

Doctor G - A Filmic Intervention Dismantling Gender Stereotypes in Practicing Gynaecology in India: A Reflective Study

Abhisarika Prajapati

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate analytically the recent Hindi movie *Doctor G* (2022) as a filmic intervention in dismantling gender stereotyping in practice of gynaecology in India in the context of women's health and the role of media. It also brings forth social conditioning and self-restricting behaviour as consequences of hegemonic masculinities. There is a significant number of women as gynaecologist but there is minimal number of male doctors in the field in India which is alarming as it creates a new gender role for men and women and hence restricts gender equality. *Doctor G* (2022) is a very significant Hindi film which grabs our attention towards the entry of a male doctor (reluctantly) in the field of gynaecology, starring Ayushmaan Khurana, Shefali Shah, and Rakul Preet Singh in the lead roles. The film dismantles gender stereotypes and questions if doctors can be divided into gender categories or how it is valid to allow gender stereotypes within the boundaries of a hospital. This paper intends to identify the gender stereotypes and their analysis in the film dismantling the machinery of patriarchal system in outlining the underlying experience. It compares the practice of gynaecology in India with other countries too.

Keywords: Gender, Gynaecology; Media; Stereotypes.

Introduction

Interestingly, a film not only promotes socio-cultural traits but also creates new trends which hold good in representing gender roles prevalent in society and, in a way stereotyping those roles as well by (un)consciously drawing a fine line between permissible and prohibited.

Bollywood movies are articulating the concerns towards gender stereo-

types by representing women in central roles, empowering them in taking decisions and following their choices which have concretely and gradually toppled the patriarchal machinery. In fact, more films on women's issues are now sprouting and trending content in low budget though quite popular Hindi movies like *Toilet, Ek Prem Katha, Double XL* and *Queen* which have represented the concerns of gender stereotypes and poignant women's issues like sanitary hyenine, problem of 'not having toilet in houses' in rural India and female body shaming as well and are playing a significant role in bringing change in society. Gender stereotypes are those images which are presented and represented often in numerous ways by several forms of media channels which fix and popularise the images pertaining to men and women as required and desired. As patriarchy prescribes the roles and responsibilities to a man and a woman by predefining the desired choices and side-lining the individual identity, it points who should choose 'what, how and how much?' When it comes to medical practitioners in the field of Gynaecology, particularly in India, we notice a significant number of women as gynaecologist but there is minimal number of male doctors in the field which is alarming in creating a new gender role for men and women, hence restricting gender equality.

Doctor G (2022) is a very significant Hindi film which grabs our attention towards the entry of a male doctor (reluctantly) in the field of gynaecology where the director of the film Anubhuti Kashyap argues gender stereotypes of the division of male and female in the field of medical categories but in an opposite way, starring Ayushmaan Khurana, Shefali Shah and Rakul Preet Singh in the lead roles. The analysis of the film helps in dismantling gender stereotypes and in questioning if doctors can be divided into gender categories or if women feel uncomfortable consulting a male gynaecologist. Many a times male gynaecologists face challenges in a society wherein gender stereotypes and social conditioning make their role and profession complex. It interrogates in turn how far it is valid to allow gender stereotypes from society at large to the boundaries of a hospital. Therefore, this paper intends to identify the gender stereotypes in the film dismantling the machinery of patriarchal system as portrayed in the film and their significance in outlining the underlying experience.

Representation of gender stereotypes and their promotion (un)consciously can be seen in many Hindi films and those films play a vital and catalytic role in bringing change in the thought process of the people by influencing collective social psyche. Several research works are available which identify and analyse gender stereotypes from diverse perspectives to highlight the negative impression of the fixed images of gender identities.

Sanchari Mukhopadhyah and Debanjan Banerjee in their research paper “Bollywood, Popular Visual Media, and Sexism in India: A Critical Glance Back” investigate reason behind Sexist and gender stereotyping in Bollywood movies along with its evolution which eventually shapes public perception. This study includes television show, advertisement and Bollywood movies as well. It also identifies the ‘occupational underrepresentation of women’ in media.

Sowmya Nandakumar in her thesis “The Stereotypical portrayal of women in commercial Indian cinema” analyses in detail sociocultural factors and women’s roles in Indian cinema; she also discusses objectification of female lead and the controversy aroused by alternate storyline with particular reference to Deepa Mehta’s film *Water* (2005).

Megan Edwards in the paper entitled “Unbound: Dismantling the Genre of Female Coming of Age Films,” discusses feminist concerns in media revolving around *Unbound*. The researcher alerts the dangerously portrayed traditional role and social conditioning of girls to direct them to enter into adulthood.

Nishitha Madaan, Sandeep Mehta, Tanea S Agrawal, Vrinda Malhotra, Aditi Agrawal and Mayank Saxena, in their collaborative research in the field entitled “Analyzing Stereotyping in Bollywood Movies” discusses the plot, poster and biased gender roles as portrayed in Bollywood movies and moreover this paper offers a semantic study based on data and experimental method of analysis. This research is an extraction of ‘gender stereotypes and biases from Wikipedia Bollywood movie data containing 4000 movies.’ (9)

Nidhi Shendurnikar Tere in her paper, “Gender Reflection in Mainstream Hindi Cinema” scrutinizes how Hindi Cinema has restricted in promoting positive presentation of gender roles and explores further that reality in mainstream cinema is constructed from male point of view.

After the review of available literature in the relevant area of this research, it is found that there is a gap in building the bridge between women’s health and gender stereotyping in practising gynaecology, which can be taken up in the potential context of the film *Doctor G* (2022). The film has not only triggered a new thought for gender equality, rather travelled an extra mile to connect the disciplines of media, marketing, gender, women’s physical and mental health.

A document released by UNICEF in 2022 ‘Dismantling Stereotypes to Drive Equality’ calls on the advertising and marketing industry to utilise its influence for good by eradicating negative gender stereotypes and supporting accurate portrayals of gender. We can give children and adolescents the chance to realise their full potential and encourage a way of thinking that includes everyone’s perspectives by avoiding the use of harmful gender stereotyping and instead promoting positive social norms in marketing and advertising, which will result in better outcomes for everyone. (3)

Media Intervention and Role of Amazon Prime

Rapid growth in telecommunication infrastructure and low-cost internet with affordability of gadgets have offered multiple options to consumers and have also brought dynamic changes in consumer behaviour. COVID-19 time has brought significant development in OTT platforms in the media world. Amazon Prime is one such channel which offers easy access to films to consumers and has also become a major platform for the release and popularity of films in India. Another noticeable change can be seen in sprouting low budget films with strong storyline leaving behind crazy fandom which has revolutionised visual entertainment too. Theatrical experience is replaced with mature and more meaningful content in films with relevant and powerful subjects.

“COVID- 19 OTT video streaming services like Hotter, Amazon Prime, Netflix, Aha, Zoom, Zee5, and others have historically governed and promoted India during a pandemic and a national lockdown. The high budget producers and directors published their films straight on OTT services like Amazon Prime Video during this Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown. Without the use of cable or satellite television, consumers can access films and television shows through over-the-top media services on the internet, say Sujith.T.S and M.Sumathy in their paper “Millennial Satisfaction on Amazon Prime video Platform with special reference to Thrissur District”

Amazon Prime’s role is quite intriguing in understanding its integrated marketing strategy wherein they have embedded Amazon for a to z products, Alexa help, films and music as well. Therefore, its role as a media channel for dissemination of information and selling the content differs from other media online platforms.

The study further says that the comedy genre is already one of the most popular ones on Amazon Prime Video, and viewers of all ages and loca-

tions want to see more of it. Customers will embark on a humorous trip with some of today's most well-known comedians as Comicstaan looks for India's next major comedic star. The comedy-filled, original sitcom will have you laughing aloud. The future appears to be really amusing. (exchange4media2018)

Film makers in India meticulously notice this trend in consumers behaviour which become another potential tool for them to serve the niche concern for society in guiding the mind of the spectator through film grammar and language in the new platter of Amazon Prime. Low budget films are no longer mocked on and stardom is no longer an inevitable factor for the success of the film. Light humour blended with serious concern and visual delight are key components in Hindi films released recently on Amazon Prime. Nevertheless, Amazon Prime released many films based on Gender identity and gender stereotypes and broke the social taboos in streaming films on LGBTQ and concerns about safe sex thus fanning the debates in India.

Discussion

The Times of India records a drastic decrease in number of male gynaecologists in India though they prefer other streams and find them as 'man appropriate' profession as Uday Gupta (male gynaecologist in the film *Doctor G*) also professes 'how can I treat something which I don't have.' This attitude towards division of medical areas and its practice form gender stereotypes wherein women are supposed to opt only this discipline if they choose to come in the field. Only 9% of American medical school students were women by the 1970s (3). There are persistent gender gaps within the specialties, despite the fact that the percentage of female medical students has increased significantly since then to 58%(4). Since 1978, the percentage of women enrolling in residency programmes in obstetrics and gynaecology has doubled, leaving men in the minority (currently, women make up 71.8% of Obs/Gyn residents). While the percentage of female medical students who graduated only climbed from 33% to 44%, the percentage of female obstetricians jumped from 44% to 74% between 1989 and 2002, says Jacques Balayla in the paper entitled "Male physicians treating Female patients: Issues, Controversies and Gynaecology" published in the journal *McGill J Mill a journal of National Library of Medicine*. This paper further argues the skills and decreasing gender bias in western countries. When we compare these responses towards male gynaecologist in India, we see gender biasness and stereotypes as well which dominate this field prominently.

Gender and Stereotypes

Gender is a socio-cultural construct which decides how to be a man and woman in society side-lining concern towards other gender issues and queer identities as well. Patriarchy maintains a hierarchy in gender roles which have to be strictly performed by individuals. Therefore, feminism demands equality and inclusion of diverse gender identities as well. There is a distinct line between sex and gender; sex is biological and gender is socio-cultural constructs. Traditional roles of gender controls man to be aggressive, strong, fearless and powerful whereas women are supposed to be under the control of men performing their duties within the four walls of houses, producing and raising children. These conventional responsibilities of a woman many a times put her life at stake as she is often oblivious of her own health issues due to lack of knowledge. Women's health is of prime importance and therefore Indian Government has also taken many steps to ensure their healthy life. Issues related to preference given to female gynaecologists than male would certainly bring forth the gender stereotypes of 'self-limiting behaviour' and hesitation in society and among women as well in accepting male gynaecologists. The roles and identities of men and women are generalised which often create stereotypes how they see themselves and how society wants to see them. Contrasting social roles prescribed to men and women creates perception about them in society and eventually we start generalising them as well, as man taking charge, leading and on the other hand women good in communion, building relationship and showing warmth. Gender stereotypes builds expectations and predict desired quality and roles that often impact one's opportunity, restrict his/her talent and skills and hampers innovation as well. Gender bias and gender stereotypes are product of our collective social psyche and its firmly rooted around us though it keeps changing. Societal roles also determine one's individual identity and try to keep them in to the fixed mould or category.

Performativity and Hegemonic Masculinity

Judith Butler rightly states in her work "Gender Trouble" that gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a series of acts performed repeatedly inside a very strict regulatory framework that over time solidify to give the illusion of substance, of a natural kind of being. If successful, a political genealogy of gender ontologies would locate and account for these acts within the constraints imposed by the many forces that regulate the social appearance of gender. This will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts.

A basic understanding of the concept of 'performativity' by Judith Butler clearly indicates towards making of gender identity and consequently creating stereotypes as well. Though the recent development in understanding gender provides us the idea that gender is neither biological nor social rather an amalgamation of both. Connell's theory shows how gender is acquired and created through the intersection of normativity and social structures. Gender is identified, developed and practised by individuals which create patterns and subsequently lead towards masculinity and femininity. Connell in "Hegemonic Masculinity" also states that this concept helps in 'discussion of professional practises by men and boys'. (834) He further argues that 'gender order constructs multiple masculinities' (835). He also mentions Gutmann who 'teases out four patterns of masculinity in working class urban settlement and they constantly renegotiated.' (835) He says further, "Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body and personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that accomplished in social action and therefore can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.' (836)

Analysis of the Film

The film *Doctor G* released in the year 2022 produced by Junglee Pictures on Amazon Prime in India attempts to break one of the very sensitive gender stereotypes of female gynaecologist and 'no male gynaecologist' with light spray of humorous instances. This film has Ayushman Khurana in lead role of a male gynaecologist who wanted to go in the field of orthopaedic as its suits more to male student of medical practice. Dr Uday Gupta (Ayushman Khurana) lives in Bhopal with his widowed mother Shobha who is interested in cooking and dreams to have her digital space in social media. Uday has just passed his MBBS exams and is aspirant in Post-Graduation where he does not get a seat in his preferred stream of orthopaedics but in gynaecology. Uday is inspired by his distant cousin Dr Ashok and takes this opportunity just to secure his seat. Dr Ashok has extra marital affair with a school girl who is juvenile and dreams of becoming a great doctor. Uday start his studies in gynaecology with a heavy heart and joins late. He encounters a senior doctor Dr Nandini who scolds him being reluctant and insincere towards the profession. He was also bullied by his female seniors. We notice clearly how Dr Uday is reluctant to be gynaecologist because women prefer female gynaecologist and its degrading to be gynaecologist for a man in India. Though Dr Nandini makes him understand to accept this profession without any kind of biasness. This film is quite significant in Indian context for starting a debate on an issue of gender stereotype where Dr Nandini advises Uday to follow

the medical code of conduct, which apparently teaches women too about the rule while going for a medical check-up. She also instructs him to lose his male touch. The film has several hilarious instances where the issue of 'safe sex' and sex education even in martial life are two lacuna which have to be discussed further openly. When Uday starts getting serious in his profession he becomes more sensitive towards the body experience of a woman and health issues. His friendship with Dr Fathima also gives him an elated idea to be friend of a woman not just the relationship of courtship. India is still struggling in securing women's health and making it a priority. Often a woman's health is in the bottom of her own list of priorities and this film does not only reveal many shades of women's health but it also unveils ignorance of both men and women about safe sex, sex education and intimate space. Uday's widowed mother Shobha presents another section of women who are left on the margin due to their marital status and are even in today's time are supposed to enact in a certain way. When Uday finds his mother with guy he is ready to accept his mother's boyfriend as he sees his mother through the lens of gender stereotypes where a widowed veteran woman is not allowed to have relationship in India and how often we consider it as immoral or wrong without understanding the emotions of a woman.

Claudia V. Peus, Tanja Hentschel,& Madeline E. Heilman argue that at first glance, one may assume that women would maintain traditional gender norms less strongly than men. Women are probably extremely aware of the rise of women in the workforce overall, but especially in fields that are traditionally dominated by males. Such changes have specific ramifications for them that may have an effect on their hopes, expectations, and actual experiences. Women might therefore be more aware of changes in domestic and professional responsibilities than men, and more tolerant of these positions as the new normal. As a result, stereotypical attitudes may be less ingrained in them and they may be more receptive to revised gender norms.

The film *Doctor G* also focuses on sexual intercourse at immature age which is shown through the girl with whom Dr Ashok is in relationship for sexual pleasure. He himself is a doctor and does not understand the importance of safe sex and the issue becomes very serious when she becomes pregnant and she has to go to abortion with high risk and it becomes difficult due to placenta praevia. Another stereotype pointed out in the film is the predictable relationship between a girl and a boy. In Indian context particularly we assume that a man and woman can only be in love relationship. If a man and woman are comfortable with each and like each

other's company there is no possibility of friendship and Indian media has represented this stereotype several times in films. Surprisingly, this filmic argument does not leave the characters in the lead roles as lovers rather it dismantles the gender bias and establish them as friends. This kind of ending of a Bollywood film is not usual, though the film has dared to create a fresh start with an ending like this. Dr Uday (Ayushman Khurana) also realises that he has become sensitive towards women's health issues and their importance in society. He realises the significance of education for women and equality as well. Further one can also notice the burden of being a man in society also as Dr Uday wants to practise Orthopaedics because of his social conditioning he is more concerned about 'what people will say?'. Uday as a man, is conscious of his role as a man and how to be a man to perform his gender roles.

If we take into consideration film techniques used in this visual text one can notice conventional movements and shot composition in capturing the scenes and guiding and engaging the mind of the audience. Though the audience of this film sits at the comfort of their homes to watch the drama created to dismantle the gender stereotypes orchestrates with pace of the plot. Brilliant narration with light humorous scenes collaborates well to serve the purpose of the filmic discussion over gender performance and gender bias too. This film also breaks the stereotype of guaranteed success only for big-budget films and received critics' applause with the audience's as well.

Conclusion

In recent time gender equality and feminism have become sizzling and buzzing words in academia and in media as well as a result of national and international collective efforts to address the concerns in the field. Humanities and social sciences keep on refining and redefining the changing dynamics of the notion of gender and gender roles. International research theoretically informs the multiple layers and patterns of patriarchy which repeats the fixed image or behaviour in social roles of man and woman to maintain hierarchy which complicates some issues too like practising gynaecology. It is often presumed that the field of gynaecology is only meant to be chosen by women and not by men as it sheds their masculinity. Undoubtedly, India is also trying to bring awareness among people to dismantle the gender stereotypes but the dream of achieving equality is still a wild goose chase. In a country like India ratio of men and women are unequal and if we take further the ratio of men and women in medical field it's not at all satisfactory. If the gender stereotypes can be

dismantled probably, our society can better fight against the health issues of women in general as breaking stereotypes of female gynaecologists would not delay medical support to women and at the same time this would discourage 'self-perception' and self-restricting behaviour in both men and women expanding the range of inclusivity. This can encourage transgenders as well to embrace this field to serve humanity which is still a silent area of research. The Film *Doctor G* does not only dismantle gender stereotypes in practising gynaecology but also alert us about other crawling gender bias as well, as gender is an entity which is not fixed but rather keeps on changing, and it is intersectional, interactional, and product of power structures. This kind of film needs more academic attention and promotion from the media.

Works Cited

- Brickell, C. (2006). The sociological construction of gender and sexuality. *Sociological* 710, Review, 54(1): 87-113.
- Budgeon, S. (2014). The Dynamics of Gender Hegemony: Femininities, Masculinities and Social Change. *Sociology*, 48(2), 317-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513490358>
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Choo, H. Y., & Myra M. F., (2010). Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities. *Sociological Theory*, 28(2):129-49.
- Cinema and the Mirror. <http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Psychoanalysis-cinema-andthe-mirror.html> accessed on 12 Dec 2022
- Claudia V. Peus, Tanja Hentschel, & Madeline E. Heilman. "The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Stereotypes: A Current Look at Men's and Women's Characterizations of Others and Themselves", *Frontiers in Psychology*.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Colour." *Stanford Law Review* (1993)
- Gokulsing, K.M., & Dissanayake, W. (1998). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*. (p. 88). Trentham Books Limited.

- Jacques Balayla. "Male physicians treating Female patients: Issues, Controversies and Gynaecology". *Mac Gill Journal of Medicine* Vol 13(1),2011,June <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3296153/> accessed on 25 Nov 2022
- Jain, J., & Rai, S. (2009). *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema*. (p. 10). Rawat Publications.
- Joseph, A., & Sharma, K. (1994). *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues* (p. 21). Sage Publications.
- Pratt, Geraldine. "Collaboration as Feminist Strategy." *Gender, Place and Culture* 17.1 (2010): 43-48.Web.
- R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Re-thinking the Concept", *Gender and Society*, Vol 19,No 6, Dec 2005. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27640853> accessed on 12 Nov 2022
- Sanchari Mukhopadhyah and Debanjan Banerjee."Bollywood, Popular Visual Media, and Sexism in India: A Critical Glance Back". *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, Vol 3, Issue 3,2021 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/26318318211027312> accessed on 15 Nov 2022.
- Sara Salih. " On Judith Butler and Performativity", http://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD2020/IPD2020%20No.2/Salih-Butler-Performativity-Chapter_3.pdf accessed on 12 Dec 2022.
- Sowmya Nandakumar. "The Stereotypical portrayal of women in commercial Indian cinema" <https://uh-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/10657/217/nandakumar-.pdf> accessed on 5 Dec 2022
- Sujith.T.Sand M.Sumathy. "Millennial Satisfaction on AmazonPrime video Platform with special reference to Thrissur District" *Vidyabharti International Interdisciplinary research Journal(SpecialIssue)* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358639017_millennial_satisfaction_on_amazon_prime_video_platform_with_special_reference_to_thrissur_district accessed on 15th Dec 2022
- Sunderland, J. (2004). *Gendered Discourses*. Palgrave Macmillan <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011/full> accessed on 22 Dec 2022