

The Negative Characters in Hindi Cinema

Dr. Nancy Devinder Kaur

Assistant Professor, Department of JMC, Punjabi University, Patiala

Abstract: Hindi cinema has witnessed a significant transformation in the portrayal of negative characters, reflecting broader societal changes and evolving cinematic narratives. This study examined the evolution of antagonists in Bollywood films, from the classic black and white villains of early cinema to the complex, morally ambiguous anti-heroes of contemporary films. The researcher did descriptive research with content analysis as a research method.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is an art form that blends the elements of photography, theatre, acting, dance, literature and digital technology. It is an audio- visual mode of Mass Communication. Cinema in a broad spectrum may be defined as a process of scripting, visualizing, capturing, recording, editing and distributing to society. It is an art form which is very close to the hearts of the viewers. The way films impact the audience no other media has done. They are pure entertainment. Cinema significantly impacts the perceptions and beliefs of the people. Films have the power to transport the audiences to the fantastical world and to live their dreams and fulfil their desires.

Ever since its inception more than century ago, cinema popularly known as silver screen has added meaning to word entertainment. Dada Sahib Phalke is credited for introducing the art of cinema to the country. In 1912 he went to London and a year later, came back as a film director and producer, releasing his first film Raja Harishchandra to the Indian audience. Another major milestone came in 1931 when India released its first full length with dialogues and songs- Alam Ara.

Initially, Lahore emerged as film making centre with major studios established there. The talent from this region had expertise in Urdu and Punjabi. They were very rich in literature. Thus, it all influenced the cultural landscape and artistic landscape of Cinema. The partition of India in 1947, significantly impacted the film industry and all the major studios and financiers shifted their base to Bombay. Appropriate weather, varied locations including beaches, mountains, plains made Bombay 'Bollywood - the hub of film making in India.

Bollywood basically means the films that are primarily produced in Hindustani language which is a mixture of Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

From the very beginning, Hindi speaking cinema revolves around three act story structure with supporting elements like music and dance. Films utilized the setup, confrontation and resolution format, with clear distinction between 'good' and 'bad' and the concept of Good was according to the Indian Traditional Value System. Even in romantic films or family dramas the concept of 'good' win over 'bad' has been exploited from the very beginning.

To elaborate on concept of 'Good Winning over Demon', Indian Films have a hero and a negative character or villain. The heroism of a hero can only be justified with the presence of a villain or a negative character. So, it can be said that a movie will be incomplete without the presence of black and grey shaded characters. Some of these iconic characters include Pran in Madhumati, Amjad Khan as Gabbar, Amrish Puri as Mogambo, Ajit in Yodan ki Barat, Shah Rukh Khan from Darr & Baazigar. A negative character can be defined as a character who plays a bad person (deliberately) opposing the hero, especially in a play, film or a book. These characters are popularly termed as villains. Typically, they act as an obstacle in the love story of hero & heroine or a home breaker in family dramas.

Hindi cinema is incomplete without villains. Every decade had one or more prominent negative character which created a benchmark. This research explored the paradigm shifts they went through during the evolution and glorification period of villains in Hindi Cinema from 1950s to 2020s. This research has analysed and helped to understand the impact of socio-political aspects on the changing narratives and trends. The study has been conducted by analysing the highest grossing movies (meaning: a movie that earned more money than any other movie) over the decades

The researcher aimed to analyse how the villains have evolved in Hindi cinema based on their importance in the films and the popularity gained.

The study focused on understanding the changes in the trends, backstories, costumes, dialogues and impacts of antagonists. The researcher also appreciated the unforgettable, well-crafted & charismatic villainous characters of Hindi cinema.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a systematic investigation to discover new knowledge & enhance existing understanding in a field. It involves gathering information, analysing data & drawing conclusions to contribute to the existing knowledge. As the topic of the research is primarily based on content, therefore, the researcher has used qualitative research methods to conduct this study. The research methods applied for the same are content analysis and personal observations.

Content Analysis: Analysing and interpreting textual, visual or audio content. It is mostly applied in media studies and social studies. This helps to find patterns and themes. **UNIT OF**

ANALYSIS

- **STORYLINE & DIALOGUES:** The plot of the story and some iconic dialogues that got popular.
- **MAKE UP AND COSTUME:** The aesthetic appearance and look of a character including prosthetics, scars etc.

SAMPLING: One highest grossing movie has been selected from each decade.

- 1) 1950s: MOTHER INDIA
- 2) 1960s: MUGHAL-E-AZAM
- 3) 1970s: SHOLAY
- 4) 1980s: MR. INDIA
- 5) 1990s: DARR
- 6) 2000s: GADAR: EK PREM KATHA
- 7) 2010s: DANGAL
- 8) 2020s: KABIR SINGH

Even though the movies 'Disco Dancer', 'Hum Apke Hain Kaun', '3 Idiots', and 'Jawan' come under the list of highest grossing movies. The researcher has consciously chosen to leave them out because they fall outside the defined scope of analysis and don't align directly with the research.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

MOTHER INDIA (1950s): The primary antagonist is Sukhilala, (played by Kanhaiyalal) a corrupt and exploitative moneylender. His character symbolizes the oppressive feudal system that exploited poor farmers in rural India. Unlike conventional villains who use physical violence, Sukhilala wields

economic power to manipulate and control vulnerable individuals, making him a representation of systemic exploitation (Dwyer, 2005). Sukhilala preys upon the misfortunes of Radha, the film's protagonist, and her family. When Radha and her husband take a loan from him, he imposes exorbitant interest rates, trapping them in a cycle of debt. His character echoes the real-life struggles of Indian farmers who faced exploitative lending practices under colonial and feudal rule (Chakravarty, 1993). After Radha's husband leaves due to an accident, Sukhilala attempts to take advantage of her desperate situation, even offering to waive the debt in exchange for her dignity—a moment that underscores his moral corruption (Kabir, 2001). Sukhilala's actions not only fuel Radha's suffering but also shape the path of her son, Birju. Witnessing his mother's hardships, Birju grows up resenting Sukhilala, eventually turning to violence as a form of rebellion. His hatred culminates in an act of revenge when he kills Sukhilala and kidnaps his daughter. However, in a tragic turn, Radha, representing justice and righteousness, is forced to kill her own son to uphold moral order. Sukhilala's character is crucial in establishing the film's larger themes of social injustice, resilience, and moral struggle. His presence highlights the stark realities of economic exploitation in post-independence India, reinforcing Mother India as a powerful critique of rural oppression and the sacrifices required to uphold justice.

MUGHAL-E-AZAM (1960s)

In Mughal-e-Azam (1960), was a period drama. The main antagonist is Emperor Akbar, played by Prithviraj Kapoor. Unlike typical villains driven by greed or cruelty, Akbar is a powerful and just ruler who becomes an obstacle to his son's love story. His opposition to Prince Salim's love for the courtesan Anarkali is rooted in his belief that royal blood should not mix with commoners. Akbar is portrayed as a wise but strict ruler, prioritizing the empire's honour over his son's happiness. He repeatedly warns Salim to end his relationship with Anarkali, but when Salim refuses, Akbar takes harsh measures. He imprisons Anarkali and later wages war against his own son when Salim rebels against him. Despite his love for Salim, Akbar ultimately chooses duty over family, ensuring that Anarkali is sentenced to death, although it is hinted that he later spares her secretly (Chakravarty, 1993). Akbar's character represents the conflict between personal

emotions and royal duty. While he is not a traditional villain, his rigid adherence to tradition and authority makes him the film's primary antagonist, standing in the way of the lovers' happiness. His rigid body language and refined language made him royal Villain.

SHOLAY (1970s)

Gabbar Singh, played by Amjad Khan, is one of the most memorable villains in Indian cinema. A ruthless and sadistic dacoit, he instils fear through his unpredictability and cruelty. His infamous dialogues, such as "Kitne aadmi the?" ("How many men were there?"), have become iconic (Sippy, 1975). Unlike traditional antagonists, Gabbar Singh enjoys inflicting psychological and physical torment, making him a formidable foe. Inspired by real-life dacoits of Chambal, Gabbar Singh's character is marked by extreme brutality and a twisted sense of humour. His merciless nature is evident when he forces his men to play Russian roulette as punishment for failure. His menacing persona is further enhanced by Amjad Khan's gripping performance, which cemented Gabbar as one of Bollywood's greatest villains (Chopra, 2014).

MR. INDIA (1980s)

Mogambo, played by Amrish Puri, is one of Bollywood's most legendary villains. His larger-than-life personality, eccentric appearance, and menacing dialogue—especially the catchphrase "Mogambo khush hua!" ("Mogambo is pleased!")—make him an unforgettable antagonist. Unlike traditional villains, Mogambo operates from a high-tech lair equipped with futuristic weapons and a private army. His character embodies pure evil, driven by an insatiable hunger for power and destruction. He exhibits no empathy, mercilessly punishing his subordinates and orchestrating massive attacks on civilians. Amrish Puri's powerful performance, combined with Mogambo's theatrical persona, has cemented the character as a cultural icon in Indian cinema.

DARR (1990s)

Rahul Mehra, played by Shah Rukh Khan, is one of Bollywood's most iconic antagonists. Unlike conventional villains, he is depicted as an obsessive lover rather than a typical criminal. His psychological instability manifests in his delusional belief that Kiran belongs to him. Rahul's character is complex; he is both menacing and sympathetic,

making the audience oscillate between fear and pity. His famous dialogue, "I love you, K-K-K-Kiran," underscores his unstable yet intense emotions (Chopra, 1993). Rahul's villainy is rooted in psychological horror rather than physical aggression, setting him apart from traditional Bollywood antagonists. His actions highlight themes of toxic obsession, unreciprocated love, and mental illness (Chopra, 1993). Khan's performance in Darr was widely praised and marked a turning point in his career, leading him to be recognized for playing anti-hero roles in subsequent films (Joshi, 2019)

GADAR: EK PREM KATHA (2000S)

Ashraf Ali, portrayed by Amrish Puri, serves as the primary antagonist in the film. As Sakina's father and the mayor of Lahore, he embodies the societal and familial pressures of the time. Ashraf's opposition to Tara and Sakina's union stems from his concern for social status, religious differences, and political implications. His character encapsulates the challenges faced by interfaith couples during Partition, representing the broader societal resistance to such unions.

DANGAL (2010s)

Played by Girish Kulkarni, Coach Kadam is portrayed as the primary negative influence in the latter half of the film. As Geeta's coach at the National Sports Academy, he discourages her from following her father's traditional training methods. His emphasis on textbook techniques, lack of personal motivation for his trainees, and ego-driven conflicts with Mahavir create a significant challenge for Geeta's progress. The film highlights the deeply ingrained patriarchy in rural India, where women are expected to conform to traditional roles. The villagers and even the Phogat family initially ridicule Mahavir's decision to train his daughters in wrestling, believing that the sport is only meant for men.

KABIR SINGH (2020s)

Dr. Kabir Singh, as a deeply flawed character whose negative traits dominate much of the narrative. While the film presents him as a passionate and talented surgeon, his self-destructive tendencies, aggressive behaviour, and toxic masculinity raise significant ethical and moral concerns (Jain, 2019). Kabir Singh exhibits extreme aggression throughout the film, often resorting to violence to assert

dominance. His uncontrollable anger is evident in his frequent physical altercations with college peers, hospital staff, and even strangers. This violent behaviour, rather than being condemned, is often glorified in the film, raising concerns about its impact on audiences (Sharma, 2019). Research indicates that the normalization of aggression in popular media can influence young viewers, reinforcing the idea that violent outbursts are an acceptable means of conflict resolution (Chatterjee, 2020). One of Kabir Singh's most criticized traits is his possessiveness over Preeti Sikka, the female lead. He dictates her friendships, interactions, and even physical space, reinforcing patriarchal notions of control over women (Jain, 2019). For instance, in one scene, he aggressively claims Preeti as his partner without considering her autonomy, reinforcing problematic gender dynamics. Scholars argue that such portrayals can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and normalize toxic relationships in society (Mukherjee, 2021). Kabir Singh's character embodies numerous negative traits, including aggression, toxic masculinity, substance abuse, and a lack of accountability. While the film attempts to present his journey as one of passion and love, it ultimately raises ethical concerns regarding its portrayal of violence, possessiveness, and self-destruction (Jain, 2019). The glorification of such behaviours in mainstream cinema can have lasting cultural implications, making it crucial to analyse films through a critical lens.

CONCLUSION

Over the decades the shades of negative characters in Indian films have undergone major shifts in all the areas like storyline, costume, makeup and cinematic treatment. From the data collected it is quite clear that the social and political narratives influence the image of villains in the films. Back in times common man used to get exploited by the money lenders. Therefore, in earlier films like *Mother India*, *Ram aur Shayam*, *Devdas*, *Waqt...* the villains were primarily the money lenders. As the economic conditions, social infrastructure and political change from time to time so did the image of negative characters in films. 1970s the villains were robbers, then they were drug lords and by the end of the century they were aggressive lovers. The image of the villains was according to the mindset of the audience. For a film to run successfully, the story and characters must be relatable to the audience.

Earlier the negative characters were written in a way to create fear in the minds of the audience through their tall and hefty physiques, big moustaches and beard, unusual style of dressing and with a habit of smoking and drinking. Sometimes these characters were also shown with some physical deficiency. They were also shown with harmful weapons and an army of henchmen. These characters were shown to exploit women and no respect to human relationships. The biggest example is the character of Gabbar from the film '*Sholay*'.

In the past the negative characters in the films were not justified well. The craft of the negative roles were written to glorify the hero. But now-a-days in the films like *Kabir Singh* or *Jolly LLB* the negative character is portrayed as a shade of a character. The perfect line between the positive and negative characters has diminished in the present times. Now, the audience is more acceptable to the fact that people change and good and bad traits are a part of human behaviour. Films now-a-days are not made on rigid stereotypes as it was done a few decades back. Now, Bollywood is embracing a transformation where heroes are ready to step into the shoes of a villain.

REFERENCE

- [1] Chakravarty, S. (1993). *National identity in Indian popular cinema, 1947-1987*. University of Texas Press.
- [2] Chatterjee, P. (2020). The influence of cinema on aggression and substance abuse in youth: A psychological perspective. *Indian Journal of Media Studies*, 12(3)
- [3] Chopra, A. (2002). *King of Bollywood: Shah Rukh Khan and the seductive world of Indian cinema*. Warner Books. Kapur, S. (Director). (1987). *Mr. India* [Film]. Narsimha Enterprises
- [4] Ghosh, T. K. (2013). *Bollywood Baddies: Villains, Vamps and Henchmen in Hindi Cinema*. SAGE Publications.
- [5] Gokulsing, K. M., & Dissanayake, W. (2013). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*. Trentham Books.
- [6] Kabir, N. (2011). *The Immortal Dialogue of Sholay*. Om Books International.
- [7] Kabir, N. M. (2001). *Guru Dutt: A life in cinema*. Oxford University Press.
- [8] Rajadhyaksha, A., & Willemssen, P. (1999). *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*. Oxford University Press.