

Men Meet Market: Bollywood Public(ity) and the Male Body

Abstract

Film promotions have seen a dramatic shift of focus from posters to the promotional events and from there on to advertisements and endorsements. It has drastically shifted and crafted itself from the realms of old world film publicity that had the content of the film in mind while promoting itself for the audience, to the new age multidimensional propaganda of films that twists the sinewy plots to accommodate the stardom of the actors that would eventually lead to the improvised endorsements and better promotion of the film among the audience.

The notion of Film poster had primarily been a negotiation for the function that it perforates the idea of the content of the movie or its prime focus into the mind of the prospective viewers. But the phenomenon underwent a change during the progress of the film industries around the world. In the Hindi Film Industry, which is primarily based in Mumbai, the trend has been observed in the late 1900. The projection of the prime character, or the Hero or Heroine in the posters has been penned highlighting their character portrayal on screen. The crucial issue being the exploitation of 'Brand Bollywood' and the hype surged by a certain actor/actress during a certain period of time, the Film Industry has seen the larger-than-life 'Hero- Worship' that has resulted in the evaluation of an actor in terms of the box-office reviews.

The recent modification in the trend has been primarily associated with the idea of an unattainable perfection that has been a companion of the actors and actresses. This idea of perfection primarily starts off with the kind of role that one enacts and continues till the technicalities of the project, for example the editing and the cinematography makes it absolutely unbelievable to relate to. The concept of 'Perfection' however just does not end here; it further proliferates to the realm of the 'Body'. The body of the actor thus becomes a

very important issue in the entire project. The certain body type that becomes 'in-fashion' and the certain that goes 'out-of-fashion' could be typical 'stereotype' of the conception of the *dèřro*, the mirage that is impossible to reach.

The constant objectification of the body is a challenge for the bearer of the body as well as the body beholder. A particular body feature has gained importance in a particular genre of cinema. The present generation is torn between the muscular 'pack-building', when one screen persona comes with a 'six-pack', the other pops up an 'eight-pack'. The criteria however, remain unfulfilled. The women on the other hand have been subjected to 'zero figures' and wafer-thin waistlines, which are attainable only by a generous help of photo editing if not starving their bodies to death.

Now the question arises as to why do the posters and associated presentations at all formulate a pictorial reality which is hardly a truth? The lifestyle of modern society claims a certain competition in matters of presentation. The concept that packaging is the actual rendering of value is a fake condition aroused by the presenters of this packaged-reality. However, the publicity moves in their continued effort to establish themselves as an automated residual emergence of the ideas that the west finds fit to gulp, is also acting as a mouthpiece of a change in society. The idea of merely objectifying women is somewhere lost in the changed scenario. In the present times it is primarily the body that becomes objectified, and is not necessarily the female-body; it is the male body that joins the clan.

The idea of objectification results in a kind of quest and therefore a kind of possession and oblong desire towards that specific body. The objectification thus primarily being sexual, the aim of the publicity houses becomes very specific, 'the object of desire being presented as bait for attracting audiences'.

Thus, the men meet market and what they capture is mediating them as the object of desire where the gaze is reversed and the female is included in the turned table. While talking of the objectification we also have to keep in mind the fact that the eyes on the poster are not necessarily of those who see a body on the poster essentially desiring it, the poster attracts eyes of the self-objectifying mass as well, who would idealise the body and hence look forward towards attaining the 'body', thus designating the body as a goal and in the process taking decisions about drastic diet control and practically starving themselves into getting into the 'perfect shape' and thereafter hating their own bodies and being dissatisfied about the body, no matter how healthy they be. The differently able person has more to lose here. In the market for the perfect body, an already dysfunctional body has to be permanently marginalized. Hence the villain becomes one who is at some point a handicapped and hence he seeks revenge from the possessor of the perfect body, the hero. The heroin here becomes much desired since her body is claimed both by the villain and the hero as the site of power politics. Thus the game of bodies and associated identities are much on the lines of a tug of war between the two men while they loom over the woman in question. The treatment of the villainous body is sometimes taken as a target for the hero to achieve during the reel time of the movie, in order to win back the woman and prove his supremacy.

In my research arena, my temporary plan had been to inculcate the role of film posters in the presentation of the male body in mainstream Hindi movies, but eventually as I delved into the arena of publicity and tried to look more closely at the posters, and what I came across was the intertwined axis of other modes of publicity that reached out to the public more than the posters at different levels. I would like to talk about the problem discussed above and also talk about the objectification and gaze 'of the society, on the society'. Therefore I dealt with the concepts of culture, objectification, body, masculinity, gender roles, subversion and stereotyping. I have been precisely adhering to the concepts behind film posters but have

worked on commercials and clippings that are a part of the marketing strategy of a film as well. This included the role of public in the publicity and how the 'need' of the audience is addressed in the realm of publicity.

I have looked into some vital allied industries while working on this thesis. My research included the fitness industry, food industry, poster makers and cinema hall owners. Other than these I have covered case studies on films screened on OTT and exclusive OTT content. The wide range of the Hindi film industry's reach has made this thesis an effort in presenting a metonymic account of the vast influence this industry has on the people of my nation. I have looked at the work from the perspective of a masculinity studies scholar who wanted to follow the changes closely and understand the way in which human emotions function as a fan. Allied industries and their socio-economic influence on each other is a very important part of this study.