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An Epoch-Making Crusade For Gender Equality Through Arts And Media

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Abstract

This research paper truthfully and sincerely deals with the issue of gender equality in our society in all spheres of life, focusing empathically on the crusade started by the well meaning and dedicated torchbearers in arts, media, music, literature and film-making, by adopting ways and means, showcasing a sincere narrative which has the potential to achieve the equilibrium in gender equality. This has become a mass movement now and it has successfully and evocatively created awareness on this burning issue, which for centuries remained neglected and resulted in gender bias and erratic mindsets adopted by patriarchal society and posed impediments on the way to progress for women in India due to several socio-religious and cultural leanings.

Keywords: *Popular culture, Art, Media, Ki & Ka, R. Balki, Open Letter, Amitabh Bachchan, Aradhaya & Navya Naveli, My Body My Choice, Homi Adajania, Deepika Padukone, Carol P. Christ, Ardhanarishwara, Mother Goddess, Mother Earth, Rema Kagti, Shoojit Sircar, Prasoon Joshi, Pink and Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury.*

Introduction

Broadly speaking the popular culture can be described as the one that is widespread and has mass following and it is supposed to project the cultural and traditional ethos and aspirations of mainstream populace deriving strength from the components of historical and circumstantial situations, social and psychological environs shaped by tradition, socio-religious and economic values and conditions. But many a times popular culture may carry strongly derogative connotations as the opposite or the debasement of 'high' culture and 'art' proper;¹ or it may be celebrated as a convenient, cheap and lusty readily available assembly-line counter-culture² which momentarily thrills but has numerous side-effects which can result in the degradation of popular psyche. This explains the everyday, unremarkable, and ordinary;³ or it may refer to dramatic eruptions against the established, normative order. It may pertain to the culture of 'the people', or it may refer exclusively to products of modern mass media in industrialized, capitalist societies, emphasizing their wide popularity, circulation, and saturation; or it may pertain to something in-between- a non-elite subculture which may eventually transform into a mass phenomenon.⁴ Thus it is a well established factor that mass media is capable of changing the mindset of people in a big way if used in a thoughtful and productive manner without any negativity it can bring a revolution of sorts and change the perceptions which are hindrances in establishing an equilibrium in the gender equality. Fortunately, the present day scenario is breathing in a fresh breath of air with openness to new ideas and thoughts and there seems to be a thoughtful responsibility in the mass media to remove the hurdles set by age old prejudices, traditions, perceptions seeped in a patriarchal society.

With this new resurgence with the spread of education and technology, men and women are marching forward in stemming out the unjust and cruel inequalities in gender imbalances. Here the role of artists, writers, thinkers, philosophers, educators, performing artists, film-makers and actors deserve appreciation for bringing out a slow yet steady change in all spheres of social consciousness. Realization that a change is most needed at this point in 21st century is half the battle won as acknowledging the pitfalls and hindrances in achieving gender equality is a right step towards this goal which can transform our nation into a real happy and modern country. Women are fighting for this cause for a long time through their own efforts and men can join in giving a big push by marching shoulder to shoulder with women.

Ki & Ka

Recently, we saw a movie titled '***Ki & Ka***' directed by R. Balki on the theme of sharing the burden of life equally by a man and a woman by changing the age-old traditional roles.⁵ (**Plate No.1**) It is heartening to see a husband doing the daily domestic chores by

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staying at home and wife going out to work pursuing her desired career and both are happy and complement each other. This may be happening in many households where young married people live primarily in metro cities. The situation demands that such cases should be replicated. A husband can also be a good householder and a baby sitter and a wife can be a successful business-woman or a career-woman. Such examples are encouraging and thoughtful.

Open Letter

In yet another example there was an '*Open Letter*' written by legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan addressed to his granddaughters Aradhaya and Navya Naveli.⁶ (**Plate No.2**) Infact the content of this letter relates to all the young girls and women in this country and offers a glimpse of hope and also reminds them of their responsibilities as good human beings and good citizens who are at liberty to achieve whatever they dream of in their lives. A society should wholeheartedly support such endeavours and many people were touched with this letter. He writes and I quote- "*You are also girls....women! And because you are women, people will force their thinking, their boundaries on you. They will tell you how to dress, how to behave, who you can meet and where you can go. Don't live in the shadows of people's judgment. Make your choices in the light of your own wisdom. Don't let anyone make you believe that the length of your skirt is a measure of your character. Don't let anyone's opinion of who you should be friends with, dictate who you will be friends with. Don't get married for any other reason other than you want to get married. People will talk. They shall say some terrible things. But that doesn't mean you have to listen to everyone. Never ever worry about- Log Kya Kahenge! At the end of the day, you are the only one who will face the consequences of your actions, so don't let other people make your decisions for you. This may be a difficult world to be a woman. But I believe that it is woman like you that will change that. It may not be easy, setting your own boundaries, making your own choices, rising above people's judgment. But you.....you can set an example for women everywhere.*"

As this advice has come from an iconic man we admire and respect for his commitment to whatever he is doing. This implies that women have to be brave and fearless and men should be equally cooperative in supporting their causes and issues which they face every day at every step of life. This is an advice even to young boys and men of this country to raise their voice against the atrocities being committed on girls and women. Infact parents of this country who are educated and enlightened should guide and train their sons for standing against injustices being faced by women in this country. This should be a mass movement which should start from our homes to the streets and spread into

different stratas of society especially in small villages, slums and towns where it is much needed. 'He' has to stand by 'She' in all circumstances.

My Body My Choice

Many thoughtful campaigns have already been started by creative and sensitive men who are in the field of media and performing arts to create an awareness amongst the masses specially imploring men to get up and take note of the unfortunate happenings pertaining to girls and women in our society which create fear and insecurity amongst them and it poses a big hindrance in achieving their full potential in their educational, professional and career fields. In one of the campaigns for women empowerment titled '**My Body My Choice**', a short film directed by famous film-maker Homi Adajania in which Bollywood Actress Deepika Padukone, an iconic youth has very sensitively lashed at the male predators and voyeurs who dictate and exploit women's body and do not let her live the way she wants to live in a civilized society. **(Plate No.3)** The viewers of this clip were liked by countless men who agreed with her thoughts and the thoughts of the director. Here again one witnesses the serious engagement of men towards gender sensitization and against the objectification of women's body. There are two conflicting perceptions and mindsets in our society on the one hand we worship woman like a '*Mother Goddess*' - a deity and on the other hand barbarous acts of domestic violence and sexual harassment is witnessed in educational institutions and work places. One should remember that a woman is a person too no less no more than a man and this realization will transform our society enormously and there will be no male hesitation in recognizing the rights of women as equal partners in progress. With this awareness suitable laws should be framed and amended to handle the rising crimes against women in this country. In the age of digital revolution, crimes which were unthinkable and went unreported a few years back are brought to limelight in with the click of a mouse. These crimes are more heinous and horrific. Men should drop the obnoxious baggage of medieval mindset. We are not living in dark ages and men should stand with women and support their issues wholeheartedly and responsibly.

It is not a feminist thought but a universal reality that "*The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of the Goddess is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power*" writes well known author Carol P. Christ who has written a large number of books on the subject of women empowerment and gender equality. Even before that if we go back to our ancient history we find an illuminating example in mythology that of '*Ardhanarishwara*'. **(Plate No.4)** There are a large number of sculptures created by yogis and philosophers which represent the power of man and woman together in the form of a figure which is half woman and half man that of Lord Shiva which amply illustrates that both man and woman complement

each other in their physical as well as philosophical manifestation. **(Plate No.5)** A man is incomplete without a woman and vice versa. It is no wonder that our ancient sages had recognized the source of all energy as ‘*Shakti*’ and fertility as a woman is represented as ‘*Mother Earth*’ which provides us with bounties for our very existence. Modern men and women can co-exist and support each other for their causes and specific issues without which it is literally impossible to achieve any worthwhile progress and harmony in our society without crossing swords and confrontations.

“*Portrayal of women in a certain way does lead to wrapped attitudes. Filmmakers do have a certain responsibility about such portrayals and they need to take it seriously*”, says a renowned filmmaker Rema Kagti. Whereas Shoojit Sircar filmmaker admits that “*We are late to understand that women should be known for their achieved identity. It is a fault on our part in the industry that we don’t portray them in a progressive manner*”. In the same breath renowned adman Prasoon Joshi explains that “*It is a two-way traffic but this could be the tipping point for films and ads to start making radical changes. We can’t say how to gender-sensitize people when their stomachs are not full*”.⁷ The things have come to such a pass that there are large packs of howling wolves hungry for more who have tasted the blood served to them by the irresponsible creators of an unfair image of women in popular culture which needs a befitting burial.

Pink

In a moving film titled ‘*Pink*’ directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury and produced by Shoojit Sircar there is a soul-stirring and sensitive portrayal of a story with a message that ‘*when a woman says no, she means no*’. **(Plate No.6)** In a court room scene where Amitabh Bachchan has acted as an elderly lawyer efficiently and wisely handles the case of three assaulted women with utmost delicacy and firmness.

Summary

The winds of change are blowing in the right direction and it is earnestly hoped that our nation will rise to the occasion to redeem the empowerment of women and gender equality. ‘He’ is supposed to stand for ‘She’ and there is no other way.

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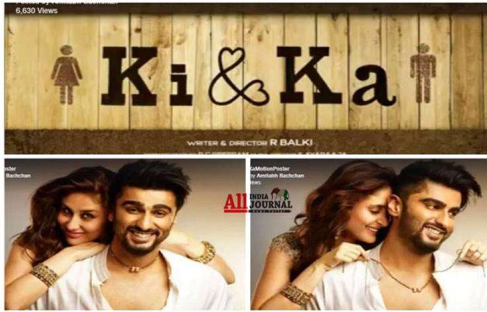


Plate no. 1



Plate no. 2

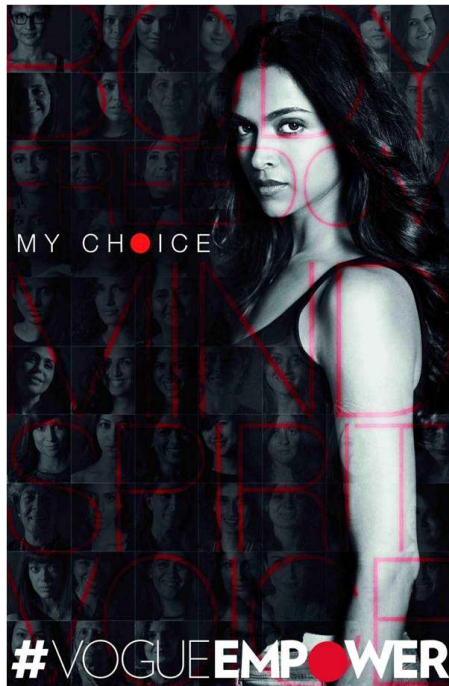


Plate no. 3



Plate no. 4



Plate no. 5



Plate no. 6