

Gender Representation of Mainstream Movies in Bangladesh

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Abstract

At present, the movie is one of the most powerful media of knowledge and information in the world. Through a movie, various issues including political, economic, social, and cultural issues come up in the society. The issues of various complex relations of the society are presented in a movie. Gender has different characters in Bangladeshi movies and the characters have different meanings. Eight movies are selected for the study through purposive sampling and research data is explained through the narrative analysis method. Stuart Hall's representation theory, Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, and queer theory have been used as theoretical frameworks for the study. The results show that in eight movies, women are portrayed as weak, compassionate, unobtrusive, and men as strong and authoritarian. There is no presentation of the Third Gender in any movie other than Common Gender movie. Women are portrayed in the movie as sexually appealing, dependent on men and victims. And men have been portrayed as sex offenders, women abusers, and criminals. Apart from the character of the heroine, the character of other women in the movie is inanimate. The men are the active and central characters in all the movies and most of them see in scenes and dialogues. In some of the dialogues and scenes of the movie, women are respected and women's issues are highlighted which is not enough to highlight women's issues as a whole. And seven of the eight movies have no scenes or dialogues about third genders. However, in the Common Gender movie, the helplessness, denial of their basic right, and various problems of third genders have been highlighted. The movie can play a positive role in overcoming the obstacles to the development of gender inequality in society.

Keywords: Movie, Gender, Representation, Narrative Analysis.

INTRODUCTION:

In the age of information technology, the influence and scope of mass media in the field of politics, economy, and culture is increasing day by day. Movies are one of the most influential media outlets in the world (Car, et al., 2016). Many important aspects of society and personal life are presented live in front of the audience through the movie (Blasco, et al., 2006). Although the movie started in 1890, many changes have taken place in the evolution of time (Bakker, 2005). Movies are now a distinctly powerful industry through the medium of art, literature, and entertainment (Ndalianis, 2004). Billion Dollars are being invested in the movie. The movie industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. In recent years, the movie has been earning 100 billion dollars per year (Escandon, 2020). Movies are not only just about finance, literature, or entertainment but also promote different ideologies around the world. The movie is one of the most subtle and powerful means of teaching and promoting ideology, so the movie is more than just a business or industry (Benshoff, 2021). The movie reflects both real and unreal events of society. However, most of the stories in the movie are related to any reality of society. The movie reflects the complex issues, relationships, and problems of society.

Gender related problem is one of the big problems of the world because it is related to history, politics, economy, religion, superstition, and many other issues. Due to some different physical structures, there are different rules and opportunities for different genders. Although half of the world's population is female and half male, the dignity, rights, or opportunities of men and women are not equal (UNICEF, 2006). Again, third genders do not get human dignity despite being human. The conventional gender system is an obstacle to the development and progress of society. The movie is one of the most popular means of entertainment and communication in Bangladesh. The movies reflect a society where there are stories of individuals, families, or societies. Different genders present differently in the movies. But we need to know what kind of presentation is shown in Bangladeshi movies. Although movies are a

medium of art, literature, or entertainment, they can play a role in the development of society or in eradicating the prevailing superstitions of society. Movie, which started in 1956 with *Mukh O Mukhosh*, is an old media in Bangladesh (Hayat, 1987). Movie has a role to play in creating or establishing gender issues and movie also can play a vital role in solving gender problems (Towbin et al., 2004). Mass media is one of the means of education and many people are influenced by the educational message. So it is very important to know what is presented in the media to understand or solve any problem. The presentation of gender in the movies will help to understand and solve the gender problem.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

There has been a lot of research on gender and women in different branches of mass media including movies at home and abroad. An analysis of gender representations in the media in Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Arab, Latin, and South Africa in 2012 under the patronage of UNESCO found that women were subjected to degrading representation in regions other than Europe. Sire describes that even though Bangladesh's *Agnee* movies are female-centric, women are portrayed as timid, weak, and male dependent (Sire, 2014). Prague points out those 4 Muslim-centric movies in India have portrayed Muslim women as ideal mothers, wives, and daughters (Prague, 2020). Nidi mention that in Hindi movies, women are seen more in cooking, shopping, grooming, traveling, and various household chores. Women are not shown in money-making professions in movies (Nidhi, 2012). Dev has identified that in Indian movies women are presented as sex toys in Hindi and regional movies (Dev, 2013). Bhowmik's research on 16 mainstream and independent Bangladeshi movies has shown that women are more portrayed in Bangladeshi movies as wives, mothers, working daughters, heroines' friends, and sisters. (Bhowmik, 2009). Shafi presents that in the advertisements of Bangladesh, women are portrayed as stupid, quarrelsome, weak, male dependent, worldly, cosmetic, sexual (Shafi, 2021). Sultana has shown that in the movies, women are shown as under the control of men (Sultana, 2002). These studies have focused more on women. Different issues of men have also come up in previous study but in Bangladesh, no study here has presented a combined representation of women,

men, and common gender. Gender sensitivity will also be the main focus of this study. Through this research, the overall picture of gender can be found in the movies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Movies are one of the most influential media in Bangladesh. On average, about 60 movies are made every year. There are many people involved in movie making. Movies are now an industry in Bangladesh. There are different genres in movies; one of them is mainstream movies. Mainstream movies are movies that are made to make a profit. Eight mainstream movies have been selected for the study through objective sampling. These are 1. *Kusum Kusum Prem (2011)*, 2. *Common Gender (2012)*, 3. *Nishwartha Bhalobasa (2013)*, 4. *Rajotto (2014)*, 5. *Chuye Dile Mon (2015)*, 6. *Under Construction (2016)*, 7. *Sweetheart (2016)*, and 8. *Mastan Police (2017)*. Recently, a total of 8 movies have been selected from 2011 to 2016. A movie has been selected from each year. However, the 2016 *Under Construction* movie was made by a female director and it is different from the conventional movies so two movies of 2016 have been selected as samples. Purposive sampling has been used for research so that directors, heroes, heroines, or other subjects are not the same things. The movies have been viewed on YouTube and data has been collected for research. From 2018 to 2021 movies are not available on YouTube so we take sampling all movies from 2011 to 2017.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

One of the most popular methods of movies research, the narrative analysis method, is used for this study. “*Narrative analysis refers to a cluster of analytic methods for interpreting texts or visual data that have a storied form. A common assumption of narrative methods is that people tell stories to help organize and make sense of their lives and their storied accounts are functional and purposeful* (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). This method is related to the structure, content, and function of stories in movies (Demuth & Mey, 2015). Narrative analysis is a useful method for uncovering the underlying ideologies embedded in stories and the larger culture that creates the narratives (Garcia Rodriguez, 2016). Stuart Hall's representation theory, Laura

Malvier's mail gauge theory, and queer theory have been used as theoretical frameworks for the study. The representation theory has been used to explain the words and images of the movies (Haque, 2001). And the presence of women in the movies is built around the good looks of men. Men have the vision of the camera in the movies, the vision of the hero in the movie, and the vision of the audience. Women are brought and presented in the movies for the satisfaction of men. Women are presented as entertainment and sex products by wearing make-up, jewelry, sexually explicit clothing. And men are portrayed as consumers of that sex product. These aspects of gender sensitivity in movies are explained with mail gauge theory (Chowdhury & Jhuma, 2014). In society, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and 3rd sex and other than normal women and men are called queer. The theory of queerness has been used to analyze the attitudes and behaviors of people in the physical structure and thinking outside of men and women in society.

RESULT & DISCUSSION:

Women Presentation: Through analyzing the various text and visual data of the eight movies, it is seen that the movies have portrayed women in line with the conventional notions of society. Through analyzing the dialogues, scenes, and characters of the movies, it is seen that the movies have presented women insensitively.

Presenting women in an obscene manner: Modesty is a normal thing for women, men, and the common gender, but in all eight movies, women have been presented in an obscene and distasteful manner. Except for the two movies *Under Construction* and *Kusum Kusum Prem*, the remaining 6 movies had item songs. In those item songs, women are mainly presented as sex objects. Item songs show women in short dresses. The chest, thighs, abdomen, and back of the woman's body have been shown repeatedly. These scenes are disrespectful to a woman. Most of the items in the lyrics mean that women have sex and enjoy it. In addition to item songs, other songs have also shown women in an obscene manner. In addition to the songs, the women in short dresses in various scenes of the rest of the movies except the common gender movies have been installed.

Sometimes women are shown wearing shorts, sometimes without veils. In the movies, men had used different dirty words and sentences for women. In the movies, women are seen using the words *besh*, *mal*, *hot*.

Introducing women in different professions: Women and men can naturally choose any job or profession. In eight movies, women are seen in different professions. In the movie *Under Construction*, the woman is portrayed as a theater worker, in the movie *Police Mastan*, the central female character is portrayed as a lawyer, and in the movie *Chuye Dile Mon*, the heroine is portrayed as a doctor. Apart from these three characters, there were 50-60 female characters in the movies. Their occupation is working girl or housewife but most of the female characters had no job. The mother, aunt, sister, sister-in-law, girlfriend, friend's sister of the hero-heroine have been played more by women in these roles. But the characters didn't have much dialogue and scenes. Apart from the heroine, most of the small and less important characters were women. Women now work in different professions. Women are working in many professions including police, businessmen, doctors, teachers but it is not reflected in the movies. Showing women in all professions through the movies will bring a positive change in the eyes of both men and women. It is important to inform society that women can do and take any responsibility in society. But outside the conventional notion of society about women, new notions are not seen in Bangladeshi movies.

Women obey men's decisions: As human beings, everyone has their own thoughts and opinions. Women have the right to make any decision about their bodies, mind, or other matters. But in the movies, all the decisions of women are taken by the man or his family. In the movie *Under Construction*, the working girl tells *Moyna* to leave her boyfriend *Sabuj Mia's* job and go to *Moyna* with him and *Moyna* does the same. Again, his brother *George* decides to marry *Richard* without the consent of the protagonist in the movie *Sweetheart*. Women have to get permission to go out of the house and it is forbidden to stay out of the house after a certain period of time. Women have the ability to take decisions. These issues are not strongly emphasized in the movies.

Women mean beautiful: Anything beautiful is always good. But there are beautiful and ugly things everywhere. This is normal. But women in the movies are beautiful. You can't be a heroine without a beautiful woman. The mother, aunt, and girlfriend of the heroine also have to be beautiful. Seeing the presentation of the movies, it seems that if a woman is not beautiful, she is worthless. Women's physical structure should not be thick or thin, his skin should be white, and his height should be good. Without these qualities, men do not have respect for women. *Kusum Kusum Prem, Nishwartha Bhalobasa, Under Construction, Police Mastan* are presented women dress up to attract men. It is not correct to present women and beauty as the same thing because not all women in society are beautiful, there are many women who are fat or whose skin color is not fair. Women should be presented as normal human beings. Showing only beautiful women in the movies will send the wrong message to both men and women.

Women handle family and children: Both men and women are human beings but there is a common belief in society that women's job is to take care of family and children. But this idea is not correct, both men and women have an equal role in managing the family and children. But after analyzing eight movies, it has been seen that women are presented in such a way that their main job is to take care of the family and children. *Raya*, the central female character in the movie *Under Construction*, is asked by her mother and husband to take children. In the movie *Kusum Kusum Prem*, Kusum is also pressured by various people to take children. Apart from family and children, women have many more jobs. Like men, they have a normal life. It was not seen in the movie. *Kusum* is seen in the movies, a man-eating and his handing him food and blowing air. These issues have been shown in the movies that are the really wrong presentation of women.

Women Violence: Violence against women is one of the problems of society. The news of violence against women in the media is common news. The issue of violence against women has been found by analyzing eight movies. In the movies, *Nishwartha Bhalobasa, Meghla's* father beats her mother but *Meghla's* mother was not seen protesting. *Police Mastan, Chuye Dile Mon, Rajotto,*

Under Construction, every movie has shown the issue of violence against women in a natural way. Eve teasing to women in the name of love proposal has been shown naturally in movies. When *Raya* goes to see her housekeeper *Moyna* at her house, a quarrel breaks out between a couple of her neighbors, and the neighbor's husband is heard beating his wife. *Moyna* informs that the matter is almost normal.

Women mean helpless: Women are portrayed as helpless, weak, and powerless in movies. Whenever women are in danger, men need help. In the movie *Nishwartha Bhalobasa*, *Ananto* is seen saving a woman from danger. In the movie *Chuye Dile Mon, Sweetheart, Police Mastan, Rajotto, Kusum Kusum Prem*, men abuse women, threaten women and raise their hands on women, but they do not protest. As shown in the movies, women can't walk alone, can't solve problems. For this, they need the help of men and they depend on men.

Men Presentation: Analyzing the data of the movies, the results show that men have been presented in different ways in the movies. In the movies, men are shown in harmony with society. Men have been presented more negatively than positively.

Men are powerful: There is a common perception of society about different genders. Men have been portrayed as powerful in movies. In the movies, men are seen fighting and vandalizing. Watching the movies, it would seem that the main job of men in Bangladesh is to do violence. The nature of men to power occupying are seen in all the movies. *Chuye Dile Mon, Police Mastan, Nishwartha Bhalobasa, Sweetheart, Rajotto* all the movies are just a demonstration of the male conflict and terrorism. In almost every movie, there are men in the role of terrorists. The movies show men committing extortion and committing various crimes. In reality, such a role of men is not seen. But these representations of men in the movies carry the wrong message in society about men.

Male decision-makers: As seen in the movies, men are making all the decisions in society and family. Men decide where the marriage of the sons and daughters of the family will take place. Men decide exactly what to cook at home. Men also decide when to have children.

Men decide where a woman will stay. The movies show male dominance over women. Men also make all the decisions of women. In the movie *Chuye Dile Mon*, all the decisions of *Nilas* family are taken by her father and uncle. When men are the decision-makers in everything, they become dictators. Men don't want to hear anyone else's opinions or understand their issues.

Men earning money: In movies, men are seen in different money-making professions. In the movies, men are presented in various professions including police, businessmen, and politicians. In the movies of *Kusum Kusum Prem*, *Nishwartha Bhalobasa*, *Sweetheart*, *Under Construction* are seen that family members depend on men for money. Men are responsible for all the expenses of the family so men have to do something to run the expenses of the family. In the movies, men are seen in various lucrative professions.

Men show emotion: There is a common belief in society that men are not ashamed, men do not cry. But men have been seen crying countless times in movies. . In the movies of *Rajotto*, *Sweetheart*, *Nishwartha Bhalobasa*, *Chuye Dile Mon*, *Police Mastan* men crying scenes are noticed. Men are also seen getting shamed in movies. *Danny* gets shamed and nervous when he shows *Nilas* in the movie. In the movies, men are seen getting angry about any big and small issues.

Men's costume: Men's clothing in the movies was more modest than women's. The movies show women in short and tight clothes. But most of the men's clothes covered the sensitive part of their bodies. However, many movie heroes, their friends, and villains were under the pressure of obscenity in their clothes. In the movies *Sweetheart* and *Nishwartha Bhalobasa*, the heroes and villains are presented in short costumes. Men should have a sense of modesty. In various scenes in the movies, different nude parts of men are shown.

Male dominance in movie making: Moviemaking requires a lot of manpower and there is also male dominance. Apart from *Under Construction*, the remaining 7 movies are directed by men. Producers, executive producers, co-producers, makeup artists, videographers,

video editors, music artists, and others almost all the manpower in a movie is male. However, there are a few women in some branches including music artists and makeup artists. What will be shown in a movie is decided at the time of production, so if there is male dominance in all aspects of production, then all the views and ideas of men will be presented more. In order to eliminate gender inequality, people of other genders also have to come to make movies.

Common Gender Presentation: Seven out of eight movies had no common gender representation. Only in the movies Common Gender have different gender topics been presented about them.

Third genders are not human beings: *Common gender* movies show that third genders are not considered human beings. No one wants to talk to them. Gender is also a part of society, no one's brother, sister, or relative wants to admit it. As seen in the movies, Third Gender *Babu* is ashamed to introduce his father and brother; they do not identify *Babu* as their relative. Although third genders want to go to public toilets, men and women stop them and beat them. As we can be seen in the movies, people in society do not think of third genders inside and outside the home.

No recognition of third genders: There are two recognized and established genders of women and men society. But there is no recognition of third gender in society. They do not have human and fundamental rights in society and the state. They do not get many opportunities for education and employment. The movies do not see any benefits for third gender of the state and society. If one is a woman or a man, society will accept him even if he does not have arms and legs, but if one is a third gender, society will not accept them. Although *Babu* was disabled, his father would accept it but he could not accept it as the third gender.

Love not for third genders: Everyone has feelings and emotions as human beings. But that feeling of the third gender as a human being has been taken away by society. As seen in the movie, *Babu* is involved in a love affair with a man but society and family do not value her love affair. Movies present to them that third genders do not have emotions and feelings. Third gender *Sushmita* says, Can't I love

anyone because I am *Hirja*? This is his question for everyone in society.

The third gender depends on others: If there is an animal, it must have some means of livelihood. But even though third genders are the greatest living being, their livelihood depends on the mercy of others. They seek help from people at home, in shops, on the streets, sometimes forcibly raising money to make a living. The movie shows that there is no opportunity for the study or establishment of gender in society.

The third genders are helpless: Third genders are very neglected and helpless in society. Their neglect starts from birth and lasts till death. They cannot live with the family normally after birth. They beg at people's doorsteps for money and food. They cannot fill up their education, medical care, clothing, shelter, food any basic needs. Their condition in society is absolutely down. Other people in society have no worries about them. The movie shows how helpless and inhumane of third gender life are from birth to death.

Women have been presented as sex products in Bangladeshi movies. Women are portrayed in movies as housewives, flexible, unobtrusive. The imposition of men's decisions on women has been shown to be normal in movies. In every movie, a special kind of camera has been used towards the sexual organs of a woman's body. Women are presented in short dresses and open dresses. The female characters were centered on love, affection, family, and marriage. All the big and small decisions of women are taken by their families and women do not give their opinion in making decisions. In the movies, women are judged by their beauty and sexuality. The issues that a woman can be self-dependent or professional was not in the movies. The issues that a woman can make important decisions for herself or her family were missing in the movies. Different embarrassing words towards women, various bad body language in movies are seen. The female characters start with love and end with love. Women are not portrayed as a real humans in movies. The issues that women can be creative, women can play a role in different sectors of society, can solve problems, can protest, and can think about the country, society and the world are

missing in the movies. The way women are portrayed in the movies is an obstacle for the country and human development.

Men, on the other hand, have been portrayed as sexually active. The movies show how a man's job is to impress a woman and make her fall in love with him and to annoy a woman for this job. In the movies, men, especially the hero, have been shown to be eve-teasing. Men have been portrayed as brave, strong, powerful, problem solvers. But in reality, many men are timid, weak, and no problem solvers. The men's clothing in the movies was relatively large and less open. But men's behavior or body language was also obscene. Unnecessary scenes of him wearing a shirt or a T-shirt, and showing his chest or an empty body do not send a good message to society. From the scripts of the movies to the camerapersons, editors, directors, and actors, the male dominance is noticed in all movie making areas. All the responsibilities of the family belong to one man. These messages were in the movies. The protagonist of the movies spends most of his time in love but with little time to study and focus on his career. These ideas about men are completely wrong. There is no shortcut to success. Although the reality is similar to the men portrayed in the movies, many things did not. This kind of representation of men in the movies is harmful and unreasonable for men as well.

The third gender also has all the basic and human rights of society. But there is no scene or statement about them in any movie other than *Common Gender*. The rest of the movies featured men and women in 100% of the scenes and speeches; there was no presence of the issue of the third gender. *Common Gender* movies mainly deal with the real problems of third genders. Third genders are also people and they have basic needs that should highlight in the movies like women and men. The movie *Common Gender* is a positive aspect for the third gender and society. But except *Under Construction* movie, all those who are playing the role of common gender were either men or women. Actually, those who were of the third gender were absent in acting. It is also a message that third genders are far behind in all areas of society, including politics, economy, and culture. The reality of society is similar to the way they are presented in the movies. They could be presented positively and in a way that would enable them to perform any task and responsibility. But *Common Gender* movie is a milestone in the development of third gender. And in other movies,

there was no scene and dialogue of their issue and problems. Gender problems are related to one another so excluding third genders will not solve the gender problem.

CONCLUSION

Different institutions of society have created the concept of gender. Any customs or practices in society need to change over time. The concept of gender in our society is a system where there is a lot of exploitation and inequality. So for modern society, many gender norms, thinking consciousness should come to an end. Concepts of the prevailing gender of society can be noticed in the movies. But the movies need an active role in the media, including various media, to change these conventional notions of gender, thought consciousness, customs. The current concept of gender can be seen in movies in Bangladesh. Movies contain insensitive words, sentences, scenes, and body language that are harmful and unpredictable to women, men, and the third gender. In the movies, women are seen in various roles as sex products and helpless, again, men are portrayed as much more aggressive and powerful. In both cases, there is a complete digestive tract. And, the way the common gender is ignored in everything that reflection is also clear in the movies. Since movies are also a medium of education, the medium of movies should express a positive attitude of society. All gender should be portrayed as human being in the movies and there should be no unequal treatment between men, women, or the common gender. People accept what is shown in the movies and behave in that way. So if Bangladeshi movies work for gender sensitivity, then gender insensitivity will be removed from society. People will be aware and one gender will respect the other gender.

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