

## **Cinema and Communication : Negotiating Female Stereotypes**

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### **Abstract**

*Communication is and has ever been an indispensable and inevitable process. It keeps flowing incessantly through multiple means and modes. In the earlier times, conveying and passing messages was sufficient for the humans, but conveying the message with the utmost impact and emphasis has turned out to be the most coveted thing today. Cinema is one of such media that thrive on the idea of an effectively powerful delivery of the message and of generating an expected reaction or response from the audience. Cinema has been a powerful medium and played a major role in establishing, and representing a strong image or message dealing with something or someone. With the aid of certain diction, dramatic techniques, costumes etc. the content is created and delivered to its audience. The proposed paper titled Cinema and Communication: Negotiating Female Stereotypes aims to underline the power of media as one of the communication modes, to highlight how cinematic representation of Indian females brought up in London put them in the fetters of stereotyping. It will highlight how the male counterparts in the Bollywood movies represent a reformer, remedy, a preacher and a guide to the heroines who are incapable of taking right decisions and of intelligent thoughts.*

**Keywords:** *Cinema, Stereotypes, East, West, Male, Female, Communication, Bollywood.*

Reference to this paper  
should be made as  
follows:

**Dr. Eti Sharma,**  
“Cinema and  
Communication :  
Negotiating Female  
Stereotypes”,  
Notions 2017, Vol.  
VIII, No.2, pp.44-49

[http://an...  
?page...](http://an...?page...)  
**Article I**

## Introduction

Communication is and has ever been an indispensable and inevitable process. It keeps flowing incessantly through multiple means and modes. In the earlier times, conveying and passing messages was sufficient for the humans, but conveying the message with the utmost impact and emphasis has turned out to be the most coveted thing today. Cinema is one of such media that thrive on the idea of an effectively powerful delivery of the message and of generating an expected reaction or response from the audience. Cinema has been a powerful medium and played a major role in establishing, and representing a strong image or message dealing with something or someone. With the aid of certain diction, dramatic techniques, costumes etc. the content is created and delivered to its audience. The proposed paper aims to underline the power of media as one of the communication modes, to highlight how cinematic representation of Indian females brought up in London put them in the fetters of stereotyping. It will highlight how the male counterparts in the Bollywood movies represent a reformer, remedy, a preacher and a guide to the heroines who are incapable of taking right decisions and of intelligent thoughts.

London has long been an enticing place for many countries like India. London keeps attracting Indians either in writing or cinema to discuss or present it in one way or the other. Artists come back to the place time and again in their creative works. The change in the stereotyped image of the British-born Indian woman in Bollywood cinema is indicative, both of the growing familiarity with the expatriate life in London as well as the coming of age of the Indian viewers.

The success of the iconic *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) in the last decades can be taken as a pointer to show how the issues of Indian roots and cultural identity in the second-generation diaspora has gone to a different level. There are other movies from Bollywood which have Indian lovers not so much concerned with their roots and Indian identity, but immersed in the metropolitan ethos of the city. The Hindi movies like *Cocktail* (2012) and *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (2012) have presented the female lead characters in a way that was unimaginable in celluloid from Bollywood at the turn of the last century. But, the issues of identity and displacement simmer and films like *Namaste London* (2007) fall back on stereotypes and show how the Western ways of the heroine are finally conquered by the spirits of the Indian male. The male lead presents conformity to an idealised Indian rural life style corresponding to the East as a panacea for the woman from London who had fallen to the bad Western ways.

In the past, the cinematic treatment of the Indian heroine from London in the Hindi films like *Purab aur Pashchim* (1970) was almost a caricature of the

Indian life in London as well as an ill-informed critique of the ways of the Western world. Though there can be arguments that such efforts were an attempt to correct the balance of East-West encounters in the postcolonial context, but nevertheless, it was a poor reflection on the life of Indian woman abroad.

The movie *Purab aur Pashchim* (East and West) displays the poles apart cultures: the Indian and the London. The movie starts featuring the pious river Ganges, and other remarkable Indian places which are the symbols of Indian culture and values. The male protagonist Bharat (Monoj Kumar) is featured all full of patriotism and Indian cultural values; he respects his elders, loves his younger brother and sister, goes to temple and sings bhajan, studies and earns at the same time to look after his family. All this is the result of his cultural values with which he is raised. Later, in the movie he somehow gets to go to London for further studies and stays with an Indian family settled in London years back. And this is when the audience is informed of the West - London. The sights of beer bars, dance bars, casinos were the very first introduction of London. On the meeting with the Indian family, he touches their feet to show respect, the lady asserts, "what are you looking for?". The Indian man comments, "she is Indian, but poor! she is unaware of the Indian culture." The protagonist meets the family's daughter next, the very first sight of whose bewilders him and puts him in a shock. The young generation of London is nothing but lotus eaters. the female protagonist Preeti (Saira Bano) defines the life style of an Indian girl raised in London; she wears short dress, smokes, drinks parties comes home late in the night, goes for vocations without bothering to inform her parents. The father of this girl is shown helpless as the daughter doesn't care for what he brought up in London, refusing whom bring her into trouble; he tries to rape her . And here Manoj Kumar epitomizes the "ideal Indian man" who rescues her and saves her from being disgraced. This is the point she starts feeling for him. He takes up the responsibility to bring her back to the "right path". Being a woman she is not supposed to smoke, drink and party late night.

The movie ends as soon as Saira Bano is swaddled in saree worshipping in the temple. Since he is the ideal Indian man, Manoj Kumar succeeds in fulfilling his responsibility to bring the girl to the right path by teaching the difference between good and evil. (India and London) *Purab aur Pashchim* presented such a picture of London that feeds only evil to its inhabitants, it deprives them of their cultural values, emotional warmth and sensitivity. They grow disrespectful and imprudent to their elders. Omkaar (Prem Chopra) who is brought up in London beats and shoots his grandfather on which the grandfather remarks, "Harnaam (Pran), father to Omkaar, kept on singing the song of the West, what has the West given us?" This ?" and

Omkaar replies, pointing at the pistol, “the West has given us this” and shoots his grandfather.

Time passed and so did the perceptions of the Indian society towards London. The audience gets to see a different picture of London in *DDLJ* released after twenty five years. London is no more about bars, dancing and partying only; it possesses beautiful places also one would love to visit and cherish the memories throughout the life. The audience gets to see a broader and beautiful picture of London this time; Westminster Bridge, River Thames, King’s Cross, Southall, Islington, Trafalgar Square, Tower Bridge etc. The audience is luckier to have such beautiful sights that make London more than a place crowded with obnoxious people. A young man and woman - both of Indian descent but born and raised in London - fall in love during a trip to Switzerland. However, the girl’s traditional father takes her back to India to fulfil a betrothal promise.

In the movie the female protagonist seems to have got rid of that caricature. The audience sees a great change in the characters; born and brought up in London, Simran (Kajol), the female protagonist adheres to the traditional Indian culture and values. She wears the traditional Indian dress, worships, prepares food and keeps her parents, particularly her father, a first-generation Indian immigrant Baldev Singh (Amrish Puri). Raj (Shahrukh Khan) is also way different from the Londoners in the *Poorab Aur Pashchim*. When angry on the beating of his father by Kuljeet (Parmeet Sethi) and his friends, Raj was hitting everyone, but he stops as soon as Simran’s father intervenes. Remember that prudent Londoner who beats and shoots at his grandfather? Where we had a helpless father in the movie *Purab aur Paschim*, who could not gather the courage to get his daughter back to the right path (the word defined by the patriarchal society), in *DDLJ*, we have a father who is the sole authority of the house. When it comes to Simran’s marriage, he is adamant on her tying knot with his friend’s son.

Though with this movie the stereotyped image of the Londoners has undergone a drastic change, we have the male and female protagonists who have their values, morals, and of course the respect, but the female protagonists still lack the logic and the sense of taking “right” decisions. Simran’s mother has killed all her desires under his (Baldev Singh) rule. She does not want the same life for her daughter Simran so she tried to convince Baldev Singh, but in vain. She finally decided to send Simran away with Raj hideously. But, Raj denies to elope with Simran without her father’s consent and defines it as the “wrong way”. Eventually, it was neither the wife nor the daughter, but the man (Raj) who succeeds in convincing another man (Baldev Singh). With the movie *DDLJ*, we thought that the things were under the

changing process, but the movies like *Namastey London* and *Cocktail* again brought us onto the same platform of thinking that sees female Londoner the patient and the male Indian the panacea.

The female protagonist Jazz aka Jasmeet (Katrina Kaif) in the movie *Namastey London* who is born and raised in London is again seen being corrected by the Indian man Arjun Singh (Akshay Kumar) the male protagonist. He, with his Indian ways of love, warmth and sensibility wins the girl who had always escaped from marrying an Indian guy considering him boorish. Arjun Singh proves her wrong and brings her onto the right track. He becomes the saviour not for Jazz only but for her friend also raised in London.

The movie *Cocktail* again draws a huge contrast between India and London. Veronika (Deepika Padukone) born and raised in London is a carefree, independent girl. The story starts with Gautam (Saif Ali Khan) who is an incorrigible flirt, and runs after every girl he sees. He has shifted from India to London few days back. Meera (Diana Penty) is a pretty girl who believes in desi values and attire, and comes to London from Delhi for a fresh start. Veronika is the spoilt bombshell who loves partying and drinking. Meera comes to London in search of her husband who finally deserts her. Soon, Gautam moves in with Veronika and Meera continuing his “no strings attached” relationship with Veronika. When Gautam’s mother visits him in London, he introduces Meera and not Veronika as his girl friend. Meera is the ideal Indian girl who Gautam’s mother would surely approve of. Veronika born and raised in London is not the girl who can be introduced to a boy’s parents, reason being she is a spoilt and a “rich bitch”. And she knows it, but doesn’t bother. Bette Davis says, “When a man gives his opinion, he’s a man, when a woman gives her opinion, she’s a bitch.”

Gautam’s mother’s remarks tell the audience how London has deprived Veronika of the values and morals. Veronika is a “bad woman” because she thinks of herself, her happiness, “As long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking”. She is a bitch because she steps out of the patriarchal frame meant for women. She is devil because she denies to remain the “Angel of the house”. Charlotte Bronte says in *Shirley*, “If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend.”

Though this movie does not have the ideal Indian man, it has a man and that

too an Indian. who plays the driving force for the changes in both the female characters. Veronica, the Londoner is metamorphosed; It is Gautam whom she changes for; she puts every effort to get into the image of the “ideal Indian woman” by wearing Indian dresses, cooking food, abstaining from drinks. Meera, the deserted Indian lady believes she is good for nothing as her husband makes her feel so. It is Gautam again who tells her how fool she is to be believing herself not worthy of love. He tells her how beautiful and desirable she is. She, then realises her folly and starts thinking the same of herself . Eventually she falls in love with Gautam.

These movies exemplify the power communication with its various media has. Cinema really is a dominant medium of communication which exerts a profound influence on its audience. It is capable of directing the audience to think and react in a certain way. From commemorating someone and something to presenting a degraded and deteriorated picture of the other, cinema can achieve all its targets easily. What is required is to ponder upon what message we intend to communicate and are we really communicating the same or is it deviating from the motto. Also what change and effect will it bring in the society should be kept in mind.

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