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Bollywood and Hollywood: Mirrors of Societies' Perceptions of Women?

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the inferior positions of women in both Bollywood and Hollywood films and the way in which these representations reflect women's actual social positions in Indian and American societies. In order to determine whether these films truly reflect women's social positions in these respective societies, this paper establishes and relies on a criteria in order to understand what women's social positions truly are in both societies. A criteria is also formulated by which the representation of female characters in the top five blockbusters from Bollywood and Hollywood in the years 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013 are judged. The results of this criteria are presented in two tables in order to clearly portray the low levels of female representation in the films analyzed. This thesis then goes on to analyze particular films from both industries in order to examine general trends in each industry as well as to track the development, or lack thereof in the case of Bollywood, of female characters over the years. As a result of the research conducted, this thesis concludes that although the positions of women in both Indian and American films as well as societies remain inferior to those of men, women in India are unequal to a greater degree than women in the US.

Introduction

Equality is a principle that is easily taken for granted by those who benefit from it, and yet is eagerly sought after by those who do not receive its privileges. The fact that women in India and the US are still treated as inferior in the 21st century suggests that the way in which our societies perceive of women and their value in society is still extremely backwards. It is not only the moral duty of a society to uplift its members but in the cases of India and the US

specifically, the largest democracy and the oldest democracy in the world,[1] it is their political duty to ensure equality for all their citizens. This paper highlights the way in which films reflect the inferior social positions of women in India and the US and argues that the representation of women in the popular cinemas of India and the US, Bollywood and Hollywood, suggest that although women in both nations are socially unequal Indian women are perceived as inferior to a greater degree.

The first section of this paper will discuss the political positions of women as reflected in the rights they are granted by the constitutions and Acts of the Indian and American governments and the laws passed in order to support these rights. The second section will discuss the social positions of women in order to highlight the fact that although women may have relatively equal rights to men on paper, these rights are not reflected in their daily lives. In addition, this section will examine the influences of religion, local traditions, and culture on women's social positions in both India and the US. The third section will explain the reasons that films were focused on in this paper as well as the criteria that is used in order to analyze films. The last section contains tables that reflect the data collected from the films analyzed and will discuss the representation of female characters in the blockbuster films of Bollywood and Hollywood in 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013.

Historiography

The topic of women's representations in films has been addressed mainly by feminists. However, although these feminists focus mainly on the representations of women in Hollywood and there is significantly less research and analysis conducted on Bollywood in comparison, their

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[1] *Times Topics: India*
Wood, S. *US and India: World's Oldest and Largest Democracies Share Historical Ties* (DIP Note, US Department of State: June 22, 2013) Accessed Online - October 5, 2014

arguments can be applied to Bollywood films. This paper focused on the theories of Mieke Ceulemans and Guido Fauconnier (*Mass Media: The Image Role and Social Conditions of Women*) who establish the ways in which female characters in films are inferior to their male counterparts. Laura Mulvey (*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*) expands upon this by suggesting that women's inferiority is due to their positions as spectacles or objects of entertainment in films and Ann Kaplan's (*Women and Film*) argument--that the camera in a film acts as the "male gaze"--is utilized in this paper in order to highlight the subjugation of women in Bollywood films in particular (especially in scenes such as "Item Songs"). Furthermore, the criteria of analyzing the representation of women in films that is used in this paper is based upon that of Alison Bechdel.

In terms of the social positions of women in India and the US, there is not much debate amongst scholars as to which factors contribute to the establishment of women's social positions as they essentially have similar arguments. Scholars such as Philip Alston and Ryan Goodman (*International Human Rights*), Gautam Bhan (*India Gender Profile*), and Michael Lipton and Richard Longhurst (*New Seeds and Poor People*) that write about the social positions of women in India argue that women are seen as inferior due to cultural and traditional Indian practices. In order to judge the social positions of women in the US this paper focused on feminist Margaret Mead's (*Women's Social Positions*) arguments. Furthermore this paper relied upon religious texts such as the *Laws of Manu* and the *Bible* in order to understand religious perceptions of women's social positions in Indian and American societies.

<u>Methodology</u>

This paper relies on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used for this paper are the top five Bollywood and Hollywood films from the years 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013 as well as the Constitutions and Acts of India and the US, the "Gender in Media" study conducted by the UN, statistics from the "Labor Force Participation Rates", a study conducted by the PewResearch Religion and Public Life Project, and religious texts such as the *Laws of Manu, The Ramayana,* and *The Bible*. The viewing of these films was carried out by the author of this thesis as well as another individual who knew and used the criteria of this paper in order to correctly analyze the films. The secondary sources that were used for this paper were feminist literature, scholarly works on Gender in Indian and American society, and articles on the representation of women in Bollywood films as well.

A criteria was created in order to fairly analyze each film to the same standards, this criteria asks four questions and is based on Alison Bechdel's "Bechdel Test". After analyzing these films a table was created in order to better represent the data to readers. The analysis that follows is based upon the films watched as well as the social positions of women that are established in earlier sections.

<u>Women's Political Positions in India and the US</u>

On paper, both India and the US have attempted to uphold the democratic principle of political equality of both their male and female citizens by ensuring that women's political positions are seemingly equal to those of men's. The importance of this principle has been reflected in the changing policies of India and the US, through legislation and amendments to their constitutions, as they have attempted to increase women's political positions and thus

equality. However although both India and the US have covered some ground in improving women's rights to voting, owning and inheriting property, getting an education, getting a job and equal salaries to men for the same work, what is lacking is the implementation of these rights by individuals in society. Therefore, although the US has passed amendments and acts such as the Nineteenth Amendment, Married Women's Property Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments, Equal Education Opportunities Act, the Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act as well as extended additional civil rights protections to women at the workplace, women in the US are still not treated as equals in all spheres of their lives because they are still not perceived as equals in society.[2]

Similarly, India's attempts to ensure equality through its constitution have been hindered by the presence of Personal Laws in India. Rather than the principles of the constitution, Personal Laws govern aspects of an individuals' domestic life such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Personal Laws are derived from the religious scriptures of religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and do not strive to uphold the equality of men and women but instead present society with a patriarchal lens by which to view society. Therefore although the Indian government has passed the Hindu Succession Act, the Indian Succession Act, the Equal Remuneration Act, the Guidelines Against Harassment at the Workplace, and the Maternity Benefits Act in order to improve women's positions in society and at the workplace specifically, the evident influence of religion on the Indian legal system and, by extension, society has aided in the maintenance of women's inferior positions in society.

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[2] *Women's Rights Timeline* (Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics, 2010) Accessed Online - October 5, 2014.

The fact that property rights are governed by Personal Laws in India means that a woman's right to owning or inheriting property depends on her religion and the way in which this religion perceives of women's value and degree of independence in society.[3] In the case of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh women, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 made it legal for women to possess complete ownership over all their properties from before and after marriage.[4] The 2005 Amendment to the Hindu Succession Act granted daughters equal shares of an inheritance along with sons.[5] However, Muslim Personal laws are derived from Sunni and Shia beliefs which seem to be more patriarchal than other religions. Laws on inheritance reflect this patriarchy as women are given only half the share of a man when inheriting property.[6]

I.   <u>Women's Rights to Education</u>

Education allows for social mobility within a society, and is therefore crucial for women's advancement. A formal education allows for women to be seen as equals in the workplace and in their households as 'breadwinners' along with the men.

The right to education is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in Article 21a.[7] However the literacy rate of women has in fact decreased over the past 6 years.[8] In 2008 India was ranked 117th out of 136 countries for its literacy rate of women and fell to 123rd in 2013.[9] Evidently

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[3] *Citizens: Personal Law* (India Gov Archive: 2011)

[4] *Hindu Succession Act 1956*

[5] *Hindu Succession Amendment Act, 2005*

[6] Pandey, S. *Property Rights of Indian Women* (Muslim Personal Law), 10

[7] *Indian Constitution* (Government of India, Ministry of Law and Justice: New Delhi, 2012) Accessed Online - October 5, 2014

[8] *Global Gender Gap Report 2013 and 2008* (World Economic Forum: 2013, 2008) Accessed Online - October 7, 2014

[9] Ibid.

though women legally possess the right to education they have not exercised it. There are a number of reasons for this; female children are considered 'second-class citizens' in their own homes[10] and only receive resources after the male child and father have;[11] high rates of child marriage lead to female children dropping out of school after primary school;[12] the fact that a female's perceived value comes from her ability to be a homemaker for which a formal education is not necessary discourages rural families especially from sending their daughters to school.[13]

The right to education in the US has been enshrined in a number of amendments and acts that have been passed in order to ensure that access to education was equal for all individuals. Title IX of the Education Amendment and the Equal Education Opportunities Act in particular were put in place to ensure that all individuals were legally entitled to receive an education. Title IX of the Education Amendment directly "prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance".[14] Furthermore, the Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 affirms that educational opportunities will not be denied to individuals on the basis of race, color, or sex.[15] In fact females made up the majority of college students in 2014, 12 million as compared to 9 million males.[16] and the US has ranked first out of

[10] Alston, P et al, *International Human Rights in Context*, 567

[11] Lipton, M. and Longhurst, R *New Seeds and Poor People* (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1989) 7-8

[12] William, R. *Why Girls in India are Still Missing Out on the Education they Need* (The Guardian: 2013)

[13] Desai, S *Gender Scripts and Age at Marriage in India* (University of Maryland: 2010) Accessed Online - February 10, 2013

[14] *Sex Discrimination: Overview* (US Department of Education: 2012) Accessed Online - October 7, 2014

[15] *Educational Law: An Overview* (Cornell University Law School) Accessed Online - October 7, 2014

[16] *Enrollment Statistics* (National Center for Education Statistics: 2014) Accessed Online - October 7, 2014

136 countries in 2013 in women's literacy rates, exemplifying the national commitment to equal access to education.[17]

II. Women's Rights to Equal Employment Opportunities and Salaries

Equal employment opportunities allow for women to be independent from men, surpass a perception as homebodies, and establish their importance in the workplace. If women do not have equal wages for the same work or with the same education level it is quite evident that the only cause for their unequal treatment, is their sex.

According to Articles 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution it is illegal to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their sex or deny them opportunities in matters of public employment.[18] The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 attempts to tackle the issues of employee discrimination as it states that men and women should receive equal pay for the same work.[19] Even with these laws in place India has not succeeded in creating wage equality as India was ranked 101st of 130 countries in 2013 in this regard.[20]

There have been many legislative changes in the US aimed at increasing women's equality at the workplace. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal to discriminate against individuals based on sex in the realm of hiring, promoting or firing;[21] it also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that strives to prevent discrimination at the workplace.[22]

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[17] *Global Gender Gap Report 2013 and 2008*

[18] *Indian Constitution*

[19] Shroff, V *Discrimination Law: Volume 16 Number 2* (International Bar Association: October 2012), 15. Accessed Online - October 6, 2014

[20] *Global Gender Gap Report 2013 and 2008*

[21] *The Civil Right Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* (US National Archives and Records Administration) Accessed Online - October 6, 2014

[22] *Women's Rights Timeline*

Furthermore, in 1967 Civil Rights protections were extended to women in order to ensure that women had the same employment opportunities as men.

However, according to the Gender Gap Index, the US was ranked 63rd of 136 countries in 2013 for its wage equality therefore suggesting that wage issues in particular have not been addressed enough.[23] The wage inequality between men and women in the US has remained the same for the past 10 years. On average women are paid only 78% of what men are paid for the same jobs.[24] This is the case regardless of their education or field.[25] According to a study conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research in 2013, jobs that are predominantly done by women pay less on average than jobs predominantly done by men.[26] For instance, school teachers are predominantly women (80% are) and even there they are only paid 91% of what male teachers are paid.[27] Therefore although women have the right to equal opportunity to employment in the US their right to equal wages is not met.

By passing laws, amendments and acts in order to bridge the gap between women's basic political rights and men's existing rights, the governments of India and the US have acknowledged the fact that women have not always been equal to men. However although the initiatives the governments have taken have resulted in relatively better positions for women on paper, this has not been the case socially.

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[23] *Global Gender Gap Report 2013 and 2008*

[24] *The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap (Fall 2014)* (American Association of University Women: 2014) Accessed Online - October 20, 2014

[25] Ibid.

[26] *Pay Equity and Discrimination* (Institute for Women's Policy Research: 2013) Accessed Online - October 20, 2014

[27] *The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation 2013* (Institute for Women's Policy Research: 2014) Accessed Online - October 20, 2014

<u>Women's Social Positions in India and the US</u>

India and the US are both extremely ethnically and racially diverse countries. This paper recognizes the intersectionalities of a woman's identity and the various facets which contribute to her social position such as class, caste, race, or ethnicity. Therefore in this paper when women's social positions are referred to the paper is alluding to the social positions of half of the population of a country rather than one specific group of women within the female population of the country.

This section focuses on the fact that the rights women have been granted by governments have not been implemented effectively in society, as their social positions are still inferior. To gain a better understanding of women's social positions the factors that have hindered the implementation of women's rights, in particular religion, culture, and local traditions, will also be examined.

I. <u>Persisting Inequalities Against Women</u>

According to renowned feminist Luce Irigaray, the idea that men and women are equal is fictitious and simply acts as an "opiate" for the people. [28] Her claim seems well grounded when the social conditions of women in India are examined, especially in comparison to the social positions of women in the US. The inequality between men and women in India is most evident in the social realm and to a much greater extent than in their political positions. In the US women's social positions seem to be better than they are in India but are still not at par with what

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[28] Irigaray, L. *Je, Tu, Nous* (Routledge: New York, 2007), 70

they should be. Although women have the right to education, equal opportunities to employment, and equality at the workplace these rights are not always implemented in women's daily lives. The lack of implementation of laws that attempt to uphold women's positions as equals in society can be explained by men's perspectives of women that have been tainted by cultural and traditional perspectives in their societies.

II.   Women's Positions at the Workplace

According to the Labor Force Participation Rates (LFPR), India's LFPR in 1993 was 36% and in 2012 fell to 29%[29] therefore signaling that women's participation in the workplace is not only low, but dropping. In terms of salaries, although the Equal Remuneration Act aimed at tackling employment discrimination in both private and public sectors, the issue persists because female labor in India is predominantly present in the informal labor sectors of the private sphere.[30] The lack of reference to this sphere in particular (by Article 16 of the constitution which only mentions the public sector)[31] results in women still being treated unequally in these workplaces. Women are paid lower wages than men in the agricultural labor sector especially, in which most women are employed.[32]

Therefore although women in India have the right to equal opportunity to employment and equal pay there are issues that prevent them from taking part in the labor force or gaining equal wages to men. Women are generally less educated than men as mentioned earlier[33] and therefore cannot be employed in areas beyond the informal spheres or to more authoritative

[29] Labor Force Participation Rate, Females (The World Bank) Accessed Online - October 22, 2014

[30] Bhan, G., *India Gender Profile,* 14

[31] *Indian Constitution*

[32] Bhan, G., *India Gender Profile,* 14

[33] *Census 2011: Literacy and Level of Education*

positions in formal spheres. This lack or lower level of education results in employers having an excuse to pay women less than men as they are less skilled.[34] Secondly, women's positions in society are those of homemakers rather than working individuals[35] (which will be discussed shortly) and this is reflected in the low number of women who are literate, continue on to secondary school, and are part of the labor force.

In the US the LFPR was 57% in 1993 and remained the same in 2012 as well.[36] Within the next ten years the number of women in the civilian labor force is expected to increase by 5.4 percent (almost equal to the increase in men).[37] However, although these statistics are promising, it is interesting to note that the largest percentage of women in the workforce, 36.2% of women, work in the education and health service industries and only 10.5% work in the professional and business industries.[38] The education service industry requires women to deal with children on a day to day basis or to focus on children's overall benefits and growth as individuals. Women in the healthcare industry work predominantly as health service managers or nurses; only 4% are CEOs of healthcare companies.[39] Therefore the high presence of women in the health care industry (especially in positions where they are actually dealing with individuals) once again reflects women's positions as care takers and those responsible for the wellbeing and advancement of others.

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[34] Bhan, G., *India Gender Profile,* 14

[35] Desai, S., "Gender Scripts and Age at Marriage in India"

[36] Labor Force Participation Rate, Females

[37] Women of Working Age (United States Department of Labor: Latest Annual Data) Accessed Online - October 22, 2014

[38] Chase, D. *Women in Healthcare Report: 4% of CEOs, 73% of Managers* (Forbes

[39] Ibid.

According to feminist Margaret Mead, these sectors are not "business employments" for women, rather professions for women in these industries should be "reassessed for what they really are, the exercise of the sort of personal skills which a wife exercises at home.. but fitting these activities to the rhythm of other people's lives".[40] Women seem to have "gendered professions".

Thus there is a clear disconnect between what is on paper as women's positions in society and what their actual positions in society are, as inferior to men in education and/or at the workplace. Therefore the causes of the lack of implementation of these rights need to be examined in order to better understand this disconnect.

The Causes of Social Inequality

The implementation of rights is in the hands of the people, therefore the factors that influences their perspectives must be examined in order to understand the difference between men's and women's social positions. Religion, culture, and local traditions affect the ways in which individuals think and perceive of the world around them and seem to be engrained in their identities and beliefs. Therefore this paper identifies religion, culture and local traditions as the main barriers to women's equal positions in Indian and American societies. This paper will focus on the dominant religions of both India and the US. In the case of India 80.5% of the population are Hindu[41] and in the US 78.4% of the population are Christians.[42]

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[40] Mead, M., *Women's Social Position* (Journal of Educational Sociology, Vol. 17, No. 8: 1944) Accessed Online - October 19, 2014

[41] *Census 2011: Religion*

[42] *Religious Affiliations* (PewResearch Religion & Public Life Project: 2007) Accessed Online - October 21, 2014

Cultures and traditions stem from the dominant religions in society and also reflect the ways in which societies attempt to organize themselves and develop. The relationship between religion and cultures and traditions in both India and the US is most evident when examining the way in which religion and patriarchal cultures and traditions reaffirm one another. In both India and the US patriarchy is seen at different levels of society, in the family, the economy, culture and the political arena.[43] Patriarchal norms are simply taken as unchangeable realities[44] because they are inherently linked to the way in which religious texts such as the Bible and the Hindu Ramayana or Laws of Manu represent the position of men and women in society.

I.   <u>Women in Indian Religion, Culture, Tradition</u>

Hindu texts such as the Laws of Manu clearly outline the responsibilities and duties required of an individual in order to make them an ideal Hindu and the Ramayana depicts the way in which Gods too followed rules to maintain their almighty positions. The Laws of Manu dictate that individuals must follow their Aśrama-dharmas, which outline the way a person of a certain age and gender should live their life.[45] The idea of Aśrama-dharma suggests that community and social and cosmic order are of more importance than an individuals own feelings and desires.[46] The Laws of Manu clearly define that a young girl is "subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent."[47] A woman once married must follow her shri-dharma which involves worshiping

[43] Cohen, P., *America Is Still a Patriarchy*

[44] Irigaray, L. *Je, Tu, Nous*, 16

[45] Doniger, W., *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Group: London 1991), 12

[46] Ibid. 32

[47] *The Laws of Manu: Primary Source* (Women in World History: 1996) Accessed Online - October 22, 2014

her husband "as a God"[48] and maintaining the household[49] furthermore she becomes the property of her husband.[50] The Ramayana highlights the importance of a woman's purity as the wife of King Ram, Sita, is sent away from the kingdom because her purity is questioned by the subjects. The king must send her although he knows she is pure.[51]

The roots of Indian culture and traditions can be seen in Hinduism. Women in India are perceived as domestic beings, inferior to men, carriers of traditions, and as property, which is reflective of principles of Hinduism.[52] Female children are perceived as inferior to male children from the time they are conceived. The mindset in lower classes is that aborting a female child is better than taking on the responsibilities of getting her married and paying her dowry.[53] Girls become second class citizens in their own homes,[54] resources, food, health services and opportunities for education are given to sons.[55] Female children learn their duties as a wife and mother as well as how to run the household alongside their mothers instead of going to school; this is seen as a better use of her time.[56] Therefore schooling becomes a luxury only available to those with enough money to send daughters to school along with their sons.[57]

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[48] *The Laws of Manu: Primary Source*

[49] Doniger, W., *The Laws of Manu,* 66

[50] *The Laws of Manu: Primary Source* (Women in World History: 1996)

[51] Buck, W., *Ramayana* (University of California: Los Angeles, 1976), 391

[52] Irigaray, L. *Je, Tu, Nous,* 80

[53] Alston, P, et al, *International Human Rights in Context* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2007), 567

[54] Alston, P, et al, *International Human Rights in Context,* 567

[55] Lipton, M. and Longhurst, R., *New Seeds and Poor People* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1989) Accessed Online - February 22, 2013, 7

[56] Desai, S., *Gender Scripts and Age at Marriage in India* (August 2010) Accessed Online - February 20, 2013

[57] Ibid.

Furthermore with the rise of globalization and westernization of India, "tradition has become a prized commodity again in India, and women are seen as its carriers and men as its defenders".[58] These traditions involve the passing on of religious beliefs as well as cultural traditions. Men are once again in the positions of authority as they must overlook and sanction women's actions and ensure that they remain pure. Lastly, females' positions as the property of male members in their household is reflected even in cultural traditions such as the way in which marriages are arranged in Indian society, in lower and some middle class families fathers still decide who their daughters will marry and must pay a dowry in order to get their daughters married.

II.   <u>Women in American Religion, Culture, Tradition</u>

The Bible outlines women's duties and defines what it means to be a 'good woman' as well. A woman's contribution to society is the fulfillment of responsibilities towards her husband and children. Proverbs 31:10-31 describe an ideal wife as one who "serves her husband and works with willing hands" for anything he requires and "works well to the ways of her household", therefore she must serve her husband and is responsible for the running of the household.[59] When a woman reaches old age she is to "teach what is good, and train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands" as is outlined in Titus 2:3-5.[60] Therefore a woman's duties as a wife and mother are clearly outlined and her ideal personality is also described as

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[58] Bhan, G., *India Gender Profile,* 6

[59] Smith, S., *100 Bible Verses About Women* (OpenBible: 2014) Accessed Online - October 21, 2014

[60] Ibid.

"submissive" and of "self-control" (Timothy 2:11-15). Women are not to exercise authority over a man and are inferior due to their role in the First Sin.[61]

A survey conducted by the PewResearch Religion and Public Life Project found that 33% of people took the Bible as the word of God and interpreted it literally. The majority 58% of people that were either unsure if it was literally true or were sure that it was not the word of God still seem to be influenced by the principles outlined in the Bible.[62] This influence can be seen in the cultural tradition in American society, as they reflect the Bible's attitude towards women. Women's primary roles are still seen as housewives who are devoted solely to domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, and the care of children.[63] Any woman who does not wish to fall into this position, for instance if she does not wish to have children, is considered to have some kind of "psychological damage" because this reproductive ability seems so inherent to a woman's identity.[64] The Bible's perspective on women's positions in society as submissive to men is seen in American culture in a number of spheres. 94% of US-born married women took the last names of their husbands, exemplifying the male-dominated nature of the most basic unit of society, the family.[65] At the workplace especially, as noted earlier there are few women in positions of authority. The cultural perspective pertaining to this phenomena is that a man's masculinity is threatened when a woman is in a position of authority over him.[66]

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[61] Smith, S., *100 Bible Verses About Women*

[62] *Religious Beliefs and Practices* (PewResearch Religion & Public Life Project: 2007) Accessed Online - October 21, 2014

[63] Mead, M., *Women's Social Position,* 453

[64] Ibid. 459

[65] Cohen, P., *America Is Still a Patriarchy* (The Atlantic: 2012) Accessed Online - October 21, 2014

[66] Mead, M., *Women's Social Position,* 460

<u>Why Films?: The Influence of Films</u>

In the year 2013 Hollywood's domestic box office collection was $10.9 billion[67] once again securing its position as the largest film industry in the world with Bollywood coming in second.[68] Hollywood is the ninth largest industry in the US[69] whereas Bollywood is the second largest industry in India (in terms of capital investments).[70] How is it that both Hollywood and Bollywood have become such significant and massive industries in their respective countries? The success of these film industries can be explained by examining the influence and reach of film as a mass media and art form in both India and the US.

Films are a unique medium of mass media due to their audio-visual nature and the fact that they combine a number of art forms[71] while still informing and entertaining audiences. Films attempt to entertain audiences while still reflecting society's perspectives and cultures in order to make them relatable and therefore successful at the box office. Scholars have gone as far as claiming that American society has become a "cinematic culture" which has come to know itself as a society and as individuals through films.[72] It is because they call upon social realities, intentionally or unintentionally, that films are not merely sources of entertainment but also prominent and influential commentators on social conditions and issues.

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[67] McDonald, A. *Feature Film Production Report 2013,* 4

[68] Ganti, T. *Bollywood: Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 23

[69] Fidelity Investments

[70] Ganti, T. *Bollywood: Second Edition*, 23

[71] Ray, S. *Our Films, Their Films* (New Delhi, 1976), 19

[72] Dudrah, R. *Bollywood: Sociology Goes to the Movies* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 23 & 24

There are many elements that allow for films to have such great influence and reach over society. Firstly, for Bollywood especially, the audio-visual nature of films allows for them to be viewed by a wider audience as illiterate people can also understand them.[73] Secondly, they are more financially 'accessible' to the general population than other art forms such as the opera (which are more expensive and tend to be reserved for people of higher classes).[74] Thirdly, both Bollywood and Hollywood produce films in the most widely spoken languages of their countries, Hindi and English.[75] Lastly, the huge amounts of funding for marketing and promoting films as a result of the "corporatization" of the film industry, has led to larger audiences.[76]

I.   "Sexist Industries": Criticism of Bollywood and Hollywood

Besides the influence and reach films have over societies, the reason films will be focused on is because of the criticism both Bollywood and Hollywood receive for their stereotypical and gender-biased representations of women. The inferiority of female characters in both industries' films is exemplified in a number of ways that are as basic as actresses having less screen time or dialogues to greater extents such as female characters not being represented as equals to their male costars as they are not portrayed as independent or developed characters.[77] The recent "Gender in Media" study conducted by the UN found that the percentage of female

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[73] Maheshwari, L. *Why is Bollywood Such a Powerful Industry? Mumbai Provides an Answer* (IndieWire: Oct 29, 2013)

[74] Ibid.

[75] Basu, A. *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective* (Westview Press: Colorado, 1995) 59, 436

[76] Ganti, T. *Bollywood: Second Edition*, 46

[77] Ceulemans, M. and Fauconnier, G. *Mass Media: The Image Role and Social Conditions of Women* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Paris, 1979), 28

characters in Indian films was only 24.9% and that in American films it was only 29.3%[78] therefore indicating the little representation women have within films.

Although the statistics themselves are reprehensible, the characters that these women portray in films result in greater subordination of women within the industry as their roles, even if 'lead' characters, tend to be in support of the male character's story or as stereotypes of what a woman 'should' be. As Budd Boetticher clearly articulates, the heroine is significant in her ability to represent or provoke certain emotions: "the love or fear she inspires in the hero or the concern he feels for her. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance."[79] Therefore the low percentage of female presence in films an be explained by the fact that their roles are mostly as spectacles or distractions rather than initiators of the plot's development.[80] In addition, women's roles are trivialized as they are constantly defined in relation to the family, marriage or motherhood[81] thus films ignore the other facets of a woman's identity.[82]

II. The "Male Gaze" as the Audience's Gaze

Both Bollywood and Hollywood have been criticized, by feminists especially, for the objectification of women and the camera acting as the "masculine gaze" of patriarchal subjugation.[83] Therefore suggesting that women are only the objects of gaze and cannot possess

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[78] Molloy, A. *Women in films 'Equally Sexualized Between 13 and 39 Years Old' UN-backed Report Finds* (The Independent, September 23, 2014)

[79] Mulvey, L. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Screen 16.3, 1975), 10

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ceulemans, M. and Fauconnier, G. *Mass Media: The Image Role and Social Conditions of Women,* 29

[82] Ibid. 28

[83] Kaplan, E. *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (Methuen: Great Britain, 1983), 30

and control this gaze.[84] For instance, the sexualization of actresses in certain "Item Songs"[85] in Bollywood is obvious; they wear skimpy clothing and perform suggestive and sexual dance moves 'for' the male character's pleasure, thus making a spectacle of her body.[86] "Item Songs" do not pretend to have a purpose beyond articulating feelings of love or lust and most of the eroticism in Bollywood films is contained in Item songs.[87] The objectification of actresses by the "male gaze" is most obvious and at its highest.[88] Indian films in particular were ranked third in showing female characters in "sexy attire" and according to the UN report, 35% of female characters in Indian films were shown with some kind of nudity and 31% in American films.[89]

The clothing in which female characters are seen is indicative of her character's values and position in society. For instance, no matter what the garment, if clothing is western it is seen as "sexy"[90] as compared to Indian clothing which is perceived as traditional and is symbolic of chastity.[91] Thus before a female character can speak audiences can assume which stereotype she falls under, traditional or westernized.

Film critics, feminists and government bodies have attempted to initiate change and bring a stop to female stereotyping and objectification in films. The government promotes cinema that

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[84] Mulvey, L. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 57

[85] Dance numbers in which a female character dances for or in front of other male characters for their pleasure. These dance numbers are usually where the sexual tension and lust in a film are seen as sex scenes are rare in Bollywood films.

[86] Ibid. 69

[87] Ibid. 37

[88] Ibid. 26

[89] Smith, S., Choueiti, M., Scofield, E., and Pieper, K. *Gender Inequality in 500 popular films: Examining On-Screen Portrayals and Behind-the-scenes Employment in Motion Pictures Released Between 2007-2012,* 1

[90] Ibid. 89

[91] Dwyer, R. and Patel, D. *Cinema India: The Visual Culture of Hindi Film*, 87

would go beyond the aesthetic (song and dance), generic, and character representations.[92] The

government's concern with films' content reflects the fact that films directly influence society's

behavior and attitudes.[93]

In the case of Hollywood, the ratio of male to female characters in films has remained the

same since 1946[94] therefore demonstrating the lack of change in women's importance in films.

Furthermore the mutually beneficial financial relationship between Hollywood and the US

government can be considered an explanation for the lack of criticism on the government's part

of Hollywood.[95]

III.   Method of Analyzing Films

The analysis of films will be conducted by examining the top five domestic blockbuster

films from Bollywood and Hollywood in the years 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013 and their

representations of women.[96] In order to analyze films' representations, or lack thereof, of women

a criteria has been created according to which the films will be studied. This criteria has been

modeled upon that of feminist Alison Bechdel's "Bechdel Test" but goes beyond the scope of her

criteria. The Bechdel Test asks three primary questions, if a film has at least two women in it, if

these women speak to each other, and if they speak about something besides a man.[97] The criteria

used to analyze films asks the following four questions:

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[92] Ganti, T. *Bollywood: Second Edition*, 25

[93] Ganti, T. *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema,* 48

[94] *The Queen of "Girl Power" on Hollywood's Heroines* (CBS News: September 23, 2014)

[95] Halbfinder, D. *Politicians Are Doing Hollywood Star Turns* (NY Times: February 6, 2007)

[96] See tables on pages 26 and 36

[97] *Bechdel Test Movie List*

Criteria	Importance of Criteria
What is the Genre of the film?	Different genres require female characters for the development of the story to different degrees. For instance, Romance films--which present audiences with heteronormative perspectives on romantic relationships--would require a female lead to a greater extent than an Action movie may require a female lead. Therefore by identifying the genre of a film and then analyzing the roles of female characters within them a conclusion can be drawn as to whether or not certain genres of film reflect women in a more derogatory manner than others.
How many female characters are there in the film that have names and more than one scene?	If a character has a name and more than one scene it suggests that she has some significance in the film.
Is the female character a Lead Character or a Supporting Character?	This criterion has two factors that establish whether or not a female character is supporting or lead. 1. Does the female character ever appear in the film in a scene without the male lead? If no, she is a supporting character. 2. If yes, is she talking about him? If she is talking about him she is a supporting character because she supports and contributes to the hero's story. If she is in a scene without the male lead and is not talking about him then she can be considered as having her own story line or character development as well.
For Bollywood films in particular - Is there an Item Song performed by a female character?	The reason that Item Songs have their own criteria is because, as mentioned earlier, female objectification in these scenes is at its highest.

Films According to Criteria

Before presenting the data collected, this paper would like to highlight the observations

made during the analysis of these films. According to the criteria, a female character can be

considered a lead if she is present in a scene without the male leads and does not discuss them.

However, this criteria failed to account for the scenes in which female characters discussed stereotypically "girly" topics such as men, love or marriage--and for Bollywood in particular God, prayer, or family values. Therefore although some films have female characters that are lead characters according to the criteria, these characters do not stray far from expressing typically female oriented concerns or discussion of "girly" topics. Furthermore, a trend evident in both Bollywood and Hollywood films was that many female characters that were categorized as lead characters only passed the criteria in their introduction scenes, when their characters were being introduced and they had not yet encountered the male leads.

I. Bollywood Films According to Criteria

Title	Year	Genre	No. of Female Characters	No. of Lead Female Characters	"Item" Song
Aankhen	1993	Comedy	4	0	No
Khal Nayak	1993	Action/Thriller	3	1	Yes
Daar	1993	Thriller/Romance	2	0	No
Baazigar	1993	Drama	4	2	No
Tirangaa	1993	Patriotic/Action	2	0	No
Kuch Kuch Hota Hai	1998	Romance/ Comedy	6	3	No
Bade Miyan Chote Miyan	1998	"Masala"	2	0	No
Pyaar To Hona Hi Tha	1998	Romance/ Comedy	3	1	No
Pyaar Kiya To Darna Kya	1998	Romance/ Comedy	3	1	No
Soldier	1998	Action/Thriller	3	0	No
Koi Mil Gaya	2003	Romance	2	2	No

Title	Year	Genre	No. of Female Characters	No. of Lead Female Characters	"Item" Song
Kal Ho Na Ho	2003	Drama/Romance	8	4	No
The Hero	2003	Action/Thriller	3	2	No
Baghban	2003	Drama	5	2	No
Munnabhai MBBS	2003	Comedy	2	0	Yes
Ghajini	2008	Action/Drama	3	2	Yes
Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi	2008	Romance/ Comedy	1	1	No
Singh is Kinng	2008	Comedy/ Romance	3	0	No
Race	2008	Thriller/Action	3	0	Yes
Jodhaa Akbar	2008	Romance	2	2	No
Dhoom 3	2013	Action/Thriller	2	0	Yes
Krrish 3	2013	Action/Thriller	2	0	No
Chennai Express	2013	Comedy/ Romance	1	1	Yes
Yeh Jewaani Hai Dewaani	2013	Romance/ Comedy	4	2	No
Ram Leela	2013	Romance/Drama	4	2	Yes

The analysis of female characters in Bollywood films will begin with an examination of the general trends observed that reflect female characters' inferiority, in particular the correlations between certain genres and the representations or lack thereof of female characters as well as the lack of change in the nature of Item Songs. This paper will then analyze the representations of the lead female characters in *Baazigar* (1993), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998),

Baghban (2003), *Rab Ne Bana di Jodi* (2008), and *Chennai Express* (2013), in order to examine whether women's representations in films have improved and identify the parallels between women's social positions and their representations in films.

II.   General Trends: Genre and Lead Female Characters

The correlation between the genre and the number of lead female characters in Bollywood films was evident. Of the Action films--which can be labeled 'male oriented'--the majority had either 0 or 1 female lead characters, with the exceptions of *The Hero* and *Ghajini* which will be discussed later. The importance of this trend is that Action films are targeted at male audiences therefore these films serve to entertain and appeal to what men wish to see. The fact that there is such a low and stereotypical representation of women in these films suggests that men do not wish to see strong female lead characters or women in positions of importance.

The representation of male characters in Action films as powerful, invincible and responsible for the female character's safety is only made possible because of the nature in which female characters are represented in these films. Female characters are represented as 'damsels in distress' or pawns between the hero and villain and therefore powerless and dependent on the male lead. The dependance of female characters on male characters is reflective of the Hindu belief that women are not to be independent of men and that they are essentially the 'property' and responsibilities of men.[98]

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[98] Doniger, W., *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Group: London 1991), 15

III. Exceptions in the Action Genre

Although the Action films *The Hero* (2003) and *Ghajini* (2008) are exceptions to the trend of Action films only having either 0 or 1 female leads, as they have two lead female characters, they are still male driven films.

The importance of both female characters in *The Hero* is due to their roles in advancing Arun's story. Reshma is a government spy, however she only has this job because Arun encourages it and trains her, before this she is a simple village girl. Therefore he is the reason that she has an important profession and can increase her economic and social position. Shaheen's role is as a means to an end; Arun initiates a relationship with her in order to advance in his mission of infiltrating the terrorist group. Her character undergoes a negative change as she is first portrayed as a serious doctor but once she falls in love she becomes a stereotypical woman in love and is seen daydreaming and even discussing her love life at work.

A scene that clearly exemplifies the representation of women as inferior to men in *The Hero* is the scene in which Reshma is suspected of being a spy while on enemy grounds. Reshma is not only threatened with physical violence but also by an underlying threat of sexual violence; therefore her vulnerability is increased because she is a woman. The man who frisks her to check for a wire does so in a prolonged and sexual manner with a degrading look in his eyes. This scene exemplifies the fact that even when a female character breaks stereotypes and has a profession that can be considered 'unconventional' for a woman (and is dominated by men) she is still inferior to a man and is subjugated.

In *Ghajini,* Sunita and Kalpana are the female leads. Sunita is studying to become a doctor and wants to study the memory loss problem of the male lead, Sanjay. However in the

process, she ruins Sanjay's plan for revenge against his fiancé's killer. Therefore she is presented as naive and her curiosity becomes a hindrance as Sanjay must clean up the mess she created. Kalpana's character is portrayed as inferior to Sanjay's because unlike his value and appeal, hers lies in her appearance. She is a model that Sanjay falls in love with instantly. Therefore her profession is obviously based upon her appearance and her appearance is also what causes Sanjay to fall for her.

IV. <u>General Trends: Item Songs</u>

The nature and objective of Item Songs has remained the same over the past 20 years, as the portrayal of the actress and her body as objects of desire has continued. The representation of women as spectacles and objects of entertainment maintains their inferior positions in films. The Item Songs in *Khal Nayak* (1993), *Munnabhai MBBS* (2003), *Race* (2008) and *Chennai Express* (2013) all exemplify the persistence of female objectification. Furthermore the fact that they are films from the Action, Comedy and Romantic genres suggests that female objectification has become widespread across a number of genres and has become a form of entertainment that is presented not only to men but also women and family audiences.

Although it has one of the strongest lead female characters, *Khal Nayak* (1993)--which is the least sexist Action film (in most regards) from those analyzed in this paper--has an Item Song. The Item Song *Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai* (What is Behind your Blouse) has suggestive lyrics and dance moves and focuses on the woman's body to a great extent. For instance, when the actress sings "in my blouse there is my heart, and I'll give this to my lover"[99] her movements suggest that she is not just referring to her heart. The dance moves in this song are extremely

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[99] *Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai - Khal Nayak* (1993)

suggestive and sexual and aim at enticing the male audience. In addition, the camera's shots are close ups of the dancers' midriffs and chests. Therefore the objectification of the female body in this scene is highly evident. The camera also focuses on the male audience at times showing them ogling the dancers and therefore sanctioning this behavior.

V.   Lead Female Characters in Specific Bollywood Films

Baazigar (1993) is a Bollywood Drama that deals with the themes of betrayal and family reputation. The lead female characters are used as pawns in the male lead's plan. The film's representation of the female leads' influence is interesting, although they cannot bring pride to their family in the way a son can (by carrying on a family business for instance) they can bring shame to their families. Furthermore, they are seen as the responsibilities and properties of their father, a belief that is outlined in Hinduism. According to Ajay's plan both female leads fall in love with him and he uses their trust as a weapon to destroy their father. After Ajay murders one daughter, the father is angry rather than sorrowed--he is concerned with how his daughter's death will make him look. He thinks that it is "shameful" that his daughter was killed by the man that she "secretly" loved and planned on marrying. He is more distressed by the potentially harmful affects this information will have on his reputation than with the loss of his daughter.

The representations of the female leads, Tina and Anjali, in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) reflect the idea that women are carriers of tradition and suggests that traditional and "Indian-ized" women are more desirable to men. During college, Anjali is Rahul's tomboy best friend who is outspoken, always wearing sports clothing, and is 'one of the guys'. Rahul becomes romantically interested in her once they are older and she becomes more traditional, she is seen

wearing Indian clothing, is modest and quieter and is seen as nurturing (she takes care of children as a camp counselor).

Tina on the other hand is presented as intelligent and westernized (she has lived in London and is always seen in Western clothing). Initially, Rahul believes that she is not "Indian enough" and is not the type of girl he "can take home to (his) mother".[100] It is interesting that Rahul believes that because Tina is modern she does not possess Indian values and culture; this suggests that modernity and being Indian cannot be complementary qualities in an Indian woman. The way in which Tina proves that she is Indian is by singing a prayer in front of Rahul. The fact that she chooses a religious song rather than just a Hindi song suggests that in order to be truly Indian a woman needs to uphold religious and cultural traditions.

The lead female characters in *Baghban* (2003) are the grandmother, Pooja, and her granddaughter, Payal; they exemplify the tension between traditional and modern India and as a result of the events in the film, traditional Indian values are seen as applicable even in modern times. Payal is represented as Westernized and modern as she is seen wearing western clothing, speaking english and in a relationship. Although her grandmother warns her against going out so late and in clothing that can be perceived as 'inviting' to men, she continues to do as she wishes.

The grandmother's warnings are proven to be for good reason when Payal is seen at a night club with her boyfriend and he attempts to force himself on to her. He says "first you invite me with skimpy clothes and then pretend to be pure and not up for this". The fact that he uses the word "pure" is interesting as it is a value of great importance for women according to Hinduism and the *Ramayana*. Payal's comment that "boys and girls are the same now", is seen as untrue as

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[100] *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998)

Pooja's concerns are still relevant in modern times, she even says "times never change for women" therefore exemplifying the persistence of women's inferior positions in society. Pooja also tells her son he must have "control over" his family in order to be the man of the house; she explains that control is the way a father or husband expresses his love. The problem with the messages the film relays is that they are highly patriarchal. In order for men to control the house women must remain subjugated and therefore inferior in their households and as a result in Indian society as well.

In *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (2008) the importance of duty is exemplified when the female lead, Taani, must marry a man she has never met because it is her father's last wish. Her introduction scene shows her planning her wedding to her boyfriend, however he passes away. Taani's father jokingly says that he "could not discipline his own daughter" into having an arranged marriage. This statement exemplifies the idea that a daughter is her father's property, he is supposed to decide who she marries. Therefore if a daughter allows her parents to make her life decisions it is a sign of being disciplined and fulfilling her duties. This exemplifies the amount of passivity required of daughters. She ends up marrying the man of her father's choice and is seen fulfilling her *shri-dharma* (wifely) duties to him even though she has no feelings for him. Therefore she is always seen serving or conforming to what the men in her life demand of her.

The female lead in *Chennai Express* (2013) also experiences similar pressure from her father to get married to a man that she does not wish to marry. However the idea that a daughter is her father's property is more evident in this film than in *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi.* The daughter must marry the man of her father's choice because it will enable her father to gain more power

and control over other villages besides his own. Therefore she becomes an object or barter, she is traded in order for the father to gain more authority. Furthermore she is seen as a carrier of tradition; when the male lead gives up on spreading his grandfather's ashes she is the one who convinces him that he must fulfill his duty to his grandfather and his promise to his grandmother. It is only after this incident that he realizes that he is in love with her.

VI. <u>Hollywood Films According to Criteria</u>

Title	Year	Genre	No. of Female Characters	No. of Lead Female Characters
Jurassic Park	1993	Thriller	2	1
Mrs Doubtfire	1993	Comedy/Romance	3	1
The Fugitive	1993	Action/Thriller	2	0
The Firm	1993	Thriller	3	1
Sleepless in Seattle	1993	Romance	4	0
Saving Private Ryan	1998	Patriotic/Action	1	0
Armageddon	1998	Thriller	2	0
There's Something About Mary	1998	Comedy/Romance	1	1
A Bug's Life	1998	Animation	5	3
The Waterboy	1998	Comedy	2	0
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	2003	Action/Thriller	2	0
Finding Nemo	2003	Animation	3	0
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	2003	Action	2	1

Title	Year	Genre	No. of Female Characters	No. of Lead Female Characters
The Matrix Reloaded	2003	Thriller/Action	3	0
Bruce Almighty	2003	Comedy	2	0
The Dark Knight	2008	Action	1	0
Iron Man	2008	Action	1	0
Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull	2008	Action	2	1
Hancock	2008	Action	1	0
Wall-E	2008	Animation	1	1
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire	2013	Action/Thriller	5	4
Iron Man 3	2013	Action	3	2
Frozen	2013	Animation	2	1
Despicable Me 2	2013	Animation	5	3
Man of Steel	2013	Action	4	2

The analysis of women's positions in Hollywood films will be conducted by examining general trends, in particular the correlation between certain genres (Action and Animation) and the representations or lack thereof of female characters. This paper will then go on to analyze the lead female characters in the Animated films *A Bug's Life* (1998)*, Finding Nemo* (2003)*, Wall-E* (2008)*, Frozen* (2013), As well as in the action films *Iron Man* (2008), *Iron Man 3* (2013) and *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013).

VII. <u>The Representation of Women in Animated Films</u>

The reason that Animated films will be analyzed rather than Comedies or Romantic films is because these films are targeted at children and are therefore representative of the values American society wishes to instill in its children. Of these values, gender equality seems to be a significant theme seen in all four Animated films.

In *A Bug's Life* (1998) there are three female lead characters, the Queen, Princess Atta and Princess Dot. The women are seen in positions of power and make the decisions for the entire colony, the Queen in particular is seen as a respected authority figure. Princess Dot is seen being bullied by two male ants her age, however this behavior is not sanctioned by other characters as Flik (male lead character) tells them that "she is entitled to her own opinion". However although she is bullied, Princess Dot does not become less opinionated or upset by their comments therefore sending the message that children should ignore bullying and not take it to heart. Princess Atta is seen as tense and serious about her future position as Queen and questions herself regularly. However the Queen reassures her of her abilities and grooms her for her future position of authority.

Although there is no lead female character in *Finding Nemo* (2003) according to the criteria, Dory is in almost the entire film as she helps Marlin (male lead character) find his son from the beginning of his search. Furthermore, Marlin himself is only seen in a few scenes without Dory therefore suggesting that they are equally significant to the development of the plot. For instance, it is Dory that remembers the address that they must go to in order to find Nemo, is able to get directions, and keeps Marlin optimistic. By the end of the film Dory's

influence on Marlin seems obvious as he is no longer as grumpy and pessimistic and is more high-spirited, like Dory.

Wall-E (2008) presents the female lead character (Eve) as the "hero" of the story as she is the one on a mission to save the world, not the male lead (Wall-E). While on her mission to bring the humans back to earth she meets Wall-E, who is presented as lonely and in need of companionship (rather than the female character). Eve is seen as a high-tech robot as compared to Wall-E with more powers and 'features' than him as she can fly, has lasers, and is more modernized in general. Although Wall-E helps Eve in her mission, Eve is the one that saves Wall-E in the end when he is about to die. Therefore rather than the female character being saved by the male character, Eve is seen as more powerful as she completes her mission, saves Wall-E, and saves the humans as well.

Frozen (2013) is a highly female-driven film as it is about the relationship between two sisters, Elsa and Anna, the challenges Elsa faces while finding herself, and Anna's search for her sister. Elsa is the Queen of the empire and Anna is the princess, therefore they are both seen in positions of authority and power. However there is a prince in the film who attempts to take the empire away from the sisters. The way in which the Prince attempts to gain control over their empire is by pretending to fall in love with Anna. The fact that she falls in love with him after the first time they meet and leaves him in charge of the empire, suggests she is naive and in need of companionship and love. At the end of the film Anna is seen to be in love with Kristoff, the man who helps her find her sister, therefore suggesting there has not been much of a change in her character as she is still focused on finding love.

Elsa on the other hand undergoes a significant amount of character development. At first she is depicted as scared and unable to harness her powers but after she runs away from the palace she seems to find herself and becomes a strong, independent woman. She realizes that what she perceived as her flaw (her powers) was actually her strength. She does not need the approval of others and does not need to hide herself just because others do not understand her. Therefore although Anna's character at times seems stereotypical of female characters in other films--as dependent on men for help, naive, and in need of love--Elsa's character presents audiences with an independent and powerful female character who realizes her own potential and decides to harness it.

VIII. <u>Women in Action Films</u>

The films *Iron Man* (2008) and *Iron Man 3* (2013) represent an interesting change in the way Action films depict female characters. Although they are still dependent on male characters for their safety and end up as pawns between the heroes and villains of the films, their characters are more developed than they used to be. *Iron Man* has only 1 female character with a recurring role and name, Pepper, however she is not a lead character as she is never seen in a scene without the male lead or discussing something besides him. Therefore this film shows the way in which Hollywood Action films, like Bollywood's, present female characters as means to ends and supportive of the male lead's story rather than with their own significant role or storyline. The male lead, Tony, is seen encouraging Pepper and telling her that she needs to acknowledge her strengths to a greater extent, as she is "the most capable, qualified and trustworthy person he has ever met". Therefore he needs to remind her of what she is rather than her being sure of herself and confident in her abilities to begin with.

However in *Iron Man 3* (2013) there is a change in the way Pepper is presented. She is now a lead female character with a part of her life that is relatively independent of Tony's. She is the CEO of a company and is seen busy running it. Tony is still seen as powerful and responsible for "protect(ing) the one thing he cannot live without", Pepper, as he must save her from the villain who has taken her hostage. However although she is presented as a "damsel in distress" at first she actually ends up saving Tony and killing the villain. Therefore *Iron Man 3* shows Pepper as more developed as an individual and as an equal to the male characters in the film.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (also from 2013) does not only have a strong lead female character (Katniss), the film is also driven by Katniss as it follows her story and she is essentially the "hero". She is portrayed as independent, does not rely on male characters in the film, is not emotionally unstable and is not in the film for the purpose of being a love interest.[101] A significant theme in the film that further highlights the increased position of women in films is the fact that Katniss, a woman, has become the symbol of an entire rebellion against the government. The government officials attempt to manipulate this facet of her character and instead explain her rebellious behavior as a result of her love for Peeta (another contestant) rather than her opposition to the system. The fact that the government's explanation for her behavior is love exemplifies the fact that they think it is believable that a woman's actions would be motivated by her overpowering emotions. However her bravery and opposition to this idea is exemplified when instead of wearing the government approved wedding dress when she appears on television, she wears the costume of a mocking jay which is the symbol of the rebellion. In addition, the nature of the games itself shows the equality of men and women in their society.

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[101] Smith, J. *Normalizing Male Dominance: Gender Representations in 2012 Films* (GRIID: February 2013) Accessed Online - November 15, 2014

The fact that both men and women have equal chances of entering the games--the choice of who will take part is made at random--suggests that they are perceived as equals.

<u>Are the Representations of Women in Films Reflective of their Current Social Positions?</u>

I.   <u>Bollywood</u>

Women's existing social positions in India and the US are most definitely reflected in the representations of women in both Bollywood and Hollywood films. The stereotypes by which Bollywood represents female characters--as damsels in distress, the responsibilities of male characters, or as mothers/grandmothers who instill Indian values and religion in their children--reflect Indian society's perceptions of women's social positions and are reflective of Indian culture, traditions and religions.

As mentioned in earlier sections, although laws and acts are in place in India that attempt to grant women equality, women do not experience these rights in their daily lives as is exemplified by their declining employment and education rates. As is true in Indian society as well as Bollywood films only middle class or upper class women--such as those seen in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, Baazigar,* or *Baghbaan*--attain a higher education as these families have the money and resources to use on daughters as well as sons. However films depict the fact that even women that are highly educated do not use their degrees to get jobs, as female characters are predominantly seen as housewives or mothers. For instance, Tina from *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* studied at Oxford University but is still only seen as a mother and wife. In addition, even when female characters are employed in films, which is rare, they have "gendered" professions[102] and

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[102] Mead, M., *Women's Social Position* - Accessed Online - October 19, 2014

are seen taking care of children--*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Anjali is a camp counselor--or in the health care industry--*The Hero,* Shaheen is a doctor.

The low levels of female employment and education in India result in little representation of women as professionals in films as well; this can be attributed to the fact that a woman's value in Indian society is still based on her domestic skills and child bearing abilities. Bollywood movies reflect this. For instance, in *Rab Ne Bana di Jodi* Tani does not have a higher education or a job and is seen solely as a housewife which Suri sees as ideal as she can focus on their home. The importance of her domestic skills is exemplified when she tells Suri that she will never love him but will ensure that she fulfills her wifely duties to him. He is not upset but rather happy that she will fulfill this role for him therefore suggesting that obtaining a woman's love is only secondary to having her run the household and care for the man.

Furthermore, the Indian cultural belief that men are superior to women is exemplified in films. For instance, in *Baazigar* although his daughter attends the same college as Ajay and is studying in the same field, the father decides to hire Ajay as his successor rather than his own daughter who is equally qualified. The lack of advancement in women's actual social positions is reflected in films, women's abilities at the workplace or as intellectuals with opinions and voices are overlooked in society and films. A woman's importance lies in her familial duties, utility to men around her, and/or entertainment value.

Due to the dominance of religious ideals in Indian society--as is exemplified in the Indian legal system as well with the existence of Personal Laws--women in films are consistently seen fulfilling their asrma-dharmas, besides the facets mentioned above in terms of their personalities and roles in society. Women in films only have authority as carriers of tradition or while they

fulfill their shri-dharmas, duties as wives and mothers, which reflects their positions in Indian society as well. For instance, the mothers in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Baghbaan* are seen promoting prayer, patriotism, and modesty of other female characters. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* for instance, the mother is seen telling her friend that if she does not know her prayers well "what will (she) teach (her) children". Therefore making evident the fact that mothers are the ones who carry on the traditions and values of Indian society and these are the only things they can teach their children.

II. Hollywood

The increased equality of women's positions in American society is reflected in recent Hollywood films as well. As stated earlier, the majority of students in higher education are women; although the women in the films analyzed for this paper were not students, female characters from three out of the five 2013 films had professions that suggested they received some sort of higher education. In *Iron Man 3* the female lead is a CEO of a company, in *Despicable Me 2* the female character is a top government agent, and in *Man of Steel* the female lead is a reporter, the specialization required for these professions suggests that these characters have received higher educations.

In addition, the fact that of the 25 films analyzed more than half of them had female characters that were employed reflects the US' consistently high (especially in comparison to India's) LFPR rate of 57%. Although women in American society do not hold positions of authority at the workplace to the same extent as men, they are seen as employed individuals that are capable of being independent of men or their families. Women in American society are no

longer seen solely as domestic beings and can not only be a part of the workforce but in rare cases in positions of authority as well, and this is reflected and reinforced by Hollywood films.

The fact that women are seen as employed or in positions of authority over men in Hollywood films suggests that Christian beliefs are not followed as closely by American society as Hindu beliefs are in Indian society. The Bible states that women should work in their homes and serve their families and that they should not exercise authority over men however this is not the case in American society or in Hollywood films. For instance, all of the films analyzed for they year 2013 (except *Man of Steel*) show female characters in positions of authority over the male character--telling them what to do, making decisions, or leading them--in at least one scene. Therefore, as depicted by the data in the PewResearch Religion and Public Life Project as well, the number of individuals in American society that believe that the Bible and its ideals should be followed word for word is low. Women are not seen as inferior to men or as prisoners to domestic demands in American society to the extent that they are in Indian Society.

III. Final Conclusions

Films from both Bollywood and Hollywood simply reflect what is existing in Indian and American societies as this allows for relatability, audience entertainment, and therefore success at the box office. Therefore, the difference in the way women are represented in Bollywood and Hollywood films can be attributed to the fact that women's social positions in India and the US are vastly different. Furthermore, from these representations of women in Bollywood and Hollywood films it is evident that women in Indian cinema and society are inferior to a much greater extent than women in American cinema and society.

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