

# LIGHTS, CAMERA AND TIME FOR ACTION

RECASTING GENDER EQUALITY COMPLIANT HINDI CINEMA



All rights over this report are held by the School of Media and Cultural Studies, TISS, Mumbai. Material that is used may be duly acknowledged as indicated in this report.

**Details of the project:**

‘Lights, Camera and Time for Action: Recasting a Gender Equality Compliant Hindi Cinema’ is a project funded by the US Consulate, Mumbai.

Proposal supported under M-NOFO-21-100 titled: Promoting Gender Equality by Addressing Gender Disparities in Popular Indian Films and the Film Industry  
Project identifier number - SIN65021CA3086

Report designed by: Adosys Consultancy Pvt., Ltd., Kolkata, India

Cover design by: Adosys Consultancy Pvt., Ltd., Kolkata, India

Report printed by: Ken Print Solutions, Mumbai

**Preferred citation for the complete report:**

SMCS, TISS (2023). ‘Lights, Camera and Time for Action: Recasting a Gender Equality Compliant Hindi Cinema’ Final Report submitted to the US Consulate, Mumbai, June.

Individual research studies may be cited with names of the authors given in the report.

# Lights, Camera and Time for Action:

Recasting Gender Equality Compliant Hindi Cinema

## Project Team

Dr. Lakshmi Lingam  
Dr. Shilpa Phadke  
Dr. Faiz Ullah  
Ms. Nithila Kanagasabai  
Dr. Harmanpreet Kaur  
Dr. Shilpi Gulati  
Dr. Rama Sridhar

## Project Associates

Dr. Sunitha Chitrapu  
Ms. Rashmi Lamba

School of Media and Cultural Studies  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

June 2023

# Contents



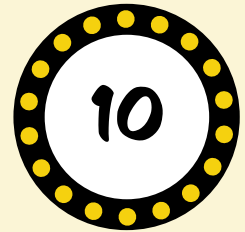
**Executive  
Summary**



**Crafting Change**



**Introduction**



**Objectives**



**Phase - 1:  
Quantitative and  
Qualitative Research**



**Phase -2:  
Youth Engagement & Public  
Awareness phase**



**Phase -3:  
Targeted Outreach  
Activities**



**Gender Balance:  
On-screen in  
Hindi Cinema**



**Off-screen: Women  
Crew Members in  
Film Credits and in  
Unions**



**Women in Other Parts of the  
Film Ecosystem**



**Calling the Shots: Women  
Directing Hindi Cinema**



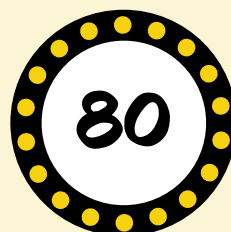
**Scripting Change: Women  
Screenwriters in Hindi Cinema**



**Talking Back:  
Creative and  
Critical Responses  
of Young Online  
Media Critics**



**References**



**Annexures**

# Acknowledgments

The School of Media and Cultural Studies at the TISS is engaged in media teaching, production, research and dissemination for close to two decades. The faculty and students closely examine questions of gender and representation in a variety of ways by engaging with media and media technologies. This project has provided a fresh impetus to the interest in film studies among the students and faculty of the School, with the bagging of this research grant supported by the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai, through a competitive process of selection. The faculty and students had collectively embarked on studying Hindi cinema, the creators of cinema, the discourses that cinema creates reproduces or resists and the everyday lives of people in Mumbai, the 'city of dreams' that got this tagline due to the presence of Hindi cinema industry.

The research team would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai, at all stages of this research. We warmly acknowledge the support of Prof Shalini Bharat, Director, TISS, in encouraging us to respond to the call for proposals and thereafter in carrying it till its successful completion. We wish to also acknowledge the support of the Institute's administrative departments, the School secretariat and technical staff.

The authors of the quantitative study 'Gender balance both on-screen and behind the screen' acknowledge the coding support by Pixights Pvt Ltd., data analysis support by Diksha Sindram and data collection support by Asmita Srivastava. We are grateful to the CEO, Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC); Director, Film and Television Institute of India (FTII); Director, Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute (SRFTI); BN Tiwari, President, Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE); Nitin Tej Ahuja, CEO, Producers Guild of India; Amit Behl, Honorary General Secretary, Cine & TV Artistes' Association (CINTAA); Anjani Srivastav, Honorary General Secretary The Sound Association of India (WIMPTSEA) for access to data. We also thank Madhavi Tangella, Arun Nambiar, Alka Khandelwal and Ashwyn Balsaver.

The research team of the study '**Calling the Shots: Women Directing Hindi Cinema**' are deeply grateful to Alankrita Shrivastava, Anu Menon, Anusha Bose, Arati Kadav, Aruna Raje, Gauri Shinde, Jyoti Kapur Das, Leena Yadav, Mansi Jain, Nandita Das, Nupur Asthana, Reema Kagi, Reema Sengupta, Rohena Gera, Shazia Iqbal, Shikha Makan, Tanuja Chandra, and Vijayeta Kumar for generously sharing their insights on gender both in the industry and onscreen.

The author of the study '**Scripting Change: Women Screenwriters in Hindi Cinema**' would like to thank the following individuals: Urmi Juvekar, Gauri Shinde, Gazal Dhaliwal, Meenakshi Shedde, Nidhi Mehra, Nupur Asthana, Atika Chohan, Rohena Gera, Sunita Chitrapu, Deepti D'Cunha, Paromita Ghosh, Rajat Dawar and Subhajit Sikder.

For the study '**Talking Back: The Creative and Critical Responses of Young Online Media Critics**', we would like to thank Gauri Jalan, Maanvi, Nivedita, Prathyush Parasuraman, Salva Mubarak, Shrishti Malhotra, Neha Shekhawat, Sonia Mariam Thomas, Sucharita Tyagi for giving us their precious time and sharing their invaluable perspectives on the reception of Hindi films among various online communities.

We wish to thank the batches of 2023 and 2024 for being actively involved in carrying out all the student-led components of the project with interest and enthusiasm. We wish to extend our appreciation to Mr Anuj Bhatt for ably handling the Social Media presence of the project. Last, but not the least, we wish to profusely thank Ms Pulama Mitra and the team of Adosys Consulting Pvt Ltd for the creative design support to the study report and all the digital content developed for the project.

*We wish to extend special thanks to all the Advisory Committee members of this project for their constant support and encouragement.*

**Dr Lakshmi Lingam**

On behalf of the SMCS team.

**28 June 2023**

# ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS



**Dr Lakshmi Lingam**

Chairperson, Advisory Committee  
Retd Professor & Dean, School of  
Media and Cultural Studies, TISS.



**Ms. Aruna Raje**

Writer/Editor/Director/Producer/  
Academic/Life Coach



**Ms. Bina Paul**

Film Editor/Joint President,  
Network for the Promotion of Asia  
Pacific Cinema



**Ms. Leena Yadav**

Film Director/ Producer/  
Screenwriter/Editor



**Ms. Meenakshi Shedde**

Independent Film Curator for the  
Berlin Film Festival and Toronto  
International Film Festival



**Ms. Nandita Das**

Actor/Filmmaker/Social Advocate



**Ms. Anamika Jha**

Media and Entertainment Lawyer

# FOREWORD

It gives me immense pleasure to see the completion of this comprehensive research study on gender representation in contemporary Hindi cinema. It is a valuable contribution to the growing corpus of critical research on Hindi cinema that foregrounds, yet again, the lack of empowering gender representation on the screen. While the Hindi film industry has demonstrated progress with regard to inclusive participation in behind-the-scenes structures and roles, the study also highlights how it needs to take short and long-term measures to do better.

Undoubtedly, cinema is a cultural resource that people draw upon to make sense of their identities, their relationships, and their societies to reimagine their futures. Cinema is also a space where women find recreation and look for stories that more authentically reflect their lives and aspirations. As such a crucial resource cinema has tremendous potential to foster inclusivity, diversity and a progressive outlook that will enable society to make strides ahead in achieving long overdue gender equality goals.

I truly hope that the insights and recommendations of the study will lend a sense of urgency to the ongoing conversations around creating space and opportunities for storytellers from diverse backgrounds as well as for the fresh narratives they have to offer.

I congratulate the research team from the School of Media and Cultural Studies for not only carrying out this critical study but also making continuous efforts in taking the findings to various important film festivals and industry forums to catalyze discussions on this important issue. In this regard, the study embraces our institutional ethos for responsive research and intervention.

I thank the United States Consulate General, Mumbai, for their kind support and cooperation. I hope they will continue to support our initiatives for inclusive development.



**Prof Shalini Bharat**  
Director/ Vice Chancellor, TISS



# Executive Summary

Media is an important institution in the promotion of Gender Equality (Sustainable Development Goal 5). Gender representation both in terms of how men, women and genderqueer are depicted in cinema as well as in terms of the numbers that are present, visible, and have a voice in various professions related to filmmaking is crucial in promoting gender equality in the media. Given the reach and scope of the entertainment industry, it is time that the industry assesses its performance not only on aspects of revenue and growth but also on issues of gender representation, diversity and inclusion within films and filmmaking processes.

It is against this backdrop, the School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai (SMCS-TISS) through a grant from the US Consulate in Mumbai has carried out a study titled: Lights, Camera, and Time for Action: Recasting Gender Equality Compliant Hindi Cinema.

Given the broader context of political debates and changes in public policies in the last decade, the study examined the influence of these on Hindi films in terms of (1) gender representation on screen on 15 parameters (2) women's participation in filmmaking processes by enumerating the end credits and further (3) women's representation in significant bodies/associations of films through primary and secondary data sources. An in-depth, shot-by-shot analysis has covered 25 high revenue-grossing Hindi films of the year 2019, as well as 10 films made by women/gender-fluid individuals and/or with a focus on women (between 2012-19). Three qualitative studies examined the experiences of women and queer Directors and Screenwriters, and the perspectives of young online film critics in engaging with the content of films.

The study enumerated 1930 speaking and named characters and the key findings below highlight the observations emerging from this data set. While much seems to be changing in Hindi films qualitatively, there is yet a lot that is desired in terms of the representation of gender and diversity on and off the screen. The study outcomes are both, surprising and not so surprising, as seen through some of the pointers presented below:

- 72% of characters in films are played by cis-males, 26% by cis-females and 2% by queer characters.
- Majority of leads and co-leads in box office topper films are men. Women play the lead and co-lead characters in women-centric movies but women generally play the role of romantic co-lead or romantic interests in the box office topper films.
- Majority of characters in films are in the age group of 21-45 years and belong to Hindu dominant castes.
- People with disabilities are rarely seen in films. Only 0.5% of characters are shown with disabilities. Characters with disabilities are used to generate sympathy or to make the character a target for comedy. People with disabilities are not shown to perform any characters of significance as teachers, bankers, software engineers, doctors, artists, etc.
- Women in employment and in public domain work are shown in films, however, the work roles they play are gendered, with a greater presence of women in health care, education, entertainment and journalism.
- The most prevalent skin tone for women characters is fair skin and body type is thin for lead characters and medium for all other supporting characters.
- Expression of romance and intimacy is restricted in the box office and women-centric movies, but most often it is male characters who initiate intimacy. The idea of consent is still fraught with ambiguity, specifically because there is a greater emphasis on women remaining demure and expressing consent through non-verbal and symbolic gestures.
- 100% of women-centric movies passed the Bechdel test as opposed to Only 36% of box office topper films.
- Women-centric movies have greater diversity and explore inbound subjects dealing with relationships, sexuality, motherhood and other sensitivities.
- Box office hits have outbound subjects like war, politics, corruption, and organized crime.





- The participation of women behind the screen tells us that men get more opportunities to contribute to filmmaking, as behind-the-screen numbers and distribution across departments have more males. Women are still underrepresented in the core filmmaking professions.
- Film institutes that educate young people to be employed in the industry admit and graduate only a few women professionals each year.

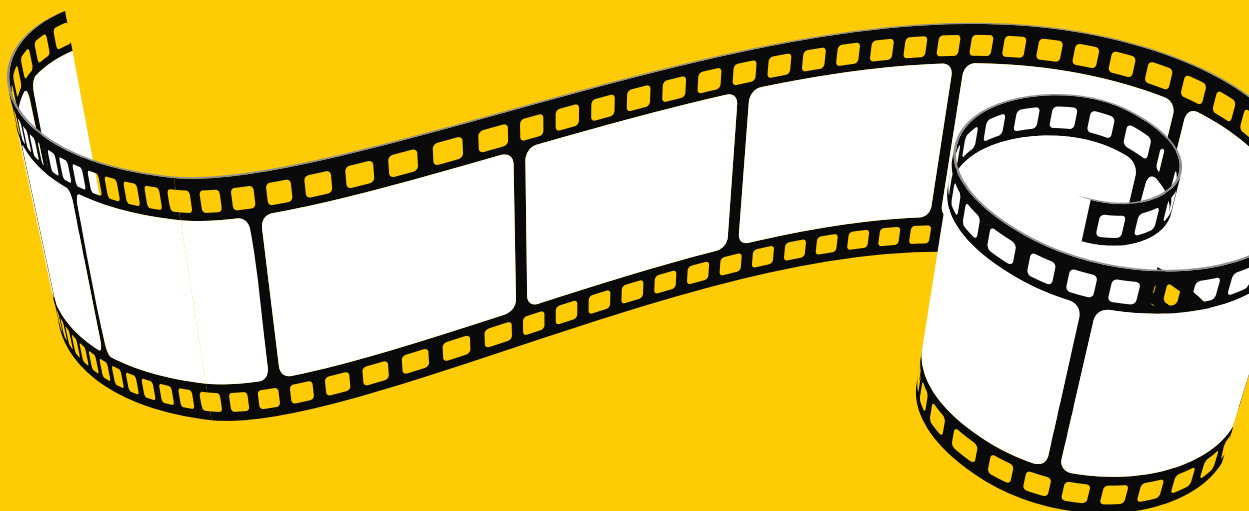
To better understand the working of gender behind the screens, as part of this project, three qualitative research projects were done with select directors, screenwriters and online media critics. The study on women directors attempted to gain insights into the Hindi film industry to consider ways of eliminating implicit biases to allow for a more progressive and inclusive professional environment. The study focused on aspects such as adequate infrastructure, mentoring, sponsoring, hiring practices, collectivizing, and female-forward storytelling that is crucial in building a gender-equitable film industry.

The screenwriter's study focused on the lack of adequate support for women writers to enter the industry in terms of screenplay writing courses, mentoring and development,

pitching to industry producers, and finding collaborators and opportunities across genres. Issues of appropriate remuneration and anti-harassment policies are also discussed.

The qualitative research study with young online media critics provides glimpses into how films are watched and discussed. It foregrounds the different ways in which the audiences talk back to the film industry about the issue of gender representation. Some of the key aspects of this study are creative criticism, online communities and education, critical and expansive views on gender representation, and the challenges posed by 'nasty' audiences.

Conclusions: The findings of this study build on the observations made by research by Geena Davis Institute (Smith et.al., 2014), by Oxfam (Ghosh, et. al., 2018) and Ormax, et.al., (2022). A careful study of 1930 characters and their representation on 15 parameters and 50 sub-parameters tells us the need to think about gender equality in films in numeric terms as well as with reference to the nuances of characterisation and dialogues. There is a need for a more conscious and clear strategy to close the gender gap on screen and behind the screen.



# Crafting Change:

## Small steps for the industry, a leap for inclusive representation

We go to the cinemas to see what is; but also, what may be. We go to the cinemas to see ourselves; but also, to dream. We go to cinemas and engage with the coding and recoding of social norms. All these can potentially challenge our worldview and also herald social change and transformation. Hindi cinema has long fashioned our most intimate aspirations and our collective dreams. The stories that we choose to tell in our films send messages about who matters. Seeing diverse, intersectional identities on screen, can deeply influence how inclusive we as a society are. It can challenge stereotypes, destigmatize marginal identities and can nudge viewers to rethink their ideas about who matters.

The benefit of belonging to the normative or the ideal is that these identities get to tell all kinds of stories—so an urban, upper-caste, middle-class, able-bodied man's story can be about anything—his ambitions or lack thereof, his love life, his friendships, his fears, his crimes, his struggles. On the other hand, people belonging to marginal identities are often pigeonholed by these very identities—stories that revolve around women become 'women-centric,' a person who identifies as non-binary or queer only features in films about divergent sexualities, a person with disability features only in a film on disability, a person belonging to minority religion often features only in stories about religious intolerance, or a person who belongs to a marginal caste gets attention only within stories of deeply violent caste atrocities. While these identities deeply influence a person's life, they also lead full lives that often exceed a particular label. Do we have the space to explore these vast and varied lives on screen? Can we make the space to tell these varied, complex and nuanced stories that look beyond labels?

Stories are often thought of as being about a few central characters, but during the course of a feature film, we see a host of characters on screen. Focusing on this can also allow us to reinterpret the question of representation.

- What would it mean to have people in our cinema with diverse kinds of identities, physical attributes and characteristics?
- What would it mean to see these characters inhabit the screen without the film necessarily being about their marginal identity?
- What if one saw as many women as men on screen?

- What if non-binary, trans, and queer characters are featured in all kinds of films and not necessarily only in films on sexuality?
- What if one regularly saw characters with non-upper caste surnames?
- What if one saw people of all skin colours and different physiques on screen?
- What if persons with disability – both visible and invisible – are part of the narrative to not invoke sympathy or repulsion but acceptance?
- What if films featured routinely a disabled banker, a trans doctor, a journalist from a socially disadvantaged caste, or a dark-skinned model or a woman police officer from an ethnic minority background – even when the film is not necessarily about their marginal identities?

Here, based on our data-driven research, and in-depth interactions with industry-insiders, we offer a few actionable ideas to reimagine the stories we tell, as well as allow diverse storytellers to flourish in the industry.

### On Screen

- Have at least 50 per cent women, trans, non-binary, and queer characters in films
- Make space for exploring women's lives beyond their role as a romantic interest
- Show women as initiating sexual relations or actively verbally consenting to a physical relationship
- Show women's pushback against violence, sexualization and toxic relationships
- Have more women in professions that are not traditionally 'feminine,' as well as in positions of authority
- Show men participating in domestic work, being caring and sharing parenting
- Refrain from using sexist language that explicitly or implicitly targets women's bodies and evokes a sense of shame
- Rethink dialogues that locate family honour in women's sexuality and sexual freedom. If such dialogues are seen as a necessity to the script follow it up with a pushback by the women characters to resist the normalization of demeaning and humiliating dialogues

- Have characters from diverse caste locations, especially as leads in films
- Include trans persons and persons with disability, both visible and invisible, as part of the cast. These need not be played by able-bodied cis-gender actors.
- Include diverse representations of ageing
- Ensure adequate representation of all skin tones and body types within the film
- Care to be taken on cinematic language that reinforces the objectification of women's bodies

## Behind the screen

Films are diverse when the filmmakers are. Making sure that there are women and people belonging to various marginalised communities is not just an issue of representation, it actively influences the kinds of stories that are told. This is especially true when such persons are in decision-making roles. This must extend to every department in filmmaking – especially the core departments such as cinematography, sound, editing and screenwriting.

Concerted attempts have to be made by all the stakeholders – the Central and State Ministries of Information and Broadcasting, the National Films Development Corporation, the Producers Guild, the Unions and Associations of all film trades, Film, Media and Journalism institutes to pursue gender equality, diversity and inclusion as their goals in the industry.

## From the Central and State Government's end:

- **Introduce schemes** to facilitate the production and marketing of women-led narratives, as well as films written, directed, or produced by women or queer persons. Such measures could take the form of production subsidies, special categories/slots in state-sponsored film festivals, and special categories for film awards.
- **Build human resources:** To ensure diversity amongst people working behind the screen is also making sure access to education in film institutes is equitable and inclusive. The following suggestions may be considered:
  - **Institute scholarships** for women students to pursue film education in various departments in film institutes.
  - **Practitioner Faculty:** Encourage women producers, directors, screenwriters, editors and cinematographers to be Visiting Faculty in film institutes. This will give the right signals to male, female and genderqueer students.
  - **Provide fellowships** to intern in the film industry for learning the craft of production sets. This could be film institutes and industry collaborations that are funded by the Government.
  - Fund and support critical media education efforts

## From the Producers Guild and Unions side:

- Producers' Guilds and Crew unions/associations have to formulate and implement policies to increase diversity and inclusion based on gender.
- Mandate a minimum percentage of persons belonging to gender locations (women, non-binary, trans) in every department. Ensure that at least 25 to 50 per cent of heads of department are from this category.
- Set up Internal Complaints Committees (as per the POSH Act) within unions, as well as production houses and film festivals, to address issues of sexual harassment. Have the information prominently posted at all establishments.
- Conduct gender, diversity and inclusion sensitivity campaigns and legal literacy of POSH Act to build respect across the board for all individuals at all levels of the industry.
- Ensure pay transparency as well as pay parity.
- Professionalize the process of auditions by conducting them in safe spaces with the presence of women in the selection teams.
- For films that are likely to have intimate scenes, there needs to be an intimacy coordinator present during the filming. The contracts signed by actors should include the content and treatment of intimate scenes and the actors' consent has to be taken and filming has to adhere to the contract.
- Provide clean toilets on sets (including outdoor shoot locations) -including gender-neutral toilets. Safe stay and travel arrangements for outstation and outdoor shoots.
- Creches to support young working parents, and drop facility for women crew during night hours.
- Set up groups to facilitate mentorship and sponsorship of early-career women/queer directors, screenwriters and producers.
- Production companies need to invest in scriptwriting education and development
- More women as writers and in writer's rooms are to be encouraged in terms of opportunities and remuneration and time given to pitch and produce a script.

## In front of the screen

- Put in place measures to grant women and non-binary folk improved access to watching cinema - from safe and inclusive theatre-going experiences to reduced digital divide.
- Producers, distributors, and streaming platforms may drive this through special campaigns and initiatives.
- Industry and social media companies to counter abuse and organized trolling in online spaces through campaigns and actionable community guidelines.



# Introduction

“

***Tonight is historic as this is the first ever Oscar for an Indian production. India's Glory with 2 women. To all the women watching. The future is audacious and the future is here***

”

**Guneet Monga**

tweeted on receiving the Oscar for 'The Elephant Whisperers'

The documentary film 'The Elephant Whisperers' and the foot tapping 'Natu Natu' Telugu song from RRR, brought Oscars to India in 2023. The award to 'The Elephant Whisperers' is a landmark achievement with Ms Guneet Monga as one of the producers and Ms Kartiki Gonsalves as the Director.

India is riding high with excitement of the Media and Entertainment industry (M&E) recording a growth rate of 20% to reach INR 2.1 trillion (USD 26.2 billion) in 2022 which is 10% more than the pre-pandemic levels of 2019, according to FICCI-Ernst and Young report (2023). Film entertainment constitutes 8.2% of this M & E industry jostling with television, digital and print media. Given the experience of the pandemic which had changed the viewing habits of the audience, the report observes that "We are at a tipping point where the Indian entertainment sector has blurred barriers like language and region and created a holistic experience that binds the nation as one" (p. 3). Given the reach and scope of the entertainment industry, it is time that the industry also assesses its performance not only on aspects of business, revenue and growth but also looks at issues of gender representation, diversity and inclusion in the content and the production of content.

Media is an important player and institution in the promotion of gender equality, in the representation of women, men and genderqueer individuals (in terms of fair gender portrayal and the use of neutral and non-gender specific language) and within the work environment/eco-system (in terms of education/training, conditions of employment and equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of production). Gender representation both in terms of how men, women and gender queer are depicted in cinema as well as in terms of the numbers that are present, visible, and have a voice in various professions related to filmmaking both in front of and behind the camera is crucial in promoting gender equality in the media.

UNESCO (2019) report observes "For artists, the imbalanced and stereotypical on-screen portrayals of women directly and negatively affect the quantum and nature of work opportunities for female actors in film, television, digital media and advertising" (p.86)....

"where there is a stereotyped portrayal of women as sexualized and less interesting/ independent than the stronger male characters, there is discrimination against female performers" (p.87).

## Gender Equality and Important Policy Frameworks

The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, not only guarantees women equality but empowers the state to enforce measures to achieve equality through positive discrimination. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution safeguards women against discrimination on the basis of their sex while Article 39(d) secures equal pay for equal work for both men and women. A close examination of major international policy frameworks will remind us the significance of aspiring for and achieving gender equality.

Gender Equality was made part of international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. That milestone document in the history of human rights recognized that "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights*" and that "*everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status.*"

In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is often described as an International Bill of Rights for Women. In its 30 articles, the Convention explicitly defines discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which asserted women's rights as human rights and committed to specific actions to ensure respect for those rights.

Achieving gender equality is Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to be attained by 2030 by all countries in the world. The performance of India has been slow on many counts, particularly in the employment, unpaid work and violence against women parameters.

## Changing Face of Hindi Film Industry

The Hindi film industry based out of Mumbai consists of not only films but several distributions, consumption and marketing activities. 'Bollywood' as it is often referred to became a cultural industry in the 1990s which marked the rise of the "consumable hero in a globalised India" (Deshpande, 2005). The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting under the Late Smt. Sushma Swaraj granted 'industry' status to filmmaking in 1998 (Ganti, 2013) to strengthen the funding of films and their business of it. The industry has grown in a multi-faceted manner.

“

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status.*

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

”

A close look at the portrayal of women on the screen tells us that the representation of women has undergone a change from colonial times, where women have moved from being a 'fearless' fighter to sacrificing Mother India, an educated dedicated wife, a pretty romantic flirtatious love interest, a dangerous vamp and an item number (Chatterji, 2013). Despite the broad-stroke changes, films continue to place a premium on an 'ideal type' of a woman with a focus on marriage, family, domestic responsibilities, and the person with sole responsibility for morality, restraining her sexuality and choices. The representations of the male as the hero, as the protagonist of films, on the other hand, have been mapped to the aspirations and desires of Indian men within the broader discourse of a nation in the making during post-independence and within a global context in current times (Srivastava, 2006).

Hindi cinema viewed women as erotic objects leading to objectification, symbolizing a fear of modernity and stereotyping with the polarization of female characters as chaste or vamp. Since 1990s, as with dance sequences, compartmentalization of female roles like heroine, vamp, sex worker, wife, adulterous woman etc., have blurred. There is the rise of the westernized heroine who took over the vamp's role. Their dance sequences, also known as 'item numbers' were added to scripts for commercial reasons and actresses appear in these 'item numbers' to express their versatility and for building their brand. Whether 'item numbers' pander to the male gaze or masculinized female gaze or provide an opportunity for women audience to fantasize, are matters of academic discussion (Kasbekar, 2001; Raza, 2015). Generally, women's desire is represented in the context of male desire, and even if their desire was shown, it was co-opted within the heteronormative marriage or shown as a transgression that needs punishment.

Nonetheless, some departures from this template are being witnessed. With a steady presence of women directors and scriptwriters, we are witnessing the portrayal of powerful and independent women (Gupta, 2015), more nuanced, complex women (Anujan, Schaeffer, and Karan, 2013) and agentic women whose violation of gender norms is not necessarily punished (Khan and Taylor, 2018). Though women continue to be shown to occupy private spaces more than the male protagonists, in recent films women exploring public spaces in cities are shown as getting jobs, love, enjoyment and rewarding (Dumas, 2023).

The post-liberalization period also witnessed queer articulations in cinema in both popular films and independent documentaries and "visibilized the queer" (Ghosh, 2010). After the reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in September 2018 by the Supreme Court, thereby legalising same-sex love in India, there is a renewed focus on making the LGBTQI+ identity and questions more visible and at times central in films. This led to the displacement of conventional cinematic codes of masculinity and femininity while also leading to public discourse around emergent sexualities as both "erotic and phobic."

## Landmark changes between 2012 - 2018

From a chronological point of view, significant shifts have occurred in discussions on gender in terms of national and international events, particularly, in the last decade. In December 2012, a young woman in New Delhi was raped and brutally assaulted, leading to her death. This incident led to nationwide protests and increased legal and media attention focused on women's issues, particularly women's safety and right to public spaces. Following this event, rape laws in the country have undergone a change. In the year 2013, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act, 2013) was passed to address the issue of sexual harassment of women in the work place. The issue of sexual harassment in the film industry, globally and nationally (in 2017) received attention in light of the #MeToo movement. Long years of LGBTQIA+ movements in the country around decriminalizing of same-sex relationships, against intimidation and violence and recognition of multiple gendered identities had received a new impetus with the reading down of Section 377 in the IPC by the Supreme Court in 2018. This year (2023) a series of petitions in regard to marriage equality were heard by a five-judge bench in the Supreme Court and are pending judgement. Given these significant on-ground events, public debates and legal changes in the last decade, it is expected that films in general and Hindi films, in particular, will be cognizant of these changes and reflect the same in their narratives.

## Present Research

A preliminary examination of the film industry, on all the parameters of gender equality – equal access, equal opportunity, equal representation, equal wages, non-discrimination, no sexual harassment and violence – using extant literature and media coverage does not produce positive results (Joseph, A, et.al., 2019). However, given the dynamic nature of media, we expect gender representations to evolve in consonance with legal, economic, political and other changes in society and thus demand continued research attention. In this research, we studied gender representation in Hindi films both on-screen and off-screen through quantitative research. We have also attempted to capture the experiences of women as Directors, screenwriters and film critics through qualitative research.

## Key Questions that framed this research:

Although there are many scholarly works studying the misrepresentation or underrepresentation of women in cinemas, pertinent questions that required to be posed are:



- ① Whether constitutional guarantees of gender equality and discourses on gender and women's empowerment have significantly shifted the film industry onscreen and offscreen?
- ② Whether legal changes pertaining to rape laws, sexual harassment at the work place and the #MeToo movement made any difference to the Bollywood film industry in its narratives?
- ③ Why do filmmakers and writers stick to the conventional ways of storytelling and keep working with stereotypes?
- ④ What do directors grapple with and why do they put gender questions at the bottom?
- ⑤ What is the experience of women directors and creative writers of the Hindi cinema landscape?
- ⑥ What are their initiatives and what are their suggestions for bringing about changes?

We envisioned this project as a multi-pronged project having diverse audiences, and involving various stakeholders - including but not limited to (a) industry leaders and influencers (b) technicians in the film industry (c) film and media students (d) the general public.

# Objectives

To study, examine, document and build evidence on gender issues within films

To capture the lived experiences of women directors and scriptwriters within the film industry

To understand how audiences influence discourse around cinema

To build conversations around significant observations gained through the studies and

To present and influence best practice models to change women's representation and participation in Hindi films.



# Phases

This project had three phases:

## Phase 1

**Involved carrying out one quantitative research (with three parts to it) and three qualitative research studies.**

## Phase 2

**Which ran concurrently with Phase 1 was mentoring students to make Public Service Announcements (PSAs), carrying out workshops and seminars with young filmmakers, journalism, cultural studies and gender studies' students to engage with ideas of gender equality in representation in films.**

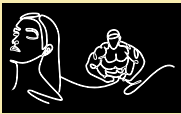
## Phase 3

**Covered the outreach activities of the project team with the film industry and film audiences. Brief details of each of these phases are covered here.**

This report covers the studies done as part of this project.

## Phase - 1: Research

# Quantitative Studies: Gender Balance: On and Off-screen in Hindi Cinema



### Study 1: On-screen gender

We examined representations of gender in Hindi films using the two categories of visibility and representation of women, which are the key conceptual categories in quantitative content analyses of gender in films (Smith et al, 2014; Ghosh et al, 2018; Khan and Taylor, 2018).



### Study 2: Off-screen gender

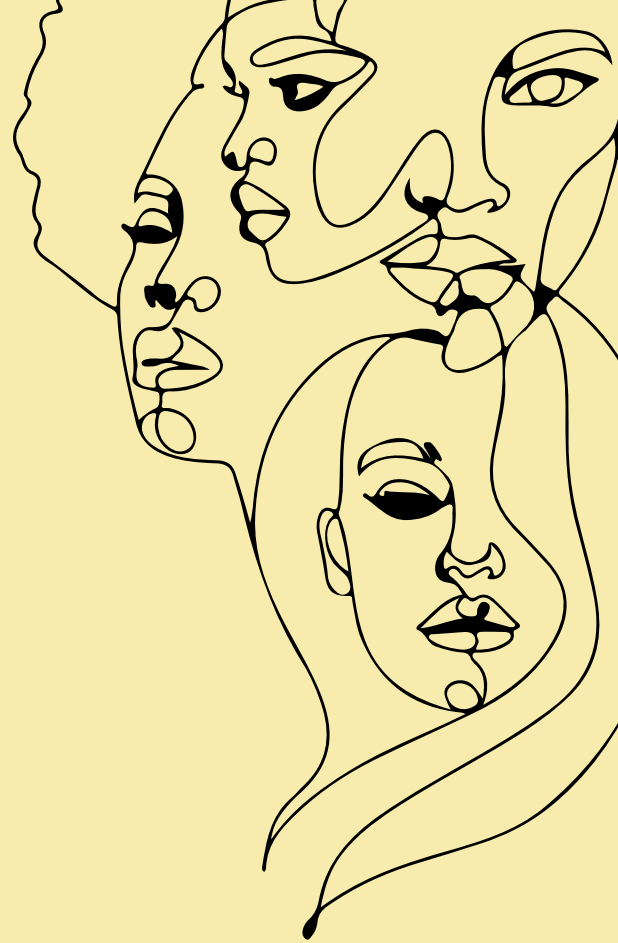
Freelance work is the primary mode of employment in the film industry and the resulting reliance on networks results in unequal access to work (Chitrapu, 2017). The main conceptual category that we use in this study is the presence of women on Hindi film crews. We examined the presence of women crew members at 1) the film level and 2) the industry level.



### Study 3: Women in Other Parts of the Film Ecosystem

In this part of the study, we collated secondary data on the presence of women in positions of relevance in the film industry such as members of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), Ministers of Information and Broadcasting, Women winning the Filmfare and National Film Awards, women graduating from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune (FTII) and Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata (SRFTI) and women Ministers of Information and Broadcasting.

Studies 2 & 3 information is reported within the binary of male and female since names are not prefixed with Mx to identify trans and non-binary individuals.



## Qualitative Studies



### Study 1: Calling the Shots: Women Directing Hindi Cinema

Film directors are at the top of the hierarchy within the film industry and they have a fair bit of influence on the narratives and scripts as well as the working environment on the film set. Since the beginning of the 2000s, we are witnessing a steady increase in the number of women directors, however, directors disproportionately tend to be men as well as belong to privileged categories: upper caste, cisgender, and able-bodied. Representation at this level is deeply significant given the amount of influence a director has. This research study focused on the narratives of 18 women directors in the Hindi film industry.



### Study 2: Scripting Change: Women Screenwriters in Contemporary Hindi Cinema

This research project engaged with the role of women screenwriters in the Hindi Film industry. Screenplay and dialogue writers have often been overlooked in India, not just in terms of visibility in a film's marketing and publicity or media interest but also by the industry where the labour of writing a script has often not been given its due. Within the

contemporary period, Hindi cinema has witnessed several women screenplay writers emerge telling stories with a renewed focus on questions of gender roles in society. The study engaged with screenwriters, their craft and process of writing as well as their position within a largely male-dominated industry and the pressures they face therein regarding conformity.



### Study 3 - Talking Back: Creative and Critical Responses of Young Online Media Critics

This study focused on the role of the audiences in influencing the discourse around the cinema. Audiences are an indispensable part of contemporary media ecologies. After decades of reception research, it is widely accepted today that audiences are not hapless prisoners of the text. They do not simply occupy the positions offered to them in the texts or engage with them as per the expectations of the media producers. Audiences make active media choices - what they want to watch or not watch - and also speak to media through thoughtful critique (articles, social media posts), creative media production (memes, satirical videos), and creative forms of activism (culture jamming, fanfiction). Through engaging with prominent young media critics who publish their creative work on online media, this research highlighted the important role they play in 'talking back' to the film industry and creating awareness around specific issues of gender representation.

# Phase -2: Youth Engagement & Public Awareness phase

In this phase, we had student productions and advocacy and outreach work. The activities are listed below:

## Public Service Announcements

Students of the School of Media and Cultural Studies (SMCS), class of 2021-23 created a series of four short Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and three short documentary films on the broad theme of gender in the Hindi film industry. They are as follows:

### 1. Title - TO-LET Toilet



**Filmmakers:** Aakriti Thatal, Riya Singh Suryavanshi, Milind Pandita

**Duration:** 2 minutes 7 seconds

**Language:** Hindi, English

**Synopsis:** An excited intern working on a shooting location for the first time has difficulty finding a women's toilet on the set. The PSA is an attempt to highlight the historicity of this issue and place it in the context of Hindi Cinema through the ages.

### 2. Project Stree, Finding Faces



**Filmmakers:** Hemant Kumar, Abhibyanjana Thatal

**Duration:** 2 min 30 seconds

**Language:** English, Hindi

**Synopsis:** The PSA contrasts the stereotypical portrayal of lead women actresses in Bollywood movies with the beautiful faces of everyday women belonging to diverse ethnic backgrounds and age groups.

### 3. Title of the film: Not an Option



**Filmmakers:** Prahlad Venkatesan, Asmita Srivastava, Rebekah Awungshi

**Duration:** 3 minutes and 15 seconds.

**Language:** Hindi, English

**Synopsis:** This film explores the varied reactions towards the issue of sexual harassment in the Hindi film industry through a parody show. The show highlights the attitudes among those working in "Bollywood" while demanding better institutional arrangements and greater awareness regarding the issue of workplace safety through the character of a host and past footage from important industry events and shows.

### 4. Title: Sanskriti.AI

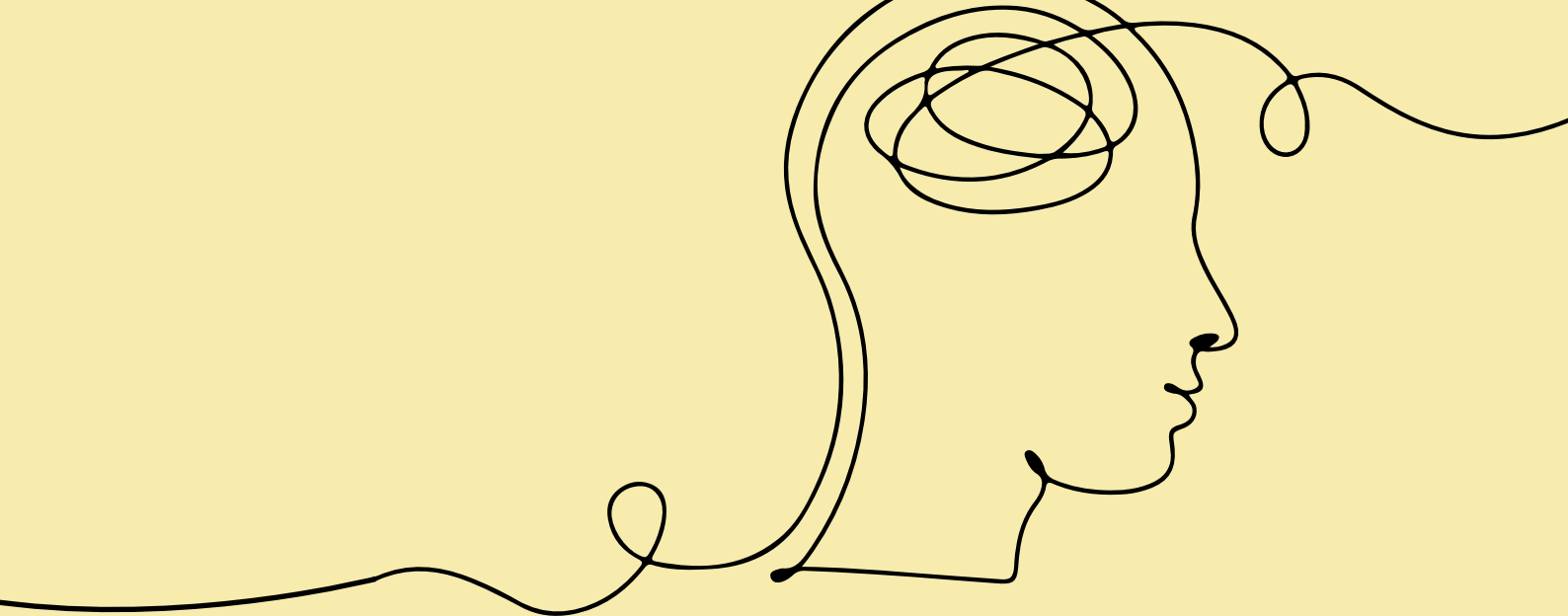


**Filmmakers:** Nishtha Bisht, Ashutosh Mishra

**Duration:** 03:09

**Language:** Hindi

**Synopsis:** The PSA is a satirical advertisement for Sanskriti.AI - a software that weeds out scenes promoting female sexual agency in Hindi films. It is inspired by the comments made by the members of censor board in the past



## Short Documentary Films:

### 1. Title: *New Girl in the City*



**Filmmakers:** Asmita Srivastava, Aakriti Thatal, Ashutosh Mishra

**Language:** English, Hindi, Nepali

**Duration:** 15:53

**Synopsis:** In *New Girl in the City*, two women new to Mumbai navigate through the city and write postcards and letters about their new experiences to their friends back home. Based on their social locations and how Hindi Cinema influences their perceptions of the city, their experiences- that make up the film- bring to light aspects such as relatability and alienation that may or may not align with what is seen on screen. The filmmakers also explore the romantic image of Mumbai and how they view it in relation to the one Hindi Cinema curates for us.

### 2. Title: *Kaali Peeli*



**Filmmakers:** Milind Pandita, Rebekah Awungshi, AbhibyanjanaThatal

**Duration:** 24:45

**Language:** Hindi, English

**Synopsis:** In an attempt to make a film, three student filmmakers and Sabhajit Yadav, a kaali-peeli taxi driver, travel across the city of Bombay. Journeying through concrete and billboard-laden roads for a day, Sabhajit shares his views

and opinions about the city of dreams, gender, society, film stars and their roles as social beings. He conveys his endearment and discontentment with the film industry today.

### 3. Title: *Dekho Magar Pyaar Se*



**Filmmakers:** Hemant Kumar, Nishtha Bisht, Prahlad Venkatesan, Riya Singh Suryavanshi

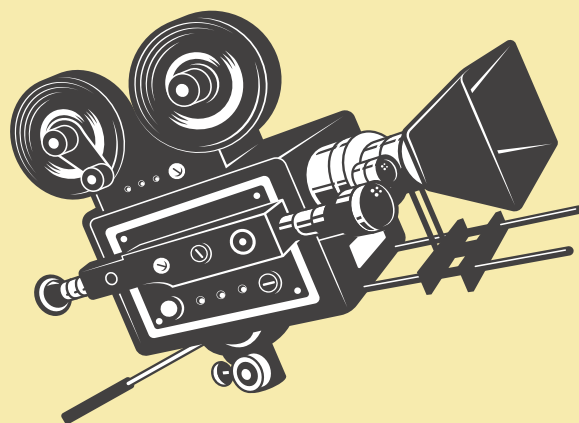
**Duration:** 16 minutes and 20 seconds

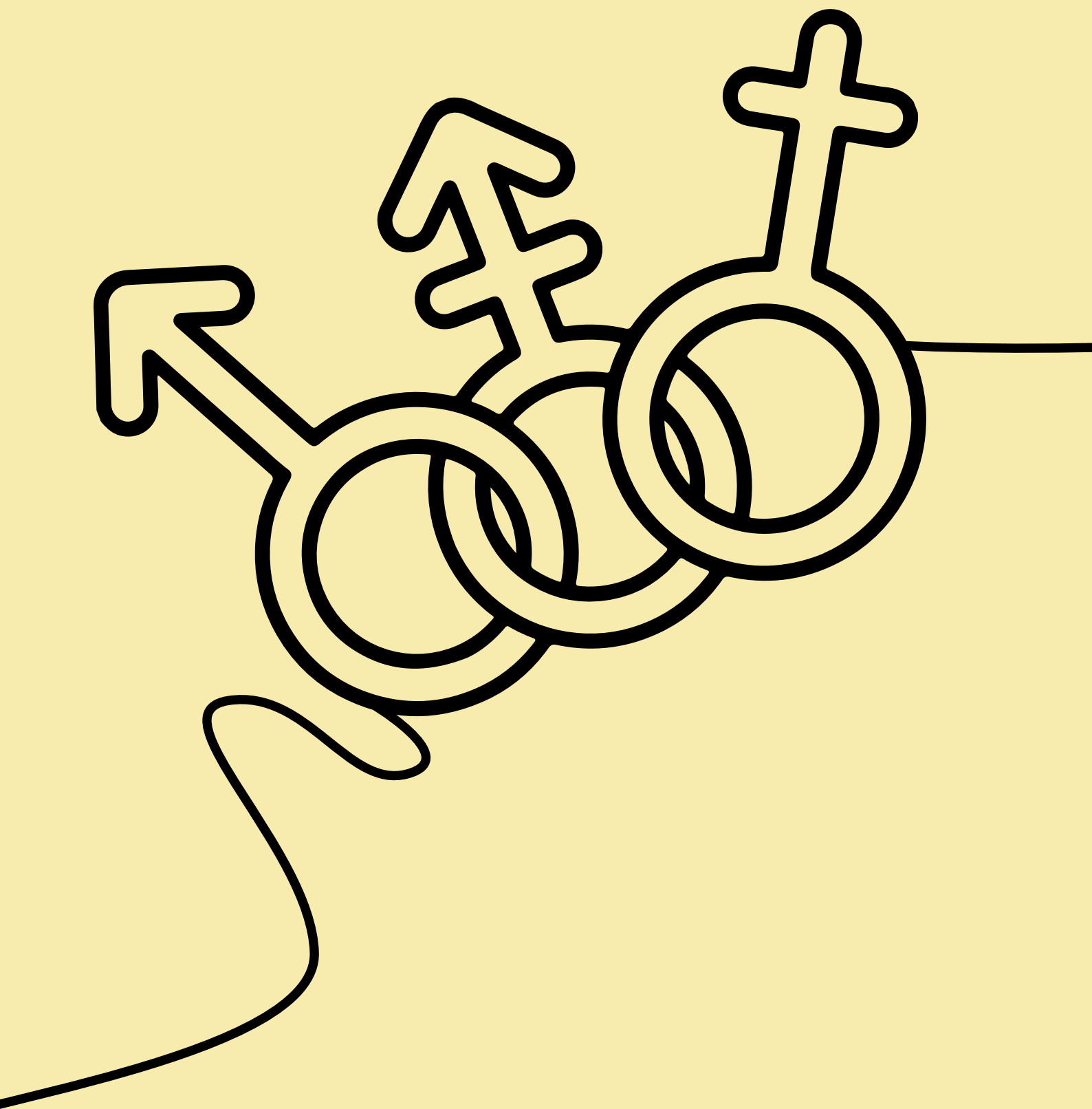
**Language:** Hindi, English

**Synopsis:** The film explores the phenomenon of Trolling faced by Bollywood actresses through the ages. Two women working for Sensational Bollywood News Company question their work and opinions while going deep into a conversation surrounding swimsuits, society and the troll culture behind them.

### *Participation in Festivals*

The PSAs were screened to great response at the India Film Project (IFP) 2022, at the International Advertising Association of India conference, 2022 and at the SamaBhav Travelling Film Festival, 2023. The short films will be sent for student film festivals nationally and internationally.





## Phase -3:

# Targeted Outreach Activities

**Frames of Reference** is a biennial School of Media and Cultural Studies (SMCS) student conference that is led by the students with Faculty support. In 2021-22 the conference took place across three days – 22 - 24 June 2022 in an online mode on the theme of *Interrogating Gender in Hindi Cinema*. We received a total of 97 abstracts. 20 students across pan India Universities and abroad, presented papers in the thematic areas of the Female Gaze; Screen Representation; Queer Trajectories; Gender and the City; Victims and Vigilantes; Masculinities on Screen and; Viewing Cinema and Horror through a Gendered Lens.

**Cut.In** is a biennial national students' film festival that is led by the SMCS students with faculty support. The 12th edition of the Cut.in was held from 15th to 17th February 2023. The three-day festival began with a workshop titled "*Gender Representation, Inclusion, and Cinema*". Curated by the School for all the young participating film-makers, it included a presentation and discussion on select insights from our study 'Lights, Camera, Time for Action: Recasting a Gender Compliant Hindi Cinema', screening of student public service announcements on the theme of gender and cinema, and an interactive session on creative film criticism by The Swaddle, a popular health, gender, and culture magazine.

The festival featured 9 short fiction and 9 documentaries by student filmmakers from across the country. The films were curated by the students of the school who selected the line-up of films from 25 entries for documentary and 23 entries for fiction. Prof. Anjali Monteiro and Prof. K.P. Jayasankar

served on the jury to select films for awards in the technical and non-technical categories. Renowned filmmaker Ms. Leena Yadav was the chief guest who awarded the prize winners.

**Participation in Film festivals:** Between July 2022 – June 2023, the project outputs have been presented at the International Film Project (IFP) 2022, Mumbai; at the International Advertising Association of India conference, 2022, Mumbai; International Film Festival of India (IFFI) 2022, Goa; Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), 2023, Pune; Pune International Film Festival (PIFF), 2023, Pune; IAWRT Film Festival 2023, New Delhi; Cinema Collective, 2023 and at the SamaBhav Travelling Film Festival, 2023 across several cities in India. The films are also travelling to a few South Asian countries where the festival is going to be held.

## Structure of this Report

This report has an Executive Summary and a section titled 'Crafting Change' with suggestions for bringing about positive changes in the film industry. This introductory chapter delineates the project and its goals and activities accomplished in various phases. The rest of the report covers three quantitative studies of gender representation on-screen, behind the screen and, gender and the cinema ecosystem. This is followed by observations from three qualitative research studies.





## **Quantitative Studies**

### **Study 1:**

## **Gender Balance: Onscreen in Hindi Cinema**

### **Study 2:**

## **Gender Off-screen: Women Crew Members in Film Credits and in Unions**

### **Study 3:**

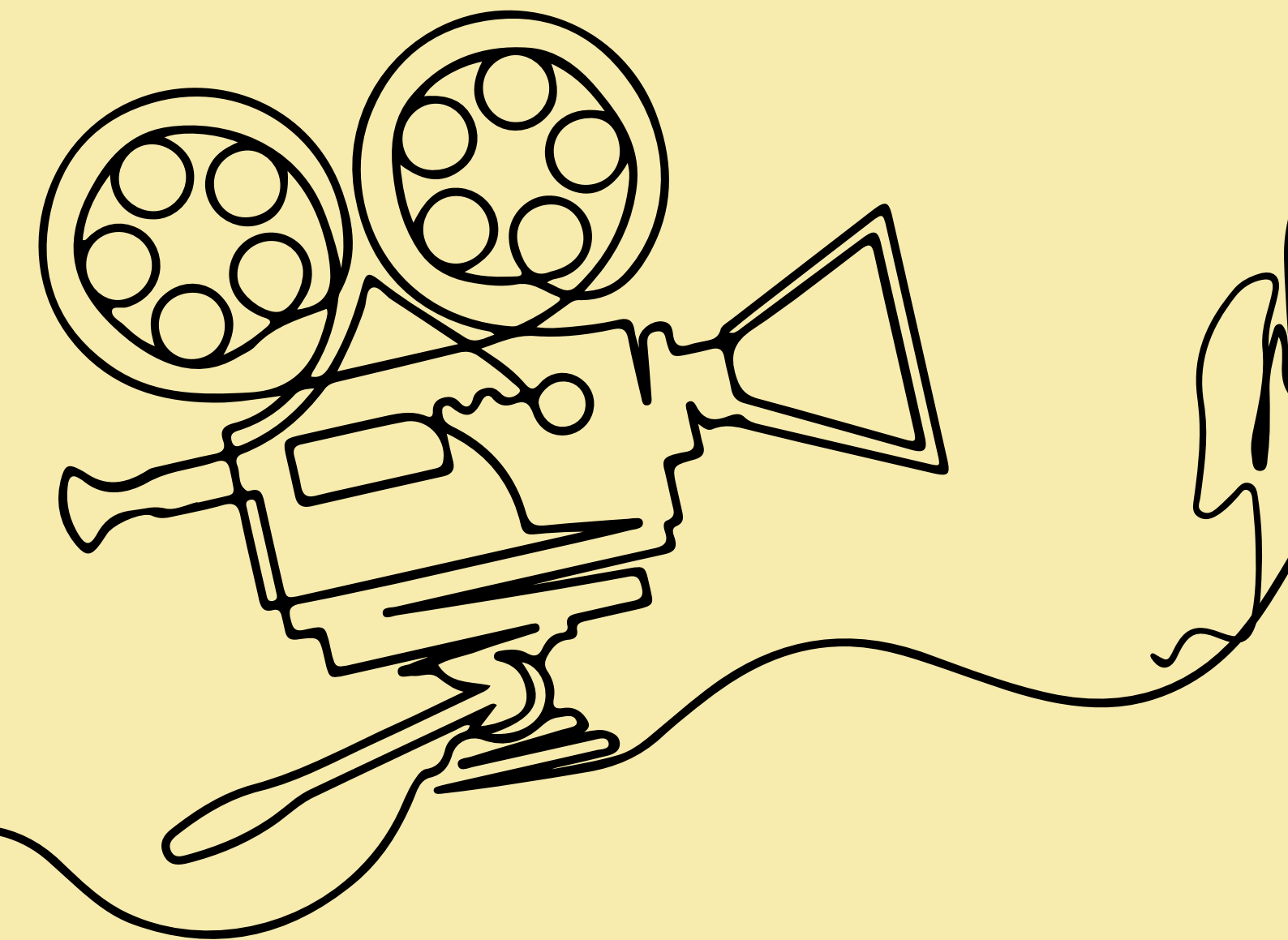
## **Women in Other Parts of the Film Ecosystem**

**Dr Lakshmi Lingam & Dr Sunitha Chitrapu**

**Assisted by:**

Ms Diksha Sindram

Ms Asmita Srivastava





# **Gender Balance: Onscreen in Hindi Cinema**

**Dr Lakshmi Lingam & Dr Sunitha Chitrapu**

# Introduction

Given the broader context of political debates and changes in public policies in the last decade, it is pertinent to study the influence of these on Hindi films in terms of (1) gender representation on screen; (2) women's presence behind the screen in the making of films and further (3) women's representation in significant bodies/ associations of films.

We posed the following questions:

- How is gender performed in top-ranking Hindi films?
- Have the post-Nirbhaya and #MeToo episodes influenced the narratives in films and in the production of films?
- How are LGBTQIA+ persons represented on screen?
- If the key production team members are women, will it make a difference to the on-screen and behind-the-screen representation?
- How many women work on Hindi cinema crews?
- At what levels do these women find employment in this industry?
- What are the enabling environment measures available for achieving substantive gender equality in the film industry?
- To what extent are they represented at other points in the film ecosystem?

The content analysis of the studied films covered visibility (3 indicators) and representation (12 indicators) with 50 sub-indicators measuring a number of attributes.

## Visibility

Internationally, the onscreen visibility of female speaking or named characters (SNC) is only at 30.9% and action/adventure films had the fewest women (23%) as reported by Smith et al (2014) in their 11-country study of 120 films which included 10 Indian (Hindi) films.

The 10 Indian films in Smith et.al. (2014) study sample had only 25% female speaking or named characters. None of the Indian films in the sample had balanced casts. Internationally, 23% of films had a female lead or co-lead, whereas none of the Indian films had a female lead or co-lead. Similar figures are reported by Ghosh et al (2014), with only 27.2% female speaking or named characters. Ghosh et al., also found that in the type of female roles, lead roles were the lowest (23% of films), while romantic co-leads (37% of films) and romantic interest roles (38.5% of films) predominated despite the presence of female plot movers (48% films).

## In this study, we enumerated:

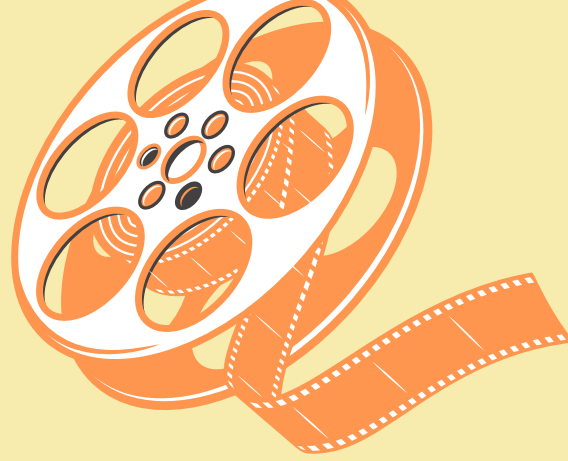
1. the number of speaking or named characters (SNCs) by gender (male, female and LGBTQIA+)
2. sexual orientation (coded based on the cues shown in the film as Heterosexual, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Any Other Sexuality)
3. type of roles (lead, romantic co-lead, romantic interest, other); and

## Representation

This aspect was studied with the following indicators:

4. Demographics were measured with two attributes age, caste, religion and disability





5. Occupations were carefully coded to represent sectors and whether these were located in Science, Technology, Engineering and Management (STEM) fields.
  6. Women in public spaces
  7. Appearance
  8. Sexualisation was coded to represent complexion, body type, type of clothing, recipient of verbal and nonverbal messages about physical desirability
  9. Sexual objectification was coded in terms of three attributes, sexual objectification, voyeuristic camera and sexist humour.
  10. Domesticity was coded with two attributes - parental status and committed romantic relationship
  11. Consent and Intimacy in Relationships
  12. Sexist humour in dialogues and gestures
  13. Bechdel Test
  14. Experience of violence by the characters and
  15. Sexual harassment and its depiction.
- (See Annexure – 1 for more details)**

## Study Methodology

This study was selected for funding by the United States Consulate office, in Mumbai, through a competitive selection process in October 2021. The project work commenced in February 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic altered film exhibition patterns from early 2020 onwards, making it difficult to draw a sample of theatrical releases from a full calendar year coinciding with the research period. Given the objective of this research, which is to capture the current state of gender representation, we therefore selected films that topped the box office in the year 2019. The top 25 Hindi films of 2019 based on the box office lists on <https://www.bollywoodhungama.com/> were chosen. (See Table 1). All dubbed films from English were excluded from this selection.

In order to contrast the box office toppers, films made by women filmmakers or where the subject of the film is considered 'women-centric' were selected. This sample had 10 films from the time period 2012-2019 critically acclaimed for their gender portrayals. A majority of these films are written/directed by women/LGBTQIA persons. These films were selected through an online survey among film and media students (see Table 2).

Our total sample was 35 films (25 box-office toppers and 10 women-centric movies).

TABLE 1 TOP 25 HINDI FILMS 2019		
NO	MOVIE NAME	BOX OFFICE (IN INR CRORES)
1	War	317.91
2	Kabir Singh	278.24
3	Uri – The Surgical Strike	245.36
4	Bharat	211.07
5	Good Newwz	205.14
6	Mission Mangal	202.98
7	Housefull 4	194.60
8	Kesari	154.41
9	Total Dhamaal	154.23
10	Chhichhore	153.09
11	Super 30	146.94
12	Dabangg 3	146.11
13	Saaho	142.95
14	Dream Girl	142.26
15	Gully Boy	140.25
16	Bala	116.81
17	De DePyaar De	103.64
18	Luka Chuppi	94.75
19	Manikarnika – The Queen of Jhansi	92.19
20	Badla	87.99
21	Batla House	87.22
22	Pati Patni Aur Woh	86.89
23	Kalank	80.35
24	Student of the Year 2	69.11
25	Article 15	65.45

Source: <https://www.bollywoodhungama.com/>

TABLE 2 10 WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES FROM 2012-2019	
NO	MOVIE NAME
26	Raazi
27	Evening Shadows
28	Dil Dhadakne Do
29	Dear Zindagi
30	Queen
31	Bareilly Ki Barfi
32	Ek Ladki Ko Dekha To Aisa Laga
33	Lipstick Under My Burkha
34	Margarita with a Straw
35	Mardaani

### Going beyond the Binary

The LGBTQIA+ characters were coded based on how gender and sexuality were represented. Cis-heteronormative males and females were coded as males and females, respectively. Individuals distinctively presented as transmen or transwomen or nonbinary were coded under the LGBTQIA+. In case, the film presents the sexual orientation of cis-gender males as gay or bisexual, or cis-gender females as lesbian or bisexual they were coded as LGBTQIA+. While this term conflates gender and sexuality, it has been used as the numbers of all these taken together are relatively small. Quantitatively, despite the conflation

one is able to make inferences. The study recognises that these categories are not the same.

### Unit of Analysis

- For onscreen representations, the unit of analysis was the speaking or named character who was credited in the beginning or end credits of the film.
- For the crew, the unit of analysis was the crew credit at the beginning and end of each film.

### Data Collection Methods

Data has been collected through quantitative content analysis by a team of four woman coders who were trained to apply the coding framework to the 35 films in the sample along with one of the researchers. Three rounds of training followed by coding took place between February and May 2022. Intercoder reliability was calculated for 3 films (approximately 10% of the total sample) which were coded by all coders and one of the researchers. Following Khan and Taylor’s (2018) argument that songs are presented as sexual fantasies and may not offer adequate variation that can be picked up in the coding analysis, we excluded songs from our analysis.

The findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.



# Study Findings

## Visibility Parameters

### 1. Number of SNCS

Characters that have a name and dialogue were considered for the study. We enumerated **1930 speaking and named characters** who were credited in the 35 films in our sample. There were 1,503 characters from 25 box-office topper films and 427 characters from 10 women-centric movies.

### 2. Gender of Characters

The distribution by gender is given below:

Table 3		GENDER OF CHARACTERS							
GENDER		BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
		F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
CHARACTERS		350	4	1149	1503	153	28	246	427
	% OF TOTAL	23.3	0.3	76.4	100	36	7	58	100

- **Cis-Gender is the norm:** 1898 characters were cis-gender males and females.
- **Only heterosexual cis-males:** In box-office topper films, cis-male characters were entirely presented as heterosexual. Two cis-female characters were presented as lesbians; one cis-female character was presented as bisexual and a single non-binary character was represented as gay in box-office toppers.
- **Very few roles for women in box-office toppers:** BO films are dominated by cis-male characters (76.4%). Only 23.3% of roles are of female characters and almost none for (0.3%) for LGBTQIA+
- **More gender inclusion in women-centric movies:** Though cis-male characters (58%) outnumbered others even in women-centric movies, there were 36% female characters and 7% LGBTQIA+ characters.

### 3. Types of roles

The characters that the 1930 individuals played were of five types —leads, co-leads, romantic co-leads, romantic interests and others.

**Definitions:** The lead propels the story forward. **The co-lead** plays a role of lesser importance than the lead but also

propels the story in association with the lead. **The romantic co-lead** plays a role of lesser importance in the story and has a romantic association with the lead. **A romantic interest** role is of a shorter length, we see them in fewer scenes and has a romantic association with the lead or any other character and their role has a limited influence on the story

- **Majority cis-males in box-office toppers:** In box-office toppers, the majority of the lead and co-lead roles are played by cis-male characters.
- **Majority cis-females in women-centric movies:** Women-centric movies, in contrast, featured a majority of cis-females as leads and co-leads. Males played the role of co-leads. A considerable number of LGBTQIA+ co-leads also were present.
- **Majority of women as romantic co-leads:** 90% of romantic co-leads in box-office toppers are cis-female characters.
- **Male romantic co-leads:** In Women-centric movies, there is a reverse trend with more male romantic co-leads.
- **Other roles:** Cis-male characters dominated the 'other' category in both types of films. The other category covers many of the supporting characters in films.

Table 4		GENDER AND TYPE OF ROLES						
GENDER	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
LEAD	15	0	85	100	57	43	0	100
CO-LEAD	0	0	100	100	60	0	40	100
ROMANTIC CO-LEAD	90	0	10	100	33	0	67	100
ROMANTIC INTEREST	86	0	14	100	18	14	68	100
OTHER	21.8	0.3	77.9	100	36	6	58	100

## 4. Demographics of the Characters

### 4.1 Age

Cues in visuals and dialogues were used to code the age of the character.

- 21-45 years age group dominates:** The 21–45 years age group was the dominant age group among all genders and in both types of films. A majority of the characters central to the story, i.e., those playing leads, co-leads, romantic co-leads and romantic interests were shown as belonging to the 21-45 age group in box-office topper films (80%) and women-centric movies (79%). In box-office toppers, LGBTQIA+ characters were only present in this group.
- Few senior citizens:** Both box office toppers (3%) and women-centric movies (1%) featured very few characters over the age of 60 years. None of them were LGBTQIA+
- Women-centric movies more inclusive of all age groups:** Women-centric movies were more inclusive with other age groups, featuring more children and teens of all genders, as well as more adults aged 46-60 years compared to box office toppers.
- Box office toppers skewed towards male teens:** Box office toppers feature more male teens (76%) than female teens (24.4%). Women-centric movies feature more female teens (66%) than male teens (30%)
- Women-centric movies feature more cis-female teens (66%) and cis-female senior citizens (83%) than male characters in these categories.
- Women-centric movies are more diverse, showing the trials and triumphs of younger LGBTQIA+ characters.

Table 5		AGE OF CHARACTERS						
AGE GROUP	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
CHILDREN (0-12 YRS)	4.3	0.0	3.9	4.0	3.3	4	9.3	7.5
TEEN (13-20 YRS)	9.4	0.0	8.9	9.0	22.9	4	6.5	12.4
ADULT (21-45 YRS)	64.6	100.0	67.6	67.0	50.3	4	65.0	60.7
OLDER ADULT (46-60 YRS)	18.3	0.0	16.4	16.8	20.3	4	18.7	18.0
SENIOR CITIZEN (61 YRS +)	3.4	0.0	3.2	3.3	3.3	4	0.4	1.4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The figures of children and teens in the LGBTQIA+ category is shown in the flashback scenes of their early years



## 4.2 Religion

Religious identities in films are represented through visual symbols, dialogues, music, religious rituals, religious pictures, idols, clothing and jewellery. These were used to enumerate the characters by religion.

- The majority of characters in both box-office (BO) toppers (79%) and women-centric (WC) films (64%) were shown as following the Hindu religion.
- A majority of the characters central to the story, i.e., those playing leads, co-leads, romantic co-leads and romantic interests were shown as following the Hindu religion in box-office topper films (84%) and women-centric movies (67%).
- The other religions that characters were shown to be following included Islam (BO 9%, WC 24%), Christianity (BO 5%, WC 4%) and Sikhism (BO 4%, WC 3%).

## 4.3 Caste

Society in India is organised on caste, religion and ethnic lines. Through a variety of ways, caste manifests itself in everyday lives and also in films through the last names of characters, caste-based occupations, caste symbols, household rituals, caste pride dialogues, domestic practices and interactions.

Through a careful examination of the characters, the characters are enumerated into two categories (Dominant Caste and non-Dominant Caste) based on cues given in the film.

Given the wide variety of jati divisions within caste in India, we did not attempt to map the characters to the four varna hierarchy of the caste system. Instead, the characters were coded into two categories (Dominant Caste, Non-Dominant Caste) based on cues given in first and last names of the characters, caste-based occupations such as priests, caste symbols displayed such as the sacred thread worn by Brahmin males, religious rituals performed, caste pride dialogues, domestic practices, and interactions with other characters. The label 'dominant caste' is used to connote caste groups that are ritually, economically and politically powerful in the caste hierarchy.

- **Dominant castes dominate:** The majority of characters in box-office toppers were shown as belonging to dominant castes (92%).
- **Dominant castes play lead characters:** Two box-office topper films featured caste-related themes, and therefore presented characters belonging to non-dominant castes. These two films contributed 82% of the characters from non-dominant castes in box-office topper films studied by us. All characters in women-centric movies were also shown to be from dominant castes.
- **Caste-specific films have non-dominant caste Lead characters:** Lead characters in box office topper films are rarely presented as belonging to non-dominant castes unless the film is one of a 'low' caste person succeeding against the odds.

Table 6

**DISTRIBUTION OF CHARACTERS BY DOMINANT AND NON-DOMINANT CASTES**

CASTE	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
<b>DOMINANT</b>	323	4	1056	1383	153	28	246	427
<b>% WITHIN EACH GENDER</b>	92	100	92	92.0	100	100	100	100
<b>NON-DOMINANT</b>	27	0	93	120	0	0	0	0
<b>% WITHIN EACH GENDER</b>	8	0	8	8	0	0	0	0

## 4.4 Disability

Disabilities were coded according to The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016<sup>1</sup>. According to the report by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Government of India (2021), 2.21% of the total population, that is 26.8 million Indians are estimated to be living with disabilities.

Within the films we had studied only 0.5% of characters were shown with disabilities<sup>2</sup>.

Disability was rarely shown in box office topper movies. If it was shown, it was used to create characters in small roles to generate sympathy or to make the character a target for comedy.

All the characters with disabilities in box-office topper films were male. Heterosexual female characters in box-office toppers and women-centric movies were not shown with any physical disability.

LGBTQIA+ characters in box-office toppers were not shown with disabilities.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) Government of India, <https://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/acts.php>

<sup>2</sup> Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India- A Statistical Profile 2021, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, Government of India. [https://mospi.gov.in/documents/213904/301563/PersonswithDisabilities\(Divyangjan\)inIndia-AStatisticalProfile2021\\_MoSPI1617249410332.pdf/838baf9e-4a4c-358a-af2a-741799be70bb](https://mospi.gov.in/documents/213904/301563/PersonswithDisabilities(Divyangjan)inIndia-AStatisticalProfile2021_MoSPI1617249410332.pdf/838baf9e-4a4c-358a-af2a-741799be70bb)

Only one women-centric film presented characters with disabilities, and it did so in a deeply impactful manner. *Margarita with a Straw*, featured two LGBTQIA+ characters shown with disabilities. These were nuanced, power-packed roles that made many statements both stated and unstated about the creative, political and sexual agency of people with disabilities.

## 5. Employment

References to employment from visuals and dialogue were observed for each character. Employment was also inferred from the display of income-earning work or references to employment and earnings in the dialogues of the characters.

**High percentage of employed characters:** The majority of characters are shown as employed in both types of films with box-office toppers having more employed characters (61%) than women-centric movies (52%).

**Women’s work participation in films is higher than the national rate:** The percentage of individuals shown to be in employment within each gender is 42% for women and 67% for men in box office topper films. In women-centric movies, it is 33% and 69% for women and men respectively. The work participation rate of women is higher in films compared to the national rate of 29.4%, as per Periodic Labour Force Survey 2021-22<sup>3</sup>. However, it is important to study what occupations women are involved in, and how their work is represented.

**Paradoxically, fewer female working characters:** Despite the presence of so many female characters with employment outside the home, the overall high number of male characters diminishes the visibility of working women characters. Thus only 16% of the working characters that we see in box-office topper films are female while 83.5% are male. In women-centric movies, this is slightly higher with 23% of working characters that we see on screen are females and 76% are males.

Table 7		EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF CHARACTERS							
EMPLOYMENT STATUS		BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
		F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
EMPLOYED		148	4	770	922	50	4	169	223
% EMPLOYED WITHIN EACH GENDER		42	100	67	61	33	14	69	52
NOT EMPLOYED		202	0	379	581	103	24	77	204
% NOT EMPLOYED WITHIN EACH GENDER		58	0	33	39	67	86	31	48
TOTAL		350	4	1149	1503	153	28	246	427

### 5.1 Types of occupations

The presence of men and women in occupations and their distribution across these occupations has been used as an indicator of gender equality at work (Bericat, E., 2012)<sup>4</sup>. Women’s and men’s occupations show very little overlap in box office toppers, and it appears as if men and women occupy very different professional worlds.

**Gender-segregated Occupations:** Women’s work appears to include professions that involve care or creative work. Men’s work appears to include professions that use power: physical, armed or political. The most popular occupations for male characters in box-office toppers had the minimal presence of female characters (Armed Forces, Law enforcement/protective services).

**Care-giving and creativity:** Among the female characters in box-office topper movies shown as having employment, the top four occupational categories were personal/corporate care (20%), media/arts/entertainment (14%), healthcare (12%) and journalism (10%).

In the personal/corporate care category, we see a range of credits for ‘other’ female characters who provide domestic help under the title of ‘maid’, ‘caretaker’, ‘cook’, and ‘cleaning lady’. This category also includes airline cabin crew, beauty salon attendants and corporate receptionists. None of these characters are leads, co-leads, romantic co-leads or romantic interests, and they all play peripheral roles in the stories.

<sup>3</sup><https://thewire.in/women/women-labour-force-india-growth>

<sup>4</sup>Bericat, E. (2012). *The European gender equality index: Conceptual and analytical issues*. *Social Indicators Research*, 108(1), 1-28.

In the healthcare category, we see a majority of nurses and a few doctors, most of whom are in the 'other' category of peripheral roles. In the media/arts/entertainment category, we mostly see female characters play 'other' roles such as models, actresses, singers, dancers, circus performers. This is also a popular occupation for female characters in romantic interest roles.

**MCP men—Military, Crime Police and Politicians:** Among the male characters in box office topper movies shown as having employment, the top four occupational categories were law enforcement/protective services (15%), politics/government (13%), crime (12%), and armed forces (10%). The male characters that play lead, co-lead and 'other' categories populate these professions.

**Less occupational segregation in women-centric movies:** Women's work and men's work show some overlap in women-centric movies when compared to box-office topper films. For instance, media/arts/entertainment is the most popular occupational category for both female (22%) and male characters (15%) in women-centric movies.

Among the female characters in women-centric movies shown as having employment, the top four occupational categories were media/arts/entertainment (22%) personal/corporate care (16%), academia (16%) and law enforcement/protective services (10%)

The academia (16%) category for female characters in women-centric movies was limited to school teachers, all from the 'other' category of roles that are peripheral to the story.

Women are not shown to play occupation roles that are seen as male professions, like drivers, spiritual gurus, CEOs or in STEM fields. Women in sex work are depicted as romanticized courtesans or trafficked victims.

## 5.2 Acceptability

Individuals who play characters in employment receive more brickbats than bouquets with twice as many negative comments being received compared to positive comments, regardless of the type of film.

Female characters appear to receive more positive comments than negative comments regarding their work while male characters appear to receive more negative comments than positive comments. This is contrary to expectations.

Employed female characters received positive comments for their academic achievement, for being charismatic, for being skilled at their work, for having potential, for winning awards, and for being well known.

Positive comments aimed at male characters include a wide range of comments about abilities, academic achievement, enthusiasm, experience, commanding loyalty, being hands-on, having potential, leadership quality, courage, strength, perseverance, reputation, success, respect, sincerity, skill, thinking ahead and having a unique style.

Negative comments aimed at male characters include comments about poor professional performance by bosses, colleagues, friends and other citizens. Male characters also got called out for flouting professional rules (such as corruption, drinking on duty, overcharging for services), brutality/insensitivity, poor skills, false claims of serious work, poor appearance and manipulative behaviour by bosses, rivals and citizens. Family members and friends also lectured male characters for their lack of ambition at work.

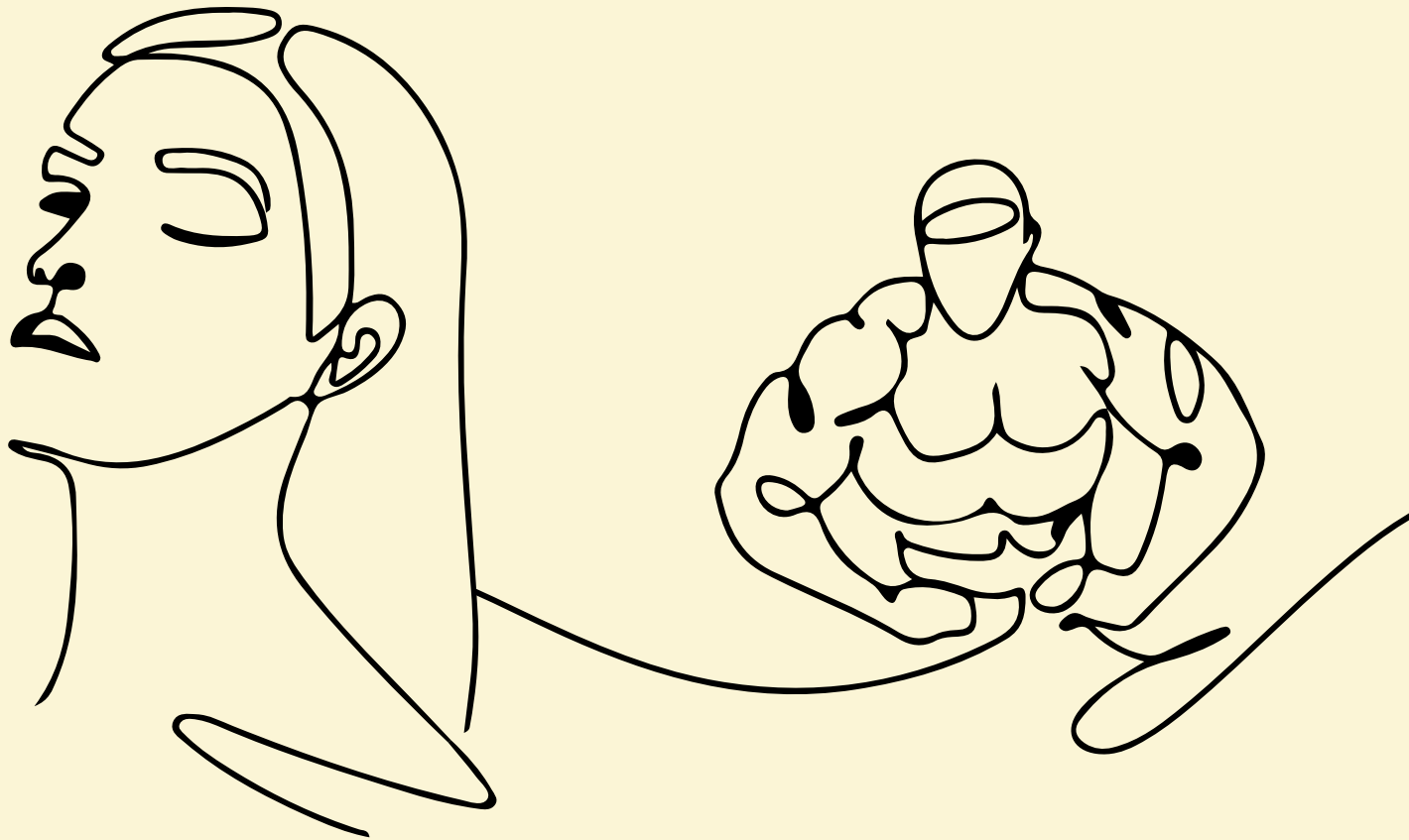
In stark contrast to this, negative comments were directed against working women about misplaced priorities. Neglect is the main theme of complaints against female characters. Comments by family members are complaints about neglecting the personal sphere. Comments by bosses are about neglecting the professional sphere

Male characters receive praise for leadership and flak for inefficiency. In the case of women, the feedback at the workplace swings between benevolent sexism in praise of women's efficiency at work or negative remarks on women's divided attention to work and home. Response to working women at home is often focused on women neglecting the home and family members are shown to display resentment.

## 6. Women in Public Roles

- Few characters (11%) in box-office topper films are shown in public roles such as law enforcement officials, news anchors, political figures and so on. Of the characters seen in such roles, only 16% are female, while an overwhelming 84% are male in box-office topper films.
- Women-centric movies also featured few characters in public roles (10%). 17% of public figures were female and 83% of male public figures.





## 7. Appearance

### (Attractiveness, Skin color, Body Type and Clothing)

Three indicators were used to categorise the appearance of characters: attractiveness, skin colour and body shape. Attractiveness was coded as the extent to which the character was the recipient of verbal and nonverbal cues that communicate physical desirousness. This indicator had three subcategories: high, medium and low.

More women than men receive high levels of verbal and non-verbal cues related to attractiveness in both types of films

Table 8	GENDER AND LEVEL OF ATTRACTIVENESS					
ATTRACTIVENESS (% WITHIN EACH GENDER)	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS			WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES		
	F	M	TOTAL	F	M	TOTAL
HIGH	51	14	33	50	33	43
MEDIUM	22	16	19	41	67	52
LOW	27	69	48	9	0	5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

### 7.1 Skin color

The extent of colorism was studied

- Most prevalent skin tone for female characters in the box office and women-centric movies is the lightest shade or 'fair' skin. The lead female characters are rarely wheatish or dark-complexioned.
- Lighter brown or 'wheatish' skin colors are most prevalent for male characters in both types of films
- Between genders, female characters were depicted with lighter skin color shades than male characters
- Darker skin tones were seen in the least number of characters across genders and across film types.

Table 9	GENDER AND SKIN COLOR							
SKIN COLOR (% WITHIN EACH GENDER)	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
LIGHT	66	50	36	43	47	39	32	38
WHEATISH	29	50	54	48	52	36	58	54
DARK	5	0	10	9	1	25	10	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

## 7.2 Body shape

To document the prevalence of body types, we classified all characters into three groups based on their body types - fat, medium and thin.

- In both types of films, more female characters are of the thin body type (60% in BO, 47% in WC) compared to male characters (40% in BO, 32% in WC).
- Percentage of women with medium body types is higher in women-centric movies compared to box-office topper films.
- A higher percentage of male characters in both types of films are of the medium body type (54% BO, 58% WC).
- Very few characters are fat, regardless of type of film or gender.

Table 10	GENDER AND BODY TYPES							
BODY SHAPE	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS (%)				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES (%)			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
FAT	7	0	6	6	1	25	10	8
MEDIUM	33	75	54	49	52	36	58	54
THIN	60	25	40	45	47	39	32	38
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

## 7.3 Clothing

Clothing in films is a shorthand to indicate the class, caste, marital, religion, ethnic status and attitude (traditional or modern) of the characters. In the case of women characters, it is about their sexuality and virtue, as well.

- In both types of films, more female characters are seen in only Indian clothing such as the sari, salwar kameez and lehenga. (waiting for data on lead characters)
- Women in the lead, co-lead, romantic co-lead and romantic interest wear Western and Indian clothing. Often the film narratives show women in Western clothing during the period of courtship and Indian clothing when the woman interfaces with the man's family. Family acceptance of the woman is linked to her attire.
- In both types of films, more male characters are seen in only Western clothing such as Western-style trousers, denim jeans, western-style shirts and t-shirts.
- Greater expression of 'modern' identities in women-centric movies compared to box-office topper films.
- Majority of all the woman in supporting characters wear Indian clothing.
- LGBTQIA+ characters were seen more in Western clothing than in Indian clothing in both types of films

Table 11		GENDER AND TYPE OF CLOTHING							
CLOTHING	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS (%)				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES (%)				
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	
ONLY INDIAN	56	25	21	29	46	7	9	22	
ONLY WESTERN	32	75	72	62	41	79	80	66	
BOTH INDIAN AND WESTERN	12	0	7	8	13	14	10	11	
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

## 8. Sexualisation

Sexualisation of characters was observed by the extent of sexually revealing clothing (such as tight, alluring, revealing apparel) and the extent of the presence of nudity (bare skin depending on the context) was coded into high, medium and low (negligible) categories.

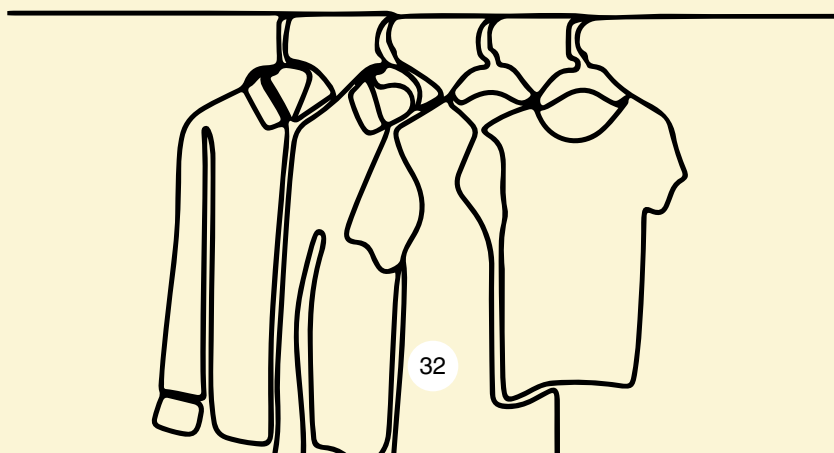
### 8.1 Sexually revealing clothing

- Most characters did not wear tight, alluring, revealing apparel in either type of films.
- More females than males are found to be wearing sexually revealing clothing: The characters who did

wear highly revealing clothing, more were females (86%) than males (14%) in box office toppers. The distribution in women-centric movies was (females 60%, males 20%, LGBTQIA 20%).

- In this parameter, we have not coded whether the character playing the role and wearing these clothes seems to exercise their agency to wear what they wear. We observed, in these films and other films, characters wearing clothes not appropriate to the profession that they are representing. Doctors, teachers, nurses, secretaries, cabin crew, and domestic helps are routinely sexualised.

Table 12		GENDER AND REVEALING CLOTHING							
SEXUALLY REVEALING CLOTHING (BETWEEN GENDERS)	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS (%)				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES (%)				
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	
HIGH	86	0	14	100	60	20	20	100	
MEDIUM	65	0	35	100	94	0	6	100	
LOW	22	0	77	100	31	7	62	100	
TOTAL	23	0	76	100	36	7	58	100	



## 8.2 Nudity

Nudity was coded as contextual, depending on the level of exposure and setting. For male characters part or full exposure from hip to upper thigh region was coded, with bare hip to thigh from the rear (medium) and bare hip to thigh from the front (high).

For female characters, part or full exposure from mid-chest to high upper thigh region was coded, while bare shoulders/bare back was coded 'low' with reference to sari blouses, and bare shoulders in an intimate setting were coded as 'medium'.

**More females than males:** Since most of the films in the sample were U or UA-certified films, instances of nudity were very low, but of the few characters who were coded for the presence of nudity, there were more females than males in both kinds of films (BO 80%, WC 87%).

## 9. Objectification:

Objectification was studied by observing dialogues, actions and cinematic angles.

More female characters are treated as sex objects by other characters, regardless of the type of film.

## 9.1 Presence of voyeuristic camera angles:

- Low presence of voyeurism in general, but higher in women-centric movies, linked to themes of sexism, and sexual harassment dealt with by women-centric movies
- More female characters presented through voyeuristic camera angles
- Women-centric movies presented these angles, at times to highlight these issues

## 10. Domesticity and Committed Relationships

We observed whether a character was shown as a parent as well as if the character was shown to be in a committed romantic relationship including marriage. This tells us how are women seen - as individuals or predominantly as members of families.

- Few characters were shown as parents in box office topper films (12%) and women-centric movies (16%).
- Female characters were shown as parents twice as often as male characters in both types of films. We see one instance of a closeted gay man as a father in the film Evening Shadows.



**Table 13 CHARACTERS IN DOMESTICITY AND IN COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS**

CHARACTERS AS	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
PARENTS	79	0	102	181	39	1	28	68
% WITHIN EACH GENDER	23%	0%	9%	12%	25%	4%	11%	16%
COMMITTED ROMANTIC PARTNERS	133	2	142	275	66	&	54	127
% WITHIN EACH GENDER	38%	50%	12%	18%	43%	25%	22%	30%

- More female characters (38%) than male characters (12%) in box office toppers were shown in committed romantic relationships including marriage.
- In both types of films, women who play the lead, co-lead, romantic co-lead and romantic interest – 85% are in committed romantic relationships.
- In one film, two LGBTQIA+ characters were shown as a couple.
- In women-centric movies, we see the same pattern of more women (43%) than men (22%) in committed romantic relationships including marriage.
- **More promiscuity in box-office topper films:** There were marginally more instances of characters with multiple intimate partners in box-office films (32%) than in women-centric movies (26%).
- **Promiscuity varies in Box office and Women-centric movies:** Marginally more males (17%) than females (14%) were represented with multiple partners in box office films. The reverse was seen in women-centric movies with marginally more females with multiple partners than males. However, the gendered difference is box-office toppers, men are shown having multiple sexual partners (simultaneous) and in the case of women in box-office toppers and women-centric movies, these are serial relationships.

**Type of relationship and commitment**

- **Monogamy is the most prevalent depiction of relationships** across genders and both types of films (BO 68%, WC 74%).

**Table 14 TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS**

MONOGAMY	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS (%)				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES (%)			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
MULTIPLE PARTNERS	14	1	17	32	11	8	8	26
SINGLE PARTNER	31	3	35	68	26	8	40	74
TOTAL	44	4	51	100	38	15	47	100

## 11. Consent and Intimacy

Love, romance and intimate acts are considered to be intrinsic to film narratives. However, Indian films due to censor board restrictions are discreet in how intimacy is explored. While the proverbial two flowers touching or a flower with a hovering bee are now in the past, the depiction of intimacy continues to be messy. We examined the extent to which intimate acts are present, who initiates it and whether there is recognition of seeking consent.

Intimate acts could be physical, verbal, or non-verbal and include affection, warmth, hugs, cuddles, glances, smiles,

and any other acts between two people who have a romantic connection or a committed relationship including marriage. This may or may not include sexual acts.

- Intimacy is restricted to a few characters in both types of films
- More male characters are involved in expressing intimacy among all characters
- Within each gender category, more female and LGBTQIA characters are in intimate scenes
- Expression of intimacy is higher in women-centric movies



Table 15	WHO EXPRESSES INTIMACY?							
ACTOR IN AN INTIMATE ACT	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
% BETWEEN GENDERS	45	4	51	100	38	15	47	100
% WITHIN EACH GENDER	9	75	3	5%	13	29	10	12%

## 11.1 Initiating intimacy

Intimacy could be initiated verbally, or non-verbally through physical or other gestures

- Fewer female characters initiated intimacy than male characters in both types of films.
- Less gender disparity in initiating intimacy in women-centric movies than in box-office topper films.

Table 16	WHO INITIATES INTIMACY?							
INITIATES INTIMACY	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
% BETWEEN GENDERS	58	67	86	73	70	100	80	79
% WITHIN EACH GENDER	36	4	60	100	38	15	47	100

## 11.2 Consent

Consent is given in an implicit or explicit verbal or nonverbal manner to indicate acceptance of any intimate act (touching, caressing, kissing, hugging or engaging in a sexual act).

- Consensual intimate acts were the most common type of intimate acts, across types of films
- Non-consensual intimate acts shown in women-centric movies focused on non-consensual sex within and outside marriage.

Table 17	WHETHER INTIMACY IS CONSENSUAL OR NON-CONSENSUAL?							
CONSENT	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS (%)				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES (%)			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
CONSENSUAL INTIMATE ACT	91	100	89	90	90	88	88	89
NON-CONSENSUAL INTIMATE ACT	15.2	0.0	13.5	13.7	15	25	16	17

Note: Characters engage in more than one episode of non-consensual intimate act. Hence figures do not add up to 100.



### 11.3 Type of consent

Consent is given in an implicit (indirect) or explicit verbal or nonverbal or any other manner

- **Explicit verbal consent by men** to intimacy was most prevalent with male characters in box office topper films but was the least prevalent with female characters in these films.
- **Non-verbal consent by women:** The most prevalent form of consent expressed by female characters in box office topper and women-centric movies was of a non-verbal nature.

Table 18		TYPES OF CONSENT							
TYPE OF CONSENT	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS (%)				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES (%)				
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	
EXPLICIT VERBAL	20	33	50	35	33	14	18	23	
OTHER	80	67	50	65	67	86	82	77	
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	



## 12. Sexist humor

Sexist humor<sup>5</sup> was coded to understand which characters made sexist jokes, which characters it was made at the expense of, and the response of that character.

Sexist humor and response

- **Sexist humor continues to be used to police both male and female characters.**
- **Box office toppers and sexist jokes** Characters in box office films made more sexist jokes than women-centric movies.
- Male characters made most of the sexist jokes in both types of films.
- **Female characters rarely call out sexism.** Rarely do we see a pushback from the female character at the receiving end of such humour. The rare female character had sexist comebacks when mocked, but was presented as an aggressive woman on the verge of divorcing her husband. Another was called 'jungli billi' (wild cat).
- **'Like a woman' continues to be used in mockery:** Male characters dressing in saris continue to draw humor. This extends to men who work in sari shops and demonstrate the drape of a sari. Comedy within a patriarchal framework pokes fun at men but the joke is on the women, for instance, a male character called other male characters who refused to participate in rough housing 'heroines'.

<sup>5</sup>See Ghosh, L., Thekudan, J., & Kashyap, M. (2018). *Impact of Indian Cinema on Young Viewers: Responses to gender and violence against women.* Oxfam India. <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/workingpaper/impact-indian-cinema-young-viewers>

## 13. Bechdel test

Despite theoretical concerns, popular culture enthusiasts are also attracted to the easy heuristic of the Bechdel Test which examines if conversations between female characters in media content focus on topics other than men. Bechdel test, considered a cultural barometer, is a measure of the representation of women in films and fiction. The test asks whether a work features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. The requirement that the two women be named is sometimes added in some studies. In this study too, we carried out the Bechdel test for all 35 films.

- **Distinct difference in performance:** Only 36% of box-office films (9 films) passed the Bechdel test while 100% (all 10 films) women-centric movies passed the Bechdel test
- More female characters in women-centric movies (37%) had conversations about topics other than men when compared to box office topper films (11%).
- These conversations in box office films included concerns about babies, religious rituals, classical music, supplies in the house, bullying in a medical college, cooking arrangements with domestic help, and obesity. In one memorable conversation, a mother-in-law asks her educated daughter-in-law to find a job instead of being in the kitchen.
- In women-centric movies, these conversations included mental health, gift-giving, selling products, job offers, 'coming out' and in one memorable conversation in the film Queen, two female characters discuss whether women are allowed to burp, in other words, what is considered permissible behaviour for women.



## 14. Violence

Violence of different forms and on different characters is endemic to films. Perpetrators and targets of physical, verbal and sexually violent acts were studied.

Perpetrators of physical and verbal violence were further categorised into initiators and retaliators.

### 14.1 Physical violence

- A majority of male characters and male leads are shown as initiating physical violence in box-office topper films.
- Few female leads are shown as initiating physical violence in a few Box office topper films
- Marginally more female characters are shown as initiating physical violence in women-centric movies than male characters
- Female retaliation to physical violence is rare. Further, there is comparatively less retaliation to physical violence in women-centric movies than in Box office topper films.

### 14.2 Target of a physically violent act

- More male characters are targets of physical violence than female characters in box office topper films.
- More female characters are targets of physical violence than male characters in women-centric movies.

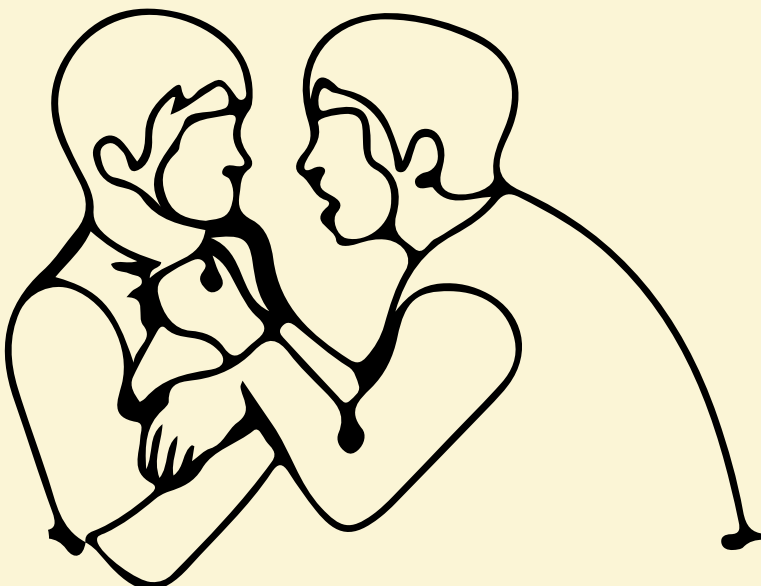


Table 19

**WHO ARE THE TARGETS OF VIOLENCE?**

TARGET: PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	BOX OFFICE TOPPERS				WOMEN-CENTRIC MOVIES			
	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL	F	LGBTQIA+	M	TOTAL
TOTAL	42	0	310	352	34	2	22	58
% WITHIN EACH GENDER	12	0	27	23	22	7	9	14
% BETWEEN GENDERS	12	0	88	100	59	3	38	100

**14.3 Verbal violence**

Perpetrators of verbally violent acts initiated such acts by using loud or soft words to attack and intimidate other characters.

- Verbally violent males are a majority in both kinds of films
- Verbally violent characters were mainly shown as initiators
- More female characters were shown as initiating verbal violence in women-centric movies than in box-office-topper films
- Female characters also retaliated less to verbal violence than male characters in both types of films

**14.4 Target of a verbally violent act**

- More male characters are targets of verbal violence than female characters in box office topper films.
- More female characters are targets of verbal violence in women-centric movies.

**14.5 Sexual violence**

- Sexual violence in the form of rape was seen in 3 of the 35 films (1 'UA' rated box office topping film; 2 'A' rated women-centric movies)
- Both films revolve around violence against women and societal and institutional responses to the same. So sexual violence within and outside marriages was central to these narratives.





## 15. Sexual harassment

The legal framework provided by Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code was used to study the various acts of sexual harassment that were committed by characters.

Perpetrators and targets were enumerated under six categories of actions which constitute sexual harassment in the form of showing pornography, unwelcome physical / verbal / non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, voyeurism and stalking.

The responses of the targets were also noted to understand whether these actions were being called out and contested or if they were uncontested, thereby normalizing sexual harassment.

### 15.1 Targets

- In both box office films and women-centric movies, the majority of targets of sexual harassment are women.

### 15.2 Perpetrators

- Both box office topper films and women-centric movies showed very few instances of sexual harassment. Between the two, box office films showed more instances of sexual harassment compared to women-centric movies.

- Stalking was the most common form of sexual harassment in box-office films where male perpetrators would physically be present at the locations of their targets.
- Women as perpetrators were shown in one Hindi film - Kabir Singh.

### 15.3 Targets' Responses to sexual harassment

- The most common female response in box office films to male sexual harassment is ignoring the incidents and in two films the women characters grew closer to the perpetrators.
- Male leads respond with violence and aggression if 'their women' are sexually harassed.
- When women call out sexual harassment, women are told they invited it by their own transgressions of a moral code.

## Conclusions:

Comprehensive conclusions of all three studies are given at the end of the three quantitative study findings.



# **Off-screen: Women Crew Members in Film Credits and in Unions**

**Dr Lakshmi Lingam & Dr Sunitha Chitrapu**



The presence of women in the crew and the film ecosystem has been studied and it is presented in this segment.

The main conceptual category that we use in this part of the study is the presence of women on Hindi film crews. The presence of female directors, writers and producers is correlated with the visibility and representation of female characters on screen (Smith et al, 2014). Women accounted for 20.5% of crew members and they made up 7% of directors, 20% writers and 23% producers in the sample of 120 international films studied by Smith et al, (2014). In the 10 Indian films sample of Smith et al study, female directors were only 9%, writers 12% and producers were 15%. Visibility, i.e., the number of female speaking or named characters increased with the presence of female filmmakers, i.e., 6.8% more with female directors and 7.5% more with female writers.

Our study examined the **presence** of women crew members through three measures:

- 1) the number and percentage of women crew members,
- 2) the various departments of a film crew they belong to (e.g., direction, writing, cinematography, etc) and
- 3) the levels at which they work as crew members (e.g.; department heads, first assistants, second assistants, interns/trainees, etc.)

We examined the presence of women crew members at 1) the film level and 2) the industry level. At the film level, we analysed the end credits of the 35 films selected for part one study.

At the industry level, we attempted to collect as much secondary data on women crew members in the unions and on the committees of the film workers unions in Mumbai that are affiliated to the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) as well as in the producers' associations and their committees.

## Women crew members

A total of 4,131 women were credited as crew members in the 35 films against 26,328 male crew members. For every female actor on the screen there are 8 women behind the screen. Whereas, for every male actor on screen there are 19 men behind the screen. The ratio works out to 5 men for every two women.

- **Marginally more women crew members in women-centric movies:** Women-centric movies had a more female crew at 15% compared to 13% in the box-office toppers. Though small, this difference is statistically significant.
- **Twice as many female heads of departments in women-centric movies:** Women-centric movies had double the number of female heads of department at 6% compared to the 3% in the box-office toppers, this difference is statistically significant.

## Levels

**Crew credits were grouped into five hierarchical levels based on level of responsibility:** heads of departments, coordinators and senior level managerial professionals, team members, assistants and interns.

- **More in the middle:** Fewer women were present at either end of the spectrum, that is, as heads of departments (WC 6% and BO 3%) and interns (WC 1% and BO 2%), more were present at the two intermediate levels of coordinators (WC 15% and BO 16%), and assistants (WC 20% and BO 17%), and the maximum were credited at the middle level as team members (WC 58% and BO 63%).

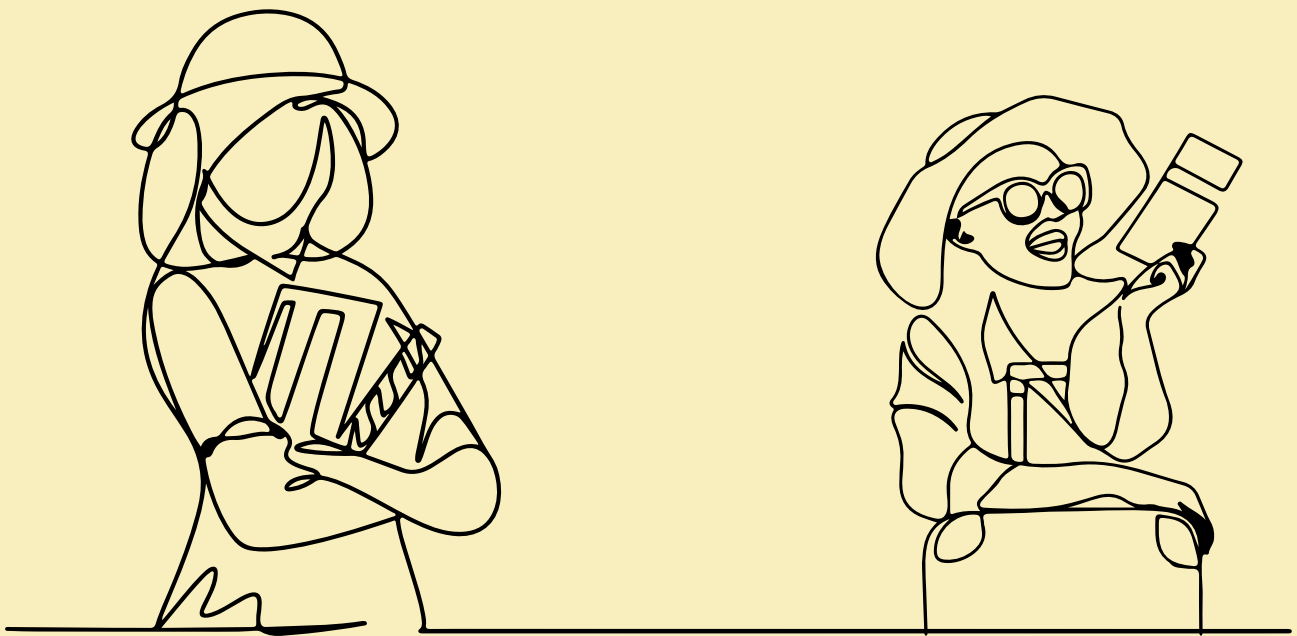
## Stereotyped Presence in Departments

Information on various departments in film making are in Annexure - 2

- **Visual Effects (VFX and animation) emerging field:** The presence of women in visual effects part of filmmaking is a new emerging department. The box office toppers had 20% of women contributing to







this part of the work. Women-centric movies whose narratives are not sci-fi or super hero or mythological have only 10% women in the visual effects credits.

- **Growing but weak presence:** Women's presence in production (WC 14% and BO 8%), music (WC 9% and BO 8%), costume and distribution (WC 6% and BO 6% in both depts).
- **Female crew concentrated in a few departments:** Collectively these five departments employed almost half the women in the crew (WC 44% and BO 48%).
- **Least representation of women was in the core film making departments.** Cinematography, sound, editing, script and lyrics collectively employed less than 5% female crew (WC 4.1% and BO 2.34%). Lighting and spot teams did not feature women at all.

## Crew Unions

- **Varying female representation in union committees:** Unions affiliated to the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), a federation of trade unions with members from the media industries in Mumbai reported a total of 6, 088 female members in its 15 unions that include women and 11% female representation on its 63-member committee.
- **Gender-segregated unions:**
  - FWICE has one woman's only union, the MahilaKalakar Sangh, which is a union of female junior artists. All the members and committee members of this union are female.
  - FWICE reported that it has 8 unions with only men. These are 1) All India Camera Technicians & Attendant Association, 2) All India Film & TV Bouncer Protection Association, 3) All India Film Mazdoor Union, 4) Bharatiya Cine Karmachari Sangh, 5) Film Studios Setting & Allied Mazdoor Union 6) JIB Association of India, 7) Junior Artists Association and 8) Movie Action Dummy Effect Association.

- Four FWICE unions have a single female member each on their committees, these are the Screenwriters Guild of India, Western India Motion Picture TV Sound Engineers Association, Indian Film & Television Director's Association and the Movie Stunt Artistes Association.
- Six unions have female members but no women are elected to their committees, these are the Association of Cine TV/AD Production Executives, Cine Still TV & Motion Photographers Association, Cine Musicians Association, All India Special Artist Association, Association of Film & Video Editors, and the Western India Cinematographers Association
- Popular unions for women crew members: Four unions, the All India Dubbing Artist Association, All India Look Alike Association, Association of Cine & TV Art Directors & Costume Designers, and Cine Costume & Make-Up Artiste & Hair Dressers Association—have 2-6 women (13%-46%) on their union committees.
  - the Cine & TV Artistes' Association (CINTAA) which is an actors' union, reported that 29% of their executive committee members were female and 38% of their membership was female.

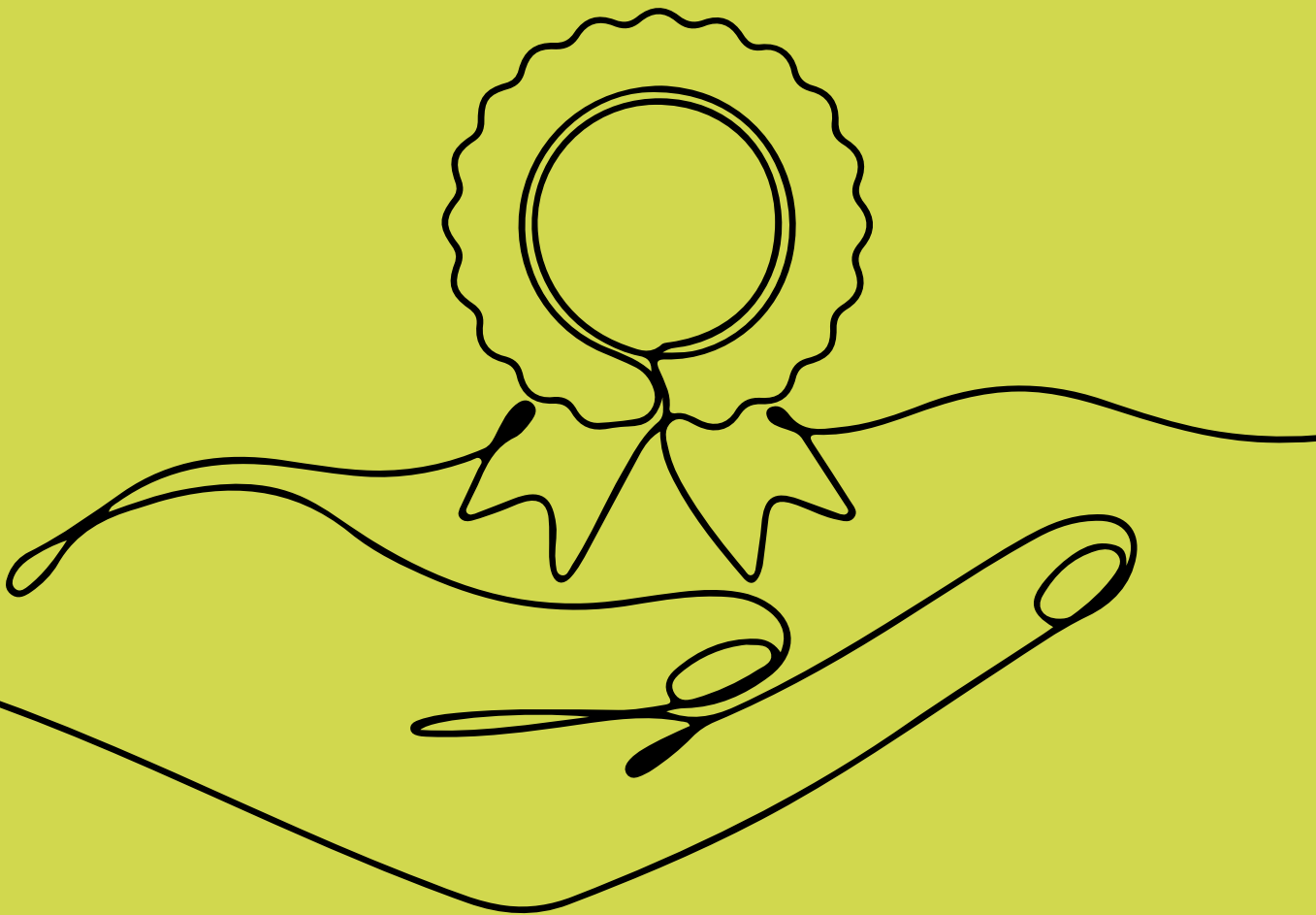
## Producers' Associations

- Among the producers' associations, the Producers Guild of India (GUILD) reported that 38% of their elected office bearers and 24% of management council members were female.

## Diversity and inclusion

No diversity and inclusion policies. None of the crew unions and producers' associations reported any policies to increase diversity and inclusion based on gender.

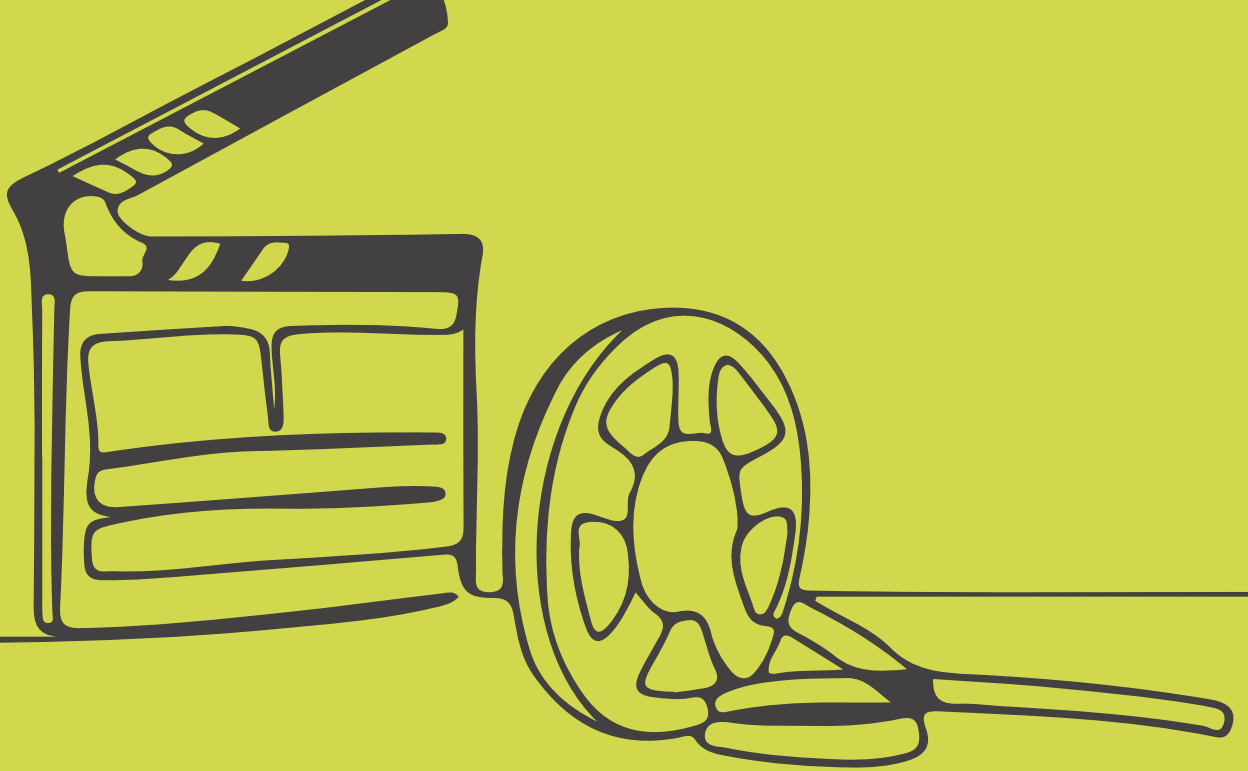
**Detailed data on women in Crew Unions is provided in Annexure - 3**



# Women in Other Parts of the Film Ecosystem

Dr Lakshmi Lingam & Dr Sunitha Chitrapu





As Joseph (2017) argues, the presence of women in the entire film ecosystem is of importance, not merely on screen or on crews to provide diverse perspectives in popular culture<sup>6</sup>. In line with her suggestion, in this part of the study we examine the presence of women in other parts of the film ecosystem.

In this part of the study, we collated secondary data on the presence of women in positions of relevance in the film industry such as members of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), Ministers of Information and Broadcasting, Women winning the Filmfare, Screen Awards and National Film Awards, women graduating from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune (FTII) and Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata (SRFTI) and women Ministers of Information and Broadcasting. This data is not disaggregated based on categories of LGBTQIA+/disabilities, since they are not reported.

**The presence of women** in the entire film ecosystem plays an important role in including diverse perspectives in popular culture.

**Elected representatives and government appointees.** Of the women professionals present at various levels in the Hindi film industry ecosystem, only 14% of elected representatives such as the Ministers of Information and Broadcasting are women, still a far cry from Europe's 34% female ministers of culture. Government appointees such as Chairpersons of the Central Board of Film Certification in India are 14% female.

**Fewer entrants into the industry.** Women form only 18% of the entrants into the system such as those graduating from the government-administered film programmes at the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune (FTII) and Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata (SRFTI).

## Award winners

**Mostly gender-specific awards for women:** While award winners appear to be breaching the 25% barrier at the first glance, most awards feature gender-specific categories, and when we correct for them, we find that women awardees are as few as 9% in some cases.

**Screen Awards:** 31% of Screen award winners were female in the 11 years from 2010 to 2020. 5 gender specific awards for acting (such as Best Actor in a Leading Role, Critics Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Actor in a Supporting Role, Best Debut and Best Playback Singer) are given separately for males and females, if we correct for such awards, then we find that only 22% of the remaining Crew Screen Award winners are female.

**Filmfare Awards:** 28% of Filmfare award winners were female in the 11 years from 2010 to 2020. 6 gender specific awards for acting (Best Actor in a Leading Role, Critics Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Actor in a Supporting Role, Best Debut, Best Actor in a Short Film and Best Playback Singer) are given separately for males and females, if we correct for such awards, then we find that only 19% of the remaining Crew Filmfare Award winners are female.

**National Awards:** 13% of National award winners were female in the 11 years from 2009 to 2019. 3 gender-specific awards for acting (such as Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress and Best Female Singer) are given for both males and females, if we correct for such awards, then we find that only 9% of the remaining Crew National Award winners are female. Only 12% of the Dadasaheb Phalke Awardees in the 50 years from 1969-2018 were female.

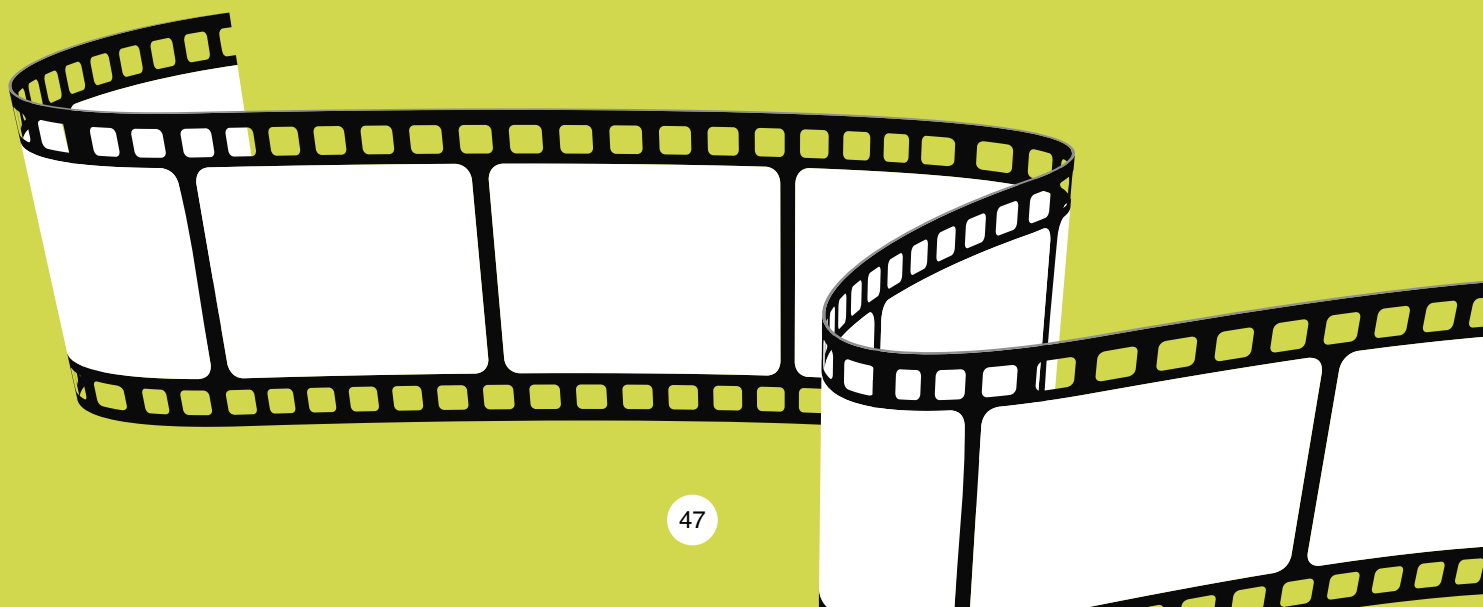
<sup>6</sup> Joseph, A. (2017). Gender equality: missing in action. In 2018 Global Report—Reshaping Cultural Policies | Diversity Of Cultural Expressions (pp. 189–208). UNESCO.

Table 20

**WOMEN IN THE FILM ECOSYSTEM**

NO	WOMEN IN THE FILM ECOSYSTEM	YEARS	NO OF YEARS	TOTAL	WOMEN	% WOMEN
<b>A. ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES</b>						
1	Ministers of Information and Broadcasting	1947-2022	75	29	4	14%
<b>B. GOVERNMENT APPOINTEES</b>						
Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC )						
2	Chairpersons	1951-2022	72	28	4	14%
2a	Board members	2010-2022	13	76	22	29%
<b>C. AWARD WINNERS</b>						
3	Women winning the Filmfare Awards	2010-2020	11	421	119	28%
3a	Women winning the Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award	1991-2017	41	41	17	41%
4	Women winning the Screen Awards	2010-2020	11	338	106	31%
5	Women winning the National Film Awards	2009-2019	11	849	110	13%
5a	Women winning the Dadasaheb Phalke Award	1969-2018	50	50	6	12%
<b>D. ENTRANTS</b>						
6	Women graduating from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune	2010-2021	11	244	43	18%
7	Women graduating from the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata (SRFTI )	2010-2021	11	425	77	18%

Sources: Annual Reports of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, Annual Reports of the Central Board of Film Certification - <https://www.cbfcindia.gov.in/main/list-of-chairpersons.html>, Filmfare Awards <https://www.filmfare.com/awards/filmfare-awards/winners> from 1953 onwards, <https://www.filmfare.com/features/from-1990-to-2017-heres-every-luminary-who-has-won-the-filmfare-lifetime-achievement-award-26080-29.html> Screen Awards <https://www.imdb.com/event/ev0002905/>, National Film Awards <https://dff.gov.in/Archive.aspx?ID=6>, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/movie-awards/national-awards-winners/2009/108>, [https://dff.gov.in/images/Documents/67th\\_Nfa.pdf](https://dff.gov.in/images/Documents/67th_Nfa.pdf) and official figures from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune (FTII) and the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata (SRFTI )



## Conclusions from the three quantitative studies

Through this quantitative research, we attempted to understand the visibility and representation of gender issues on screen, off screen in Hindi films and the broader film related ecosystem that can assist and strengthen gender equality. Three quantitative research studies covered: 1) gender representation on screen (2) women's participation in filmmaking processes by enumerating the end credits and further (3) women's representation in significant bodies/associations of films through primary and secondary data sources. An in-depth, shot-by-shot analysis has covered 25 high revenue-grossing Hindi films of the year 2019, as well as 10 films made by women/gender-fluid individuals and/or with a focus on women (between 2012-19). The year 2019 marked the last year of theatrical releases before the Covid-related global shutdown, when we wrote this research proposal in 2020 in response to a proposal competition by the US Consulate, Mumbai. Several public policy and legal changes took place post-Nirbhaya, #MeToo and the Supreme Court verdict on Section 377 that took place in the last decade within a broader context of civil society movements spurred debates and discourses. We were keen to see if film narratives are cognizant of these changes and also play a transformative role in 'pushing the envelope'.

The study examined gender representation on screen using 15 parameters arrived at through a rigorous review of the literature. The themes covered were the number of speaking or named characters (SNCs) by gender (male, female and LGBTQIA+); type of roles they play (lead, romantic co-lead, romantic interest, other); demographics were measured with the attributes age, caste, religion and disabilities; employment status and occupations; appearance; sexualisation; sexual objectification; domesticity; consent and intimacy; experience of violence and sexual harassment and its depiction.

The study outcomes are both, surprising and not so surprising, as seen through some of the pointers presented below:

- 72% of characters in films are played by cis-males, 26% by cis-females and 2% by queer characters.
- Majority of leads and co-leads in box office topper films are men.
- Women play the lead and co-lead characters in women-centric movies but women generally play the role of romantic co-lead or romantic interests in the box office topper films.
- Majority of characters in films are in the age group of 21-45 years and belong to Hindu dominant castes.
- People with disabilities are rarely seen in films. Only 0.5% of characters are shown with disabilities. People with disabilities are not shown to perform any characters of

significance as teachers, bankers, software engineers, doctors, artists, etc.


- Women in employment and in public domain work are shown in films, however, the work roles they play are gendered, with a greater presence of women in health care, education, entertainment and journalism.
- The most prevalent skin tone for women characters is fair skin and body type is thin for lead characters and medium for all other supporting characters.
- Expression of romance and intimacy is restricted in the box office and women-centric movies, but most often it is male characters who initiate intimacy.
- The idea of consent is still fraught with ambiguity, specifically because there is a greater emphasis on women remaining demure and expressing consent through non-verbal and symbolic gestures.
- 100% of women-centric movies passed the Bechdel test as opposed to Only 36% of box office topper films.
- Women-centric movies have greater diversity and explore inbound subjects dealing with relationships, sexuality, motherhood and other sensitivities.
- Box office hits have outbound subjects like war, politics, corruption, and organized crime.
- The participation of women behind the screen tells us that men get more opportunities to contribute to filmmaking, as behind-the-screen numbers and distribution across departments have more males. Women are still underrepresented in the core filmmaking professions.
- The presence of women in the crew is higher in films directed by women and/or women-centric movies.
- Women's presence in film associations and unions is gendered. Their absence in film crews reflects in their absence in Unions. There are seven Unions with no women's membership.
- There were only 4 (14%) women Ministers of Information and Broadcasting since independence
- 13% of National award winners were female in the 11 years from 2009 to 2019.
- Film institutes that educate young people to be employed in the industry admit and graduate only a few women professionals each year.

These findings reveal how our deep-seated biases in society are reflected in the representations in cinema. The understanding of filmmakers of what they think can help the film to succeed also leads to reinforcing stereotypes.

Departures from the formula are seen as risky. However, filmmakers have to take note of significant all-around changes that happened during the pandemic, where watching content has shifted from theatres to digital platforms and handheld devices, assisted by technology disruptions. These have broadened audiences' interest in content, breaking down barriers of language, geography and culture.

The chapter titled 'Crafting Change: Small steps for the industry, a leap for inclusive representation' (p.-4) of

this report has provided ways forward for filmmakers to reimagine on-screen representations; to Government to introduce a variety of initiatives and incentives for closing the gender gap in the availability of women and genderqueer individuals to join the crews and contribute to film making; and production houses and associations to put in place Government mandated committees to deal with sexual harassment, augment gender-sensitive infrastructure and put in place several policies to influence industrial practices to bring about shifts internally, as well.



**The film industry has to embrace the changed environment by telling new stories and embracing the ideas of gender equality, diversity and inclusion, on-screen and behind the screen not merely as a mandatory requirement but as the 'new normal'.**





## Qualitative Studies

### Calling the Shots: Women Directing Hindi Cinema

Dr Shilpa Phadke & Ms. Nithila Kanagasabai

**Assisted by:** Ms. Srishti Walia

**Podcast:** Ms. Nabeela Rizvi

### Scripting Change: Women Screenwriters in Hindi Cinema

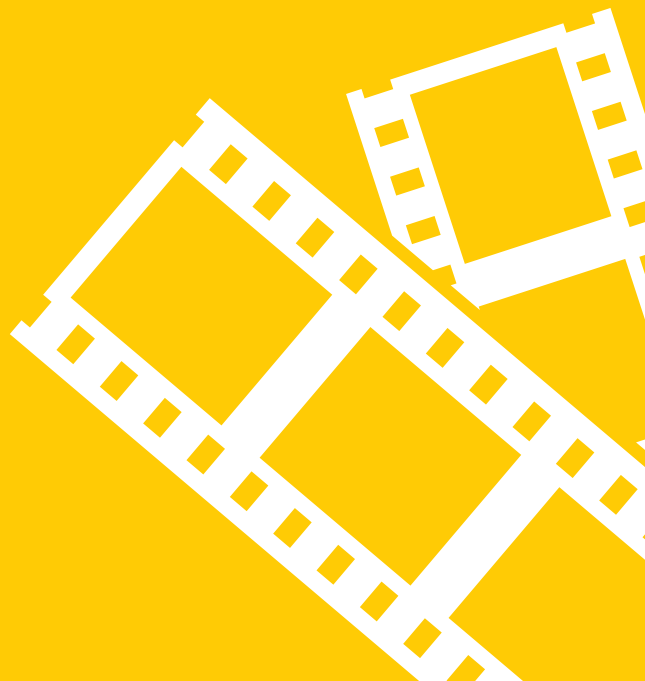
Dr Harmanpreet Kaur

**Assisted by:** Subhajit Sikder

### Talking Back: Creative and Critical Responses of Young Online Media Critics

Dr Faiz Ullah

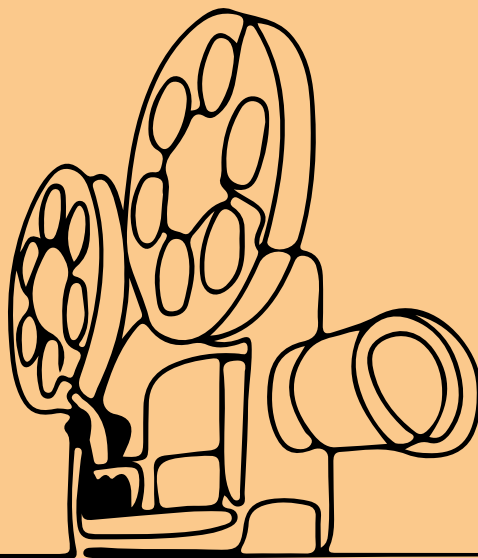
**Assisted by:** Ms Nabeela Rizvi & Ms Asmita Srivastava

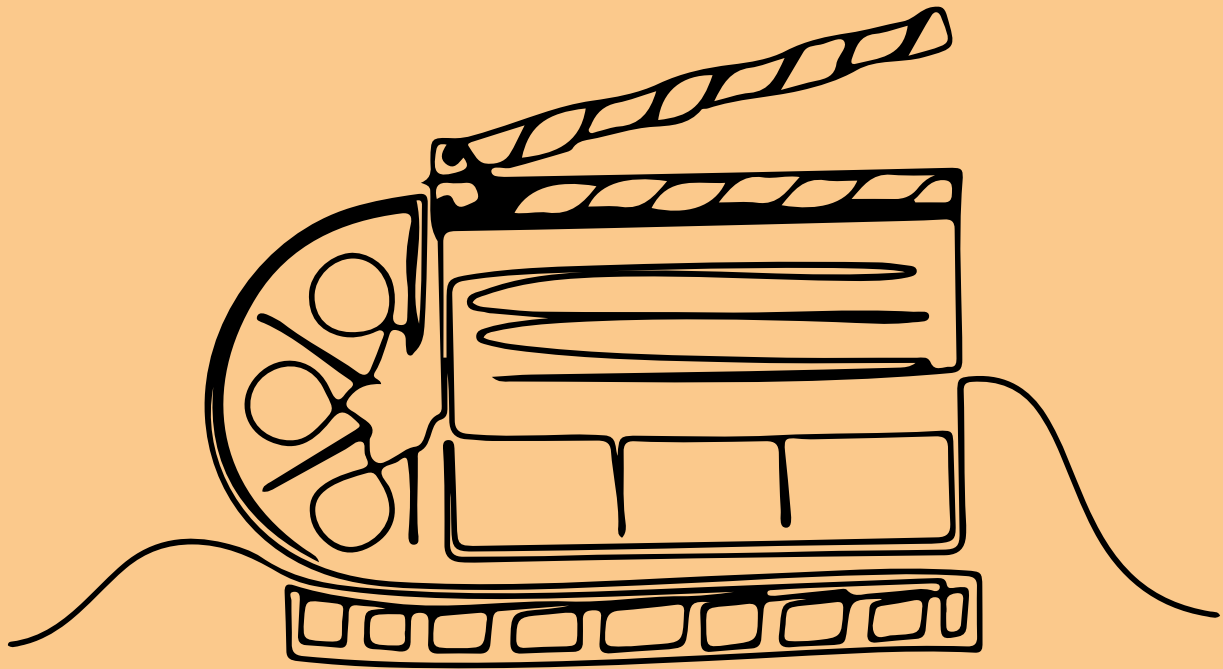




# Calling the Shots: Women Directing Hindi Cinema

Dr Shilpa Phadke & Ms. Nithila Kanagasabai





## Introduction

The making of a film is an intrinsically collective process that involves many people's time, money, and creativity. Directors are amongst those at the top of the hierarchy within the film industry and have significant influence over not just the narratives and scripts, but the working environment on film sets as well. However, as is true of many other professions, directors too disproportionately tend to be men as well as belong to other privileged categories: upper caste, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied. In the last two decades, we have witnessed an increase in the number of women directors in the Hindi film industry, even as they continue to be a very small proportion of all directors.

In this study, we engage with women filmmakers in order to understand not just their individual journeys within this field but also to create a collective picture of the journey thus far and to imagine the path to creating a more inclusive Hindi film industry. We delve into their ideas of gender as represented on screen and if and how gender identity impacts their professional lives. This report attempts to offer insights that could encourage and aid more women and those belonging to marginalized identity locations to enter the world of Hindi cinema.

## Methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with eighteen women directors of different generations to engage with their stories of entering the industry, their experiences of being part of the industry in the role of directors as well the ways in which they see gender questions and seek to address them in their films. We sought to understand what it means to be a woman director in the Hindi film industry and whether this identity had any impact on the form and structure of their filmmaking both in terms of the cinematic image as well as the way they run their sets. We engaged with questions of sexual harassment, gender stereotyping, gender equity, and inclusion - both on their sets as well as on the screen.

Many of the directors we spoke to have had long careers in the Hindi film industry. They have achieved box-office success as well as critical acclaim and have received national and international awards in recognition of their work. We have also spoken to some early career filmmakers - those who have made short films and are in the process of realizing their dreams of making their first full-length feature. Some directors we interviewed include:

1. Alankrita Srivastava [Turning 30 (2011), Lipstick Under my Burkha (2016), Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare (2019)]
2. Anu Menon [Waiting (2016), Four More Shots Please - Season 1 (2019), Shakuntala Devi (2020)]
3. Anusha Bose [Shame (2019)]
4. Arati Kadav [Cargo (2019), The Time Machine (2016), 55 kms/sec (2020)]
5. Aruna Raje [Shaque (1976), Gehrayee (1980), Sitam (1982), Firebrand (2019)]
6. Gauri Shinde [English Vinglish (2012), Dear Zindagi (2016)]
7. Jyoti Kapur Das [Chutney (2016)]
8. Leena Yadav [Shabd (2005), Teen Patti (2010), Parched (2015), Rajma Chawal (2018)]
9. Mansi Jain [Lunch Lady (2015), Chhuri (2017), Everything is Fine (2018)]
10. Nandita Das [Firaq(2008), Manto (2018), Zwigato (2022)]
11. Nupur Asthana [Hip Hip Hurray (1998-2000), Mahi Way (2010), Mujhse Fraaandship Karoge (2011), Bewakoofiyaan (2014), Four More Shots Please - Season 2 (2020)]
12. Reema Kagti [Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd. (2007), Talaash: The Answer Lies Within (2012), Gold (2018)]
13. Reema Sengupta [The Tigers, They're All Dead (2012), TYU's Company (2012), Counterfeit Kunku (2018)]
14. Rohena Gera [What's Love Got to do With it? (2013) Is Love Enough? Sir (2018)]
15. Shazia Iqbal [Bebaak (2019)]
16. Shikha Makan [Bachelor Girls (2016), Gond Ke Laddoo (2022)].
17. Tanuja Chandra [Dushman (1998), Sangharsh (1999), Yeh Zindagi Ka Safar (2001), Sur – The Melody of Life (2002), Hope and a Little Sugar (2006), Qarib Qarib Singlle (2017)]
18. Vijayeta Kumar [Blouse (2014), One Day Mataram (2015), Zindagi in Short (2020), Kicking Balls (Documentary 2022)]

The most senior director in this cohort is in her late 70s, and the youngest directors are in their early 30s. Many of these film directors have also worked or continue to work in the film industry in other capacities including, but not limited to assistant directors, producers, set designers, screenplay writers, and actors. As directors too, many of them work across television, web, and cinema and make films in various formats - full length features, short fiction, and documentaries.

All interviews were done online, on Google Meet, between January 2022 and April 2023. We chose to do this not simply because of the pandemic, but also because our interviewees found it easier to meet us online. These interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. While we quote extensively from our interviews in the report that follows, we do not attribute them to specific directors in order to protect their privacy. We have consciously chosen to centre the words and narratives of

the participants of our study and only provide some context and organization, because we believe that given their experience and their expertise, they are best placed to flag what can be changed to make the industry more gender-inclusive.

## Key Findings & Discussion

The report does not intend to offer a prescriptive formula for 'correction' but hopes instead to nudge key stakeholders in the film industry to consider some of the following proposals in order to eliminate implicit biases and allow for a more progressive and inclusive professional environment. In this section, we focus on some of the key ideas proposed by the women filmmakers in order to further make the film industry in general, and the film set in particular, more welcoming to women and those belonging to marginalized gender identities.

# Infrastructure

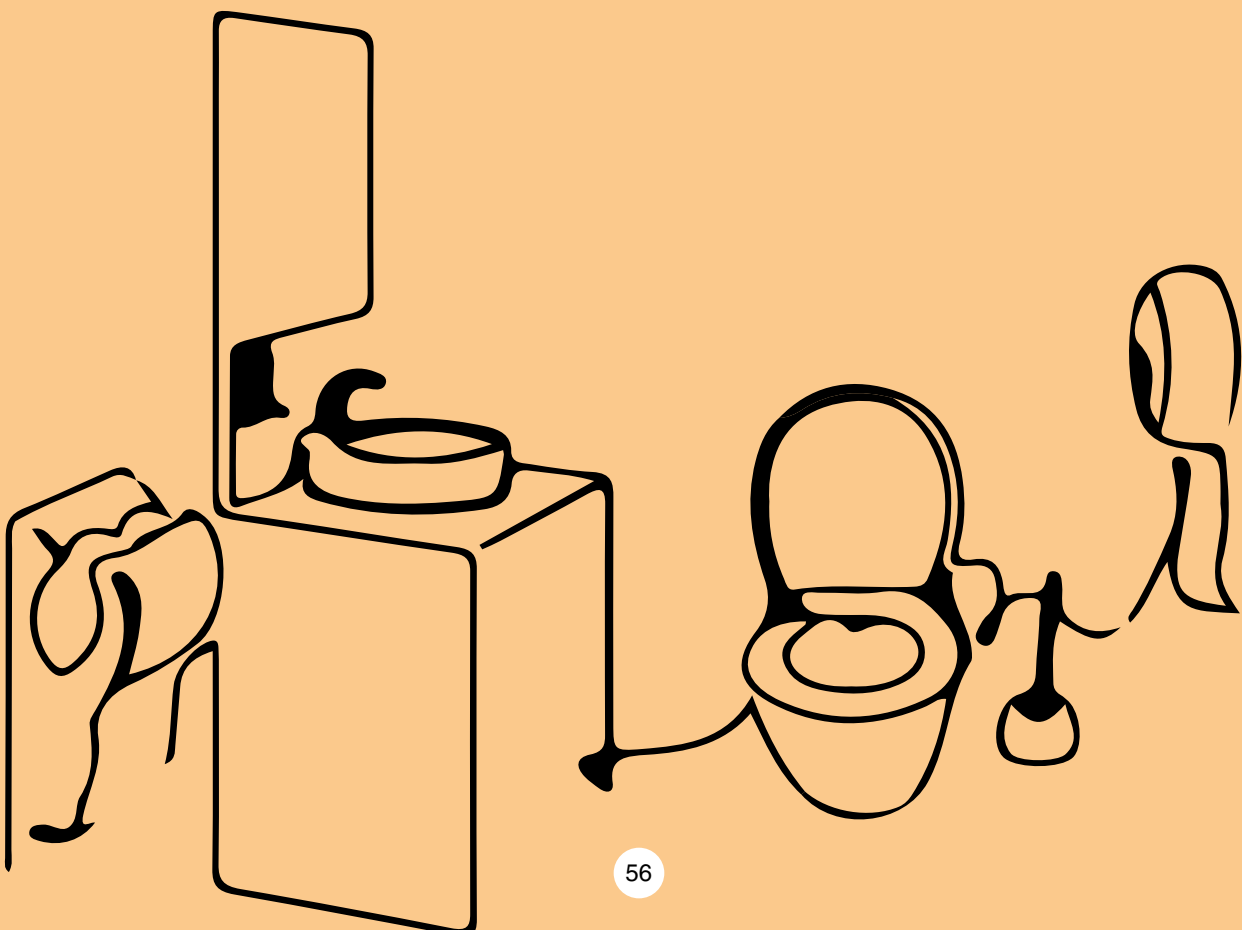
While the number of women on film sets has increased in the past two decades, the infrastructural change this should ideally entail has not kept pace. Women's participation in the labour force is fundamentally connected to the availability of basic sanitation infrastructures like toilets, and the absence of these impacts not just women's experiences in the workplace but their very presence there. On average, women use toilets more often than men, have specific needs due to menstruation, and also tend to take more time. In the absence of toilets, women are often forced to look for isolated spaces - risking their safety and health. The directors we interviewed pointed out that though things have changed drastically for female leads, for women members of the film crew similar changes have not taken place. To make workspaces more inclusive for women, and to encourage and increase female labour force participation in films, it is imperative that clean, accessible toilets are set up.

***Ladies' toilets on shoots! Clean. Accessible and enough in number. I really feel that is something I do ensure on my shoots. Because it didn't exist. Stars will have their vanity vans, and so does the director. So, you get portable toilets for extras and junior artists and the female crew that's working on the set.***

Similarly, the lack of childcare services is associated with lower rates of female labor force participation. Having children between 0-5 years old significantly lowers women's opportunities to join the film industry and retain their jobs. Given that women continue to be predominantly responsible for unpaid care work, instituting daycare facilities on sets can enable a more equitable environment in the workplace.

***Gosh! My first thought is day care. Because many of us are already in our mid to late thirties by the time we end up being directors. And if we decide to have children, we don't know what to do with the child (when we are at work...) That was a personal challenge.***

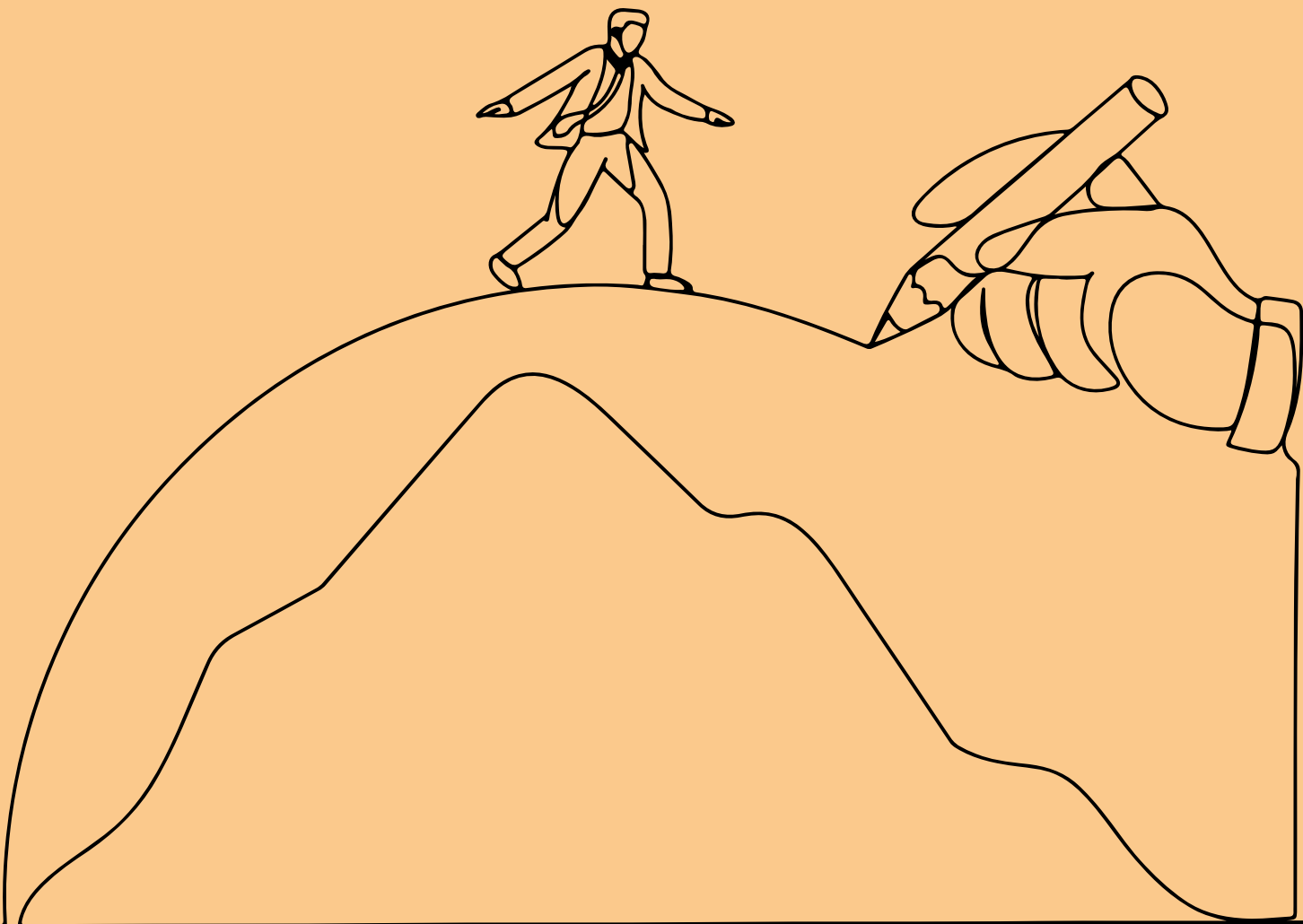
Other infrastructural suggestions that were made include transportation for women for very early morning and very late night shoots, presence of Presence of Internal Complaints Committee as per the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, for all associated with the film across pre-production, production, and post-production. Some of the directors spoke specifically of organising workshops with the crew to create awareness about sexual harassment.



# Mentoring

Speaking about their early days in the industry, each of the directors we spoke to recalled a mentor or a few mentors to whom they owed a debt of gratitude. Women, or men, who would take an active interest in their career, serve as a sounding board, share their experiences and wisdom, challenge their assumptions, help them learn new skills, and in some cases also endorse their word so they could get funding. Some of the more established directors said they were actively trying to pay it forward and wanted to encourage everyone in the industry to do the same. Mentorship may be a one-time meeting with an early career professional or a more sustained interaction. It could start with heads of different departments hiring more women assistants as part of their teams, enhancing their skills, helping them enroll in professional communities and groups such as unions, and taking a sustained interest in their careers. Men often have access to a 'boys club' or network that women don't have and this is something that needs redress. Mentorship matters. Mentoring more women can eventually raise not just the numbers of women directors, heads of departments, and other crew but also ultimately transform the kinds of films being made and the stories being told.

*I think mentoring is a very important part because it is a big wide field with no real guidance; not everybody goes to a film school and even if you do nobody really prepares you for the harsh reality. A lot of well-known male directors laugh at me because I pay interns. They say, 'Oh, the interns should be grateful!' Starting from financial things to just mentoring in terms of what kind of stories you want to tell and how - that it's okay to ask questions and to think differently. That's why I also seek women as assistants because you want to have those voices. You know, ten years later, they will become filmmakers, and will have a strong voice.*



# Sponsoring

While sponsoring and mentoring share similarities, sponsoring involves directly advocating for professionals as well as believing their skills enough to invest in them. Helping women directors find financing for some of their first few independent films can have a massive impact on their career trajectories. It also means funding women-led/women-centric movies on par with male-centric films. The directors who spoke to us told us how hard it was to get funding, especially if it was a film that centred a female character. They spoke about having to alter storylines, reduce the age of the female lead, get male stars, and make their parts stronger compared to the female lead - all in order to secure funding for their projects.

Money is central to the act of filmmaking. It is important for the film industry to actively seek to fund filmmakers from marginal locations. Funding filmmakers who are not uniformly upper-caste Hindu cis-gendered men will allow for complex and diverse voices to emerge.

***Z was a producer. She didn't tell me how to direct. She didn't tell me how to write. She didn't help me with any of that; how she helped me was by having my back. By producing my show, and just believing I could do it.***

***A female action film costs the same amount as a male action film to do the stunts. If a woman has to jump off a helicopter, it's not going to be cheaper than a man jumping off the helicopter. So, if I have to make an impact of that scale, and decide to do a female action film, I'll get a fraction of (the budget of) a male action film. The films should get the money and not the gender. I feel like, if you really want to see change, you have to put the money where your mouth is.***





# Hiring Practices

Our quantitative study of thirty-five films during the years 2012-19, we found that women-centric movies had more female crew at 15% compared to 13% in the box-office toppers. Significantly, women-centric movies had double the number of female heads of department at 6% compared to the 3% in the box-office toppers. The least representation of women was in the core film making departments such as cinematography, sound, editing, script and lyrics, and was collectively less than 5% (Women oriented: 4.1% and Box office toppers 2.34%). Lighting and spot teams did not feature women at all.

Most of the directors we spoke to agreed that one of the simplest ways to get more women to be a part of the team and to simultaneously create a gender-equitable environment was to hire women HoDs. The lens with which a film is made reflects the subjective location of those involved in the process of production, especially those in decision-making positions - not just directors but heads of departments such as photography, editing, sound, art, stunts, and costume. The numbers of women in the art department and costume design have increased but a similar change has not yet been seen in the other departments. More women leading these departments will also reflect in the aesthetics and, in turn, the politics of films. One director suggested that only a law mandating a specific percentage of women in these positions will be able to effect any real change.

*The thing is, this kind of change (more women on sets) only happens when rules and regulations are made. Whether it's the producers' unions or it's the government. I think Germany has one of the highest percentages of women in the workforce, but even there, it is only 40%, and that has come on the back of ten or fifteen years of legislation. So I think; honestly, that's the only thing that will make a change.*

*Reservation in politics has changed things. In the beginning, it was difficult - seats were not being filled, but it has become easier with time. Just by sheer numbers because there are more men, so it's always easier to fill in all the posts with men. There are women in some departments like costume and art design, or maybe assistants, but what about other departments? I think it's really, really important that we make it almost mandatory that a certain percentage should be filled by women, and it's possible.*

*I think more women distributors, more women in positions of power, really choosing what gets made.*



# Telling Women's Stories

For the directors we spoke to, centring women and their narratives in films was one of the best ways of ensuring a more gender-equitable industry and society. This involved not just female-forward storytelling but also the freedom to create and narrate complex and layered female characters within all kinds of films. They also spoke about focusing on female authorship and agency and the idea of a female gaze. There has recently been a growing conversation on women writing men characters and how this impacts the kind of men we see on screen. This matters because we need varied visions and expressions that will allow different kinds of cinema to be made and stories to be told.

*For me, the female gaze is about how the women characters are looked at. I try to write them as well-rounded characters and am not trying to hide their fissures, not running away from exploring their darker side or the more complicated aspects of their lives - whether it is to do with their physical being or their intimate choices or their moral compass... It is also about how much agency that character has, and how much the character drives the narrative.*

*In my 20 years in the industry, I do find that I now have to face less opposition if I want to make a film with a female protagonist. I don't necessarily need to make sure that there's an A-list hero, which I had to do in my first film in order for it to get funding. If you take such an actor, then you have to give him a story, which actually ends up harming your own film.*



# Collectivizing

With the MeToo Movement sweeping across India in 2018, many industries, including the film industry, felt the lack of avenues or representative bodies to protest against sexual harassment and discrimination or even to articulate the presence of misogyny on sets. This resulted in the focus on coming together to talk about existing and persistent problems, encourage discussion, and strive to find solutions. In the Malayalam film industry, women creatives, including top actors, directors, screenplay writers, and technicians formed a representation and lobby group called Women in Cinema Collective (WCC). While the Hindi film industry does not yet have a formal collective dedicated to women and minority genders, the directors recognised the potential of even informal Whatsapp groups and also their aspirations of having a more organised group that would lend them bargaining power. The directors we spoke to flagged not just the ways in which women need such collectives but also pointed to the other hierarchies between different professionals that exist. More than one director spoke of how they ensure that the crew across hierarchies are offered the same food rather than discriminating based on their position in the crew. The act of collectivising was then seen as a way to address all the deeply hierarchical relationships on a set.

*It's also about the deeply hierarchical structure that mainstream cinema had... where you are actually at the top end of it because you're the lead of the film. So you know, actors are treated well but very differently from the rest of the crew. The actors, the director, the DoP... It was very uncomfortable to have different food for different people working on set, and to have this van and to always have an umbrella over a few while a junior artist would really be out in the sun.*



# Claiming the F-Word

While all the directors acknowledged the need for more women to be writing and directing films, none of them enjoyed the prefix woman to the title director. This makes sense since nobody refers to men directors as such. While they acknowledged that it was important to have a voice as women who are directors, they felt keenly that they were marked by their gender in ways that men are not. The difference is not just symbolic but also structural. Being women directors has an impact on how much money they are able to get, especially for their first projects, and how much independence they get, and the kind of authority they are able to exercise on a set.

*I think many women directors feel they won't be taken seriously if either they keep working on material that is led by women or they keep claiming to be feminists. Most of them are actually pretty feminist when you talk to them. I think it's just that they don't want to say it because you feel like you want to be just thought of as a director and your gender shouldn't come into play.*

*I feel like directors, on some level, are androgynous. For me when I'm approaching a scene, the concern is really - what is the drama of that scene? And then depending on what that is, I will use the male and the female characters or any gender to bring out my point.*

However, many of the directors we spoke to also actively claimed the f-word: feminism. They spoke of how their feminism inflects the way they make films, both on the set and in terms of the ways in which characters are treated within their films as well.

*I think I've been a feminist way before I was a writer or a director. It's just who I am as a person and I'm proud to be a feminist because, if you're not a feminist, you're saying, you don't believe in the equality of men and women that they should have equal rights and opportunities. To be honest, I find it very odd that people are scared of saying they are feminists, and that just goes to show how deep patriarchy really is, you know? I'm like, of course, I'm feminist and I try to create work through a feminist lens and that's my constant endeavour.*



# Conclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are often treated as boxes to be ticked off. Ensuring equity in representation is so much more than mere lip service. In this report, we draw on the experiences and voices of different generations of directors who are a part of the film industry and speak as people who both understand it and are deeply invested in it. While they acknowledge the changes that have taken place, they also appreciate that there is still a long way to go. Based on their knowledge of filmmaking and production processes they suggest ways in which transformations can take place that will create more inclusive and welcoming environments for women as well as people from other marginalised locations. These suggestions if taken on board have the potential to not just create a gender-equitable workplace, but also revolutionize and make way for a more creative and dynamic industry. This will allow for a more complex, pluralistic, and heterogeneous aesthetic of storytelling to emerge.





# Scripting Change: Women Screenwriters in Hindi Cinema

Dr. Harmanpreet Kaur

# Introduction

Screenplay and dialogue writers have often been overlooked in India, not just in terms of visibility in a film's marketing and publicity or media interest but also by the industry where the labour of writing a script has often not been given its due. The screenplay writer<sup>7</sup> imagines the film, before anyone else in the film production. The writer begins with a blank page. Within the contemporary period, Hindi cinema has witnessed several women screenplay writers emerge to tell stories with a renewed focus on questions of gender roles in society. This study engaged with the screenwriters' craft and process of writing as well as their position within a largely male-dominated industry and the pressures they face therein. It engaged with the writers as authors of their script, and their collaborations with male and female directors and producers to make their stories come to life on screen. Screenwriting has been studied in India by a few scholars<sup>8</sup>, most notably in the recent book by Anubha Yadav (2021) which carries interviews conducted by the author with various women screenwriters on their process, struggles and experiences in the industry. The research engages with this existing work that has emerged very recently and attempts to build on it by talking to a diverse set of contemporary women filmmakers who have contributed to Hindi cinema with narratives that have in various ways broken the mould of conventions in Hindi cinema by highlighting gender and other social issues in their work.

## Study Participants

The research was undertaken with a qualitative methodology of carrying out online interviews between January 2022 – July 2022 with select screenwriters, to understand their work and experiences of working in the industry. These included four screenwriters, three screenwriter-directors, one film programmer and screenwriting mentor. One screenwriter among these identifies as a transwoman. The study included the following writers with some of their prominent work where they have contributed as a screenwriter, co-screenwriter, dialogue writer and screenwriter-director:

- Atika Chohan [Margherita with a Straw (2014), Chappak (2020), Agra (2023)]
- Gauri Shinde [English Vinglish (2012), Dear Zindagi (2016)]
- Gazal Dhaliwal [Lipstick Under My Burkha(2016), Ek Ladki ko Dekha to AisaLaga (2019), Mismatched (2020-22)]
- Nidhi Mehra [Veere Di Wedding (2018)]

- Nupur Asthana [Hip Hip Hurray (1998), Chance Pe Dance (2010), Unpaused: Naya Safar (2022)]
- Rohena Gera [(Kuch Na Kaho (2003), Sir (2018)]
- UrmiJuvekar [(Darmiyaan (1997), Oye Lucky LuckyOye (2008), Shanghai (2012) and Screenwriting Mentor]
- Meenakshi Shedde (Film Programmer, Screenwriting Mentor)

The screenwriters were selected based on their availability in the limited time period of the research. It was necessary to speak to a broad section of the writer's community working in Hindi cinema with varying levels of experience. It was further necessary methodologically to include both writers, writer-directors and mentors to provide enough perspectives on the screenwriting profession and gendered experiences therein. The participants engaged with questions on why they wanted to be screenwriters, inspiration for their stories, ease or lack of access when it came to meeting prospective producers or directors, creating characters across gender, creative labor, authorship, questions of gaze and their recommendations for a more gender equitable industry. The participants thus include senior writers to those who may have been working in the industry for many decades but were only able to write/direct a film with more personal control on the final product much later in their career. Others include younger writers who either through successful collaborations have managed to write and direct popular films or others who have had a fair amount of struggle working across different mediums in the entertainment industry in Mumbai. The participants also represent the changes reflected not only in representation and narratives on screen in terms of gender and society but also larger media industry changes in the film industry over the past few decades (late 90s to present) with some participants witness to them across television, film and streaming platforms. The findings in the subsequent section stem from these conversations and the quotes have been kept anonymous in the interests of privacy.

## Findings

### Writing for Cinema

The study was interested in exploring the ways in which female screenwriters entered the industry or began their writing projects. Writing for cinema happened for most of screenwriters, after switching over from another allied media profession like advertising, television, journalism, theatre and even direction. This was also possible because of personal interest in the craft of screenwriting and wanting to do something beyond their existing creative outputs in their respective fields like advertising or television or due to screenwriting opportunities available to them. One writer says:

<sup>7</sup>Also referred to as Screenwriter or Scriptwriter

<sup>8</sup>This includes Rakesh Sengupta (2018) who has researched screenwriting practices during the first Indian Talkies or scholars like Madhuja Mukherjee (2022), Debashree Mukherjee (2020) and Rashmi Devi Sawhney (2020) who address women's labour in 'film work' in the cinemas of colonial to the immediate post-colonial period of Indian cinema history. This includes writing to producing, composition and singing to costume design and make-up. Ishita Tiwary has further written about screenwriting practices on OTT platforms (2023). Ormax-Tulsea have also published an industry report on screenwriters in the Indian theatrical and streaming industries (2023).



***“I don't know where the idea came from. I think it was probably wanting to control the narrative a little more than just 30 seconds. Like getting something out there that's mine, you know, and just doing something different, like evolving in that sense.”***

Another writer began her career after graduating from a media school and assisted a director before writing and directing a hit television show in the late 90s. However, she struggled for ten years after that for her first feature film. She says:

***“Unlike today, where you have one hit big show, that opens a lot of doors to you. It wasn't like that back then. There were very clear demarcations between a television director and film director, a woman director, a male director.”***

Thus, every screenwriter's journey has been unique and it can be observed that out of the seven screenwriters interviewed, only one had completed the Screenplay Writing course offered by FTII, Pune while others have done either a media course or switched to screenwriting from other media professions.

## Collaborations and Mentoring

While for some screenwriters it was important to have control over their own scripts and hence, they preferred to direct it themselves, for others the craft of screenwriting itself carried creative satisfaction. However, it must be mentioned that 'luck' was considered an important factor when it came to finding the right collaborators in terms of funding and production. Writers consider collaborations extremely important for screenwriting. One writer says, “I have been very lucky in that way if you look at it that I always worked with people who had a certain respect for my work.” Thus, professional success as a screenplay writer can be attributed to these collaborations which ensure that steady projects are available year after year in an otherwise unorganised industry prone to precarious working conditions.

Since film projects are received or pitched on a freelance/contractual basis with several issues surrounding contracts and remuneration (as highlighted by the Screenwriters Association or SWA), these collaborations become central to professional success. However, several initiatives like NFDC's Screenwriting Lab (since 2007) and Mahindra-Sundance Script Lab (since 2012) have provided more avenues for screenwriters to pitch projects and get mentored on an international stage. The importance of mentoring for screenwriting is vastly different from film direction due to the nature of the craft itself which is largely solitary. One Screenwriting mentor interviewed for the study says, “I think, you don't really need mentoring, you just simply need some schools which will teach you how to write.” She explains how a screenplay is a technical document but many people

along with teachers at film schools sometimes do not know what are the components of screenwriting. Despite this, it is difficult to get film projects without essential networking and collaborations, especially in terms of pitching.

## Pitching Scripts

One of the major hurdles that women screenwriters face in the industry is of pitching their film scripts to producers. One of the biggest hurdles for a writer interviewed for this study was being a first-timer in terms of writing-directing a feature film with the main protagonist, a middle-aged woman. She says,

***“I don't think anyone's going to like jump at a subject like this or wasn't going to, at least at that point. And there's no dance, and there's no action, and there's no sex, and violence or none of the things that could make, you know, give a chance to a first timer. It was also suggested that why don't I take a big male star as a co-star so that it could get funded, and it could see the light of day.”***

There are also experiences where pitching, brainstorming or working on scripts with male directors or co-writers has led to questionable behaviour around intimacy and professionalism. For example, one writer says, “There were experiences like that early on around ten years ago and I know for a fact that these things don't happen anymore simply because, you know, just awareness is so much. Now there is social media.”

Thus, it becomes imperative to put harassment policies in place with regard to screenwriters, where harassment could also include sexist humour.

## Issues of Genre

Another issue faced by some writers is what genre they get considered for seriously due to their gender in terms of both pitching and commissioned projects. A writer narrates an incident where in 2015, she wrote a film script about female friendship and she says, “I was told by a leading producer that you can't write about female friends.” With the increasing corporatisation of the film industry, producers largely tend to be male or are 'men in suits' who will demand multiple iterations of scripts leading to them losing their essence or making demands on male stars to lead or co-lead. This is justified for funding purposes. She further informs about how certain genres are excluded for female writers:

***“I remember a few years ago, I wrote a story about War. World War and the Indian participation in it. I mean there was no way I could get money to make it because nobody will trust me with it. Despite having done so much work they will trust a new guy to make a war film.”***

Another writer talked about her own experience in which a producer was looking to make a sequel of a hit film, but

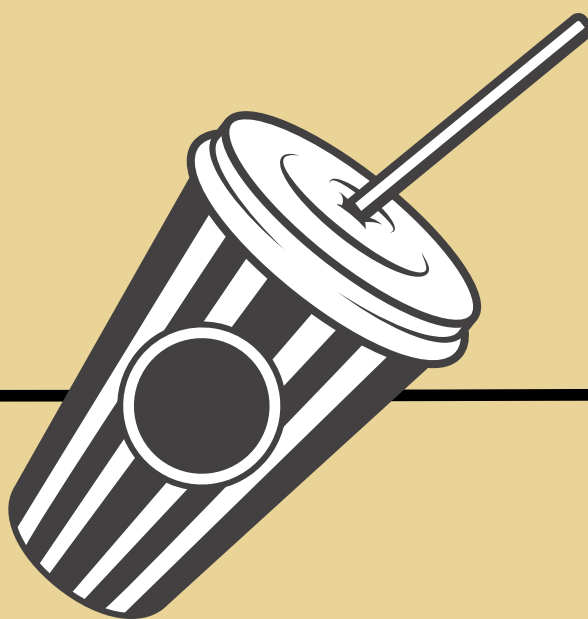
specifically wanted a male writer for it – the genre was a slice of comedy. She says, “I said, would you give me an opportunity for your next film? And he turned me down. He said, No, I can't because you know, a woman won't be able to write this. I need a guy a guy to write.” She assesses her experiences and concludes that: “Most of my work that has come out. I was actually hired by female directors.”

## Conclusion

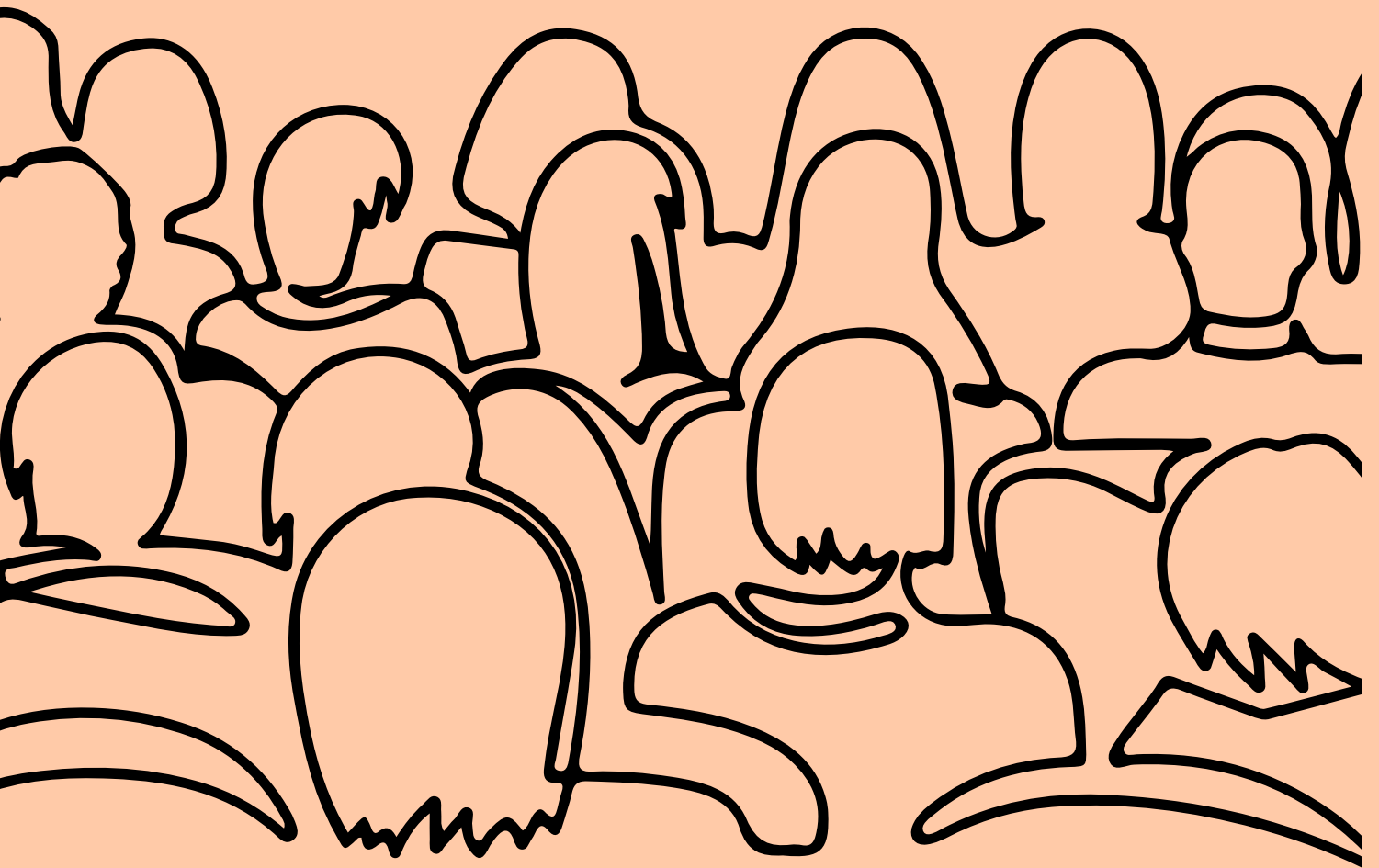
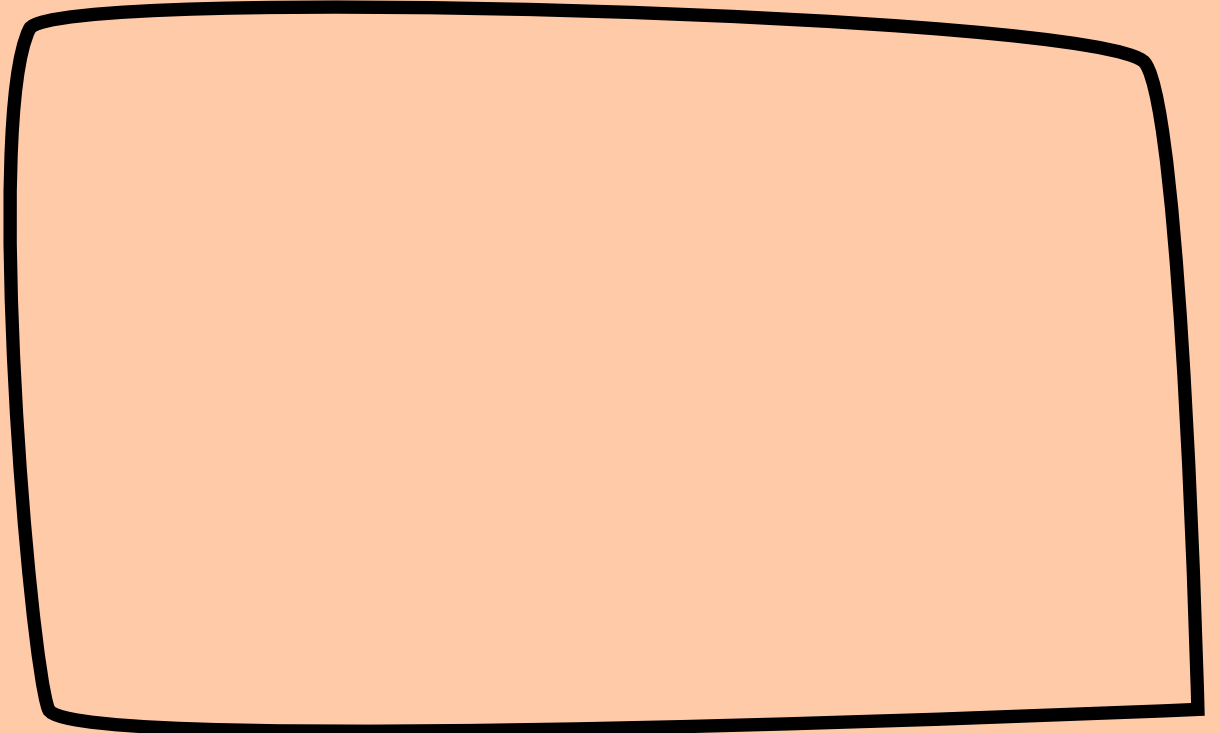
The aforementioned issues have been faced by the participants at varying stages of their careers in the film industry. However, they all contend that things have changed to some extent over the last decade with the arrival of streaming platforms and with women audiences being key target for streaming companies. This has led to diverse writers' rooms, for example, one of the participants spoke about how she was hired as a lead writer for a series. She says,

***“I wanted it to be balanced, right? This room. So, there were two, women and two men. At least I learned so much about, you know, straight men's lives and their challenges and I'm sure they learn a lot about us. When we write together, they get perspectives that they didn't have earlier. We with their help, create male characters which would appeal to men, as well as women. It's a very interesting dynamic to have both men and women in the writers' room. I love my writers' room.”***

While some participants also opined that the reason more women find jobs with streaming platforms is because the platforms need more content. One participant felt that women still do not prefer to enter the screenwriting profession over other roles in film production due to issues of remuneration and steady work. She says, “As a writer everyone is going to cut your money and not pay you and then complain that there is no writer in this country. That could be one of the reasons why girls are not coming into writing and going directly into the direction and then somehow or the other catching up with writing.” Based on these observations, the study makes the following recommendations.

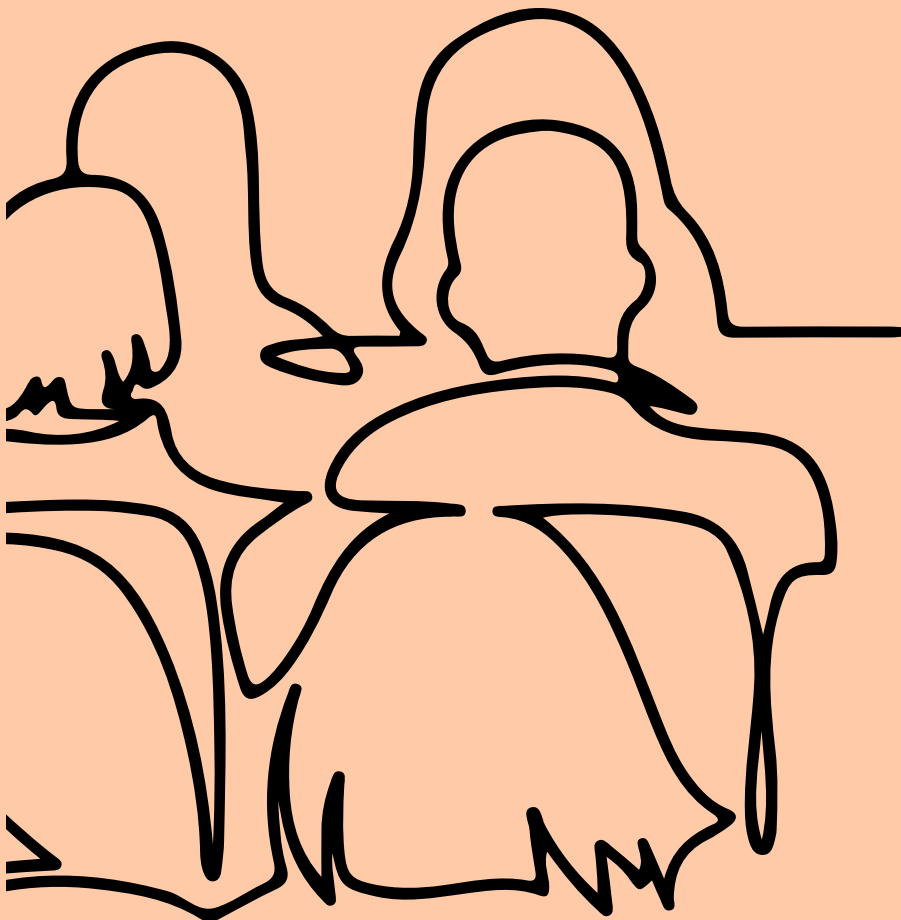






# Talking Back: Creative and Critical Responses of Young Online Media Critics

Dr Faiz Ullah

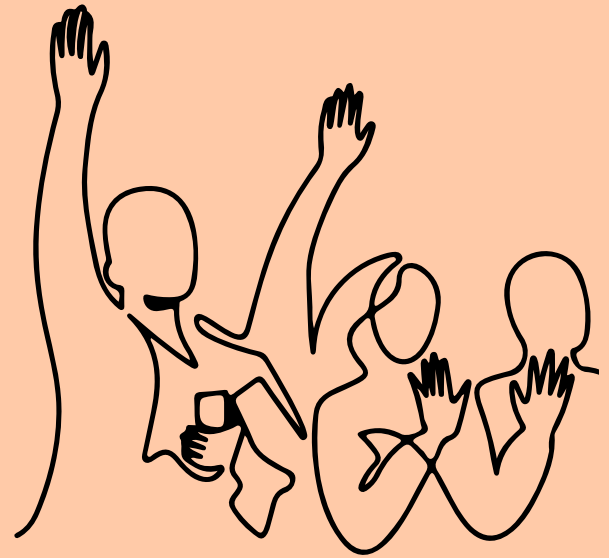


Films are made so that they can be seen. Enough people paying money to watch them, either in theatres or on streaming platforms, enables the highly commercial film industry to make more films<sup>9</sup>. Audiences, therefore, are a crucial part of the film industry and its reproduction. However, audiences are a comparatively less studied part of cinema in the Indian context. Research work on cinema tends to be predominantly focused on the screen, or the film text, and the political economy of filmmaking - institutions and policies, technology and distribution, directors and producers, actors, etc.

Of the limited work done on the audiences, most is either in the nature of market research or in relation to 'media harms' - the perceived behavioural change effects of the media. In both the cases, the imagination of the audiences is that of 'poor audiences.' Market research carried out on audiences has a singular objective - to get more money out of their pockets. Such research leaves the audiences literally poorer in the process<sup>10</sup>. 'Poor' in the second sense relates to how the audiences are perceived to be impressionable and vulnerable to the harmful behavioural 'effects' of the cinema - bechari audience. The underlying idea behind this perspective is that audiences tend to uncritically imitate what they watch. They are conceived as dupes who need to be protected from such effects through various kinds of censorship. They are also portrayed as crazed-out fans and more recently have begun to be pathologized as screen-addicts. Such research is not only reductionist and disempowering for the audiences but also for the film industry as it misses out how the audiences actually engage with cinema and contribute to its vibrancy.

## Why Study the Audiences?

For Cultural Studies, popular culture is an important area of academic research. It is where the 'common sense' of the time is made and unmade. Put differently, newspapers and magazines, television and cinema, and online media play a significant role in shaping popular understanding of various aspects of collective life. For instance, cinema is one of the main sources of cultural cues about romantic relationships – affection, courtship, consent, etc – and plays a significant role in influencing contemporary norms around them. It could be said that inequitable and damaging representations in this context – stalking, harassing, disregard for consent, etc - have been 'normalised' by the Hindi cinema, among other social institutions, by recurrent and pervasive messaging. While this 'common sense' is often passed off as mundane or natural, Cultural Studies encourages researchers to focus on the ways in which such representations are constructed and how audiences actually grapple with them. While the media industry may continue mainstreaming skewed and damaging gender representations, partly because of lack of diversity and partly because it helps maintain the structures of power, it is entirely possible for the audiences to not buy into



them. Compared to the passive nature usually attributed to the 'poor audiences,' Cultural Studies conceive of audiences as active. Audiences actively select the media they want to consume, actively interpret it variously within the context of their knowledge and experiences, and actively speak their mind about what they like or dislike. Criticism and pushback by the audiences significantly shape the media.

Getting affected or influenced by the media is not a matter of inevitability. Acknowledging this is not an attempt to valorize the audiences or to ignore the ideological functions of the media. In fact, the ideological functions of the media are strong. That is why concerns around ethics and representation in the media continue to be studied. However, supplementing such research with an audience-centric perspective is to draw attention to the fact that the so-called 'effects' or influence of the media can neither be read directly off the screen nor are they unmediated. They need to be studied in specific instances of how the audiences negotiate with the explicit and implicit meanings of the media. Instead of asking what the media do to the people, Cultural Studies encourage researchers to flip the question on its head and ask: What do people do to the media?

## How We Did It?

For studying how audiences talk back to the film industry, we interviewed a specific cross-section of audiences – young online media critics – who are responding to the issues of gender representation in Hindi films in different ways. As a large-scale study of any particular audience group was not feasible given the focus of the larger research project, a small sample of young online media critics was engaged with as exemplars of active audiences. The two key inclusion criteria were critical perspective and creative output.

The young online media critics' work spans writing, online content creation, and administering online forums and communities. While some of them have been associated

<sup>9</sup> According to the FICCI-EY 2022 report, titled "Windows of Opportunity: India's Media and Entertainment Sector - Maximising Across Segments", 1600 films were released in India in 2022, grossing over Rs 10,000 crore in revenues. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/37mr5fvs>

<sup>10</sup> Segmenting of audiences into various categories according to their viewing behaviour is one such research theme. The Ormax CineSense 2023 report divides the 2.1 crore theatre-going audiences into five categories based on a variety of parameters. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/487d2nmn>



with online media companies, others have been working independently as film critics and cultural catalysts. Our respondents were (in alphabetical order): Gauri Jalan, @meh.fil.mein (Instagram); Nivedita, @thewomenofcinema (Instagram); Prathyush Parasuraman; Independent Film Critic; Salva Mubarak, Rayon Mag; Shrishti Malhotra and Neha Shekhawat, The Swaddle; Sonia Mariam Thomas, Independent Writer and Content Creator; Sucharita Tyagi, Independent Film Critic; and a few others whose significant interventions enlivened the field but they did not wish to be identified. Based on a thematic analysis of their interview transcripts and their online work and engagement, we have tried to understand how a specific cross-section of the audience is talking back to the Hindi film industry, while also involving thousands of others in the process. Some of the themes emerging from their work help us understand both the evolving cinema-audience relationship and its implications for gender representation.

## Critical Fans

The young online media critics we spoke to identified themselves as fans of cinema in general and certain genres, directors, and actors in particular. But for them, unlike a devoted fan, cinema is not merely about recreation but also an institution deeply entangled with society and politics and therefore deserving of critical scrutiny. They are attentive to questions of ethics of filmmaking and representation. In other words, they care about how the films are made, what kinds of stories they tell, and who features in such stories.

It is precisely because they love cinema and understand its importance in the wider social and political context that they watch films carefully. And it is not only them; all of us have had experiences where even as we are enjoying what we are watching, gratuitous violence, demeaning representations, and sexist humour, among other things, often make us recoil in discomfort. This runs counter to the above-mentioned, popular understanding of audiences as impressionable and lacking in agency.

Increasingly, audiences are taking to the Internet to speak their minds about what they like or dislike about films

they watch. Central to these conversations is the idea that representation matters. It matters because art and culture provide people with the resources to understand who they are and their place in the world to a large extent. When the audiences see stories of self-realisation, healthy relationships, democratic societies, an assertion for social justice, and so on, it provides them with cultural resources and opportunities to discuss issues that affect their everyday lives. As these conversations pick up pace, they foreground ideas and agendas that the society collectively needs to debate and address.

## Creative Forms

The mention of the word critic often conjures up images of an erudite, self-serious person who delivers their judgment on films week after week for lesser informed readers or viewers. While this image may not entirely fit contemporary film critics – most are reflexive and interesting – there is no denying the hierarchical relationship between mainstream media film critics and their readers or viewers. However, the young online media critics we spoke to, and countless others who comment on cinema and culture online, have a somewhat different equation with their respective constituencies. Given the affordances of social media, their comments and reflections on cinema are creative and interactive. Instead of just text or speaking to the camera, young online media critics make use of a variety of forms, including short comments, screenshots, gifs, memes, polls and quizzes, informative threads, audio clips and podcasts, reels, and short mashup videos, to make sharp observations about films.

***“We need more female film critics out there, writing and producing videos. Video so far has been taken, even within the film critic community, not very seriously as film criticism, which is a little bit of ostriching [sic] going around. Like, if you're not putting your film criticism on video, it's just not going to reach [out] that much. I'm not saying suddenly become a YouTuber. But be a film critic who is also on YouTube.”***

The other significant theme that emerged from our interactions with the young online media critics is the use of humour and satire to make their work more engaging. Their work resonates within social media not only because it is in sync with online trends at the level of form but also because it invites engagement and participation in conversations around gender and cinema through ease and levity. Our respondents highlighted how they look forward to interacting with their respective communities and are particularly excited to participate in conversations that either take their analyses further or bring up ideas and insights that they had perhaps overlooked.

***“It has to be very, very unstructured... there can't be a format to it, there can't be any production, so to speak, for it. When I used to watch movies, earlier, I used to watch them with my friend. So, she was sitting on her whatever***

***in her house, and I was sitting in mine and we used to text back and forth about it. So, I wanted that tonality for it. And I'm just doing that because I know it sounds very, like, self-important, but I wanted to build a community where it's just like, you know, we're just talking about these things, there is no sense of I am some...I'm speaking to you from a perspective of a critic. I'm just talking.. I'm just talking to you"***

Every now and then, such content travels beyond the film and culture communities through likes, sharing, comments, and further poaching to inflect other conversations. The open and participatory aspect of such interactions also speaks to the discussion in the previous subsection on culture as the stepping stone to civic participation.

## Community and Education

One of the key contributions of young online media critics in facilitating conversations around gender and cinema is community building. By creating compelling content, engaging online with fellow audiences, and facilitating critical conversations young online media critics become the nuclei around which small but enduring communities are formed around common interests and concerns. They are also nodes to wider ephemeral online networks that allow the participants to move across different themes and issues. For illustration, it was found that the young online media critics were a key part of the networks not only on cinema and gender but also those focused on social justice (anti-caste movements; gender and sexual diversity), economic justice (inclusion and participation; pay parity), politics (governance; against religious intolerance and discrimination; censorship), and technology (access; digital rights) to name a few.

Where the young online media critics seem to have made the most difference is introducing their respective communities to concepts and tools to critically analyse gender representation in cinema. The young online media critics make academic, activist, and industry research accessible to their respective communities, equipping them with perspectives and the vocabulary to help articulate what they like or dislike about gender representation in Hindi cinema in concrete terms. Some of the key concerns that have moved from the intersection of feminist and queer cinema academic research to popular discourse are the historical contribution of women and queer filmmakers; semiotic and psychoanalytic studies of gender representation; the role of independent filmmaking in addressing representation deficits; and intersectional concerns in making and watching films. It is to young online media critics' credit that terms like 'microaggression', 'gaslighting', and 'mansplaining' have become mainstream cinema discourse. The significant uptake of representation evaluation tools, most prominently

the Bechdel Test<sup>11</sup>, also speaks to the vibrancy of the conversations that the young online media critics catalyse. More recently, computational tools to measure gender representation – like the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ) and Spellcheck for Bias<sup>12</sup> – have also been foregrounded by young online media critics in online chatter around gender and cinema.

***"Because I believe in a way that giving people an idea about the terms that are being dealt with in films or the way that media is being consumed, empowers them in a way so that they're able to have these conversations in the classrooms and on their dinner tables. You know especially for a woman. I don't want them to be side-lined and being told that they're just ranting and not talking facts. On many occasions, I have faced this, men would just want women to shut up in a conversation and be like, 'go bring me data', 'go bring me where this is coming from', I don't want your personal opinion on it but where is the fact you're talking from? You're making everything in your mind."***

The young online media critics were concerned that children and young adults today are spending more time than ever with screens and therefore need critical media education inputs in schools and colleges. Some of them also pointed towards the need for online safety trainings for children and young adults to confidently navigate online and social media spaces.

***"I think the only way the audience plays in resisting or shaping the Hindi cinema is by being responsible viewers and consumers of it. For that one should willingly and consciously be aware of their choices and also at the same time not hold themselves back from experimenting and exploring. I know that most of the population goes to theatres to relax and escape from their tiring schedules but the choices matter a lot. Small steps like film screenings of important and relevant issues at your school and college, followed by a discussion should be encouraged as they create a whole new room for introspection."***

## Stereotypes and Tropes

Most of the mainstream film criticism is patterned around weekly theatrical releases and, more recently, platform drops. Mainstream media critics get access to special press previews so that their reviews can be published or aired on the release date. Such reviews overwhelmingly follow the five-star rating system, which is a shorthand for the entertainment quotient of the film. The usual question that

<sup>11</sup>To clear this test, the film has to have at least two named female characters who talk to each other about something other than men.

<sup>12</sup>For more details on this, please see: <https://tinyurl.com/ycxjr92k>



most audiences ask before deciding to watch a film is: “How many stars?” A four or five-star rating in Mumbai-speak is called a *paisa vasool*; quite literally bang-for-the-bucks. Given the high-ticket prices, this is not an unfair ask. But due to this narrow scope, such reviews focus more on the formal aspects of films – narrative, pacing, acting, production quality, songs, etc - as opposed to assessing them critically, including representation issues. To be sure, there are film critics and publications that do publish sensitive and engaged analyses, but they are a comparatively small part of the overall film criticism community. It is against this background that a significant practice of young online media critics’ work, where they comment on the pervasive and entrenched aspects of representation in Hindi cinema, needs to be appreciated.

***"In addition to just how writing about how women are being represented in a single film, I would probably try to address parallels and find a common theme that has been there, even in films that are 30 years old. The film came in the 1980s, 1990s, and in a way, we grew up watching these films. And we might have celebrated those films when we were young but it kind of gave us an icky feeling and as we grew up, it didn't feel right."***

Stereotypes and tropes are storytelling conventions that accumulate over a long period of time and often yield reductionist and damaging representations of communities and the worlds they inhabit. For illustration, dominant stereotypes related to gender tend to represent women and non-binary folk in unidimensional, fixed, overgeneralised terms – from selfless caregivers to exaggeratedly sexualized. Similarly, employing violence against women as a plot driver, something that online discussions around the Landau Test<sup>13</sup> have brought into the popular conversation, has been a disempowering trope in Hindi cinema for a long time. Filmmakers use them, unknowingly or consciously, as a shorthand to convey certain meanings without having to grapple with the complexities of human nature or evolving societies. In doing so, they not only strengthen the existing stereotypes and tropes but also short change audiences of exciting and diverse stories, and at a larger level impoverish cinema as a social and cultural resource. It is precisely this concerning aspect that young online media critics are effectively scrutinising and calling attention to. They look at cinema historically as well as connecting the dots across contemporary films and bring into relief patterns that are latent and, in most cases, normalised to the status of common sense. The Swaddle’s work in this regard has been exemplary, wherein they have done sharp and engaging features on the stereotypes and tropes like *Selfless Lover*, *Rape Victim*, *The ‘Other’ Woman*, *Young Widow*, among others.

## Expansive View of Gender

Moving away from an essentialist view of gender, the young online media critics advocate for an expansive view of the interrelations between media and identity. Their work remains keenly attentive to the long-running debates around gender, especially how one’s gender is not a reliable indicator of one’s worldview, behaviour, likes or dislikes, among other things. This differs from an essentialist view of gender wherein various gender identities are thought to be in possession of particular attributes. However cliched, it is this line of thinking that drives the belief that women or queer filmmakers think and work differently than their men counterparts. The young online media critics were of the opinion that conceiving gender in such narrow terms strengthens the currency of gender stereotypes and continues to hold people in separate prison houses of gender roles and expectations. The young online media critics’ work responds to this complexity by asking deeper questions about the tone, texture, and politics of gender representation in films, irrespective of who is at the driving wheel. This is also consistent with the opinions shared by women film directors in the first part of the qualitative research studies. To be sure, representation behind the screen does matter as is discussed in the following subsection.

***"...It's about having more women, more different kinds of people behind the script and behind the camera, but also the expectation is not for them to make feminist films. Seeing stuff that is more raw, I think, that's the future. Unfortunately, abhi [now] it's kind of not feeling right, you know what I mean? It's like agar aurathaitohmatlabupar mic pe chadhakebolnahaidekho feminist film hai [if it's a woman then she should be put on a pedestal and given a microphone to say, look it's a feminist film]."***

On the audience side, young online media critics are critical of the way media consumption itself is a factor in the shaping of gender identities. The so-called gender preferences in genres, for example, cannot entirely be explained by gender identities. In other words, when it is said that men are supposed to like action and adventure genres and women are supposed to like melodrama, what is often missed is that the male and female gender identities are constructed and reproduced by the perpetuation of such consumption practices<sup>14</sup>. Children are socialised into such practices from the very beginning thereby strengthening the gender divide. Breaking through such divides around media consumption could be one of the first steps towards loosening the tight grip of gender norms over our lives. The young online media critics, therefore, promote a more inclusive viewing culture by discussing a wide variety of work and encouraging fellow audiences to be more curious and experimental in their media diets. According to many of them, young people today may have functional media skills – shooting, editing,

<sup>13</sup>A film fails the test if a main female character ends up dead, pregnant, or if she causes a plot problem for a male protagonist.

annotating, etc – but are lacking in critical media skills to understand the ideological role media plays in everyday lives.

This expansive view of media and identity questions the very basis of gender difference even while remaining alert to its role in maintaining inequitable power structures. The young online media critics expressed their frustrations with the film industry's anathema to feminism, with people either reluctant to identify with it or denouncing it outrightly as subversive, and were of the opinion that an industry cannot hope to be gender just in its practices and output if its reluctant to even discuss the underlying issues.

## Substantive Representation

To return to the theme of behind-the-screen representation from the foregoing subsections, the young online media critics were of the view that inclusive gender representation in behind-the-scene roles should not be premised on the understanding or condition that such inclusion would necessarily lead to radical storytelling. Conditional inclusion, in their opinion, would restrict women and non-binary folk to only certain kinds of topics and storytelling. Inclusion is worth aspiring for as an end in itself. Behind-the-screen gender inclusion should be the goal, in young online media critics' opinion, not only because gender-sensitive and inclusive stories are missing from Hindi cinema, it should be the goal because women and non-binary folk are severely underrepresented in the structures of Hindi cinema. Fixing the on-screen gender representation deficit cannot only be the burden of those who have been kept at the very margins of the industry. To be sure, the young online media critics did acknowledge that the growing diversity among the ranks of film writers, directors, directors of photography, editors, lyricists, music directors, and playback singers, among other roles, is indeed bringing a certain freshness to Hindi cinema.

The other concern that the young online media critics shared with regard to both on and behind-the-screen gender representation in Hindi cinema was due to the continued marginalisation of the oppressed caste women and non-binary folk. They credited the women's and queer movements in India for making the question of representation of women and non-binary folk salient not only in the Hindi film industry but across all sectors. However, some of them struck a dissenting note when it came to the roles and demands within women's and queer movements for those from the oppressed castes. This intersectional view was also articulated by a couple of them to point out the palpable exclusion of the transgender community, especially as on-screen trans roles tend to get played by cis-het actors.

The young online media critics finally advocated for representation among the audiences as well. According to them, the Hindi film industry continues to imagine a paying cis-het male as the default audience of the films they produce<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, most of the Hindi film industry fare is geared towards their sensibilities and expectations.

***“Six out of ten people in movie theatre are men and then the question is who are these four women? Are these women who tag along with the men? Sitting through masculine movies because their brothers, fathers are watching them or are these women making decisions for themselves about what kind of movies they want to watch? So then that changes things because suddenly then people will be like we are making masculine movies because the audience is masculine. So that then becomes the lynchpin upon which people have been saying for decades that this is why we make Masala Movies the way we do and now we have women coming in who are producing movies who say we will make movies and the audience will find itself.”***

It must be acknowledged that because of high ticket pricing, concerns around public safety, including safe transportation, are some of the reasons why women's participation in theatregoing is not optimal. The young online media critics felt that such impediments should be addressed by the industry by holding special campaigns and events and preferential pricing to welcome women and non-binary folk to the theatres. Similarly, they also expressed concern about the gendered digital divide; women's access to digital devices and the Internet continues to be lower than men's. They again see a role for the industry and the streaming platforms to address this issue by special subscription drives for women and non-binary folk. The larger point that most of the young online media critics made was that until there's a substantial shift in the makeup of the audiences, the film industry will continue to target the consumer whom they imagine has the means to be sitting in the theatres or in control of the digital devices. Though the young media critics did not make this point explicitly, it was clear that the continued underrepresentation of women and non-binary folk among the audiences should be read as an index of their exclusion from the larger spaces of culture and leisure.

## 'Nasty Audiences'

One of the strongest themes that emerged from our interactions with the young online media critics was the looming shadow of what are being called 'nasty audiences' in contemporary media studies research on online conversations around culture and cinema. Nasty audiences are essentially online trolls who direct abuse, harass, and even threaten violence against those they disagree with. Most of the time, they are aligned with conservative ideologies and hold reactionary views on issues of social justice. Most of the young online media critics we spoke to identified the loud, aggressive, and organised nature<sup>16</sup> of various sections of 'nasty audiences' as a major force on social media platforms that overwhelm and tend to browbeat progressive conversations around Hindi cinema. A few of our respondents also acknowledged the impulse to moderate their views anticipating blowback from the

<sup>14</sup>The ongoing *Barbie Vs Oppenheimer* is a recent iteration of this raging debate. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/39cxhjxy>

<sup>15</sup>Around two thirds (66%) of the Indian cinema audiences are male. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/muy6m8ts>

'nasty audiences'. However, the larger view was that 'nasty audiences' are being countered by audiences who care enough about keeping progressive conversations on even under challenging conditions. Such resistance takes the form of fact checks, blocking and reporting, and counter-mobilizations, among others.

Within this context, the terrain of conversations around gender emerges as a particularly volatile site for views and counterviews. Gender and media scholars have time and again drawn attention towards how in the name of tradition and cultural identity women's freedoms are circumscribed<sup>17</sup>. The underlying argument is that women are the repositories of traditional and cultural values, whether national or related to particular communities, and any changes therein threaten the very existence of national or community identities. This is why representations where women are asserting their autonomy with regard to relationships, family, social roles, sexuality, and so on, draw the ire of the self-appointed custodians of national or community identities. The young online media critics pointed out how such moral policing, harassment, and threats of violence have a chilling effect not only on fellow audiences but also women and non-binary professionals in the film industry, most particularly directors and actors. The young online media critics also brought up how the Hindi film industry is struggling in the face of organised boycott campaigns against films that have strived for, to various degrees, inclusive representation or progressive themes and stories. Industry delegations, of late, have brought the issue of such online campaigns to the notice of law enforcement agencies as well as the government.

***"It is difficult in the sense that there is that little layer of self-censorship that has crept in because no one wants to be the next target of any troll armies on the Internet. That takes a mental toll on you, especially if you're an independent film critic, you don't have a legal entity or a platform or a publication behind you to support your words and your output if someone decides that they're legally upset with you. This little bit of self-censorship that has crept in, which is not just a film critic thing but a journalism thing."***

## Conclusion

Through engagement with young online media critics, a specific cross-section of cinema audiences, we were able to foreground the range of perspectives and responses that films run into when they play in theatres or are watched on personal screens. Two key themes that bear repeating in this regard are that audiences do not necessarily take the meanings that films carry in an uncritical fashion and that they make their views about films known in various ways. Films do have influence over audiences and society at large but such influence is often overemphasised at the expense of audience agency. Having said that, audience agency can only go so far in the face of the heft of the film industry and its ideological underpinnings. It needs bolstering up with critical media education and the exchange of ideas and opinions in an environment free of hectoring and violence.

<sup>16</sup>For details, please see this research on "network characteristics and mechanics of the organized anti-Bollywood activity on Twitter: <https://tinyurl.com/5368dc2y>

<sup>17</sup>For a critical discussion on how the anxieties related to liberalization and globalisation played out in gendered terms, please see: <https://tinyurl.com/yh47akj8>

# Conclusions from the Three Qualitative Studies

Through the first two qualitative studies, we draw on the experiences and voices of different generations of directors and screenwriters, who are a part of the film industry and speak as people who both understand it and are deeply invested in it. They have shared experiences of facing different kinds of barriers and overcoming them through personal struggle and perseverance. While they acknowledge the changes that have taken place, they also appreciate that there is still a long way to go. Based on their knowledge of filmmaking and production processes they suggest ways in which transformations can take place that will create more inclusive and welcoming environments for women as well as people from other marginalised locations.

The third qualitative research study with young online media critics throws light on a range of perspectives and responses that films run into when they play in theatres or are watched on personal screens. Two key themes that emerge are - audiences do not necessarily take the meanings that films carry in an uncritical fashion and that films do have influence over audiences and society at large but such influence is often overemphasised at the expense of audience agency. The study lays emphasis on the significance of critical media education and the exchange of ideas and opinions in an environment free of hectoring and violence.



**Diversity, equity, and inclusion are often treated as boxes to be ticked off, however, ensuring equity in representation is so much more than mere lip service.**

# References

- Anujan, D., Schaeffer D.J., and Karan. (2013). The Changing Face of Indian Women in the Era of Global *Bollywood*. In David Schaefer and Kavita Karan (Eds.), *Bollywood and Globalization: The Global Power of Popular Hindi Cinema*, pp.110-126, Routledge, New York.
- Chatterji, S. A. (2013). The evolution of representing female sexuality in Hindi Cinema 1991-2010. In K. M. Gokulsing & W. Dissanayake (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinema* (pp. 179-192). Routledge.
- Chitrapu, S. (2017). Associations and Networks: Inequalities in Film and TV Production. In A. Athique, V. Parthasarathi, & S.V. Srinivas (Eds.), *The Indian Media Economy: Market Dynamics and Social Transactions* (Volume 2, pp. 152-169). Oxford University Press
- Deshpande, S. (2005). The Consumable Hero of Globalised India. In R. Kaur & A. Sinha (Eds.), *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens* (pp. 186-206). Sage Publications.
- Dumas, H.R., (2023). Streets in the Streets. Gendered engagement with the urban space in Hindi films: a quantitative study. *GeoJournal*, Vol.: (0123456789) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-023-10832-7>
- Ganti, T. (2013). Corporatization of the Hindi film industry. In K. M. Gokulsing & W. Dissanayake (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas* (pp. 337-350). Routledge.
- Ghosh, L., Thekuddan, J., & Kashyap, M. (2018). *Impact of Indian Cinema on Young Viewers: Responses to Gender and Violence Against Women*. Oxfam India.
- Ghosh, S. (2010). The Wonderful World of Queer Cinephilia. *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies*, 1(1), 17-20. DOI:10.1177/097492760900100104
- Gupta, Sukanya. (2015). 'Kahaani, Gulaab Gang and Queen: Remaking the Queens of Bollywood'. *South Asian Popular Culture* 13 (2): 107–23.
- Joseph, A., Paul B., Mahmood, A. S. P. and Sukumar, M. 2019. Shift Focus: Women Shaping the Narrative in Media and Entertainment. Women in Cinema Collective. <https://wccollective.org/resources/>.
- Kasbekar A. (2001), Hidden Pleasures: Negotiating the Myth of the Female Ideal in Popular Hindi Cinema, in Dwyer R. & Pinney C. (2001), *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Khan, S., & Taylor, L. D. (2018). Gender Policing in Mainstream Hindi Cinema: A Decade of Central Female Characters in Top-Grossing Bollywood Movies. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3641–3662.
- Mukherjee, D., (2020). *Bombay Hustle: Making Movies in a Colonial City*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mukherjee, M., (2022). Bodies in Waiting Remapping Gender, Labour, and Histories of the Indian Film Industry (1930s–1950s) in *the Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 57, No. 22, pp.60-68.
- Ormax Media-Tulsea (2023). The Right Draft, <https://www.ormaxmedia.com/data/library/TheRightDraft-OrmaxTulsea-2023.pdf>
- Raza, N (2015). Deconstructing Gender Roles in Bollywood Films: Through Women's Empowerment Development Discourse. Master's thesis. Department of Society and Globalisation, Roskilde University, Denmark.
- Sawhney, R., (2021). Fatma Begum, South Asia's first female director: resurrections from media and legal archives. In M. M. Monika Mehta, *Industrial Networks and Cinemas of India: Shooting Stars, Shifting Geographies and Multiplying Media*, (pp. 21-34). London, New York: Routledge.
- Sengupta, R., (2018). Writing from the Margins of Media: Screenwriting Practice and Discourse During the First Indian Talkies in Bioscope. *South Asian Screen Studies*, 9 (2), pp 117-136
- Smith, S. L., Choueiti, M., & Pieper, K. (2014). Gender Bias Without Borders: *An Investigation of Female Characters in Popular Films Across 11 Countries* (p. 41). Geena Davis Institute (Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative, University of Southern California, Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. <https://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/gender-bias-without-borders-full-report.pdf>
- Srivastava S. (2006), The Voice of the Nation and the Five-Year Plan Hero: Speculations on Gender, Space, and Popular Culture, in Lal V. & Nandy A. (122-155), *Fingerprinting Popular Culture: The Mythic and the Iconic in Indian Cinema*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Subuhi Khan and Laramie D. Taylor. (2018) Gender Policing in Mainstream Hindi Cinema: A Decade of Central Female Characters in Top-Grossing Bollywood Movies, *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3641–3662.
- Tiwary, I (2023). "OTT Is Exactly What TV Is Not": Structural Adjustment and Shifts in Indian Scriptwriting. In Amanda D. Lotz and Ramon Lobato (Eds.), *Streaming Video Storytelling Across Borders*, New York University Press.
- UNESCO. 2019. Global Report 2018—Reshaping Cultural Policies | Diversity of Cultural Expressions. <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/global-report-2018>
- Yadav, A., (2021). *Scripting Bollywood, Women Unlimited*, New Delhi.

## Annexures

# Annexure -1

## Parameters and Response options

### 1. Number of Speaking and Named characters

### 2. Gender of characters

2.1 Gender: Cis/Trans, Male/Female/Any Other;

2.2 Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Any Other Sexuality

### 3. Type of role

3.1 Type of role (Lead, Romantic Co-Lead, Romantic Interest, Other)

### 4. Demographics

4.1 Age group (Child 0-12, Teen 13-20, Adult 21-45, Older Adult 46-60, Senior Citizen 61 Upwards)

4.2 Religion (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Any other, please Specify). Cues taken in visual symbols, dialogues, music or any other)

4.3 Caste (Dominant Caste, Non-Dominant Caste). Cues taken from the last names, visual symbols, dialogues, music or any other

4.4 Disabilities (None, 1a. Locomotor Disability (i. Leprosy Cured Person/ii. Cerebral Palsy/iii. Dwarfism/iv. Muscular Dystrophy/v. Acid Attack Victims), b. Visual Impairment, c. Hearing Impairment, d. Speech and Language Disability,

2. Intellectual Disability (a. Specific Learning Disabilities/b. autism spectrum disorder),

3. Mental Illness

4. Chronic Neurological Conditions/Blood Disorders (i. Multiple Sclerosis/ii. Parkinson's Disease/b. Blood Disorder-i. Haemophilia/ii. Thalassemia/iii. Sickle Cell Disease),

5. Multiple Disabilities. cues in visual symbols, dialogues, music or any other)

### 5. Employment

5.1 Employment status (Has a source of own income or is Dependent on family/others.)

5.2 Occupation Sector (Academia, Armed Forces, Construction, Crime, Farming/Fishing, Food service, Healthcare, Journalism, Law enforcement/protective services, Law, Management/Business/Finance, Media/arts/entertainment, Personal/corporate care, Politics/government, Religion, Sales, Science/technology/engineering, Small business owner, Sports, Transportation, None, Any other)

5.3 Chief Executives (No, Yes, No occupation). Also included royals/rulers here

5.4 STEM careers (Life/physical sciences, computer science/technology, Engineering, Math, Other-Specify, Non-STEM, No Occupation)

5.5 Acceptability. Any comments made about this SNC's career/work. Positive Comments, Negative Comments, No comments were made.

### 6. Women in Public Roles

6.1 Public sphere (Does this SNC have a public role, e.g is she/he a celebrity, an expert, an officer of the law, the head of an institution, a politician, or any such visible role? No, Yes)

### 7. Appearance

7.1 Attractiveness (recipient of verbal/nonverbal utterances that communicate the physical desirousness. High, Medium, Low, Nothing mentioned)

7.2 Skin color (Dark, Wheatish, Light)

7.3 Body shape (Thin, Medium, Obese, Any other)

7.4 Indian clothing (Yes/No)

7.5 Western clothing (Yes/No)

### 8. Sexualisation

8.1 Sexually revealing clothing (tight, alluring, revealing apparel--High, medium, low)

8.2 Nudity-Depends on exposure and setting. For women (part or full exposure from mid chest to high upper thigh region: High, medium, low). While bare shoulders/bare back could be coded 'low' with reference to sari blouses, bare shoulders in an intimate setting should be coded as 'medium'. For men: (part or full exposure from hip to high upper thigh region: High, medium, low). Bare hip to thigh from the rear (medium), Bare hip to thigh from the front (high). For men, bare torso does not count as nudity

## 9. Objectification

10.1 Objectification by other characters (Do any of the other characters treat this SNC like a sex object through their dialogue or actions. Yes, No)

10.2 Presence of voyeuristic camera (Do the camera angles show the SNC as a sex object. Yes, No)

## 10. Domesticity

10.1 Parental status. Is this SNC a parent? (No, Yes)

10.2 Committed romantic relationship. This includes marriage/engagement (No, Yes)

## 11. Consent and Intimacy

11.1 Participant in an intimate act (Yes, No)

11.2 Consensual intimate act (No, Yes, No intimate acts)

11.3 Non-consensual intimate act (No, Yes, No intimate acts)

11.4 Initiates intimacy (No, Yes, No intimate acts)

11.5 Type of consent (Explicit Verbal, Implicit Verbal, Any other, No intimate acts)

11.6 Promiscuity (Multiple partners, Single Partner, No intimate acts)

## 12. Sexist Humour

12.1 Sexist humour (Makes a sexist joke, Butt of a sexist joke, NA)

12.2 Response to sexist humour (Supports, Does not Support, NA)

## 13. Bechdel test

13.1 Is there at least one conversation that this female SNC has with another female SNC that is not about a male character. (Yes, No, No conversations with another female character)

## 14. Violence

12.1 Perpetrator of a physically violent act (Yes-Initiator, Yes-Retaliated, No)

12.2 Target of a physically violent act (Yes, No)

12.3 Perpetrator of a verbally violent act (Yes-Initiator, Yes-Retaliated, No)

12.4 Target of a verbally violent act (Yes, No)

12.5 Perpetrator of a sexually violent act (Yes-Initiator, Yes-Retaliated, No)

12.6 Target of a sexually violent act (Yes, No)

## 15. Sexual Harassment

15.1 Perpetrator of sexual harassment (Yes, No)

15.2 Target of sexual harassment (Yes, No)

15.3 Sexual harassment in the form of sexually coloured remarks (Yes, No)

15.4 Sexual harassment in the form of showing pornography (Yes, No)

15.5 Sexual harassment in the form of unwelcome physical conduct of sexual nature (Yes, No). Code unwelcome physical touch, blocking one's path here

15.6 Sexual harassment in the form of unwelcome verbal conduct of sexual nature (Yes, No). Code unwelcome words in any form such as saying them out loud in person or on the phone or texting, etc

15.7 Sexual harassment in the form of non-verbal conduct of sexual nature (Yes, No). Code unwelcome gaze here

15.8 Voyeurism (Yes, No).

(Without consent) Any man who watches, or captures the image of a woman 1) engaging in a private act where the victim's genitals, posterior or breasts are exposed or covered only in underwear; 2) or the victim is using a lavatory; or 3) the victim is doing a sexual act that is not of a kind ordinarily done in public

15.9 Stalking (Yes, No)

i) Unwelcome following, attempting to contact a woman despite a clear indication of disinterest (ii) monitors the use by a woman of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication

15.10 Response to sexual harassment (No change in expression, expression changes to fear, expression changes to anger, Any Other Please Specify)

# Annexure - 2

## List of Film Departments enumerated

List of Departments	
1	Accounts
2	Action
3	Actors Staff
4	Art Direction
5	Casting
6	Choreography
7	Cinematography
8	Consultants (Language Experts, On Set Medics, Physiotherapists, Science And Other Advisors)
9	Costume
10	Crowdfunding Support
11	Digital Intermediate
12	Direction
13	Distribution
14	Dubbing
15	Editing
16	Grips
17	Hair
18	Intimacy
19	Junior Artist Coordinator
20	Legal
21	Lighting
22	Lyrics
23	Makeup
24	Marketing
25	Music
26	Music Distribution
27	Production
28	Promotion
29	Publicity
30	Script
31	Security
32	Sound
33	Stand Ins
34	Subtitles
35	Transport
36	Vendors And Suppliers (Equipment, Insurance, Catering)
37	Visual Effects

Note: 5 Levels: Heads of Departments, Coordinators (including Senior Level Managerial Professionals), Team Members, Assistants, and Interns



# Annexure - 3

## Women in Crew Unions

No	Union	Year	No. of women committee members	No. of total committee members	% female committee members	Number of women members	Number of total members	% female members
<b>Federation of Western India Cine Employees (Umbrella organisation for film trade unions)</b>								
1	Federation of Western India Cine Employees	2022	7	63	11%	6088	NA	NA
<b>FWICE AFFILIATED UNIONS that include women members</b>								
1	All India Dubbing Artist Association	2022	6	13	46%	60	NA	NA
2	All India Look Alike Association	2022	3	8	38%	60	NA	NA
3	Association of Cine & TV Art Directors & Costume Designers	2022	4	15	27%	250	NA	NA
4	Cine Costume & Make-Up Artiste & Hair Dressers Association	2022	2	15	13%	1000	NA	NA
5	Screenwriters Guild of India	2022	1	12	8%	8	NA	NA
6	Western India Motion Picture TV Sound Engineers Association	2022	1	14	7%	11	NA	NA
7	Indian Film & Television Director's Association	2022	1	18	6%	3750	NA	NA
8	Movie Stunt Artistes Association	2022	1	21	5%	6	NA	NA
9	Association of Cine TV/AD Production Executives	2022	0	14	0%	76	NA	NA
10	Cine Still TV & Motion Photographers Association	2022	0	15	0%	2	NA	NA
11	Cine Musicians Association	2022	0	13	0%	8	NA	NA
12	All India Special Artist Association	2022	0	15	0%	20	NA	NA
13	Association of Film & Video Editors	2022	0	15	0%	17	NA	NA
14	Western India Cinematographers Association	2022	0	20	0%	70	NA	NA
<b>FWICE affiliated Women Only Union</b>								
15	Mahila Kalakar Sangh	2022	11	11	100%	750	750	100%
<b>Independent Unions not affiliated to FWICE</b>								
16	Cine & TV Artistes' Association	2019	6	21	29%	2630	6883	38%

Source: Federation of Western India Cine Employees, Cine & TV Artistes' Association (CINTAA).







### About the School

The School of Media and Cultural Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences has done pioneering work in critical media education in the country. The vision of the School is to be a centre of excellence that actively promotes critical thinking, education, research, production, dissemination and advocacy in the areas of media and contemporary culture, with a focus on equity, social justice and human rights. A unique feature of the School is the close linkage between its technical and academic work. The School offers a two-year full time Master's degree and a PhD programme in Media and Cultural Studies. The School has to its credit several awards for its documentary films at national and international film festivals. The films are widely distributed and used as teaching and advocacy resources.

### Visit:

[www.tiss.edu](http://www.tiss.edu)

[www.smcs.tiss.edu](http://www.smcs.tiss.edu)

[divercity.tiss.edu](http://divercity.tiss.edu)

[gendercinema.tiss.edu](http://gendercinema.tiss.edu)

### Contact Details:

Dean,  
School of Media and Cultural Studies,  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
V N Purav Marg, Deonar,  
MUMBAI 400088  
INDIA

**Phone No: +91 22 25525000**

**Email: [dean.smcs@tiss.edu](mailto:dean.smcs@tiss.edu)**