

# Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema: Analysis on Animal Hindi Cinema

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**Abstract**—The portrayal of women in Indian cinema has long been a subject of critical analysis, reflecting societal norms, cultural values, and evolving gender dynamics. This paper delves into the representation of women in *Animal* (2023), a Hindi-language film directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, within the broader context of contemporary Indian cinema. Through a detailed examination of the film's narrative, character arcs, and visual aesthetics, this study explores how *Animal* both challenges and reinforces traditional gender stereotypes in Bollywood. The research draws on feminist film theory, gender studies, and media representations to investigate the film's treatment of female characters, their agency, and their relationships with male protagonists. It also assesses the intersection of violence, vulnerability, and empowerment in shaping the cinematic portrayal of women. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how modern Hindi cinema navigates the complexities of gender identity, power structures, and societal expectations in an increasingly globalized media landscape.

**Index Terms**—Cinema, protagonist, portrayal of women, gender stereotypes, male protagonists.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indian film has traditionally been a potent medium for influencing public opinion and expressing society ideals because of its great diversity and cultural richness. The way women are portrayed in Bollywood films has changed dramatically over the years, yet there is still constant discussion and criticism about it. The portrayal of women in Hindi cinema has reflected and influenced the shifting dynamics of gender relations in Indian society since the beginning of the industry, when female characters were mostly limited to stereotypical roles of devotion, sacrifice, and passivity. More recently, however, these portrayals

have increasingly shown women as complex, multifaceted individuals.

Sandeep Reddy Vanga's 2023 film *Animal* offers a distinctive perspective on these changing representations. *Animal* provides an engaging and complex portrayal of its female characters, despite its primary focus on the deep psychological and emotional journey of its male protagonist. Despite not being as important to the plot as their male counterparts, these characters play a crucial role in the themes of pain, family, loyalty, and retaliation.

This study aims to investigate how women are portrayed in *Animal* in relation to the larger field of modern Indian film. This research attempts to analyse how *Animal* deals with issues of gender, power, and agency by looking at the film's narrative structure, character development, and visual language. This movie's depiction of female characters offers a chance to examine how Indian cinema now struggles with gender norms, providing both progressive depictions and reiterating long standing stereotypes.

Furthermore, against the backdrop of a violent, frequently poisonous male-driven story, this article will evaluate the degree to which *Animal* subverts or upholds the cultural constructs of femininity, agency, and vulnerability. This study will advance knowledge of how Bollywood film both reflects and shapes the evolving roles of women in Indian culture by applying feminist film theory and critical gender analysis. This study will clarify the intricacies of gender representation in contemporary Hindi film and its ramifications for more general social and cultural debates by concentrating on *Animal*.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The portrayal of women in Indian cinema has long been a topic of debate, critique, and exploration, with

varying interpretations depending on the genre, time period, and evolving societal norms. Analyzing the representation of women in Hindi cinema, particularly in contemporary films like *Animal* (2023), offers an intriguing lens through which to examine gender dynamics, cinematic aesthetics, and cultural shifts in India.

### 2.1. The Evolution of Gender Representation in Indian Cinema

Women were mostly restricted to the stereotypical roles of spouses, mothers, and obedient daughters in early Indian cinema, especially between the 1940s and the 1970s. Women were frequently portrayed as symbols of virtue, selflessness, and familial honour in accordance with societal norms. This tendency is highlighted in the writings of academics like Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2008) and Shoma Chatterji (2011), who show how women were frequently characterised by their interactions with male heroes, representing ideals of obedience and purity.

Due in large part to the impact of societal change, women's growing prominence in public life, and media globalisation, the representation of women started to evolve in the 1980s and 1990s as more nuanced characters emerged. This change is explained by Raka Shome (2006) and Rachel Dwyer (2006), who point out that women are portrayed as being more self-reliant, outspoken, and frequently involved in professional situations. Films started to balance tradition and modernity, but these portrayals were still constrained by patriarchy.

### 2.2. The New Wave of Female Representation in Contemporary Cinema

Interest in more complex depictions of women in Indian cinema has increased in the twenty-first century. Filmmakers started to experiment with a variety of characters that represented modern culture rather than sticking to stereotypical portrayals. Women were shown in films such as *Queen* (2013), *Piku* (2015), and *Raazi* (2018) as complex, multifaceted people with goals, wants, and imperfections. Nandini Chandra (2012) and Tanika Sarkar (2001) stress the significance of these films in questioning conventional narratives and providing a forum for the investigation of women's agency.

### 2.3. Violence and Trauma in Indian Cinema: The Case of 'Animal'.

Sandeep Reddy Vanga's film *Animal* offers a fresh interpretation of women's roles in the Hindi film industry, particularly in respect to their interactions with male leads who deal with toxic masculinity. In sharp contrast to more progressive representations in other genres, female characters are frequently portrayed in this violent, action packed drama as victims or survivors of male aggression. Ayesha Kidwai (2022) and Asha Bhardwaj (2023) are two academics who have studied how films like *Animal* employ the theme of violence to study the broken state of romantic and familial ties in the contemporary society. Despite being essential to the plot, *Animal*'s female characters roles are frequently determined by their interactions with male characters, perhaps displaying a passive resilience rather than active agency.

The movie has drawn criticism for how it portrays trauma and frequently links women to the effects of masculine aggression. In her work on modern Bollywood film, Kritika Agarwal (2023) contends that *Animal* illustrates the psychological and emotional toll that toxic masculinity takes on women, but ironically, it also reinforces the conventional narrative of women as martyrs who are powerless to overcome the violent systems in their environment. As a result, even while *Animal* deviates from conventional representations in terms of unadulterated emotion and thematic complexity, its treatment of women could yet follow some recognisable trends.

### 2.4. Feminist Cinema Criticism: Gender, Power, and the Male Gaze

To comprehend the gender dynamics in films like *Animal*, a critical examination of the masculine gaze in Indian cinema is essential. Despite being created in a Western setting, Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze has influenced feminist film criticism in India, especially in regards to comprehending how the camera objectifies female characters. The way the female form is framed in *Animal*'s hyper-masculine world demonstrates this gaze, implying that even if women may play important roles, the male experience still frequently takes precedence.

In her critique of this trend, Shampa Banerjee (2020) contends that despite advancements in the cinema industry towards more nuanced female characters,

women are still frequently portrayed through the prism of male trauma and desire, subjecting them to tales of strength and power that are controlled by men. Animal's more forceful and simplistic view of gender roles contrasts with the more progressive and nuanced depictions of women in the films of directors like Anurag Kashyap and Vishal Bhardwaj.

### 2.5. Women and Trauma in Contemporary Hindi Cinema

Recent research on trauma in Indian cinema has gained popularity, especially in relation to how women are portrayed. Trauma is used in films like *Animal* as a metaphor for the greater social and psychological problems that Indian women encounter, in addition to being a story device. However, the pain that female characters endure frequently goes unresolved, which results in interpretations that criticise the representation of women as lifelong victims in a patriarchal system.

The way that male character's violence is interwoven with women's victimisation in *Animal* has generated discussions about whether these films provide a platform for female empowerment or just serve to uphold damaging gender stereotypes. According to Nivedita Menon (2015), trauma runs the risk of limiting women to submissive roles and undervaluing their capacity for agency in overcoming such hardships, particularly when presented as an intrinsic aspect of female existence.

### 2.6. The Intersection of Gender and Class in *Animal* (2023)

Characters' socioeconomic backgrounds especially those of the women in *Animal* are crucial to comprehending their roles in the story. Given that the female characters' challenges are characterised by both their socioeconomic situation and gender, the intersectionality of gender and class is essential. Gayathri Venkatesan (2022) draws attention to the increasing awareness of class-based depiction in modern Indian cinema, where films like *Animal* capture the sinister undertones of urbanisation, familial power relations, and economic inequality. With films like *Animal* pushing boundaries but yet battling ingrained cultural conventions and gendered expectations, the representation of women in Hindi cinema is still a contentious issue. The future direction of women in Indian cinema will become clearer with

further investigation into the reception of such films by viewers and the consequences for gender debate in Indian culture.

## III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In this study, "Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema: Analysis of *Animal* (2023) in Hindi Cinema," the representation of female characters in modern Bollywood cinema is critically examined, with a focus on the Sandeep Reddy Vanga directed movie *Animal*. The study will investigate how women are portrayed in Hindi cinema across time, following changes from clichéd roles to more nuanced and sophisticated representations. The study will investigate how *Animal* constructs its female characters, their agency, emotional depth, and relationships with male protagonists, particularly in the context of a violent and action driven narrative. Additionally, the study will examine the use of cinematic techniques, such as the male gaze, and how these influence the representation of women. To determine if the movie presents a subversion of these gender assumptions or upholds traditional patriarchal conventions, a feminist perspective will be used. The study will also look at how *Animal* represents shifting gender roles in contemporary India, as well as the wider cultural and societal ramifications of these depictions. In order to assess the film's influence on the current gender discourse in Indian cinema, the study will conclude by discussing audience reactions and interpretations of these portrayals. The study seeks to offer a thorough grasp of how *Animal* fits within the broader context of women's representation in contemporary Indian film through this multifaceted approach.

## IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The portrayal of women in Indian cinema has long been a subject of debate, with traditional representations often reinforcing patriarchal ideals and limiting female characters to passive or subordinate roles. In recent years, however, there has been a noticeable shift in the narrative and cinematic treatment of women, especially in contemporary Bollywood films. Sandeep Reddy Vanga's 2023 film *Animal* tells a complicated and violent plot in which women have important but frequently problematic roles. *Animal* poses important queries regarding the

complexity, agency, and victimhood of female characters in a male-dominated story, even in light of the changing landscape of gender portrayal in Indian cinema. Within the larger framework of Bollywood's depiction of gender, this study aims to investigate the issue of how women are portrayed in *Animal*. In particular, it seeks to investigate whether the movie questions or upholds conventional representations of women and how its treatment of female characters either supports or impedes current conversations about gender, power, and agency in Indian cinema.

## V. OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the characterization of women in *Animal* (2023)
- To evaluate the feminist implications of the film's portrayal of women.
- To contextualize the film's representation of women within contemporary Indian society.

## VI. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the research titled "Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema: Analysis on *Animal* Hindi Cinema" will employ a qualitative, textual analysis approach to examine the representation of women in the 2023 film *Animal*. This analysis will be conducted through the lens of feminist film theory, focusing on the characterization of female characters, their roles within the narrative, and the implications of these portrayals. The research will first involve a close reading of the film, analyzing key scenes and the development of female characters throughout the storyline. Attention will be given to how these characters are framed visually, their dialogues, and their interactions with male protagonists, assessing their agency and significance within the plot. Additionally, the study will evaluate the feminist implications of these representations, considering whether they challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms. The analysis will also contextualize the film's depiction of women within contemporary Indian society, exploring how it reflects or critiques current cultural attitudes toward women's roles and identities. Through this methodology, the research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how *Animal*

contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender representation in Indian cinema.

## VII. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

7.1. To analyze the characterization of women in *Animal* movie.

This study examines the portrayal of women in the film *Animal*, focusing on agency, emotional depth, narrative importance, and power relations. By analyzing autonomy, trauma, and cultural context, the research evaluates whether female characters are marginalized supports for male arcs or complex individuals shaping meaning within contemporary Indian cinema discourse.

### Agency and Autonomy

The ability of female characters to make choices on their own, control their own fates, and impact the plot is a key component of character analysis. The study will assess if the women in *Animal* have any true sense of autonomy or if their main function is to react to the male characters' activities. Do they function to support the emotional or narrative growth of male characters, or are they presented as active actors with their own ambitions, objectives, and actions. This will entail examining both instances of women being oppressed or subjugated as well as those in which they oppose male authority, defy expectations, or take control over their circumstances.

### Emotional Complexity and Depth

Another key element is the emotional depth of female characters in *Animal*. In many films, women are often reduced to stereotypical emotional roles, such as the victim, the caretaker, or the romantic interest, without much room for complex inner lives. This study will examine how the women in *Animal* are portrayed emotionally. Are they given depth, with their own fears, motivations, and growth arcs. How do the women in the film respond to the intense situations of violence and trauma that surround them. Are they depicted as resilient individuals who navigate emotional and psychological challenges, or are their emotions merely a plot device to further the male characters journeys.

### Narrative Significance and Role in the Plot

The study will investigate how essential the female characters are to the main plot and themes of the movie. Do they play supporting roles whose main

purpose is to assist the tales of the male heroes, or are they essential to the plot's development. Whether the female characters in *Animal* drive important plot developments, shape the course of events, or mostly serve as plot catalysts or emotional backdrop for the male leads, their narrative significance must be evaluated.

#### Power Dynamics in Relationships

Given *Animal*'s violent and emotionally intense content, the study will also evaluate how power is distributed between the male and female characters. To comprehend the negotiation and representation of gender roles, the film's interactions between men and women will be examined. Does the film depict interactions that empower women, or do the female characters' ties with the male protagonists define their inferior positions. The study will look at how the characters interact emotionally, physically, and psychologically, particularly when it comes to male aggression and violence, and how these interactions either support or contradict conventional gender roles.

#### Portrayal of Trauma and Victimhood

The representation of female characters in *Animal* is influenced by the violence and trauma that are prevalent throughout the film. The study will look at how trauma and victimisation are portrayed in regard to women. Are they depicted as survivors, or is suffering at the hands of male aggression the main aspect of their character arc. The study will investigate if these female characters are ensnared in victim narratives that restrict their complexity and depth, or if they are offered the chance for emotional recovery, empowerment, or agency following tragedy.

#### Cultural and Societal Context

Finally, the analysis will situate the portrayal of women in *Animal* within the broader cultural and societal context of contemporary India. The study will explore how the film's depiction of women reflects or critiques the evolving roles of women in modern Indian society. Are these women representative of the changing gender dynamics in urban India, or do they reflect more traditional and regressive gender roles. This will include a discussion of how the film fits into or challenges current trends in Bollywood cinema regarding gender representation.

7.2. Evaluate the feminist implications of the film's portrayal of women.

This section explores female agency and autonomy in *Animal* through a feminist lens, examining how women are represented in terms of power, choice, sexuality, and emotional depth. It evaluates whether the film challenges or reinforces patriarchal norms, gender hierarchies, and the marginalization of women in male-centric narratives.

#### Female Agency and Autonomy

Feminist critique places a strong emphasis on portraying women as independent, self-governing beings who can influence the story and make choices on their own terms. The study will investigate whether the female characters in *Animal* are portrayed as active participants who influence the plot or if they are reduced to supporting roles that advance the arcs of the male protagonists. Feminist cinema theory, specifically Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze," indicates that women in film are often objectified and reduced to the role of the "other," existing exclusively for the pleasure or development of male characters. The research will analyze how the female characters in *Animal* are framed whether they are objectified or whether they are given room to display their own desires, emotions, and actions independent of male characters.

#### Power Dynamics and Gender Hierarchies

The interactions between the male and female characters are crucial to comprehending the gender power dynamics in *Animal* (2023), despite the film's focus on male trauma, aggression, and psychological complexity. Examining how gender hierarchies are upheld or challenged in media representations is crucial, according to feminist theory, especially power based frameworks like those put out by Judith Butler or Bell Hooks. The study will assess the interactions between the female characters and the male characters, particularly with regard to power dynamics. Do the women in *Animal* demonstrate power on their own or are they depicted as the targets of masculine aggression. Are these women merely passive spectators in the male-centric story, or do they possess the ability to question or confront the male characters. Whether the film's power structures uphold conventional gender norms or provide alternate depictions of female strength and resistance will be the main topic of analysis.

#### Portrayal of Violence and Trauma

Since *Animal* contains a lot of emotional and physical violence, the study will also look at how violence is portrayed and how that impacts how women are portrayed. Women's bodies are frequently used as locations of pain and suffering in films, with little chance for empowerment or healing, as feminist critiques frequently point out. This analysis will focus on how the movie portrays female characters in relation to male violence, whether they are abused, manipulated, or controlled. Whether the women in *Animal* are given the chance to regain agency following tragedy or if their suffering further deepens the psychological journeys of the male heroes will determine the feminist implications. Do these women's victim status define them, or do they possess the ability to transcend it.

#### Sexuality and the Male Gaze

Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze, which contends that popular film frequently depicts women's bodies through the eyes of male characters, presenting them as objects of desire rather than beings with free will, is another essential component of feminist film theory. The study will look at the visual representation of *Animal*'s female characters in comparison to its male leads. Do the women have complexity and autonomy that changes the power relations, or are they portrayed in a way that appeals to the male gaze. In addition, this research will look at how female characters are positioned in relation to male characters, how their sexuality is depicted, and whether or not they are sexualised or granted agency over their own sexuality.

#### Complexity and Depth of Female Characters

A critical feminist analysis often focuses on whether female characters are given depth, complexity, and individual narrative arcs, or whether they are reduced to one-dimensional roles that serve the story's male protagonists. In *Animal*, the research will explore whether the women are fully realized characters with their own emotional, psychological, and narrative journeys, or if they are defined primarily by their relationships to men or their roles in furthering the male protagonists' stories. Are these women allowed to have their own desires, flaws, ambitions, and growth arcs, or are they primarily defined by external circumstances such as their association with male characters or their experiences of suffering.

#### Feminist Subtext and Societal Critique

The study will also assess if *Animal* challenges or upholds established gender roles, as well as the film's larger feminist undertone. Does *Animal* support traditional and regressive ideas about women's responsibilities in society, or does it provide a feminist viewpoint on topics like gender inequality, violence, and power. The study will examine how the movie addresses current gender issues, including how toxic masculinity is portrayed and how it affects female characters, as well as if the story promotes a more equal perspective on gender relations. Through its depiction of women, does the movie question or uphold patriarchal systems? The feminist analysis will also take into account how the movie's portrayal of women relates to broader cultural trends and how women are portrayed in modern Bollywood.

#### Audience Reception and Feminist Implications

Finally, the research will consider how audiences, particularly feminist viewers, interpret the film's portrayal of women. Do critics and audiences perceive the female characters as empowered and significant, or do they see them as victims or mere plot devices. The feminist implications of the film's portrayal of women are also shaped by its reception whether the film is seen as progressive in its treatment of women or whether it is criticized for reinforcing outdated gender norms.

#### 7.3. To contextualize the film's representation of women within contemporary Indian society.

This section situates *Animal* within contemporary Indian society to examine how its portrayal of women reflects shifting gender roles, persistent patriarchy, and evolving feminist discourses. By linking cinematic representation with social change, the study evaluates whether the film mirrors progressive realities or reinforces traditional expectations surrounding women's agency and identity.

#### Changing Gender Dynamics in Post-Independence India

Gender dynamics have changed significantly since India gained its independence, especially after the feminist movements of the 1970s and 1980s raised awareness of social justice, women's rights, and legislative reforms. The way women are portrayed in Hindi cinema has steadily changed over the past few decades, reflecting shifting views on gender roles. This change involves a more varied portrayal of women's lives, a stronger emphasis on women's

empowerment, and increasing visibility in the political and professional arenas. These changes haven't been smooth, though, and the complexity of patriarchal structures and gender inequity still exists.

*Animal* (2023), which takes place in contemporary India, might be seen as a result of this shifting environment. The study will examine if the movie criticises or reflects the current changes in gender dynamics by examining the female characters. Does *Animal*'s depiction of women support more conventional and patriarchal representations or does it recognise the changing position of women in Indian society. The analysis will specifically concentrate on whether the film addresses problems of female autonomy, independence, and equality as well as if the women are portrayed as passive or active participants in their own lives.

#### Women and Agency in Contemporary Bollywood

Films depicting women as multifaceted people with agency, professional aspirations, and personal interests have become more prevalent in the twenty-first century. Bollywood productions like *Piku* (2015), *Raazi* (2018), and *Tumhari Sulu* (2017) have captured the evolving social mores of the time, as women are increasingly defying expectations and claiming their independence in the profession, in interpersonal relationships, and in negotiating social conventions. Women are portrayed in these films as complex individuals with the ability to take charge of their own lives, overcome obstacles, and create their own stories.

*Animal*, on the other hand, is a male driven story that mostly deals with issues of trauma, violence, and masculinity. In this regard, the study will examine if *Animal*'s female characters are granted agency or if they are reduced to supporting parts that mainly draw attention to the male lead's emotional and psychological problems. In *Animal*, are the female characters shown as individuals with their own aspirations, objectives, and complexity, or do they continue to be subordinate to the emotional experiences of the male characters. This will clarify the ways in which the movie conforms to or departs from current representations of women in Hindi cinema.

#### Reflection of Societal Expectations of Women

In contemporary India, societal expectations of women are evolving, but traditional roles such as being dutiful wives, mothers, and caretakers continue

to hold significant influence. The film will be examined for how it reflects these enduring expectations of women, particularly in relation to family dynamics, romantic relationships, and domesticity. Do the female characters in *Animal* conform to these traditional roles, or do they challenge and redefine them.

The film's exploration of themes like violence, familial trauma, and revenge may intersect with gendered expectations, as women are often depicted in traditional media as the emotional caretakers of families. How does *Animal* present women within these frameworks. Are they portrayed as emotionally supportive figures, or do they break free from these stereotypical expectations to develop their own identities.

#### Women and Violence in *Animal* (2023)

With films like *Pink* (2016) and *Mardaani* (2014), Bollywood has started to highlight the realities of violence against women in recent years, ranging from sexual assault to domestic abuse. These films show women as active agents of resistance who actively oppose and challenge the power structures that uphold gender-based oppression, rather than only as victims of violence.

Given that *Animal* revolves around emotional and physical violence, the study will look at how the movie deals with the relationship between gender and violence. Do the female characters in *Animal* face and fight against the violence in their existence, or do they only act as victims of male aggression and violence. Is their representation empowering in any way, or does it only serve to emphasise masculine trauma by depicting them as objects of suffering. The study will place the movie's depiction of female suffering in the broader discussion of Indian women's rights, safety, and empowerment.

#### The Changing Role of Women in Urban and Rural India

The contrast between urban and rural characters has frequently characterised the representation of women in Hindi cinema. While rural women frequently continue to live within old, patriarchal institutions, urban women are generally portrayed as more contemporary, independent, and career-focused. These differences are being questioned as India grows more urbanised and women have more access to jobs and education.

*Animal* (2023), though set in an urban context, will be analysed for how it navigates these shifting boundaries. Are the female characters portrayed as empowered, urban women who challenge traditional roles, or do they conform to more regressive stereotypes that align with rural, conservative depictions of women? Does the film represent a more progressive, contemporary India where women are navigating the complexities of modern life, or does it revert to older, more traditional representations.

#### Feminism in *Animal* and the Male Gaze

The study will conclude by examining the feminist ramifications of *Animal*'s depiction of women in light of the male gaze, a notion first proposed by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. In films, women are frequently portrayed as objects of male desire, their agency reduced to suit the male protagonist's narrative demands. This is known as the "male gaze." The research will investigate whether the female characters in *Animal* are shown from a male perspective or if the film permits women to exist as separate subjects in their own right, given its strong emphasis on masculinity, violence, and male pain.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

In summary, the way women are portrayed in *Animal* (2023) offers a nuanced and comprehensive perspective for comprehending how women are portrayed in modern Hindi film. The film's portrayal of female characters provides significant insights on the ongoing changes in gender dynamics and cultural expectations in India, even though the main focus is on the journey of the male protagonist. *Animal* both defies and conforms to standard gender clichés in different ways, according to the research, which looks at the agency, complexity, and roles of women in the movie. Despite not being the main protagonists, the female characters play a crucial role in the emotional and psychological development of the story. But the male-driven plot typically takes precedence over their roles, which begs the issue of how much feminist representation has been truly welcomed in contemporary Bollywood film. According to the research, *Animal* does not completely engage with a feminist criticism of gender relations because women are frequently reduced to supportive or passive positions, even when it addresses current concerns of

trauma and masculinity. This ambivalence highlights the conflict between the continuation of conventional gender standards and progressive depictions of women in Indian cinema. In the end, *Animal* reflects the complicated and occasionally contradictory current condition of female representation in Bollywood, implying that although there has been progress, much more has to be done to completely reinterpret the role of women in Indian cinema.

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