

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract.....	3
1. Methodology.....	4
a. Selecting a Sample Size.....	4
b. Parameters (Quantitative).....	5
c. Parameters (Qualitative).....	8
2. Finding Space to Talk.....	10
a. Number of Credited Characters.....	10
b. Dialogue Distribution.....	11
c. When Women Speak.....	13
3. Defining Space to Talk.....	15
a. Scene Distribution.....	15
b. Women By Themselves.....	17
c. Saying Hello to the Gaze.....	20
4. Representing Gender in Labour.....	24
a. Defined Worker Profiles.....	25
b. Occupations Not Mentioned.....	26
c. When Women Work.....	29
5. Talking about Sexuality.....	32
a. The Behaviours that Encourage Sexism/Misogyny.....	32
b. Consensual (?) Sex.....	34
6. The (Ob)Scene – the many objections of the CBFC.....	36
Conclusion.....	38

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Centre for Studies in Gender and Sexuality for proposing this research project for our benefit. In particular, we would like to thank Shiv Dutt Sharma and Nandita Dutta. Their constant assistance in providing us with preliminary research material, procuring academic and non-academic sources and more importantly, their willingness to take time out to work with us through our many hurdles, have proven invaluable to the successful completion of this project.

We would also like to thank faculty members from Ashoka University, in particular Professor Madhavi Menon and Professor Geetanjali Singh Chanda for their academic guidance through the course of our yearlong Fellowship. Their classes have greatly helped us in adding a depth of theoretical base to our analyses. We also thank Ayesha Verma for her feedback on “Representing Gender in Labour” and Srija Umapathy for her constant support and companionship.

This project would also have been impossible without the constant supply of caffeine from the kind people of the Ashoka University pantry.

In the end, we would like to thank the many women, actors, filmmakers and writers who have built the repertoire of films that we plan to critique—for the rare moments that made us smile without cringing, laugh with a light heart and sympathize in agreement with the filmic gaze.

Abstract

“Mazak kar raha hoon, picturein nahi dekhti kya?”

- Arjun Singh, *Namastay London* (2007) ¹

As the Western media deals with the rippled consequences of the #MeToo movement, there seems to be a burgeoning consciousness among moviegoers and filmmakers for on-screen representation that is more socially diverse. This study hence, is an attempt at initiating a conversation about the nature of the content that we, as consumers, seem to encourage through our tastes and preferences. The project is being conducted along quantitative parameters—such as analysing dialogue distribution between gender-based identities, looking at their corresponding number of scenes, as well as accounting for the many ways in which we tend to encourage sexist/misogynist behaviour.

This data is being supplemented by qualitative reports which will talk about these numbers in depth, asking some crucial questions—what are the kinds of visual settings where male and female characters are typically located? How does the male gaze get translated on the cinematic screen? How is sexual harassment normalized at the level of representation? Some of these analyses have pushed us to consider moments where the quantitative distribution between male and female representation is more or less equitable. What remains essential here is to see whether the overall structure of these films still conforms to a patriarchal rhetoric, or does the mere fact of representation emerge as a potential disruption? The study is meant to advance itself through the collation of both statistical and representational evidence to reach a conclusion. The idea, as we said earlier, is to understand the kind of stories that find space for representation through our movie-going patterns and explain the gender roles in which our films and our society are mutually implicated.

¹ “I’m joking—don’t you watch movies?”

1. Methodology

A. Selecting a Sample Size

Our research began by thinking of ways to narrow down on a sample size of films to evaluate—given our limited time and resources, we could only focus on a few. Further, we wished to make sure that this sample set was truly representative of consumer choices. We decided to evaluate films from the past two decades, starting from 1995, to get a sense of how things have changed (if at all), or gauge any emerging trends or patterns.

We tried determining the kinds of films the public is likely to talk about years down the line. How do we define “popularity”? Are we to solely rely on box office figures? Or are we also to look at films that get nominated in award shows, shared on media platforms and become a part of the collective legacy of our cinematic history? We knew that we wanted to target cinema that appeals to the masses, but also the kind of cinema that finds approval among figures of authority or the “State”. We then listed out films under the following tabs—

1. Filmfare Nominations
2. Winner for Best Feature Film (National Film Awards)
3. Winner for Best Feature Film in Hindi (National Film Awards)
4. Winner for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment (National Film Awards)
5. Highest Grossing Films (according to box office figures as mentioned on various online websites)
6. Number of Wikipedia Page Visits (Wikimedia Pageviews)

We gave one point to every film for each of its Filmfare nominations. Each film also got a point every time it appeared in categories 2-5. It got an additional point if its respective number of page visits is higher than or equal to the number of average page visits across all the nominated films released in that particular year. By selecting films that scored a higher aggregate than eleven, we were able to narrow down a total of forty-five films to begin with²—

1. Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (Aditya Chopra, 1995)
2. Karan Arjun (Rakesh Roshan, 1995)
3. Raja (Indra Kumar, 1995)
4. Rangeela* (Ram Gopal Verma, 1995)
5. Raja Hindustani (Dharmesh Darshan, 1996)
6. Maachis (Gulzar, 1996)
7. Dil Toh Pagal Hai (Yash Chopra, 1997)

² The following study is an analysis of twenty-eight of these films, plus *Dabangg* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. Since the Centre for Studies in Gender and Sexuality continues to build on this study, the final report should have a convincingly comprehensive picture of Indian Cinema from 1995-2015.

*Films excluded from the following analysis

**Additional films

8. Border (J.P. Dutta, 1997)
9. Pardes (Subhash Ghai, 1997)
10. Virasat* (Priyadarshan, 1997)
11. Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (Karan Johar, 1998)
12. Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 1999)
13. Sarfarosh* (John Mathew Matthan, 1999)
14. Taal (Subhash Ghai, 1999)
15. Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai (Rakesh Roshan, 2000)
16. Lagaan (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001)
17. Dil Chahta Hai (Farhan Akhtar, 2001)
18. Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham... (Karan Johar, 2001)
19. Devdas (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002)
20. Company* (Ram Gopal Varma, 2002)
21. Humraaz* (Abbas Mustan, 2002)
22. Koi... Mil Gaya* (Rakesh Roshan, 2003)
23. Veer-Zaara (Yash Chopra, 2004)
24. Main Hoon Na (Farah Khan, 2004)
25. Black* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2005)
26. Parineeta (Pradeep Sarkar, 2005)
27. Rang De Basanti (Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, 2006)
28. Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (Karan Johar, 2006)
29. Lage Raho Munna Bhai (Rajkumar Hirani, 2006)
30. Taare Zameen Par* (Aamir Khan, 2007)
31. Chak De! India (Shimit Amin, 2007)
32. Guru* (Mani Ratnam, 2007)
33. Om Shanti Om (Farah Khan, 2007)
34. Jodhaa Akbar (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008)
35. Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi (Aditya Chopra, 2008)
36. Rock On!! (Abhishek Kapoor, 2008)
37. 3 Idiots (Rajkumar Hirani, 2009)
38. Love Aaj Kal (Imtiaz Ali, 2009)
39. My Name Is Khan* (Karan Johar, 2010)
40. Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara (Zoya Akhtar, 2011)
41. Barfi! (Anurag Basu, 2012)
42. Gangs of Wasseypur* (Anurag Kashyap, 2012)
43. Queen* (Vikas Bahl, 2014)
44. Bajirao Mastani* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2015)
45. Uda Punjab* (Abhishek Chaubey, 2016)
46. Dabangg** (Abhinav Kashyap, 2010)
47. Bajrangi Bhaijaan** (Kabir Khan, 2015)

B. Parameters Considered (Quantitative)

1. *Finding Space to Talk*: This study is largely inspired by an analysis of dialogue distribution in Hollywood cinema (which primarily includes films produced by Disney studios), conducted by Hannah Anderson and Matt Daniels (Anderson and Daniels 2016). Measuring the gender-based distribution of the number of credited characters in our films, as well as their respective dialogue

distribution, gives us an opportunity to statistically back our claims as regards the disparity that marks our storytelling practices. In seeing it as a mirror to our social world, the lack of opportunity given to women and queer characters to express themselves in our films is a reflection of the ways in which we deny them a voice and promote a discriminatory “culture of invisibility” (FRIEDMAN, DANIELS and BLINDERMAN).³

2. *Defining Space To Talk*: While just by looking at the cast of characters and their dialogue distribution, a disparity of gender representation becomes evident, it is also possible for a film to centre itself around a singular woman character, while secondary characters are played by male actors [for instance, *Parineeta* (Pradeep Sarkar, 2005)]—or at least, for a film to claim as such. To see if a single woman character has occupied the space of the screenplay’s frame is the first step, but our study has also tried to see how often does this happen, by looking at the number of scenes distributed across gender identities.

We define the term “scene” very loosely, in that a song sequence can be taken as one whole scene. Generally however, a change of scene can be identified through a change of location or the end of a conversational sequence. These locations too have been further distributed across the following categories—⁴

- a. *Domestic Sphere*
- b. *Place of Work*
- c. *Place of Worship*
- d. *Place of Recreation*
- e. *Educational Institutes*
- f. *Miscellaneous*⁵

3. *Representing Gender in Labour*: A 2017 World Bank report ranks India 120th out of a 131 countries in terms of women participation in the labour force (Venkatesh 2017). As such, the female participation in the country’s labour force has consistently dropped post-liberalisation, even as the level of educational qualification for women has been increasing steadily (Bhandare 2017). This sorry state of affairs finds resonance in our cultural representations, where men are shown to adopt roles and professions in the family “business”, whereas women are consistently represented as domestic goddesses, supplementing the male character in his educational and

³ Since Bollywood screenplays are not readily available, we had to count dialogue-distribution manually, going through these films scene by scene. To ensure that we account for human error, each film was quantified by all three researchers and the statistics mentioned below are resultant averages.

⁴ Again, the quantification has been done manually by the three researchers and the subsequent data was averaged out across our individual results.

⁵ Refers largely to outdoor places being used for non-recreational, non-educational or non-economic reasons, such as short-term travelling.

professional pursuits. To mark such stereotypes, we accounted for quantitative representation along the following parameters—

- a. *Defined Work Profile*
- b. *Occupation Not Mentioned*
- c. *Unemployed*
- d. *Student*

In including a tab such as “Occupation Not Mentioned”, we are trying to arrive at a nuanced understanding of a woman’s labour in conventional economies. Domestic labour for instance, may still contribute to a household’s economic stability, but largely goes unrecognized and unpaid. In accounting for such instances, we try and highlight how films leave the domestic output unrecognized as well (or on the rare occasion, at least mention it).

4. *Talking About Sexuality*: With films such as *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (Alankrita Shrivastava, 2016) and *Margarita With A Straw* (Shonali Bose, 2014) trying to break the taboo by talking about women exploring their sexual desires, this parameter forms an essential part of our study. The idea is to quantify moments where we may see characters engaging in consensual sexual activity. Further, we also try and analyse the way in which sexual interaction and exchange has been portrayed in the past. This is achieved through accounting for moments when sexual harassment or behaviour that encourages sexism/misogyny has been either normalized or moralized. If culture is the means through which we mark our interaction with the opposite gender, it should be interesting to see till what extent our sexual behaviour is replicated (or dialogically produced) on the cinematic screen.
5. *The (Ob)Scene – the many objections of the CBFC*: Since our study also wishes to see how cultural representation interacts with the “State”, it makes sense to examine the many omissions and additions that films have had to undergo, in seeking permission from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) and reaching out to the masses. These modifications have again been classified along the following categories—⁶

- a. *Cuts on Sexuality*
- b. *Cuts on Misogyny/Sexism/Sexual Harassment*
- c. *Non-Sexual Slurs*
- d. *Cuts on Violence*
- e. *Additions*

⁶ This classification is based on our interpretation of the nature of instructions given in the various CBFC reports available online.

C. Parameters (Qualitative)

1. *When Women Speak*: In order to scrutinize our collected statistics, we try and identify the films which, on an average, have a near equitable distribution of dialogue between men and women; or the rare ones that actually favour women. We do this at the level of dialogues uttered by the entire cast, as well as solely those uttered by the male and female protagonists in question (queer characters do not appear as protagonists). The idea is to qualitatively comment and locate points of empowerment (if any) within the narratives of these films.
2. *Saying Hello to the Gaze*: As Laura Mulvey, in her seminal essay on the subject, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” points out, the very act of watching a film is voyeuristic, wherein the on-screen characters become the very object of our visual pleasure (Mulvey 1999). Furthermore, since the social reality of our worldview tends to be male-dominated, this visual pleasure is also from the point of view of the male gaze; that is, storytelling which is meant for the entertainment of the male masses. In the past, twitter users and bloggers have pointed out how the principle of masculine pleasure seeps into Hollywood screenplays, by looking at the ways in which women characters are introduced—largely in relation to their sexuality, as opposed to anything else (MARTINETTI 2016).

This section of the report provides us a glimpse into the way that Bollywood’s visual lenses are encoded within the male gaze. We do so by descriptively identifying the contrasts, as well as the similarities, in the very introduction of male and female protagonists in all of our films. In some ways, the report highlights the particular modes of sexualisation for both male and female characters that we, as visual consumers, take pleasure in. At other points, it shows how the very body of the female character is further fragmented and objectified for the demands of the male gaze.

3. *Women by Themselves – Elaborating the Bechdel Test*: The Bechdel test asks for at least two women characters in a film in a scene by themselves, talking about something other than a man. In another study by the *The Pudding*, about 40% of Hollywood films between 1995 and 2015 fail this test (FRIEDMAN, DANIELS and BLINDERMAN). While most of the films in our sample set do not pass as well, the Bechdel test itself is often considered an inadequate metric for multiple reasons (Liao 2017). While we continue to struggle for this bare minimum for instance,

⁷ Refers to cuts on brand labels.

women conversing among themselves about their desires and romances (albeit, purely heterosexual ones) can also be read as an act of subversion.

This section of the report focuses on scenes where credited women characters are found by themselves (or in the company of other women characters or non-credited secondary characters), in order to comment on the nature of their participation in the script. This is an attempt to see whether they make decisions that catalyse the plot of the film forward, or whether they speak about their own aspirations.

4. *When Women Work*: As described earlier, the representation of economic profiles in culture becomes an important indicator of our definition of labour in general. This parameter hopes to identify instances where women are shown to engage in labour that is recognized and/or paid—either by themselves or by those around them. Our attempt is to show the kind of occupations largely associated with women, in order to highlight the nature of employment options that we, as audiences, deem acceptable for women in general (or end up condemning a particular kind of woman for choosing them).

2. Finding Space to Talk

***“Keh diya na...
bas keh diya!”***

- Nandini Raichand, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001) ⁸

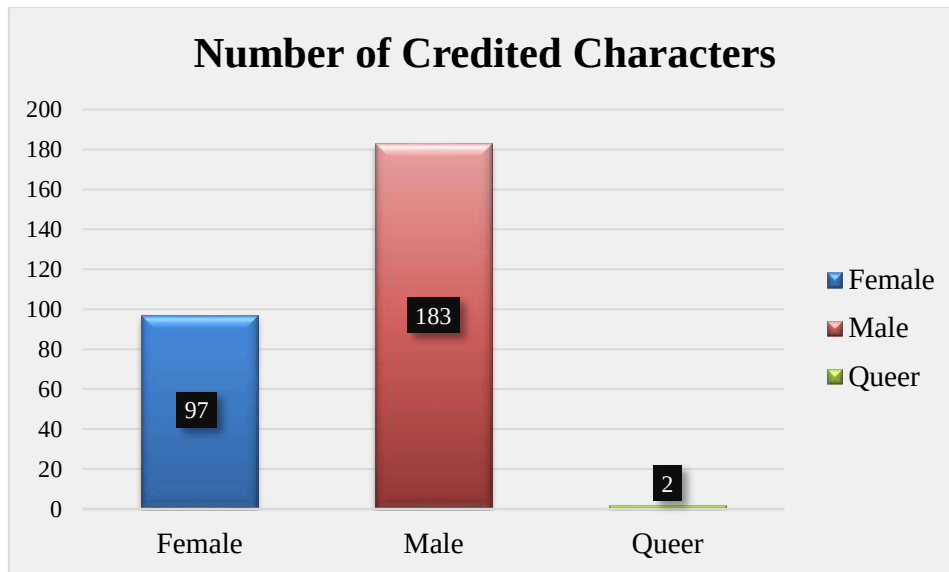
A. Number of Credited Characters

As far back as 1990, Amartya Sen, in a report that analysed the skewed sex ratio of the human population, declared a 100 million women “missing” from parts of Africa and Western and Southern Asia (Sen, 1990). This number refers to that portion of the human species that has not been given space to exist—hence, indicating the inequality of resources between men and women that begins right at birth. Our study extends this dissonance of population to the cinematic conception of female characters. A Quartz report for instance, reveals that 2017 saw a dip in the number of women-centric films in Hollywood (Mohdin, 2018). Closer home, an inherent bias in our storytelling is visible in something as basic as the gender based identity of the protagonist in question. To this end, we begin by looking at the distribution of credited characters within the films in our purview. Whose stories are we willing to tell? Have the carriers of these stories changed over time or not?

There remain of course a numerous amount of characters in any film—and film databases online are willing to share details about the most minor roles in some cases and ignore entire portions of a film’s cast in others. Our approach remained pretty basic—what actors/characters appear in the opening credits of a film? The assumption is that these names are the very first impression for anyone who watches the film. (Granted, there were cases where a filmmaker chooses not to share any names at all—leaving the responsibility of telling the ubiquitous names of the film’s cast to the very end of the film. In such cases, we have used titles from DVD covers—the officially sanctioned remnants of a film, once it has moved out of theatres.)

The graph below shows that across the thirty films in our sample, male characters account for nearly twice as much as female characters [while the amount of queer characters is negligible—two in *Raja Hindustani* (Dharmesh Darshan, 1996)]. Again, this is not to say that we did not encounter more female/queer characters while watching our films, but that these were generally secondary characters, with little stake in the film’s plot and hence, went non-credited.

⁸ “I said it... that’s it—I said it.”



Graph 2.1: Number of Credited Characters, 1995-2015 Dataset

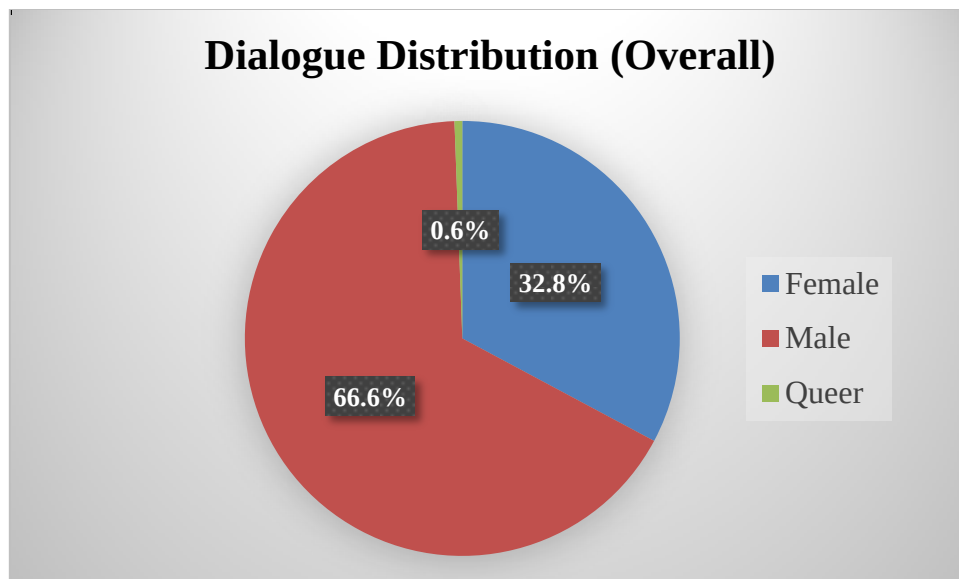
Some cases remain worth considering separately. In *Chak De India!* (Shimit Amin, 2007)—a story about a women’s hockey team, the only actor credited at the beginning of the film is Shahrukh Khan. An argument can be made for debutant actors, which don’t usually share the same space with the more established “stars” of any film. However, this does not stop the makers of *Lagaan* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001) from mentioning each of their long cast of actors—male *and* female—at the beginning of the film. Similarly, in *Parineeta*, Vidya Balan, a debutant actor, but one whose character holds a significant space within the film’s plot, is mentioned at the very beginning of the feature itself. Clearly, the stage of an actor’s career is not the only issue here.

In the same film although, Rekha gets mentioned in the opening credits, even though she only appears for a cabaret number. Similarly, Malaika Arora Khan in *Dabangg* (Abhinav Kashyap, 2010), as well as Kalpana Iyer and Pratibha Sinha in *Raja Hindustani*, appear in their respective films for the duration of a song/dance sequence and leave the screen without uttering more than a couple of lines at most. We still count these as “characters” and add them to our calculations [while recognizing that there are also female or queer characters, in cases such as *Taal* (Subhash Ghai, 1999) or *Jodhaa Akbar* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008), which hold as much significance in a film’s narrative as any other secondary character, but are still “missing”].

B. Dialogue Distribution

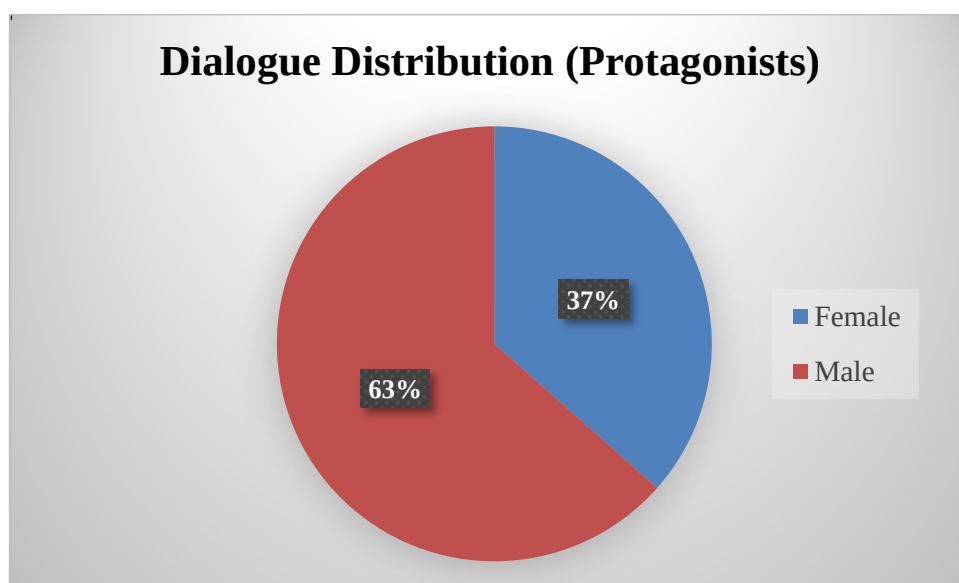
Even making it to the screen although, does not guarantee the kind of representation we are hoping for. In many cases, such as *Dabangg* and *Dil Chahta Hai* (Farhan Akhtar, 2001), the female characters are scripted in a manner that their allotted dialogue is restricted to monosyllabic replies and answers posed by a male presence. While it is impossible to statistically account for the short-hand

nature of these dialogues, we were able to count the number of dialogues between male, female and queer characters (credited and non-credited)—



Graph 2.2: Dialogue Distribution (Overall Cast), 1995-2015 Dataset

Women characters account for as little as a third of the total number of dialogues in our entire study. Again, we emphasize that these dialogues account for everything uttered in the course of a film, ranging from a single flashback sequence to the most grandiose of speeches: dialogues spoken by a non-entity within the scope of the plot, the college friend of a woman for instance [(*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* (Aditya Chopra, 1995))], to a passing slur by one among a teeming crowd of villagers (*Lagaan*). However, given the skewed sex-ratio of Bollywood stories (as pointed out above), it made sense that male characters would occupy a dominant portion of these dialogues and hence, we tried singling out a similar distribution between the male *lead* and the female *lead* of all our films—



Graph 2.3: Dialogue Distribution (Protagonists), 1995-2015 Dataset

Not surprisingly, there was not much of an improvement in the numbers, while the queer population, by virtue of their absence as protagonists in any story, has completely disappeared.

These statistics are of course enlightening, but what was more revealing was the way in which the female character was generally represented as a non-verbal participant. In *Dabangg*, as pointed out earlier, when Chulbul Pandey decides to marry Rajjo, she remains for the better part silent, never having expressed her consent, other than in a supposedly loving gesture of holding Chulbul's hand. Similarly, there are significant portions across films, where a female character is shown crying repeatedly and we are asked to consider this as a scripted dialogue—in *Border* (J.P. Dutta, 1997) for instance, a blind mother repeatedly calling after her son, a soldier on duty; or in *Taal*, where Mansi spends most of her time in near silent contemplation and depression, thinking about her former lover.

C. When Women Speak

Films	Overall	
	Female	Male
Kuch Kuch Hota Hai	55.03%	44.97%
Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam	50.95%	49.05%
Devdas	57.18%	42.82%
Chak De! India	52.02%	47.98%

Table 2.1: Dialogue Distribution (Overall Cast), 1995-2015 Dataset

There are however, exceptional cases where the overall percentage of dialogues by female characters outweighs that of male characters. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998), this is primarily due to a larger cast of women characters (seven, as opposed to four male roles). The same can be said about *Chak De India!*—although of course, it helps to note that it took an entire team of women players to outweigh the share of dialogues by a male coach (Shahrukh Khan, who, as pointed out earlier, is the only credited character at the beginning of the film).

Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 1999) and *Devdas* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002) on the other hand, enjoy an equitable number of male and female characters. In the former, the share of dialogues is more or less equal, while the latter favours women characters significantly. It is also noteworthy that both of these films, by the same director, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, flirt with the idea of a woman desiring outside of her marital bond. In the same vein, a few other films have nearly an equitable distribution of dialogue, often also giving space to their women characters for a powerful intervention in the script, but ultimately edging out in favour of the male cast. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Karan Johar, 2001) for instance, Nandini, played by Jaya Bachan, turns around a quote on the patriarch, to stand in open defiance; and in *Veer-Zaara* (Yash Chopra, 2004), the titular female protagonist becomes a spokesperson for educating the girl child in a village in northern India.

Films	Protagonists	
	Female	Male
Raja	58.17%	41.83%
Raja Hindustani	52.52%	47.48%
Pardes	54.24%	45.76%
Devdas	51.81%	48.19%
Parineeta	51.21%	48.79%

Table 2.2: Dialogue Distribution (Protagonists), 1995-2015 Dataset

However, only one of the above exceptions sticks to the table when we filter down the test for dialogue distribution between the protagonists—*Devdas*—and primarily so, because it has two female leads (*Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* on the others hand, gets omitted on a similar account—it has two male leads).

Raja (Indra Kumar, 1995) and *Raja Hindustani* become surprising additions, given a high frequency of sexist/misogynist behaviour, as well as instances of morally policing a woman. *Pardes* (Subhash Ghai, 1997) again, enters the list by giving Ganga, its female lead the opportunity to break into monologues that sing praise of the purity and chastity of her country. *Parineeta* on the other hand, offers us a working woman in Lalita, played by Vidya Balan, in many ways the defining protagonist of the film—but also one that is tasked with pleasing everyone around her—her surrogate parents, her cousins, their guest, her lover and his mother.

Quantitatively accounting for the credited characters or the dialogue distribution of a film, is clearly insufficient as a wholesome comment on any story, but still forms an important element that requires our critical attention. Especially in the kind of cinema we consider, where the aesthetic demands an introduction of the integral characters of a film at its very beginning. As our statistics indicate, the kinds of stories we prefer to consume are largely about male characters. The question that remains to be answered is—if the issues these stories tackle remain solely masculine in nature?

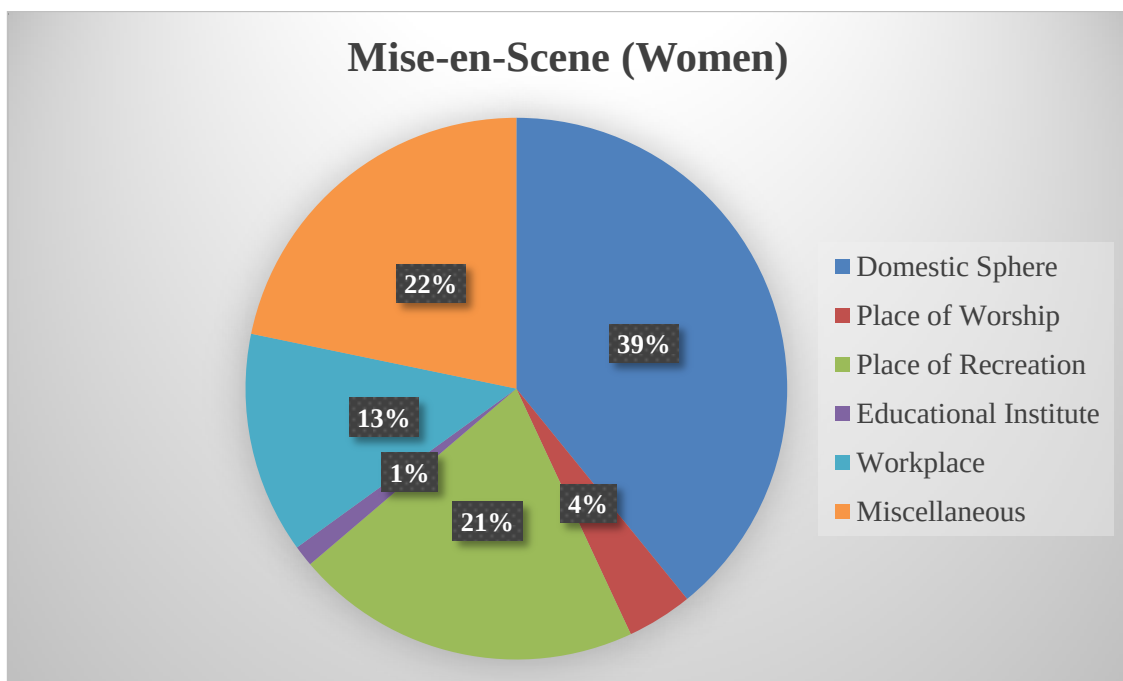
3. Defining Space to Talk

“Ekant.”

- Malikaaye Jodhaa Bai, *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) ⁹

A. Scene Distribution

The lack of political will is not the only reason that women’s participation in the labour force or their literacy rates, for instance, have not increased proportionately. It is also down to the social norms prescribed to women by their family members and those outside the home that restrict their spatial and social movement – “The 2011 Indian Human Development Survey shows that a significant fraction of Indian women say they require permission from a family member to go to the local market or health centre. In the end, it’s pretty difficult to look for a job if you can’t leave the house alone (Pande 2017).”

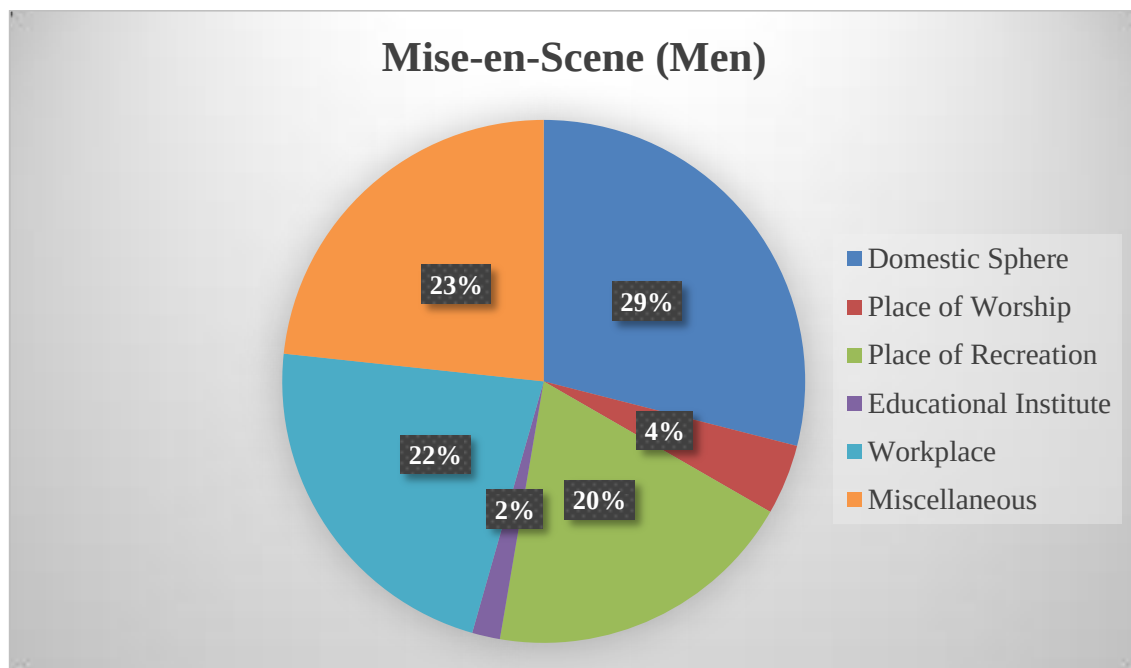


Graph 3.1: *Mise-en-Scene Distribution (Women)*, 1995-2015 Dataset

It is relevant hence, to look at the ways in which certain gender-based identities become associated with certain locations. Our study is not merely investigating the number of scenes each character receives, but rather, looking at the number of times a character appears on screen in a different

⁹ “Isolated.” (But in this context, a command asking everyone to leave the person alone.)

location. On an average, this boils down to 1833 appearances for men, as opposed to 1354 appearances for women. We further organize these statistics based on the location in which both men and women get represented.



Graph 3.2: *Mise-en-Scene Distribution (Men), 1995-2015 Dataset*

The charts above declare some obvious disparities—women occupy the domestic sphere more frequently than men.

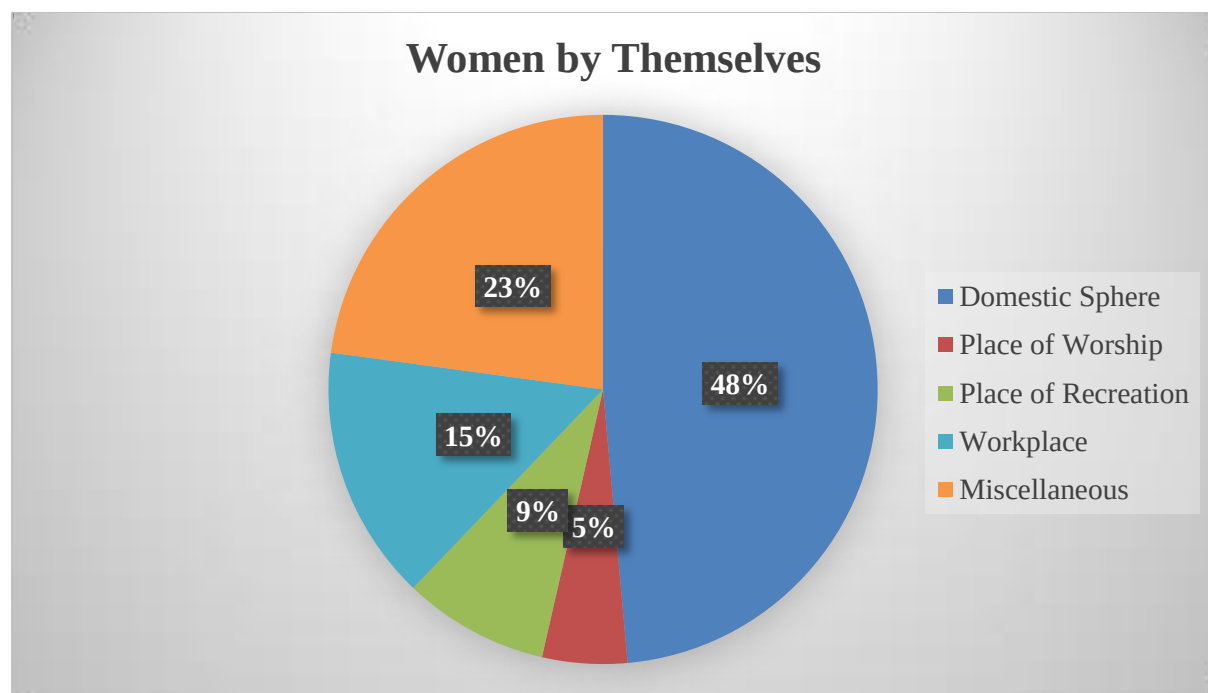
In his essay titled “The Nation and Its Women”, Partha Chatterjee raises a crucial question regarding the disappearance of women centric reform initiatives at the peak of the nationalist movement. The status of women in society, he feels, did not lead to a passionate debate among the “nation’s” intelligentsia, as it did in the time of Rommohan Roy or Vidyasagar for instance, both of whom pioneered the beginnings of formal education for women in nineteenth century Bengal. Chatterjee interrogates the possible reasons behind this apparent “retrogression” of the woman question and attributes it as a by-product of the creation of an East-West dichotomy within the nationalist discourse. While the colonizer, due to its scientific and industrial superiority, has been able to subdue the Eastern subject in the material sphere of the outer world, the nationalist anti-colonialist may still cling to the spiritual sphere of the home, which, having resisted the corrupt influences of Westernization remains a source of the superior “inner self” (Chatterjee 1999).

Patricia Uberoi points out the resurgence of a similarly gendered segregation of the public and the private space in her assessment of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, where the threat of a cultural liberalisation is met with a reinstatement of the Indian youth’s adherence to seemingly traditional “*Hindustani*” values (Uberoi 1998). Simran’s return to her homeland for instance, seeking patriarchal

legitimation for her romantic relationship, implies the security of domestic (Indian) superiority. Similarly, in *Pardes*, Ganga is meant to symbolize all that is good and “pure” about India—explicitly even, singing a song that says “*I love my India*.” In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* as well, the anxiety of leaving behind the motherland is represented and countered in equal measure by Anjali, as she chants the national song and the national anthem and is brought to tears when her son reflects this token patriotism.

B. Women by Themselves

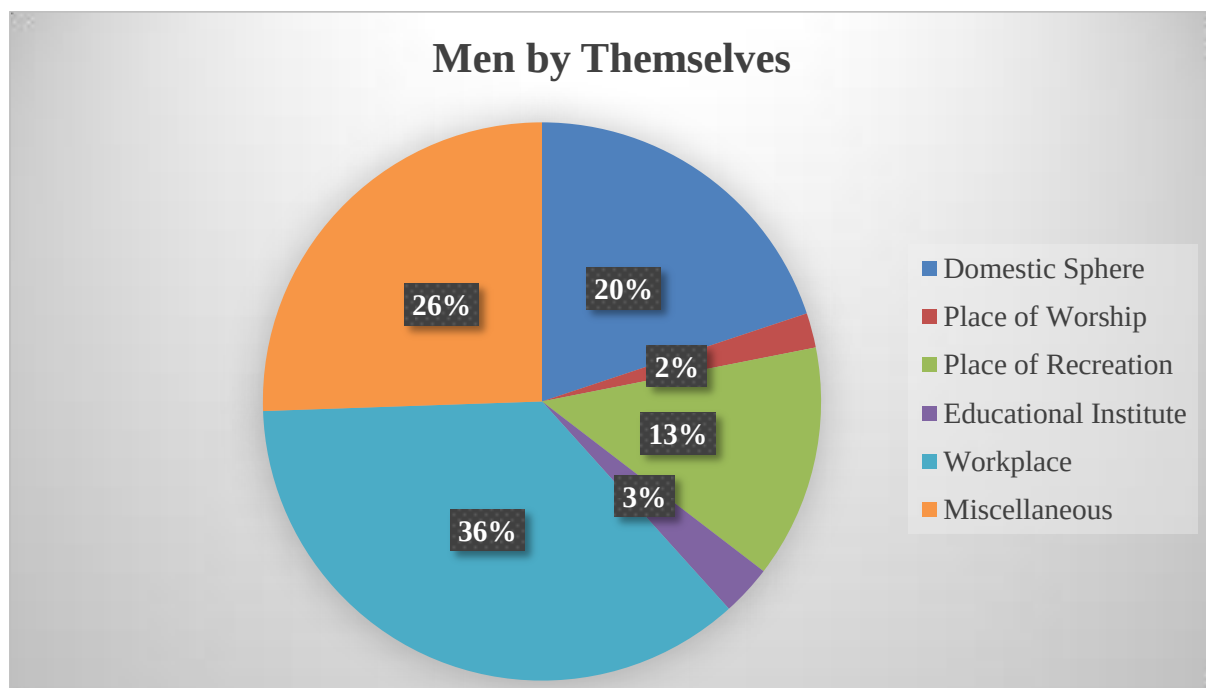
Given that men tend to dominate the credited cast of characters and are generally the central figure in any screenplay, it is inevitable that they enjoy a higher number of scenes. It is also inevitable that women tend to play the decorative element of any screenplay, as if to adorn the storyline, rather than push it forward. The Bechdel test, as stated earlier, probes into this limited space in order to see if women occupy the screen by themselves at any point in a film—it also demands that the subject of conversation within this exclusive zone is devoid of men. In a similar strain then, we tried evaluating the number of times that credited female characters appear by themselves, as compared to their male counterparts—a 140 times for the former, as compared to a glaringly disproportionate 547 appearances for the latter.



Graph 3.3: *Mise-en-Scene Distribution (Women by Themselves), 1995-2015 Dataset*

“Appearing by themselves”, for the purposes of our study, doesn’t necessarily mean that they are devoid of any male presence—credited women characters for instance, can also be considered “by themselves” when dealing with secondary/non-credited male characters (or vice-versa). If our social

reality gets filtered on screen, it should be interesting to see how women handle themselves in a world full of men. Does the equation change when they are dealing with different kinds of men—ones farther away from the traditional protagonist or antagonist? Or do the power hierarchies in even these instances get reinforced in one way or another? Quantitatively for instance, the mise-en-scene distribution in these cases heightens the disparate association of women with the domestic sphere and place of worship as opposed to men (50% versus 22%) and that of men with their respective workplaces as opposed to women (36% versus 15%)—whereas the minimal representation in an educational institute disappears for women altogether.



Graph 3.3: Mise-en-Scene Distribution (*Men by Themselves*), 1995-2015 Dataset

All films (but three) failed the Bechdel test on another account—in that, the topic of conversation when women were by themselves always concerned a man. However, a more comprehensive analysis of these sequences revealed a more nuanced picture after all. In *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* for instance, all such scenes are within the domestic sphere and feature conversations between mother, daughter and sister. Even while they converse on issues concerning marriage and family, in doing so, they recognize the bounds of their patriarchal world order and comment on ways in which they get victimized by it or conversely, might subvert it. Similar moments take place in *Karan Arjun* (Rakesh Roshan, 1995), *Pardes*, *Jodhaa Akbar* and *Barfi* (Anurag Basu, 2012); while refreshingly in *Dil Toh Pagal Hai* (Yash Chopra, 1997), Pooja’s female guardian, for however a superfluous moment, also asks for her help in scolding the husband from hindering her “work” as a householder.

These are also moments where women are shown to respond to a general state of violence in their individual ways. In *Karan Arjun*, a mother begs to a female goddess for the safety of her sons and

later goes about in defiance to the “evil” antagonist, promising vengeance for their murder. In *Maachis* (Gulzar, 1996), a couple of song sequences feature the female protagonist at farm and within the domestic sphere, lamenting the state of affairs in her hometown (in Punjab), as it suffers from the consequences of State violence. In *Border* on the other hand, the same actor appears for a brief section within the film to play the role of a concerned wife who tries to stop her husband from performing his “duties” as a soldier.

In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, the trope of the concerned wife is repeated, so as to make Tina seem like an angelic figure of self-sacrificing womanhood—she chooses to have a baby for the sake of her husband and asks her daughter to try and find a replacement lover for her father. Even as one of the few films with more scenes for women by themselves as compared to men, the conversations are largely restricted to talking about Rahul’s lost love and Anjali’s desire for him (the latter is referred to in a place of worship and in sentimental tones by the mother-in-law herself). Another film that quantitatively weighs in favour of women is *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, where chatter about a potential wedding is mixed with friendly banter between a woman and her friend. Similarly in *Parineeta*, a maternal figure adorns Lalita with jewellery while blessing her to “rule” in whichever house she is married to.

But are there further ways to look for solidarity between women? In *Taal*, an aunt asks Mansi to forget her former lover and move on, by accepting a successful career as a dancer and vocalist. Unfortunately, the larger narrative of the film tries to gloss over such advice, especially when Mansi’s own sisters condemn her for trying to comply with it. In *Devdas* on the other hand, the subject of unrequited love becomes a way for two women to bond over their desire for the same man, rather than compete against one another. In *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, a concerned mother tries reassuring a traumatized daughter, asking her to stay patient while she tries salvaging her “illicit” love. In *Jodhaa Akbar* again, the woman’s sphere in the Mughal household is a space for the Queen to reflect on the nature of love, for her to assert her right over the domestic ties of the kingdom and ultimately infringe the battlefield when the threat looms closer home.

Outside of love, what else can women talk about? One of the three films that passed the Bechdel test is *Chak De India*, where women players fight, coach and support one another on their way to a world championship. Even when they talk about a man, it is to debate whether he is a suitable coach for their team or in a tone of determination, pledging to prove the worth of their sport to someone who belittles it. In *Rang De Basanti* (Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, 2006), two women laugh over and complain about the difficulties of their job, even though such scenes sift away from the film’s narrative quite early. The same can be said for *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (Kabir Khan, 2015), where a mother’s resolve to pray for her disabled daughter and send her to school is shown in a sensitive light and forms the prologue of the story to follow.

Films	Female	Male
Raja Hindustani	3	0
Kuch Kuch Hota Hai	16	1
Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham...	4	8
Veer-Zaara	20	4
Chak De! India	9	6
Bajrangi Bhaijaan	12	6

Table 3.1: Number of Individual Appearances, Male vs. Female, 1995-2015 Dataset

C. Saying Hello to the Gaze

The quintessential Hindi film has a “hero” and a “heroine”—typically in a romantic relationship. The plot of a film is centred on them by engaging with the details of their lives—their families, work profiles and perhaps past-times. Filmmakers take special care in sketching the portraits of the male and female protagonists in an attempt to familiarise the characters to the audience—making us understand where the characters come from and why their lives take the turns they do.

Analysing the introductory shots of these protagonists, across the thirty films in our study, has revealed certain recurring patterns—there is an obvious contrast in the way a “hero” and a “heroine” is introduced. The pattern shows that female protagonists are portrayed in a way such that the first time we see them on-screen, their identities become closely linked to their sexuality. Thus, most of the female characters in our study are introduced with reference to certain objects and people. The hero, in turn, is shown mostly with respect to an action, which at many times is “heroic”. He is also shown by himself, as if he doesn’t need extra props like a female, to be introduced.

The obsession to first show the female protagonist by the means of her body clearly points to the presence of a male-gaze that engulfs most of the films in the Bombay film industry. The presence of this gaze further enables the woman to be portrayed in relation to a man—that is, making her an appendage to a male figure. The portrayal of a man in relation to himself or his actions further shows how the gaze is discriminatory, in that a male is not viewed as the object, rather as the person who determines the perspective of the film. The female thus, gets reduced to a glorified commodity in the hands of the male subject.

The female characters in our study are introduced in a variety of ways, but with an overarching theme of being exhibited as sexual beings and associated with a man (visible or invisible). We have identified three ways of introducing the female within our sample set:

1. *The Sexualised Heroine*: The heroine is always introduced as a sum total of her individual body parts. In these introductory shots, the camera typically pans from her lips to her eyes to her earrings and her *dupatta*, along with many other similar visual cues that define the

woman. In *Veer Zaara*, Preity Zinta's character is first described by a male voice while she is shown running through the fields with a focus on her *dupatta*, her earrings and so on. Pooja in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, is shown in fragmented body parts before we get to see her as a whole—only after shots of her long array of fashion magazines, cosmetics and shoes.

2. *She who is defined in association with a He*: Gauri in *Lagaan* is first shown with the camera moving from her hands stretched in front of the village astrologer, all the way up to her eager face, asking, “Will I get the prince of my dreams?” This very first shot establishes her as a character whose primary motive is to get associated with the man of her dreams. This general theme of being associated with the male protagonist of the film is shown in the portrayal of the introductory scenes of Paro in *Devdas*, Sonia in *Karan Arjun*, Lalita in *Parineeta* and so on. If not the hero explicitly, then the heroine is many a time associated with an invisible man. Simran in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge* and Ganga in *Pardes* are first shown dreamily doing something—that is, thinking of their would-be prince. In *Veer Zaara* again, Zaara is first shown against posing the question of her marriage, establishing her identity as something that can be fortified only through an association with a man.
3. *Neutral*: The heroine is shown as a human being going about her daily business and not overly-sexualised. These kinds of introductions happen in some of the more recent films in our movie list. Meera in *Love Aaj Kal* (Imtiaz Ali, 2009) is first shown waving goodbye to her friends and going to a mall and Rasika in *Bajrangi Bhaijan* is shown travelling on a bus. The trends might hence be shifting—although a major part of the gaze persists, but gets increasingly normalized.

There are earlier exceptions to this kind of portrayal—for example, Veeran in *Maachis* is shown in the middle of a household chore. Given the social context and background, and acknowledging the fact that she is doing a domestic job, she is introduced as a person committed to an activity, as opposed to a sexualised object in the eyes of a male.

The male protagonist is shown in a variety of ways, distinct from being party to sexual objectification—the male is shown through a markedly different angle—

1. *Committed to Labour*: The hero is shown working, or at least located in his workplace, in the very first scene. Raja in *Raja Hindustani* is shown in the taxi he drives, Karan and Arjun in *Karan Arjun* are shown working hard in the quarry the first time they are shown, Arjun (Hrithik Roshan) in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobaara* is shown in his workplace; he is a stock market broker.

2. *The Much Anticipated Hero*: In these introductions, the scene has a build-up that leads to the entry of the hero. In such scenes, the male is being cheered by a crowd which spikes the interest of the audience. Everyone on screen is waiting for him to make his appearance or a lady is yearning to see him. Rahul (Shahrukh Khan) in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* is seen entering after a sufficient amount of suspense—with his mother intuitively realizing that he must have arrived. Rahul again in *Dil Toh Pagal Hai*, is hard to locate as the time for his character's stage entry nears—Nisha (Karishma Kapoor) frets and waits for him to appear—which he does, jumping out of nowhere in a daredevil fashion. DJ's (Aamir Khan) introductory scene in *Rang De Basanti* involves a bunch of people cheering for him while he chugs on a bottle of beer. These kinds of scenes make sure that the man is shown as a chosen favourite among a cast of characters. He is the one everyone looks up to or looks around for. The same happens for Dev in *Devdas*, even as he is construed as more of an anti-hero—a large welcome awaits him on his return home. No female character is privy to such treatment.
3. *The 'Heroic' Hero*: Another pattern we noticed in some films is that the hero is first shown engaging in a "heroic" activity. Raja (Sanjay Kapoor) in *Raja* saves his brother from a dangerous shipping container that might drop on his head at any moment. Chulbul Pandey (Salman Khan) in *Dabangg* is first shown blasting into a warehouse full of thugs on his bike and follows this up with an action sequence. Rancho (Aamir Khan) in *3 Idiots* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) is first shown escaping a ragging session by his college seniors by skilfully evading it while others suffer. So the man is either shown as valiant or intelligent in these scenes. The film maker makes sure that the image formed of the male is that of a "Hero" with a specific skillset—or a random one. Rohan (Hrithik Roshan) in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* is shown to hit a winning run in his college's cricket match.
4. *Just There*: Among the earlier films in our sample set give us male introductory shots where the protagonist is displayed without an elaborate context. The heroes in *Veer-Zaara* and *Maachis* are introduced casually during songs. Manav in *Taal* and Munnabhai in *Lage Raho Munnabhai* (Rajkumar Hirani, 2006) are shown relaxed in leisure in their introductory shots. There is also Sameer in *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, who is first shown in a long rant with his dead father. These shots indicate that the male protagonist doesn't have to do anything to prove his worth as the subject of the story—after all it is his movie.

The introductory scenes are constructed in ways that they convey a message to the audience. It gives a fair idea on how to view a particular person. Should they be viewed as an object of pleasure? Or should their activity and decisions drive the film? Could they also instead facilitate another character's progress through the rest of the narrative? The introductory shot sets the tone for the

character; it sketches the subtle curves and hues that attempt to come out during that initial scene—and are going to recur through the rest of our story.



Fig. 3.1 In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, Pooja, played by Kareena Kapoor, is introduced as a fashion diva in overly sexualised tones, whereas Rohan, played by Hrithik Roshan, is introduced while hitting six runs for his team in a cricket match, while cheered on by his college mates.



Fig. 3.2 In *Veer-Zaara*, to introduce Zaara, played by Preity Zinta, the sequence of shots are - her earrings jingling in the wind, her bangle-clad hands, her flying *dupatta*, followed by her running through a mustard field, with the camera focussed on her legs, all of which are repeated more than once. On the other hand, Veer, played by Shahrukh Khan, is introduced casually as he turns around singing the song, “*Kyon hawa...*”.

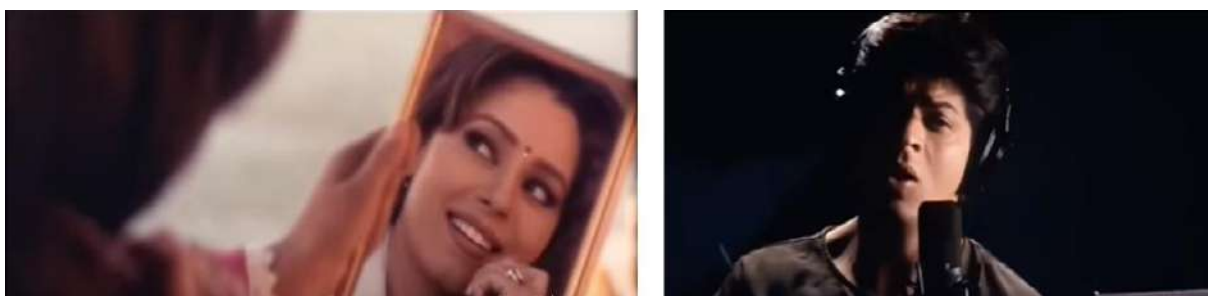


Fig. 1.3 Mahima Chaudhary, who plays Ganga in *Pardes*, is first shown grooming herself with a mirror in her hand and dreamily staring into the distance, while a folk song plays in the background, asking her father to look for a suitable groom. Arjun, played by Shah Rukh Khan is first shown singing a song in a recording studio—his workplace.



Fig. 1.4 Paro, played by Aishwarya Rai, when introduced for the first time in *Devdas*, looks fondly at the lamp that symbolises her relationship with Devdas (played by Shah Rukh Khan). Meanwhile, Dev's entry scene is built-up with a lot of anticipation from his family members, for the returning hero, thus making him the “anticipated hero” in our study.

4. Representing Gender in Labour

***“Saari umr guzar gayi meri
iss naukri mein...”***

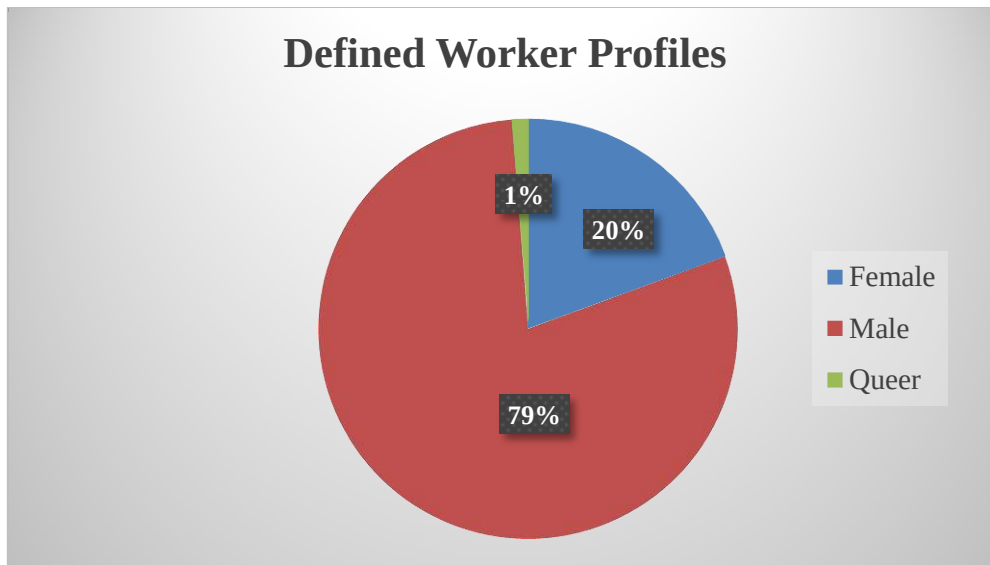
- “Ajay’s” Mother, *Dil Toh Pagal Hai* (1997)

The opening sequence of *Om Shanti Om* (Farah Khan, 2007) shows the titular protagonist Om, played by Shahrukh Khan, jumping with exuberance as a junior artiste on the sets of *Karz* (Subhash Ghai, 1980)—he’s delighted to watch his hero Rishi Kapoor dance in front of him. Soon, he imagines himself in Kapoor’s place and the film complies with this fantasy, rewarding “Om” with the persona of a film star as the narrative progresses. In a way, the film is giving us a taste of Bollywood’s own chimera, the kind that inspires a teeming line of individuals to join the film industry—or any other industry for that matter.

Films starring Ranbir Kapoor for instance, aim for a certain kind of demographic—the adventurous “youth” of the city—unsure of their life choices (*Wake Up Sid* (Ayan Mukerji, 2009)), wanting to shake things up and make a name for themselves (*Rocket Singh* (Shimit Amin, 2009) and *Rockstar* (Imtiaz Ali, 2011)), torn between the desire to explore the world and stay in touch with their loved ones (*Ye Jawanai Hai Diwaani* (Ayan Mukerji, 2013) and *Bachna Ae Haseeno* (Siddharth Anand, 2008)), and typically armed with a DSLR, a guitar or a video game controller (all of the above). It’s not that women cannot look up to these characters for inspiration, but as the following study will indicate, we will be hard pressed to find a diverse representation of professional or economic roles within the already limited space female characters occupy. It is this economic inadequacy of wholesome representation that this section of our report aims to address.

Further, adding to the sociological profile of their protagonist(s) gives the filmmaker an opportunity to play with the central conflicts of the film. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham...* for instance, the conflict in the film is pre-empted in Rahul’s and Anjali’s respective class backgrounds or in *3 Idiots*, where Rancho’s theatrics as an engineering student become a popular critique of the education industry. In which case, it’s worth pondering upon the kind of professions filmmakers choose to represent, in that there seem to be some crucial links between the demographic and sociological sketch of our characters, how it generally affects the storytelling narrative of a film and how it appeals to a certain kind of audience.

The following study tries to understand the gendered nature of this construction by looking at the various professions filmmakers try depicting (or not depicting) in their works—



Graph 4.1: Defined Worker Profiles (Male, Female, Queer), 1995-2015 Dataset

A. By a “**Defined Worker Profile**”, we refer to instances where a character is visibly constituted through their professional attributes in a film. This definition may occur through dialogue, but can also be implied in visual codes—by locating a character at their workplace or showing them adorned in a uniform. Out of the thirty films we analysed, a total of 161 credited characters fell into this category. Male characters account for 79% of them, while female characters account for 20% of them. The 1% of this chart that falls under the “Queer” category refers to two characters from the film *Raja Hindustani*, where a couple of domestic servants, sketched with gendered ambiguities, are sent as guardians of the film’s female protagonist. Their representation as workers although, recedes gradually as they move away from the “workplace” and are shown in increasingly domestic spheres, transitioning into hetero-normative relationships.

But interpreting worker profiles is not as obvious a task as it may seem. While our study is concerned with conventional representation, if cinema is a reflection of societal expectations, then society too, defines “work” as economically relevant in more than one way. Within this 20% are hidden exceptions where the filmic text gives the viewer an opportunity to see employment in a nuanced way. In *Maachis* for instance, once her brother has been rounded up and beaten violently by State authorities, Veera, Tabu’s character, shoulders much of the farm’s responsibility, driving the tractor to the field and taking care of its poultry produce. Her economic contribution is recognized by other members of the household as well. On the other hand, conventionally, the woman’s role in the total output of the household is gleaned over, by themselves, as well as their relations.

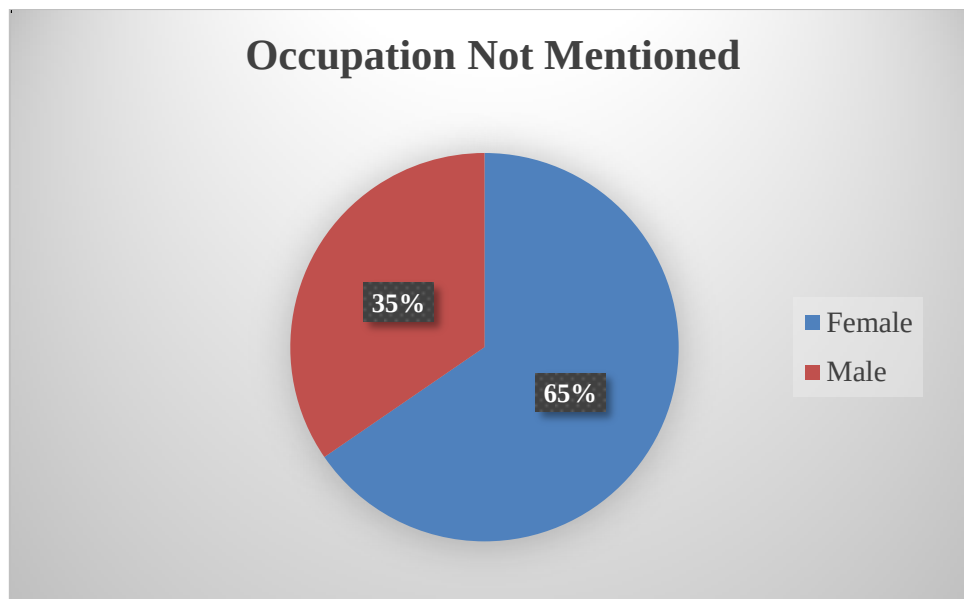
This recognition is not made roundly apparent in all such films. In *Lagaan* for instance, a spike in the number of male credited characters who are considered farmers or colonial officers, affected by the revenue system of British India on either side of the spectrum, does not correspond with a spike in the number of female characters. Further, while these women are shown duly affected by the system, as well as participants within the struggle, the nature of their labour is still largely domesticated. They cook food for their male relatives, they stitch their equipment, and they pray in temples—and while the rhetoric of the male protagonist is marked with open defiance for the colonial master, asking his villagers to join the clarion call of rebellion, the female protagonist, played by Gracy Singh, seems to be predominantly concerned with her romantic interests instead. When it comes to historical fiction, the filmmaker has the freedom to choose between adhering to “history” or to good “fiction”. In *Jodhaa Akbar* for instance, the filmmaker attempts at free interpretation—showing a Queen engage in the martial arts (but never in the field of war). Further, even while she is recognized as a “Queen”, her singing voice is an (pleasant?) intrusion in matters of the state, and even while her marriage is a token exchange of Mughal expansion, she has to fight to prove her stake within the domestic confines of the Mughal Empire. Being a Queen is a role and a job. It is not completely private or completely public.

Similarly, the domestic labour a woman undertakes is rendered economically invisible in our day-to-day lives. Silvia Federici would call this reproductive labour essential in setting up a capitalist economy in the first place (Federici 1975). But the question remains—do we as a society count the labour of the homemaker as economically meaningful? It is for this reason that while assessing the domestic duties of a woman character we could not call her “unemployed”. In *Devdas*, Parvati is called a “*thakurain*” (a landlady) by her mother-in-law. This title, which she has begotten through marriage, still carries with it a social weight and responsibility that attaches itself to the respectability of the household. In *Dabangg*, Sonakshi Sinha’s character, Rajjo, earns for herself through pottery and through handicrafts, but this fact does not seem to carry any bearing till Chulbul Pandey, played by Salman Khan, calls her a “craftswoman”. In either case, the fact that they carry a stake in the running of the household is washed over by restricting their agency—Parvati cannot cross the bounds of her mansion and once she marries, Rajjo does not seem to engage in the kind of labour she used to.¹⁰

B. These are the “Occupations Not Mentioned”, the ones that remain unrecognized by the players of the film, the audience watching it, and the ones making it—¹¹

¹⁰ In *Devdas* although, the restriction in Parvati’s whereabouts it can be argued, are a result of historical accuracy and a certain adherence to the film’s adaptive source material. But even in interpreting this restriction, the film is only heightening the sense of tragedy associated with Paro’s and Dev’s love story, as opposed to critiquing the source of such oppression.

¹¹ Refreshingly perhaps, in *Dil Toh Pagal Hai*, the first time we see Farida Jalal’s character, she is engaged in domestic labour and says, even out of mere irritation, that she has been engaged in this “work” for many years.



Graph 4.2: Occupations Not Mentioned (Male-Female), 1995-2015 Dataset

Out of a total of 81 occurrences within this category, women characters occupy the larger share of this chart. When the occupation of a male character is not mentioned, or he is not shown in his “workplace”, chances are that the character is either an aged man (Pooja’s Uncle in *Dil Toh Pagal Hai* and Hari Prasad in *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*) or from an affluent background (Rohit in *Dil Chahta Hai*, Manav in *Taal*, and the real Ranchoddas Chhanchad in *3 Idiots*).

Other than these profiles, the fact that a member of our society is meant to contribute to it in economic ways can be seen through multiple associations. As students for instance, men and women are envisioned investing in themselves, to contribute as workers in the future. For this reason (and others), a character might occupy multiple socio-economic profiles in the same film. In *Dil Chahta Hai* and in *3 Idiots* for instance, men are shown as college-going students at the beginning of the film, but as the story reaches its climax, these characters have been endowed with a different profile.

The same cannot be said for their counterpart female characters in both the above cases. When *Dil Chahta Hai* begins, Shalini (Preity Zinta) is at a club accompanying her boyfriend Rohit to what seems to be his graduation party. She is the woman Akash (Aamir Khan) wants but cannot have because she’s engaged to someone else. Shalini disappears for the first half of the film and later reappears when Akash is ready to join his father’s business and “get serious”. By the end of the film, she is still the woman Akash wants but cannot have because she is engaged to someone else. In *3 Idiots*, Priya (Kareena Kapoor) is a medical student shown inside a hospital a couple of times, performing her medical duties. In fact, the high point of the film’s drama makes it a point to display her medical expertise. As the film ends however, the three male protagonists have gone on to

The recognition of her productive labour thus, arrives from the character itself and we have hence counted it as a “Defined Worker Profile”.

transform, either the world scientific community, or their own careers, while she is ready to get married. The climax moreover, shows her in her wedding clothes, having run away from one man to consider marrying another.

The larger trend that we are referring to is a “**Change of Profile**” across male, female, and queer characters—

Name of Film	Number of Credited Characters (I)		Total Number of Profiles (II)		Change of Profile (II-I)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Karan Arjun	3	4	3	7	0	3
Maachis	1	4	2	4	1	0
Pardes	1	3	1	4	0	1
Kuch Kuch Hota Hai	7	4	7	5	0	1
Dil Chahta Hai	5	5	5	7	0	2
Rang De Basanti	4	12	4	13	0	1
Lage Raho Munna Bhai	3	10	3	12	0	2
Om Shanti Om	1	2	1	3	0	1
Rock On!!	4	5	5	7	1	2
3 Idiots	2	9	2	14	0	5
Barfi!	3	6	4	7	1	1
Bajrangi Bhaijaan	2	3	1	4	-1	1

Table 4.1: Change of Profile (Male-Female), 1995-2015 Dataset

This change occurs across twelve films and is all positive in case of male characters, going up to as much as five changes of profile in the case of *3 Idiots*, as demonstrated above. Queer characters are absent from the list, while women characters see this change by a single profile in two cases. In *Maachis*, Veera leaves behind her farm and joins a group of terrorists. Being a “terrorist” is not equivalent to being a worker with economic means, but it defines a character negatively, in as much as being a “goon” defines Munna’s and Circuit’s character in *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*—we refer here, to their social position, which in either case, can even be sympathized with by the audience, once goons and terrorists become underdogs victimized by larger systems.

The second positive change of profile occurs in *Barfi!*, where Jhilmil (Priyanka Chopra) an autistic woman is shown physically dependant on her family (even though she is economically independent, as the plot reveals). By the end of the film, she jointly runs an institution for children, along with her

husband, the titular protagonist of the film.¹² The second positive change of profile occurs in *Barfi!*, where Jhilmil (Priyanka Chopra) an autistic woman is shown physically dependant on her family (even though she is economically independent, as the plot reveals). By the end of the film, she jointly runs an institution for children, along with her husband, the titular protagonist of the film. The third change in profile is shown in a rather sketchy way in *Rock On!* (Abhishek Kapoor, 2008), where Debbie, at first an amateur fashion designer, is forced to leave her career ambitions to head the family business. By the end of the film however, she is said to have become a full-time fashion designer, but only once her husband, Jo, has been able to realise his dream as a musician himself. As such, while she heads the family business and constantly reminds her husband of the economic woes his family has to deal with, she is seen as a hindrance to the progressive growth of Jo as a musician, as opposed to the other woman in the film, Sakshi, who, as a typical “domestic goddess” and a prospective mother, pushes her husband Aditya to pursue his musical passion.

As “**Students**”, characters make a total of seventeen appearances, out of which four are women characters. Apart from Priya in *3 Idiots*, as mentioned above, we see Pooja from *Kabhie Khush Kabhie Gham*, as well as Anjali and Tina from *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* in a collegiate campus—never inside a classroom, unless of course, the professor wishes to talk about “love”. Characters are also often “Unemployed”—as a category, this differs from engaging in domestic labour. Characters in our study fall into this category only if they are called so by the dialogue of a film, or express their desire to “work” in general. Abbas Khan’s character, Makhhi, in *Dabangg* is seen unfit as a suitor for a woman because he does not have a “job” and Arjun Rampal, as Joe in *Rock On!* is looking for a working opportunity throughout the film. The expectation is that they will eventually contribute to the household economically, as opposed to women characters that are not to concern themselves with such a responsibility.

C. When Women Work

They Dance – In *Raja Hindustani*, Kalpana Iyer and Poonam Sinha, each of whom is credited at the beginning of the film appear for a single sequence together, share one dialogue between them and are dancers and singers at what seems like a roadside *dhaba*—the song is “Pardesi, Pardesi”. In *Dabangg* similarly, Malaika Arora Khan, credited at the beginning of the film appears for an “item song” titled “Munni Badnaam Hui”, and dances for what seems to be an assembly of drunkards, before leaving without a word. In *Parineeta*, Rekha is thanked at the beginning of the film and appears for a cabaret sequence, exiting wordlessly, singing “*Kaisi Paheli Zindagani*”.

¹² The only negative change of profile occurs in *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, where a young girl “Chutki” cannot apparently go to a school due to a disability. Her mother however, wishes to send her to one and we can therefore read the conclusion of the film as a positive, while idyllic moment.

There are other dancers too—in *Dil Toh Pagal Hai*, Nisha (Karishma Kapoor) and Pooja (Madhuri Dixit) are dancers in a play directed by Rahul, competing for his fantasy of a woman named “Maya”. We are also shown Pooja’s teacher, an older woman, who teaches young girls classical dance. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Anjali goes to a summer camp, avoiding a fiancée who wants to guilt trip her for doing so, to teach children “singing and dancing”. In *Taal*, a father is proud of his daughter when he tells a renowned music director that she has done a “B.A. in Music”, and a heartbroken Mansi (Aishwarya Rai) chooses to move on by accepting a job. She becomes an international celebrity and performer, while friends from her village tell her that she is “not this person”.

Finally, in *Devdas*, Madhuri Dixit plays an infamous *tawa’if*, Chandramukhi—who refuses to perform until her lover is in sight (courtesans often performed only for the patron and HIS gathering if he requested and they behaved according to the decorum of the kotha and not for general gatherings). She also delivers a passionate and reasoned outburst, bringing to light hypocritical social conventions that marginalise women such as herself.

They are maidens and caretakers – In *Jodhaa Akbar*, the DVD gives credit to two of the Queen’s maidens. In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Rifat Bi (Himani Shivpuri) is a matron, and a figure of motherhood warning Anjali against men, while taking care of her domestic needs. In *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham*, Farida Jalal plays “DJ”, the surrogate mother (nanny to both the Raichand sons), but one who never really traverses the class divide or the capacity in which she was employed at the Raichand mansion. Her labour is coated in her sentiments for the Raichand sons—while she ties their laces and feeds them food, she also cries at the thought of their union.

They are artists and creative folk – In *Dil Chahta Hai*, Tara Jaiswal, is a woman who drinks, is older than her lover, and a mother who cannot meet her child. She is also an interior designer. We see her work and we see her go to work, before the film decides to end her life and kindle a way for her lover to move on. She goes to art galleries and is interested enough to visit an artist’s attic to view his collection personally, but is also his muse and object of desire, to be brought together on the canvas. We see another interior designer in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, played by Kalki Kochlein, who is ready to give up her job to adjust to a new life with her husband, Kabir. But that does not sit well with him, who sees it as an encroachment of his private space.

In *Rang De Basanti*, the film begins and ends with the voice of Sue, an English woman who wants to chronicle the story of her grandfather. In *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, Janvi is an RJ, and Munna falls in love with her listening to her voice. The last time we see the recording studio in the film (Janvi’s workplace), she is no longer the only employee there—Munna has joined her and they preach “Gandhigiri” to people together. In *Love Aaj Kal*, Deepika Padukone plays Meera, a conservationist who wants to be practical about her career, but is also unafraid to be vulnerable when it comes to matters of the heart. For a few seconds, the filmmaker gives us the only sequence in our entire study,

where a woman is shown at her workplace, devoid of a visible male presence, or one lurking in the background (Figure 4.3).



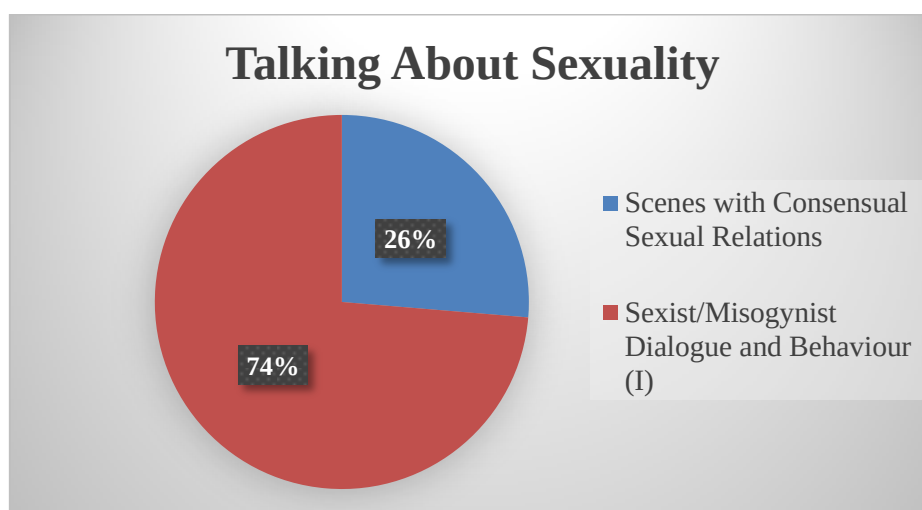
Figure 4.3

5. Talking About Sexuality

“Tum fresco dekh rahe ho ya Disco kar rahe ho?”

- Meera Pandit, *Love Aaj Kal* (2009) ¹³

At a time when the #MeToo movement has taken the world by storm, it helps to know how conscious we are, as an audience, to call out sexism on screen. It is pervasive, but more importantly, normalizes non-consensual acts of intimacy—often dangerously glorifying behaviour that includes stalking women, restricting their movement in public spaces or intruding their privacy without prior permission. In analysing such moments within our study, we have looked at a total of 132 instances that try representing sexual relations on screen. We further interrogate till what extent are these consensual or in which cases do these fall in line with sexist/misogynist rhetoric—



Graph 5.1: Consensual and Non-Consensual Sexual Acts, 1995-2015 Dataset

Within these 99 acts which are implicit with sexist/misogynist dialogue or behaviour, about 45% translate to near sexual harassment.

A. But what do we mean when we talk about “sexist” or “misogynist” attitudes? Surely, the very fact that the industry is heavily skewed in favour of one category of gender is obvious in our assessment of the number of credited characters, number of dialogues and the distribution of scenes across a film’s narrative. This particular parameter goes a step further to analyse the nature of a film’s dialogue. It is

¹³ “Are you looking at the fresco or enjoying at some disco?”

not necessary for instance, for harassment to be on full display, pointedly glorified or defended. Instead, it is often coloured in the lighter shades of comedy or glossed through in dance sequences.

In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* for instance, Rahul (played by Shahrukh Khan) whistles at a teacher in a classroom. The teacher is of course, unoffended and shown to enjoy this objectification. While he quite literally wears the label of a “cool” guy in his college, Rahul is presented as a playboy, someone who may be charming for many a woman—an image that pervades, it seems, through many of Shahrukh Khan’s films. Be it *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayenge*, *Karan Arjun* or *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham...*, his persona as a particular kind of romantic lead allows his characters to pass off certain acts of intimacy as non-consequential. Even in *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (Aditya Chopra, 2008), the latest of his films in our study, Tani’s (played by Anushka Sharma) expression of discomfort in the face of his character’s many flirtations is met with a comedic response. In a song sequence that follows, the masculine Raj literally picks up Tani to stop her from leaving and dances around her, to which she responds in equal measure, more amused than offended at his “*jatpan*” (literally meaning a kind of brute masculinity).

When misogyny is not amusing, it still resonates in the exchange between characters, often characterizing the darker tones of a film. After a point, it doesn’t matter if the dialogue is uttered by a “villain” or a “hero”, because the language of exchange remains largely unchallenged. In *Pardes*, when Ganga, the female protagonist, leaves behind an abusive fiancé, she runs into a couple of thugs who sexually threaten her. She has to be then saved by Arjun, her lover. The film at the end of the day is not critiquing the kind of sexual relations that mark its discourse. Rather, these become the attributes of the villainous West and the “pure” East, constructing a platform for one kind of NRI to shine out against the other. In an earlier episode in the same film for instance, the question of Ganga’s marriage is to be resolved through a match of *kabaddi*, in a test of competing masculinities—for the better part of this transaction, Ganga remains absent.

Similarly in *Dabangg*, the first time Sonu Sood’s character, the archetypal villain of the film, is shown in his “*akhada*” (gym), the filmmaker tries to convey that he is a corrupt politician and particularly lecherous in enquiring after his prospective wife. But we find such behaviour in the “hero” of this same film, Chulbul Pandey, as well—a corrupt police officer who makes his beloved feel uncomfortable on more than one occasion. The difference is in representing the former as more ominous and the latter as more heroic or even laughable. So when Sood’s character rhetorically questions, “*kiske batashey zyada gol hain?*”, whether he refers to testicular balls or muscular biceps, the conversation is still excessively sexist on either side of the divide.

In *Chak De India!* as well, when the coach of the women’s hockey team challenges the male hockey team for a match, the authorities warn him not to indulge in a “*pandavon waali shart*” (the bet by the Pandavas)—a mythological allusion to the infamous episode in the epic *Mahabharata*, where

Draupadi, the wife of five kings, is “gambled” away in a game of dice and subject to sexual harassment in open court. The authorities further warn him that he has already been subject to such a “cheerharan” (literally meaning “stripped off one’s clothes”, but here referring to the coach being “stripped of his honour/pride/respect) in the past. At this point, the film determines what has been foreshadowed all along—the central question is not of a women’s sports team gaining international recognition in spite of the sociological hurdles its members’ face, but rather, the quest of a dishonoured sportsman trying to regain his respectability.

The highest frequency of such misogynist instances (11) occurs across two films in our study. In *Raja* (1995), the film perhaps critiques the act of molestation by making it a crucial point of contention within the plot. However, it simultaneously overlooks the same sexism when deployed by the film’s protagonists. It also makes light of molestation done at the expense of frisking someone and the humorous quotient, it seems, is largely due to the fact that one of the parties is queer. While such a crass quality of humour is not surprising from a nineties flick—a time when content was largely driven along similar lines—the other film we refer to, *3 Idiots* (2009), is much more recent. It shares this platform largely because of the number of times the characters joke by utilizing the word “balaatkar” (literally means “rape”), thereby trivializing the act itself.

3 Idiots also stands out in our study for other reasons. It is one of the few films where a female character indulges in sexual harassment. When Rancho refuses to kiss Piya, she tries forcing herself on him. In *Pardes*, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* and *Parineeta*, the language of misogyny is similarly deployed by women to police another woman’s sexual relations or flirtations. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, Pooja (a.k.a “Pu”) goes about objectifying men, rating them on a scale of ten, in order to see who qualifies for being her date to a college party. However, the scene ends when the entire exercise is mocked by Rohan, played by Hritik Roshan, who enters this line of men and exits after rating Pooja instead.

*

B. There are about 35 moments in our study where protagonists participated in consensual sexual relations—this includes everything ranging from acts of kissing, to heightened expressions of intimacy. Often these exchanges occur in the middle of dance sequences and are more suggestive than explicit in nature. Sometimes although, they remain restricted to the fantastical realm—removing the possibility of such relations in the pre-marital stage. In *Pardes* for instance, a passionate exchange between Ganga and her prospective groom occurs while a song plays in the background and the family is out on a recreational visit (Ganga will later refuse any possibility of such a relationship because an “Indian” will never allow pre-marital sex). Similarly, in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, Rahul and Anjali are displaced from an act of harassment in a marketplace to a consensual and intimate song sequence in the middle of what looks like an Egyptian desert. In *Parineeta* further, the

image of Lalita and Girish together is played twice, just to drive the jealous and self-destructive tendencies that Shekhar will subject himself to. In more than one way hence, the act of consensual sex is still predominantly within the domain of masculine imagination.

The power differential of gender roles is also reflected in the language of consensual sexual exchange. In *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, when Nandini and Sameer are about to have sex, Nandini falters and expresses her ambivalence about the act of kissing. She fears getting pregnant and Sameer has to laugh away her doubts and mansplain her into kissing him anyway. In *Devdas* as well, while an entire song sequence (“*Bairi Piya*”) is devoted to the sexual act between Dev and Paro, the latter expresses her supposed unwillingness more than once, while ultimately becoming a passive participant through the rest of the song. In *Parineeta* again, before Shekhar and Lalita do have sex, Shekhar has to comfort a crying Lalita into silence (the song that follows although, is sung in the female voice). Similarly, in *Lagaan*, before Bhuvan and Gauri can show any intimacy on screen, he has to allay Gauri’s fears and assure her that she is the only one in his mind. Ironically enough, in *Raja* on the other hand, Madhu is shown completely non-ambivalent about her sexual desires for the titular protagonist and again, as a part of a couple of dance sequences, engages in consensual sex.



Figure 5.2 In this wedding night sequence from *Dabangg*, Chulbul Pandey (played by Salman Khan) asks his bride Rajjo (played by Sonakshi Sinha) about her nickname “*rotta*”. She explains that it means “*kalmuhi*” (literally translated as black-faced woman but means “a woman who had brought dishonor onto her family”). When he asks her about her ‘dishonorable’ past, she tells him that he will discover it over the next few months. This sexual banter hints that perhaps, Rajjo has had pre-marital sex and is not apologetic about it.

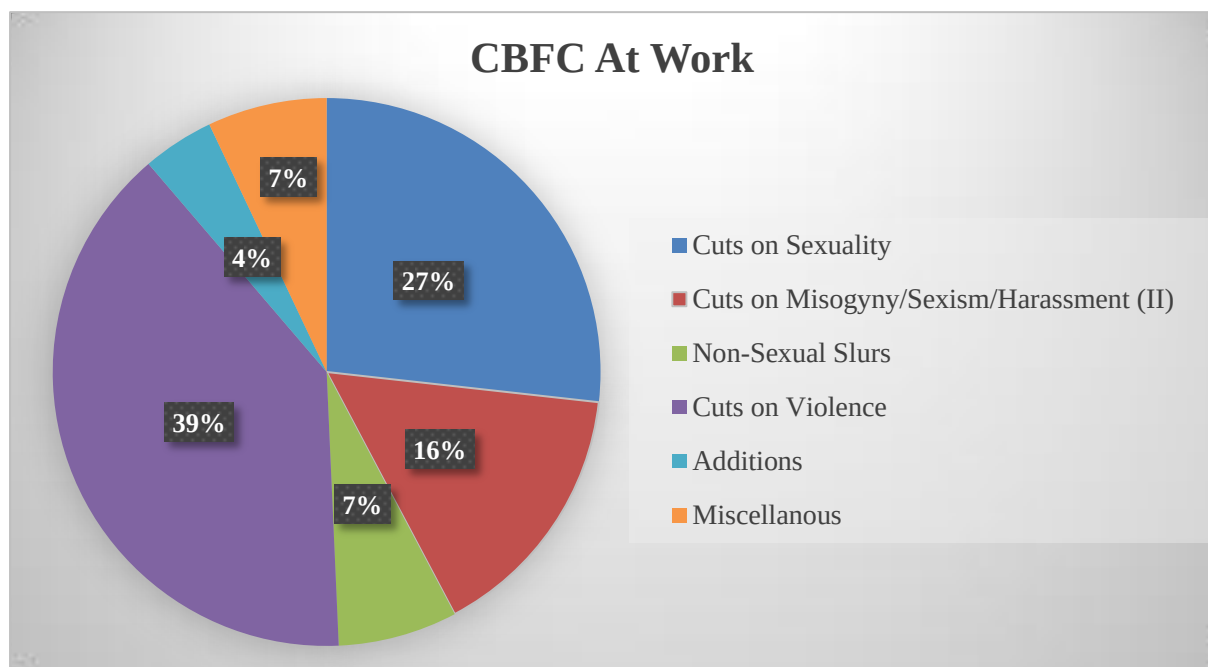
There are moments although, where the sexual act is more playful for either participant and confronts the question of consent head on. While we never see them engaged in sexual relations on screen, in *Devdas*, Chandramukhi refuses to entertain any customers other than Dev. In *Jodhaa Akbar*, the

Emperor refuses to touch the queen until she expresses any desire to return his affection—a moment that seems as surprising to the Queen Jodhaa as to the rest of the royal household, which anyway refuses to recognize the legitimacy of their marriage until they produce an offspring. Jodhaa and Akbar on the other hand seem to have no qualms with a patient courtship, taking their time before finally accepting one another as partners. In *Love Aaj Kal*, Meera and Jai are pitted together as products of a globalised world, engaged in a casual relationship that has embraced “modernity” for all it entails. Neither has any compunctions about kissing each other—in fact, when both of them stand in front of one of Meera’s frescos, Jai puts his hand around her back and Meera casually jokes about the act before kissing him again. In *Barfi!*, once the titular protagonist has “tested” the limits of Jhilmil’s love for him, they press foreheads together, an otherwise asexual act, but once reciprocated, may display Jhilmil’s desire for Barfi as well.

6. The (Ob)scene or the many objections of the CBFC.

The past year has had its fair share of controversies surrounding the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). While films such as *Lipstick Under My Burkha* were objected to on grounds of being “lady-oriented”, others such as *Padmavat(i)* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2018) became embroiled in caste politics and consequent state censorship. As reflected in the construction of our sample set, our study has tried investigating the intersection of the State and popular culture. Hence, it became important to examine the ways in which the CBFC, a State functionary, has expressed its objections to popular content. While we could not avail the exact number of cuts or additions ordered by the Board for all the thirty films in our set¹⁴, we did manage to account for sixty-eight modifications across twenty of these films—

(Central Board of Film Certification 2018)



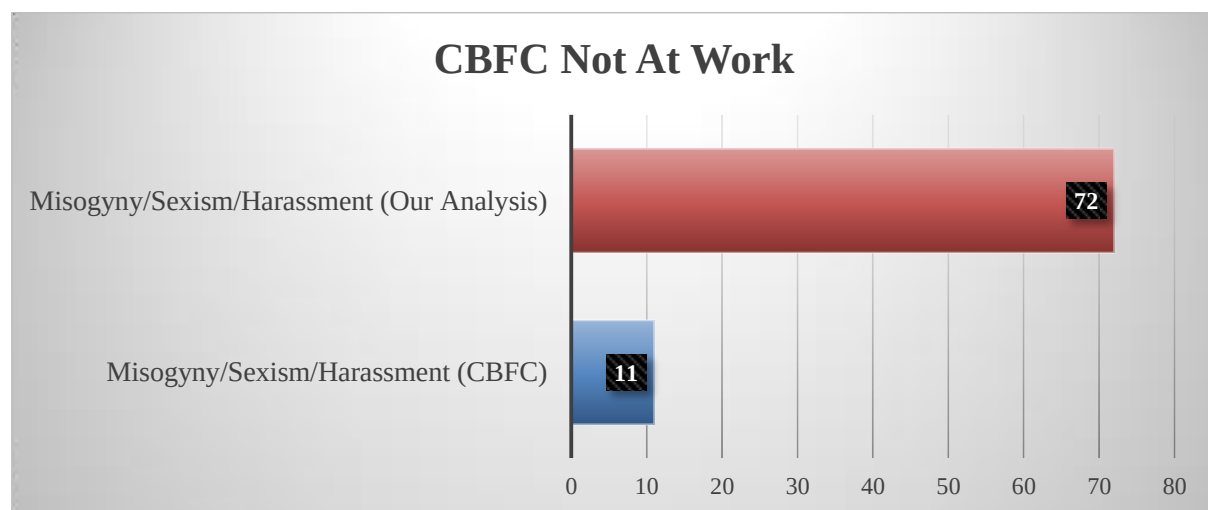
The largest portion of these cuts had to do with reducing the audience’s exposure to violence—particularly sequences that are represented through blood and gore. In *Karan Arjun* for instance, a long sequence of gun violence and combat action, near the climax of the film, is heavily reduced. Such cuts are aplenty in films from late nineties and gradually decrease over the years, although perhaps, mostly due to the changing nature of the content produced, rather than anything else.

A significant chunk however, was also meant to censor out moments which we consider sexually suggestive in nature. In films such as *Karan Arjun* and *Pardes* for instance, this includes omitting shots of women dancing—the first of these disallowed visuals of “dancers hitting chest to chest” and

¹⁴ An RTI has been filed to that effect.

the latter demanded editing out dancers in a Las Vegas club. In *Raja* and *Love Aaj Kal*, films that released more than a decade apart, the CBFC has asked for cutting out scenes wherein the leading duo are either shown kissing or in “close intimate visuals”. The Board is also concerned with omitting out “close visuals of Madhu’s (Madhuri Dixit) thigh” and the very utterance of the word “*hijra*”. Scenes displaying consensual sexual relations are also omitted in both, *Parineeta* and *Rang De Basanti*. In *Taal*, the Board and the script seem to be in complete consensus in censoring visuals of a woman wearing bras.

When it comes to censoring scenes with sexist/misogynist content, the Board’s stand comes across as rather ambiguous. While they ask for shots of sexual harassment or domestic violence to be reduced in films such as *Raja* and *Pardes*, these are moments when the film is also depicting such scenes in a negative portraiture, rather than normalizing them. So while the Board does ask for certain gendered cuss words to be removed (such as in *Rang De Basanti*), it also takes little heed of the other seventy-two moments of behaviour encouraging sexual harassment that the films in our study normalize.



Conclusion

The cover page of this report features a scene from *Parineeta* that has already been mentioned above. It is from a sequence featuring “Women by Themselves”. In the context of our previous assessment, it features an older woman blessing a younger one, Lalita, putting a necklace around her neck and saying – “*jis ghar jao, raj karo*” – which literally means she should “rule” whichever home she marries into. In a particular context then, this moment can be read as empowering and yet, the film has already implied that the “home” in question belongs to the older woman herself—and that she is only saying as such because she wants Lalita to marry her own son, Shekhar. Thus bringing her back to the domestic fold, a sphere where Lalita has already exhibited her superior qualities (as mentioned above, the sincere surrogate-daughter, the sincere sister, the sincere daughter-in-law and the sincere lover).

But there is another way to read this scene. We know that Naveen Roy, Shekhar’s father and a rich businessman opposes this potential match. In the larger plot of the film, he is the evil patriarch who cannot look beyond class and beyond his own interests in Lalita’s family’s property. In giving her jewellery (her property) to Lalita then, the unnamed older woman, Naveen Roy’s wife, Shekhar’s mother, is perhaps giving Lalita back what will eventually leave her. More importantly, she is claiming her preference against that of her husband’s, calling Lalita “her own daughter”, much before Lalita and Shekhar get “married”. Her blessing becomes even more poignant when we realize that her own authority has generally been subdued against that of her husband’s.

This sequence then, in many ways encapsulates the multifaceted nature of our study. By looking through the films in our sample set in light of our different parameters, we try and point out that critiquing the representation of gender in Bollywood cinema can never be done without context. There are no clear moments of empowerment which lack a counter-current of patriarchal authority. What we can hope for hence, is an inter-connected method of reading cinema that is critical of our stereotypical convictions and yet, invites the possibility of alternative storytelling.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Hannah, and Matt Daniels. "Film Dialogue." *www.pudding.cool*. April 2016.
<https://pudding.cool/2017/03/film-dialogue/index.html>.
- Bhandare, Namita. "Why Indian Workplaces Are Losing Women." *www.thewire.in*. 5 August 2017.
<https://thewire.in/labour/indian-workplaces-losing-women-nationwide>.
- Central Board of Film Certification. *Central Board of Film Certification*. 2018.
<https://www.cbfcindia.gov.in/main/>.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "The Nation and its Women." In *The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, by Partha Chatterjee, 116-125. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Federici, Silvia. "Wages Against Housework." *Power of Women Collective*, 1975: 1-8.
- FRIEDMAN, LYLE, MATT DANIELS, and ILIA BLINDERMAN. "HOLLYWOOD'S GENDER DIVIDE AND ITS EFFECT ON FILMS." *www.pudding.cool*. n.d.
<https://pudding.cool/2017/03/bechdel/> (accessed April 27, 2018).
- Liao, Shannon. "We can do better than The Bechdel Test." *www.theverge.com*. 22 December 2017.
<https://www.theverge.com/2017/12/22/16807424/alternatives-bechdel-test-bad-moms-lena-waithe>.
- MARTINETTI, CHER. "WOMEN'S WORK: WHY THE JOBS OF FEMALE FILM CHARACTERS MATTER." *www.syfy.com*. 17 February 2016.
<http://www.syfy.com/syfywire/womens-work-why-jobs-female-film-characters-matter>.
- Mohdin, Aamna. "THE NUMBER OF FEMALE LEADS IN HIT HOLLYWOOD MOVIES FELL IN 2017." *www.quartzy.qz.com*. 27 February 2018. <https://quartzy.qz.com/1216868/women-in-leading-roles-of-hit-hollywood-films-fell-in-2017/>.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Film Theory and Criticism*, by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 833-844. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Pande, Rohini. "Get the policies right first: How to get India's women into the workforce." *www.business-standard.com*. 17 March 2017. http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/rohini-pande-getting-india-s-women-into-the-workforce-117031601398_1.html.
- Sen, Amartya. "More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing." *www.nybooks.com*. 20 December 1990. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/12/20/more-than-100-million-women-are-missing/>.
- Uberoi, Patricia. "The diaspora comes home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ." *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1998: 305-336.
- Venkatesh, Mahua. "India ranks 120th among 131 nations in women workforce, says World Bank report." *www.hindustantimes.com*. 29 May 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india->

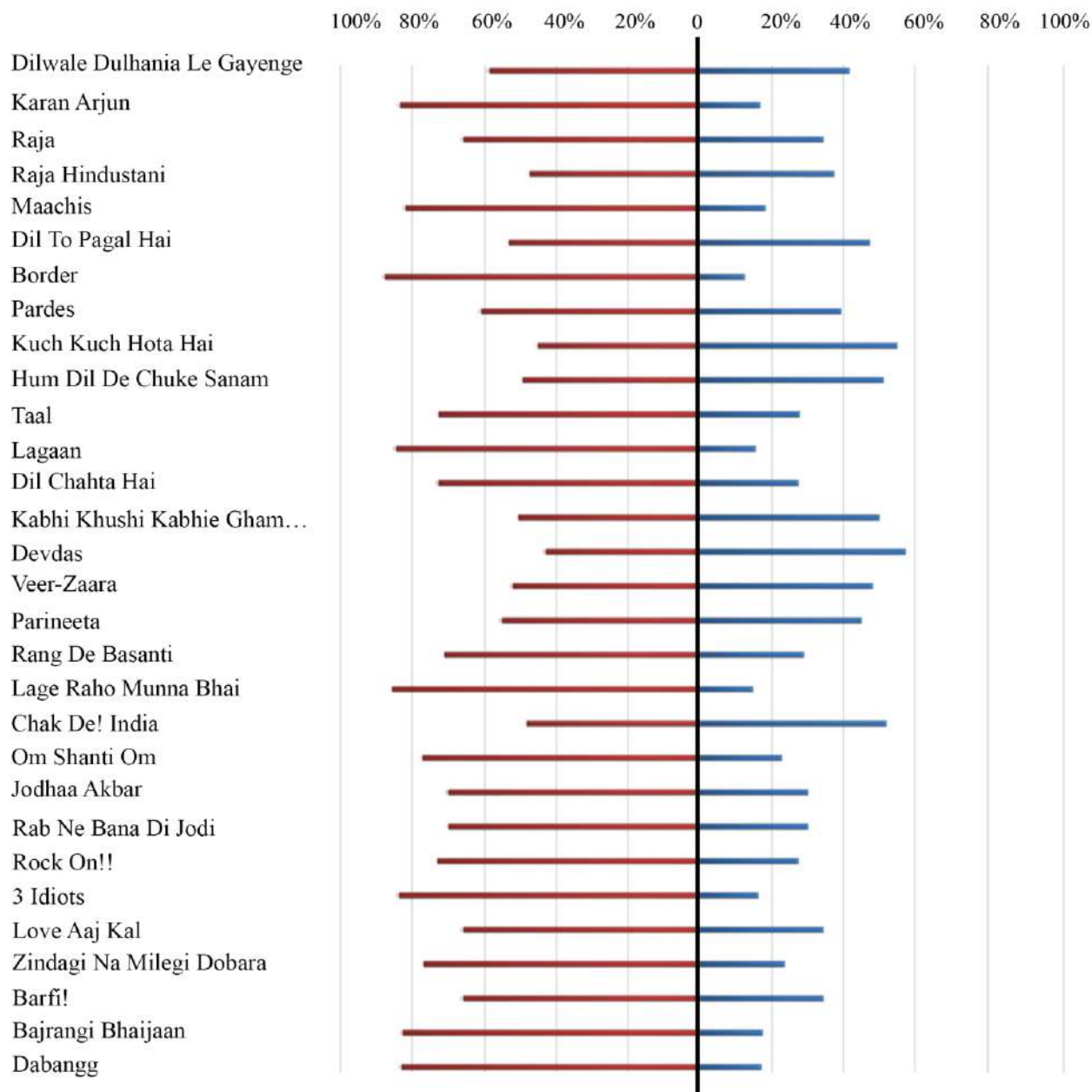
news/india-ranks-120th-among-131-nations-in-women-workforce-says-world-bank-report/story-Q5AVD5aRlmLHA1RAFpnZuJ.html.

Wikimedia Pageviews. *Pageviews Analysis*. 2018.

<http://tools.wmflabs.org/pageviews/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&range=latest-20&pages=>.

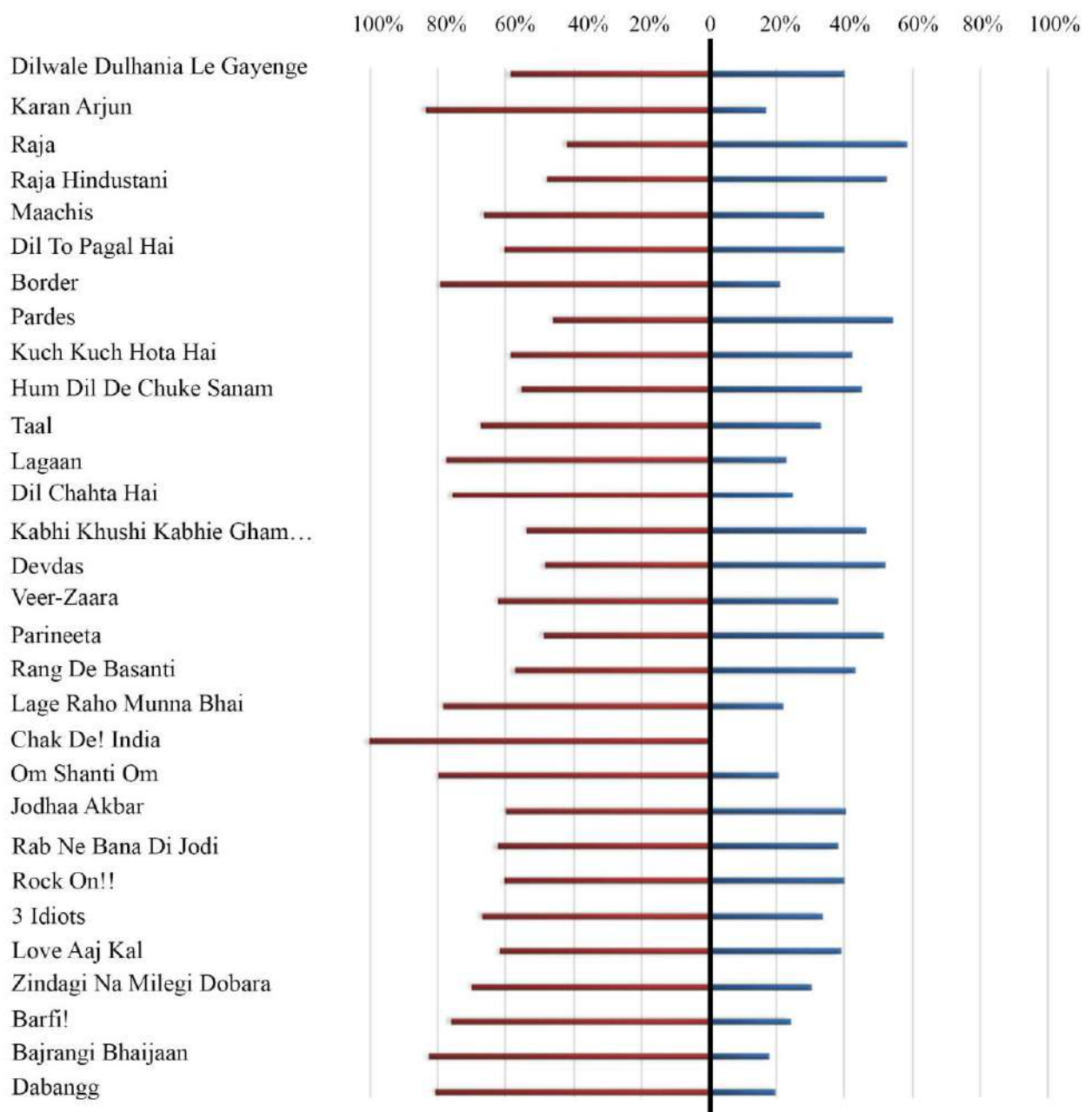
All images are sourced from YouTube clips.

Appendix – Dataset for Dialogue Distribution



Dialogue Distribution (Overall Cast), 1995-2015

Male | Female



Dialogue Distribution (Protagonists), 1995-2015

Male | Female