women.

Jism 2 is the story of a young girl, Izza, who is shown as a prostitute in the film. Although the main protagonist female character is shown equally intelligent in the film but at the same time she is shown as a prostitute or sex seller who sells her body as a submissive woman before men. It's a thriller movie and the female protagonist, Izna is hired as a spy of a detective agent but throughout the film the invisible camera of Scopophilia has focused on her body parts to work for male gaze. She is stereotypically presented as emotionally and sexually a submissive woman who willingly presents herself and her body for the sexual satisfaction of her boy-friend and also for the agent for whom she works. She is shown as an acquiescent woman who at many parts of the film is used as a sexual object to give a relief to the stress of male protagonists.

Throughout the film scenes, Izna is shown with sexually revealing costumes with backless tops and deep neck blouses with busty breast. The camera framing and camera angles of her certain body parts have also driven the force of male gaze in all the shots or scenes of Izna. In most of the shots, her breast and thighs are taken as an object with some sexually tempting camera angles of her body parts. The analysis reveals that male characters are presented as independent and intelligent member of working class and female characters are shown just as an erotic object for the sexual desires of men. Therefore, such a kind of portrayal is not only showing the sexual objectification of women for the sake of male gaze but is also showing the patriarchal control of men over women.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The in-depth study and analysis of both of the selected films which are the big productions of two

popular female producers, reveals that women have just been shown as sexual objects in the films. The male gaze theory of Mulvey apt here with the notion that the body parts of female characters are shown through the camera angles and camera framing as an object of male desire. The sexual objectification drives the male gaze from three dimensions; from the view of male protagonist, from the view of camera lens and from the eye of male spectator who look at the female character by taking her just as an object for her sexual desires. Under the heavy control of patriarchy women are bound to get their goals by providing their body as an object for sexual satisfaction of male protagonist or sometime to the male antagonist in the modern films which are now produced and viewed as top-rated films in the country. Though these selected films are produced by the female producers but as they are also under the hidden dominance of male audience who actually wants to look at women in films just as an erotic object of their sexual desires. Therefore, it is a reason behind such objectification of women body that producers just aimed to get profit from these commercially produced films. Women are treated as an entertaining sex object, therefore sexual abuse and objectification which leads to exploitation of women is considered acceptable. The sexual objectification in films inflames the instinct of sexual abuse, sexual assault and other violent acts such as rape
which in the light of the objectification theory of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) is the worst impact of sexual objectification of women in films.

These two selected films are released and have got popularity just before the shameful and brutal incident of gang rape of a young girl in an urban city of India in 2012. Therefore, under the feminist theory, it is revealed through this study that women are sexually objectified in the Indian films which to some extent are responsible for the sexual harassment and rape violence against women in India. Moreover, objectification of women body is under the strict ideology of patriarchy. The main targeted audience is male therefore under the invisible domination of men the films are a source for sexual satisfaction and also responsible for wrong temptation and sexual aggression among men in the patriarchal society. Therefore, such a kind of entertainment is actually meant for exploitation of women under patriarchy. The study concludes that the sexual objectification of women can evoke unhealthy social and physical instincts in viewers and provoke the chances of rape and sexual violence against women.

The article recommends the sexual objectification of women in films produced by female producers should be diminished and discouraged to portray a positive image of women of this society. This article aimed to improve the situation of women rights as to be protected from rape and sexual violence which is caused through the image portrayal of women as a sexual object in the films. Therefore, it is recommended that a constructive image of women should have to be portrayed through the films or cinema and especially the female producers should have to focus more on positive representation of women and women concerning issues in films.

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