

**MEN MEET MARKET: BOLLYWOOD, PUBLIC(ITY) AND
THE MALE BODY**

**SYNOPSIS OF THE THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
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The Title of the Thesis

The thesis is titled “Men meet Market: Bollywood, Public(ity) and the Film Poster”. There are four keywords in the title. Men, market, publicity and Film poster. The title was planned when I thought of working on the change seen in the presentation of men in the Hindi film industry. By the word presentation, I mean their on-screen visual presence, the impact they have on fans and the changes seen in the way men are perceived in the Hindi film industry as well as its audience, which is popularly known as Bollywood. The research has covered the time-line from 1998 to 2022. The release of the film *Pyar Kiya toh Darna Kya* (1998) marks the beginning and it ends with the OTT release of the second season of *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* (2022). The reason for this selection was the beginning of the presentation of the male body as a bare torso in a song of this 1998 film, which paved the way for a series of display of the bare male body for almost twenty years after the release of the film. Salman Khan, the lead actor in the film had been pivotal to this change. The audience was enthralled by this sudden change of stance and the notion of Salman Khan looking for opportunity to take off his shirt was a popular stunt for the audience. The male torso was not sexualized in this way before by the audience of Hindi films. It was a new beginning of making the audience accustomed to looking at the body of the leading men alongside women with wafer-thin waistlines and semi-bare bodies on screen. By the time we come to the last leg of this time-line, we are introduced to the changed norms of presentation of a lead actor who is not hyper masculine and need not be the one to go shirtless in order to lure the audience to watch the film. The influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the way films have been marketed and released is another important aspect of the research.

The second word- ‘market’ is a synonym for the demands of the audience. Once the bare bodied male torso was on display by one actor, the other actors followed. There was a series

of films like *Ghajini* (2005) and *Om Shanti Om* (2007) when the two other leading actors Aamir Khan and Shah Rukh Khan started working on their body and advertising their fitness. The market was gradually filled with six pack and eight pack abdomens and well-chiseled bodies. On the other side of the market was the fan, someone who looked up to these role models and started craving for a body like that on screen. Unrealistic body-goals and crash diets led to the evolution of another industry. The fitness industry started to pick up momentum and gradually it became a massive allied industry alongside the film industry. However, with time, people shifted focus from presentation to content and fitness became a necessity and not a fancy desire for the common people. Films too changed with the changing mindset of the audience. The Hindi film industry shaped itself anew with the idea of making films on the life of people living in the fringes of the society. Gradually the narrative changed and the focus was on the common people. This shift was seen in the mainstream commercial cinema very gradually and steadily. It is not that this was the first case of making films that are based on content, but in the 70's and 80's the content specific films were not a part of the mainstream film making. The gap between the two kinds of films, (content centric and star centric) gradually became narrow after 2000 and it continues to be like that now.

The other aspect of the Hindi film industry was its film promotion methods that made a huge contribution to the trends in question. The Hindi film industry has shown many significant changes in the way promotions are handled in the production houses. The journey from the hand-drawn posters to the digitally reprinted ones has been simultaneously enriching and new for the industry. It has contributed significantly to the cost of production.

Posters have evolved and included other forms of change in film promotion, for example, like making of trailers and Instagram reels which ensure that the film is more attractive to the prospective audience. The format of presenting the male lead actor in a film poster too has changed over the years. This is similar to the way in which women are presented in the

promotional videos, the sexualizing gaze is now not limited to a particular sex. The audience is now presented with multiple choices of films, releasing on the same day and the industry has shown very significant changes in terms of its promotional strategies. Film posters and publicity are intricately related but not limited in its reach. Posters have become the new accessories in the homes of the fans, as the cost of buying them has become affordable for the middle class as well. Also, publicity is not limited to interviews and trailers. The actors are now required to go on promotional tours. The space of interaction for these actors with their fans has been varied and therefore included public places like gyms, colleges and concerts et cetera.

Fieldwork and Research Methodology

My fieldwork has been varied. I have conducted a series of interviews with cinema hall owners and proprietors. I have interviewed people from the fitness industry. I have interacted with poster makers, art-house consultants and fashion designers. The interviews have been conducted in Kolkata and the suburban areas of West Bengal. The place here has acted as a metonym for the entire pan-Indian audience. The extent of the influence of the Hindi film industry is no less in any part of the country. My geographical location has enabled me to base my observation and interaction to the people in my state. This has helped me bring in additional and new material on the important work that the people outside Mumbai do in relation to the Hindi film industry. The active participants have given their opinion on different aspects of the Hindi film industry. Sometimes, they have been comfortable in disclosing their names and sometimes not.

The interviews have been conducted on multiple interfaces. Some of the interviews were in person, while some were over the phone. Some hardly like an interview initially and some

were conducted over small interactions and meetings. People have been uncomfortable at times, because the range of interviewees was wide. In this process I have come across some interesting aspects of fieldwork that has been a part of my work. The interviews also form a qualitative research of the people working closely with the industry. There is also the prominence of survey in my research which is useful in better understanding of the functioning of the industry.

My initial approach was to conduct the only qualitative research and with time the methodology shaped well. The changing trends and the subsequent reactions of the people working on the outside had been related. It was interesting to make a study of these trends and developments. The data collection for the research was primarily through interviews. However, when I began to research the OTT platforms, I started working with a thick description of the changing face of fragile masculinity seen in films that are being released there. The overall analysis in the thesis is mostly based on evidence and interaction. Sometimes different methodologies have come together in some chapters. It is different for the different chapters.

Literature Review

Important scholarly precursors for my thesis are: Rachel Dwyer, Christopher Pinney, Arjun Appadurai, Ranjani Mazumdar, Aruna Vasudev, Philip Lenglet and others.

Ranjani Mazumdar in her book, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (2007) observes that, in 1970s, the trend of urban location for the film was a norm. She traces the journey of this urban hero from *Deewaar* (1975) to *Ghulam* (1998) where over a period of twenty-three

years the hero still remains a part of the urban dark lanes and aspires to be accepted as a legitimate part of the urban mainstream.

Mazumdar talks about the growth in the film industry, which in turn contributes to the growing appetite of the audience of the film industry. She discusses advertisement strategies and talks about the presentation of posters on walls, billboards and lamp-posts.

In Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalisation* (1996), 'theory of rupture' and the idea of media and migration being two different interconnected analogies that tend to talk about the work of 'imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity'. He distinguishes between the individual and collective sense of imagination and stresses on the importance of imagination as a property of collectives and not 'merely as a faculty of the gifted individual'. He highlights the concept of 'community of sentiments' where the collective thinks in a similar pattern and tries to form a community feeling towards a particular mode of entertainment. Appadurai is of the opinion that the role of globalization has been of key importance in bridging the gap between the producer and consumer. This has however, blurred the line between the temporary consumers and the imaginary national attachments. Appadurai elaborates the 'theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand and fantasies of electronic propinquity on the other'.

In the introduction to the book, *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (1983), by Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Langlet, Langlet states that the Indian film industry is basically a 'commercial' industry that finds itself 'threatened in the last decade or so by a cinematic approach which is exploring avenues that are 'different' and 'new', trying, through reconciling art with celluloid to forge an idiom more relevant to the emerging Indian reality.

Ruth Vanita in the foreword of the book titled, *Masculinity and its Challenges in India* (2014), by Rohit K. Dasgupta and K. Moti Gokulsing speaks on the changing image of the man in Hindi film industry. She points out that the politics of skin colour that plays a huge role in transforming the men of the celluloid has been projecting masculinity in a different light from what had been a long-standing trait for the screen deities. Beauty and its extension of the fetishism for fair skin has been a part of this problem. Ranjani Mazumdar however, in her essay, titled “Figure of the 'Taponi': Language, Gesture and Cinematic City”, published in the Economic and Political Weekly {Dec. 29, 2001 - Jan. 4, 2002, Vol. 36, No. 52 (Dec. 29, 2001 - Jan. 4, 2002)}, states that the image of the outsider, the macho messiah for the poor, the homeless ‘taponi’, the nomad with an ambition of being the resident of the city becomes a permanent image of the struggle that the audience has to accustom in a ruthless city for pursuing their dreams.

The literature review was a process from which I had gathered the initial direction of my work and then progressed towards the formation of the chapters.

Chapter Plan

My thesis is divided into four chapters excluding the Introduction and the Conclusion. Here is the list of the chapters.

1. Introduction
2. Chapter 1: Marketing Strategy: The making and distribution of a Hindi Film
3. Chapter 2: New -Age Cinema: OTT and the notion of ‘(S) Hero- Worship’
4. Chapter 3: Concept of New- Age Posters: Digital Printing and its effect on Art Form

5. Chapter 4: Fitness and deception: Presentation of body in the age of multimedia
6. Conclusion

Chapter 1 concentrates on the market that the Hindi film industry has created over the years. It includes three major interviews with cinema hall owners and proprietors, as well as portions of small interviews with other relevant workers attached with the cinema halls for a long period of time. Primarily, it discusses the contrast between the spectatorship of multiplex and single screen theatres. The three major interviews were conducted in person and the interviewees in question had been eager to speak their mind. While Basushree and Jayanti are cinema halls that run on original reels of cinema, Mallika is a video hall. It is a kind of hall that organizes shows without bringing reels of the film from the original distributors. Once the DVD or equivalent of the reel is out in the market, these cinema halls use them to screen films. Generally, these halls screen a film after a month of their release. Such halls are very common in the suburban areas of Kolkata.

The idea was to select different cinema halls among others who have not changed their format of their shows and yet they are still in business. The halls in question were Basushree, Mallika Cinema and Jayanti, Barrackpore. The proprietors were quite interested in speaking to me. I had a set of questions for them which I shall include here. Their answers were divergent. Yet they had some common links in terms of circumstances through which they had to pass in order to keep their cinema halls running even when the audience had become keener to visit the multiplexes.

To these people, the experience of watching a film does not necessarily centre on physical comfort and they claim that their halls are to be more renowned but less comfortable. This categorization of the cinema hall has been very popular amongst the audience of the suburban area. The effect on the revenue is positive since the money collected is not drained on the

paraphernalia of glossy exteriors and consumable peripheral commodities presentation to the audience. The people who watch a film in these theatres know what they have signed up for. Jayanti, being a converted multiplex, was a local favourite for the film loving audience. Jayanti at one point was a single screen theatre which was later turned into a low budget multiplex by the same owners. There are three screens now and a snacks counter. The set up was such that the people would get the idea of it being a new-found kind of a film screening space which is somewhere between the multiplex and the single screen theatre . The comfort was compromised and cost, curtailed. This resulted in increase in the number of audience opting for these cost-effective multiplexes.

The interaction with the owners and proprietors was mainly helpful in finding out how the audience has over the years created the image of demi- Gods out of the actors playing the role of the hero in a film. Cinema halls have been sites of the creation of the larger-than-life image of the hero, garlanded and bathed in milk. This was a time before the multiplex going audience emerged. The new multiplex audience looks for comfort and flexible show-time options and does not create ruckus outside the cinema hall on the release of the film of their favourite actor. The single screen halls have gradually accommodated the pattern of the multiplex and this has resulted in their becoming a version of the multiplex with compromised comfort and compensatory rates. The identification of the correct audience has become very important for the business run by these single screen hall owners now.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the presentation of masculinity in two contradictory films from two different mediums, *Jamtara Season 1 and 2* (2020 and 2022) and *Gurgaon* (2017). While *Jamtara* was a Netflix original, *Gurgaon* was premiered in the IFFA, Macao 2016 and released worldwide in 2017. The names of these films are taken from cities of the same name in North India which are not considered to be first grade places like the metropolises of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. While the cities are pivotal to the plots, the narrative

of these films is more rustic and less sophisticated because of their settings. The origin of this genre of films could arguably be traced to the 2012, *Gangs of Wasseypur*, written, directed and produced by Anurag Kashyap. However, Kashyap's film was along the lines of *Satya* (1998) and *Shool* (1999) which could be loosely categorized as the gangster movies, where the protagonist was presented as a morally ambiguous character. He is neither a conventional hero nor a villain. Where *Gangs of Wasseypur* won over the likes of its predecessors was the presentation of masculinity especially in the sequel of the film, *Gangs of Wasseypur II* (2012).

The reason for selecting these new-age films was to trace the narrative of the film at length and make an estimate of how the image of the Hindi film hero has changed over the years. It would be perhaps inappropriate to use the term hero in this context. We can blur the lines and talk about the central character of a film since the characters are now unmarked in fixed categories. We are now used to a non-cinema going crowd, after the pandemic hit us hard on our faces. But the love for cinema has remained with the Indian audience throughout the ages and is not lost even now. With the access of 'Netflix' and its competitors, 'Amazon Prime', 'Disney Hotstar' and the regional equivalents like 'Zee 5' and 'HoiChoi', the new theatre is inside the audience's pocket. Cinema is now released simultaneously and sometimes independently on OTT platforms. These are the new ways in which cinema becomes an intimate affair. For decades, films have changed its modes of spectatorship audience based on social circumstances.

The telefilm was not invented by OTT platforms, but the medium used was television in the case of regional telefilms. These telefilms were telecast at specific times and dates. This led to condensed viewership which made the TRP rise and fall with the time of e telecasting. With the advent of the modern take on these mediums, the telefilms have become much accepted as a form of entertainment and people can watch these while they commute and

therefore, the viewership index has become somewhat improved in connection to the concept of flexible time for viewership.

The first OTT launched in India was BIGFLIX launched by Reliance Entertainment in 2008. This was not a major success then. Gradually the country has incorporated around fifty-one OTT platforms and the range is widely regional. Netflix started as a DVD rental system back in 1997, in Mumbai it developed its own niche of distribution, production. and the 'Netflix Originals' is an example of film production which has taken the multimedia as the means proponent of reaching out to a wider audience. The OTT has different customized options through which they section their viewership and show a particular kind of content to a particular audience. This creates a possible categorization and the prospective audience gets more comfortable with the medium.

In Chapter 3, I have incorporated interviews with poster makers and industry experts and trade analysts. Today, the poster makers have receded to the fringes of the city and the digital image has taken its place. However, the most popular idea was the conception of the posters and how that has evolved with the passing of time in the Hindi film industry. The trend shifted in 1995 with the release of *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* which made the poster in regional language (Hindi was used explicitly in its first set of posters) and specified the area of publicity. It was one of the first movies by Yash Raj Films to have multiple posters pre and post release of the film. The film has recently, in 2021, completed twenty-five years of its continuous screening in 2021 at Maratha Mandir (a single screen theatre in Mumbai). The posters have undergone different layers of changes. In terms of content and documentation as well as presentation and making, posters have travelled a long way. When we talk about the production of posters, we must be aware of the localized poster making. The posters that are put up in various cities are all transported virtually and printed at local markets. In this chapter, I have talked about the inclusion of the Instagram reels and trailers as the other

modes of film promotion. The digitization of posters and the loss in the field of poster making as an art is something that has been discussed at length. Interview of a poster maker (who wished to keep his identity hidden) has been included in the chapter.

A very interesting aspect of the art of poster making is the colour-scheme. The specific colours used in a poster, determines the kind of film one can anticipate it to be. Usually in mainstream Hindi cinema, shades of green and black represent horror, while pastel shades are used for films dealing with interpersonal relationships and love as a prominent theme. While blue is most judiciously used in the posters pertaining to films dealing with a more complicated relationship issues with blends of darker hues. These general assumptions are so stereotypically used in the film posters that it makes the art of poster making somewhat predictable, if we follow the pattern of the compositions closely. Colour palettes in the film posters often determine the scheme of thought that the director follows keeps in the entire film. Sometimes the dominance of a certain colour makes it schematic to a particular environment that has relevance to in the plot. This is a technique that Sanjay Leela Bhansali started in his film-making. The colour palette was an obvious determining factor for his films like *Saawariya* (2007) and *Black* (2005). He was the first in mainstream Bollywood to talk about the colour scheme and the idea of presenting the film poster as a schematic representation of the colours that shall be predominant in the film itself. His colour palettes have often brought out the era in which the films are set and the kind of environment they represent. Strong determined shades of colour have been incorporated to suit the presentation. and the aspect that makes it more difficult What is more difficult to look at is the relevance of these colour schemes to in the mind of the audience. The unaccustomed eyes see it as a bright poster, but the trained audience understands this strategic e concept of colour usage as to be a quality meant to attract the audience to a particular kind of cinematic imagination. The

audience therefore gets attracted to a well thought-out film publicity material. It makes an effective publicity for the film.

In Chapter 4, these are interviews of the people who tend to look at body-building as the only means of livelihood and the industry around body correction centres and the people associated with it. The entire industry of fitness and body correction rests on the notions that arise out of these beliefs. In this connection, I have conducted a series of interviews. The interviews range from that of a fitness-enthusiast, a fitness coach, a certified dietician to a gym proprietor, food joint owner and a physiotherapist.

The one event that changed the day-to-day functioning of affluent fitness centres was the Covid-19 pandemic. The closure of the fitness centres and gymnasiums at this point in time was a mandate that was made by the government at both the central and state level. This made it impossible for the sustenance of the employees and service-providers. The people working for these institutions were completely under the effect of the pandemic while people took this to be of secondary importance compared to medical care and food. This chapter has six major interviews and two minor interviews (where I did not get the desired time and input from the interviewee). The way the Hindi film industry has contributed to this industry is being examined in this chapter.

After an intensive study of the field and the established work in this area of research, my initial argument was to look at the changing trends. I started with a comparison of the multiplex and the single screen cinema hall. I later went on to understand how the OTT as a platform has replaced both and become the new reality for the Hindi film industry. I started with the faith that the gyms and fitness centres are purely influenced directly by the changing trends of the film industry.