

Illuminating Women's Oppression in Indian Society through Select Hindi Cinema

AISHWARYA KUMARI

*Assistant Professor, Department of English
Jaipur National University, Jagatpura*

Abstract

'Is female member at your home, safe'? A question every person running a family should ask to themselves. For centuries women in Indian societies witness physical, mental, psychological and, other forms of abuse within a family. This forgeable behaviour is carried out mostly by patriarchal society having misogynistic nature against women, leading them either to captive, or to run far away with sense hatred. Aforesaid word 'safe' extend its boundaries to sexual, emotional, psychological, and economical. Indian cinemas, a source of entertainment, has become a medium to depict and understand the sufferings of such women in day to day lives. This paper attempts to draw the attention of reader towards female subjugation by their families and relatives. It has been analysed through select Bollywood hit movies to portray the male dominated Indian society and their suppression on women. Movies selected for the paper are: Highway (2014) by Imtiaz Ali, DilDhadakneDo(2015) by Zoya Akhtar, Dear Zindagi (2016) by Gauri Shinde.

Keywords: *Bollywood movie, family, misogynist, patriarchy, women abuse.*

Introduction

The Indian cinema essentially Bollywood has equivalent perception in degrading emotional and intellectual quest for Indian culture. To date, Bollywood cinema has been studied as a source of entertainment portraying layers of society in a modern effect. However, women portrayed in the movies are shown suppressed directly or indirectly. They are mostly presented on-screen behind the supremacy of prejudiced people. The word abuse is a form of two parts- "use", meaning to employ, and "ab"- derived as a Latin prefix indicating "away" which as a whole is produced as "misuse" or "use wrongly". It has become very prominent in present time and people are unaware of the consequences of abusive traits. It is cruel and inhumane treatment or a rude expression intended to hurt or offend somebody.

Now, when one talks about 'abuse' the automatic word that comes as a prefix is women that is "women abuse". This paper will consequently talk about types of abuses within a family and how is it yet to discover amongst people in India. To examine this critical condition, a medium- Bollywood movies has been chosen so that one can visualize it easily. The select movies that will introduce one to different forms of abuses are- *Highway* (2014) by Imtiaz Ali, *DilDhadakne Do* (2015) by Zoya Akhtar, and *Dear Zindagi* (2016) by Gauri Shinde. These movies have

been based on their popularity amongst the viewers and their collection in the box office. Also, these directors have given many other remarkable works to the industry. Women's abuse is not just limited to physical or sexual but it further extends to emotional, psychological, and economical abuse as well, following the gender biases as a major route. From the time of 15th century to now the role of women has been constantly changing but the suppression of women is nowhere the same.

"On an international level, the *United Nations Declaration* on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides the following definition":

"The term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". The factors that affect such causes could be numerous like; drug addiction, alcoholism, anger to show the power of masculinity. These behaviours can take number of different forms of abuses so let's just look at the precise meaning of the followings:

Physical- It is one of the most highlighted and known forms of abuse that people are aware of which includes; hitting, slapping, punching, or physically off-putting a partner against their drive, not giving someone their

physical space, and particularly if someone feels unsafe physically.

Sexual- It involves rapes or other forms of forced sexual acts. Sexual abuse takes place irrespective of women's desire and permission.

Verbal/Emotional- The sign of physical abuse is easier to notice by the near ones but in the contrast, emotional abuse is hard to recognize as it is not visible. The victim themselves sometimes are unaware of such abuse because of lack of physical harm. The words used by the perpetrator shatters someone's emotions badly and it takes a longer time to heal.

Mental/Psychological- It often involves making the victim doubt their self-sanity. The victim begins to accept the abuser's decision more and doubt themselves. Such abuse leads someone to remain in isolation, think only negatively, speak less, and of course, lacks in taking a firm decision as they are so mentally weak.

Economic- Since abuse is more about power and control so abuser leaves no chance to be more powerful to dominate others and the key factor to hold the power is financial.

Cultural/Identity- It happens when abusers use aspects of a victim's particular cultural identity to inflict suffering or to control.

Power and Control in Physical and Sexual Violence

- a. *Using Monetary abuse:* Such abuses take place to prevent women from having access to economic resources and not allowing them to work according to their will. The male members also prohibit and neglect the idea of indulging them into family income or property.
- b. *Using Psychological abuse:* It is the most prominent abuse that takes place in the present time by humiliating and making them feel awkward and bad for everything around them. They mock and comment upon their intellect stream of consciousness; imposing or instigating to feel them guilty. The male community creates havoc by using looks and gestures upon women which ultimately leads them to suffer throughout. This stereotypical image has been imposed upon women to which they need to shackle from society.

- c. *Using the privilege of Man:* They consider themselves as the ring-master and trigger women as subservient by not allowing them to decide for themselves. Women who want to shackle from the predominant norms of society are not given space to follow their free will. They limit their involvement with the outer world, using envy to justify the imposed actions.
- d. *Emotional Blackmail:* This form of abuse is found taking place under the carpet where a supreme member of the family believes that such abuses didn't happen. However, it often takes place ignoring the consequences of the sufferer. The victim in such cases is found mostly alienated, depressed, and bound unnecessarily to adapt to the culture and norms of the society.

A lot of research has been done on women abuse in a work area but it's appalling to find people, not working on the different forms of abuse within a family. These movies will however let you know how one can be harmed mentally, verbally, and psychologically rather than just abused sexually. This research is been conducted after reviewing literature related to the same topic. And sample researches include women problem in the work area, women issues with an intimate partner, female child abuse or women getting violent to protect themselves but there was hardly any work done on women suppression within the family in various form when noticed in the context of India. Indeed, this paper will focus suppression of women in an abusive form portraying through Bollywood movies for a better understanding.

Literature Review

Violence against women is experienced by women of all ages and social classes, all races, religions, and nationalities, all over the world. It is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men (Krug et al, 2002). Violence against women is a widespread problem, with appalling physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic consequences for girls and women (Gill & Rehman, 2004). Feminist commentators suggest that women are not equal partners with men in the context of violence against women. It is a cultural and political framework. Violence against women is both the result of gender inequality and

how it is perpetuated (Brownmiller, 1976; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Radford et al, 2000).

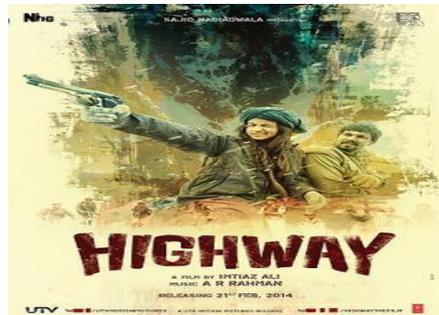
The different forms of abuse and violence that women undergo within families have become both a global and gendered health issue (World Health Organization, 2013, 2014). "Despite much being done since the 1970s to "break" the cycle of violence occurring in families, it persists as a serious concern affecting many countries. Abuse and violence are accompanied by short-term and lifetime health issues affecting victims physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual well-being" (Campbell, 2002; LamersWinkelman, Willemen, & Visser, 2012). In the historical time, women are considered by many thinkers to be irrational and intellectually hollow beings who merely existed for the sake of beauty and procreation. (Wollstonecraft) "Film criticism has a value for literary studies for it allows us to view them differently, to look for the unconscious reflection of social reality, the underlying power structures, the frames which melt into each other, the repetitive narrative patterns, the dialogues which use myth and history, juxtapositions which take place and the simultaneity which the medium allows. There is no possible way that literature departments can hold themselves aloof from the cinematic medium, especially when the cinema has never shown any hesitation in appropriating literature for its purpose". In the case of a joint family system, several families may reside within the same household (Segal, 1991, Abraham, 1999; Fernandez, 1997; Hassan, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Ramirez, 1999). In some instances, the husband's immediate or extended family may be direct participants in emotional and/or physical abuse of the woman; in other instances, they may become indirect participants by instigating or coaxing the husband to abuse his wife (Lateef, 1999; Ramirez, 1999). Hoffman; in his article 'Psychological abuse of women by spouses and Live- In Lovers', interviewed twenty-five women and found that more satisfying mental attitudes were reported by the women who were no longer in an abusive situation. The ability of women been criticized and neglected can destroy their integral part and self-esteem (Hoffman, 1984). "If entertainment can be directed to also increase positive emotion, meaning, eudemonia, it will be good enough" - The New Era of Positive Psychology (Seligman, 2004).

Methodology

This article is voiced by collecting material and data from secondary sources. These secondary sources include box office hit, internet, magazine, news update, and by reviewing the literature. A multiple research papers from a reputed journal that is Scopus, Springer, Jstor, etc has been reviewed to reach this outcome. This research is further analysed by the observation method. Movies have been selected based on their popularity and collection at the box office. It also offers same background and purpose to match up with the research topic. Further, movies are evaluated and applied using audience response theory and collecting reviews from commoners in the review section of the movie. Movie selection is done on a random basis and has nothing to do with the years preferred. To serves the purpose of this article and to make reader easily visualize the purpose, these following movies have been selected. Select movies are discussed in detail only after watching it twice for a thorough analysis.

Movie Analysis

Highway



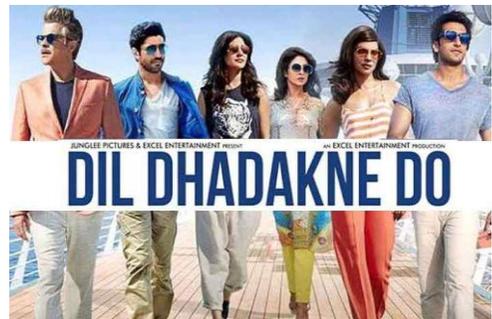
The super hit movie is directed by Imtiaz Ali; casting Alia Bhatt as Veera and RandeepHudda as Mahabir portrays the obscure situation of our society. Alia Bhatt has beautifully portrayed the mango women who suffer because of her close family member. These acts are mostly carried out by an elderly male member of the family, which the sufferer never finds a way to disclose to her parents, and even if she does, was asked to keep within herself. Alia Bhatt in the movie was constantly facing the same situation that one day took her away from their family and let her choose the stranger outside. She was nine years old when she got abused by her uncle and that drained her in trauma. She was physically forced to let

enjoy her body by her uncle by giving the bribe of chocolate. It's been a long time where a women's body is just considered as an object to enjoy as per men's need. Thus, after a time, on her way to cherish the beauty of environment and a night drive with her fiancé she accidentally gets kidnapped by Mahabir and his gang which in no time became her choice. She begins to enjoy his company and felt safer. She then decided to stay with him and leave her luxurious life. She was abundant by the thought of her family members as they were equally responsible for supporting her uncle and not Veera. They have been focusing more on the consequences of so-called society and relatives. At the end part of the movie, she was caught by her father who forced her to return home. Being physically deteriorated she was kept under observation and parallelly her parents were in a discussion for her marriage. This stereotypical nature in 21st century creates a gap between a child and her parents and it need to be broken. However, at the end of the movie, Veera decided to take a stand, for her own life for her better future, and for those common women out there who come across such abuses but are unable to speak out. She very bravely discloses the cruel act of her uncle and that was a sigh of relief that results in strong self-esteem. One can only keep others happy if he/she is themselves happy within a soul and it can be achieved only if one is physically, mentally, psychologically, has positive air around them. Many people reviewed this movie as 'Stockholm syndrome', which is not true. In subjugation within the family, she found a peaceful escape when kidnapped by Mahavir and his gang (Rachel Saltz, Feb 20, 2014). It was just about two souls who were prisoners of their own lives, searching for their own space and solace in each other incidental journey. This movie got a release on 21 February 2014 and received huge success with a collection of 47.7 crores INR at the box office.

While analysing this particular movie, one can also relate it through 'Audience Response theory', which talks about how audience responds to a particular reading or visual presentation. This movie has the essence of hypodermic needle theory; it's because as a viewer many were engrossed with the situation of Alia Bhatt. The viewers could relate and compare the episodic scenes occurring throughout the movie. Our audience could not

attempt to evaluate it in their possible way, rather, they consume and injected the ideas been propagated by the directors. The audience or viewers passively accept the concepts in hypodermic needle theory without giving it a second thought. Alia Bhatt in the song 'Jugni' was seen as the independent free soul relishing her freedom with the stranger. (ART) This movie explains to us the impact of sexual abuse that is a forcible act and takes place irrespective of one's permission. It leaves a huge psychological impact on women's mental health especially when the victim is not heard.

Dil Dhadakne Do



This movie is directed by Zoya Akhtar in 2015 casting Priyanka Chopra aka Ayesha as a leading role, Ranveer Singh as Kabir Mehra, Farhan Akhtar as Sunny Gill playing a role opposite Ayesha and Anushka Sharma as Farah Ali opposite Kabir Mehra, the only and youngest son of Kamal Mehra (Anil Kapoor) and Neelam Mehra. Kabir and Ayesha are siblings of Mr. and Mrs. Mehra who is a rich business family. The characters in this movie are compared to animals. The Only difference is animals cannot speak but human beings can. They are shown as the strongest species on earth. Human has many languages to speak but the major one is money that helps in talking so is with Kamal Mehra. The movie simultaneously has three parallel stories within. It can be thus given as example of 'metafiction'.

Every character in the movie is struggling with their own problems. However, all tend to show a perfect happy face to the outsiders. The rich Mehra family is not at all happy amongst themselves but portray others as the happiest family on earth. So, the movie begins with the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Mehra's 30th anniversary. They invite all of their friends to celebrate on the cruise. As a

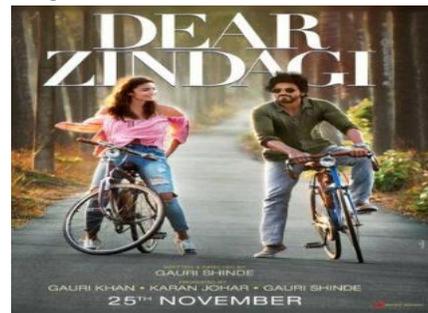
viewer one can examine the greed behind such a grand party. It's not just for the get-together of all near and dear ones but rather to be highlighted as a rich capitalist outspoken person amongst the society. Almost every woman in this movie is shown suppressed and dominated by the male power whereas the male is shown as a highly powered creature. On the other hand, where Ayesha Mehra is a self-made woman and is noticed under the top ten business company is never appreciated by her father. According to Indian tradition, she was even discarded from her family because she is married and belongs to other families. Her mother advises her to leave the work and focus more on the household work and family to run a successful marriage. The whole movie revolves around the dominance of women's character and male superiority. The directors firstly target the audience and analyze their pattern of interpretation to produce such movies. Movies thus can be said as the reflection of the society that gives an individual to either follow it blindly or have their faith and beliefs. In the final analysis of the movie, one can examine the male power over women either by humiliating, disowning, or disrespecting them with their pre-dominant thought. The director has tried showing the major issues in present time through the famous actors who many youths follow. The media firstly target the audience to produce such movies but in contrast, many amongst us do not accept the idea of the dominance of males and the elite.

This movie is a perfect example of hypodermic needle theory in few instances. The first and foremost scene is when Ranveer Singh (Kabir Mehra) catches the eye of Anushka Sharma (Farah Ali) for the first time in a swimming pool. The movie showcases this visualization from the beginning of 37 minutes 40 seconds till 39 minutes 12 seconds. In the 1hour 31minute 42 sec part of the movie the viewer gets to know that Ayesha (Priyanka Chopra) starts her business by selling her gold jewelry and none supported her which was later revealed by her friend Sunny Gill (Farhan Akhtar) after having a heated conversation with Manav; Ayesha's husband. This leads the audience to sympathize with Ayesha but also enjoys the story to see her as a well-established woman and this circumstance is known as 'the negotiated theory' is the part of 'Reception theory'. This movie earned a collection of 145 crores INR at box office.

Through the analysis of this movie, one can observe what situations Priyanka Chopra, Neelam Mehra, and Anushka Sharma must be going through throughout. These psychological, emotional, economical abuses have been mostly ignored by the society and the reason is these are abstract feeling which is not visible to the people around. Such abuses do not leave any mark on the body of human being and thus remains unquestionable.

The reason for taking Bollywood movies as a medium to showcase such inhuman acts is people adapt visual presentation more easily than the written sources. These movies have been selected because they serve the same interest and idea as this paper demands.

Dear Zindagi



This film is directed by Gauri Shinde in 2016 who is a champ in presenting soul-promising scripts. The movie cast Alia Bhatt as Kaira who is an outstanding performer and plays the promising role of broken girl same as in Highway. The film is all about Kiara's rendezvous with emotional breakdown. Shahrukh Khan on the other hand plays a charismatic role in the movie especially in the life of Alia Bhatt (Kaira). The story deals with Kiara's love life who instead of having good friends and a well-established job gets hitched in her love life. She gets worse when dealing with her parents. "Gauri Shinde abandons all cinematic gimmicks to convey a straight and genuinely real tale of a girl struggling with her emotions". The involvement of Dr. Jehangir Khan (Shahrukh Khan) brings about a change in Kaira's life and relationships. "Their woody Allen-type conversations add some realistic spunk to Dear Zindagi. This film has some soul-searching philosophy along with some heart-crushing realities on offer. A movie like Dear Zindagi offers you to feel alive and fearless". This

movie grossed over 139.29 crores (US \$20 million) at the box office.

The movie can be analyzed through the 'Two-step flow model' which is a type of Audience response theory. Under this model, one receives the idea and starts to propagate in and out. The movie storyline and the visual presentation itself give the idea to the youth to start living for themselves before anyone else start living their life. Alia Bhatt being so technically sound in her profession yet suffers mentally due to her personal and love life. Indeed, the song 'Just go to hell Dill', also gives the idea of Kaira suffering throughout but is later found raising her voice to her parents for the rights and space that she deserves. This however provokes the viewer to think of themselves and be an active individual than just being a silent-blind listener and receiver. Such movies are a glimpse of Indian society and vice-versa.

The director also focuses on introducing the public to the concept of therapy for mental issues that creates confusion in one's mind. This counseling process includes factors like- education, career, marriage, relationship, business, etc. Adding to it, people in India find it a disease but it's more of suffering from trauma due to lack of support from family. Such a situation occurs when one is in chaos and has no one to talk with or when a person is in search of love and respect. Moreover, it could be a barrier of a thin line between parents and a child or the pattern of thinking between friends, or fear of being judged and mock upon by colleagues, these factors can also create a deep hollow inside someone's life. Therefore, giving space to everyone is not just important but necessary. As also said by Mary Wollstonecraft in 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'. This movie leaves us with the idea that despite having a fulfilling life one remains to suffer through psychological and emotional abuse. The reason could be people around or family members who feel that if a person is earning well or has an extremely virtuous materialistic life, then he/she is happy but the bitter truth is the opposite in every scenario. In the present time where everything is in rush people hardly find time to spend on themselves. Alia Bhatt was never supported by her parents neither emotionally nor professionally. She was always in a search of love and soulmate but at the same time fear being left alone, therefore, she decides to leave first whomever she

meets. Kaira was economically stable but she could not enjoy those moments because deep inside she felt all alone until she met Dr. Jehangir Khan. So, as the title of the movie suggests appreciating your life first to see better growth and to identify the existence of your life. Dear Zindagi defines the meaning of life and how it should be lived. It also tells us that a smiling face is not always happy within and every person on earth needs someone to talk to, laugh, cry and love. Dear Zindagi also makes us realize that if you don't hold the steering of your life then someone else would capture the driving seat.

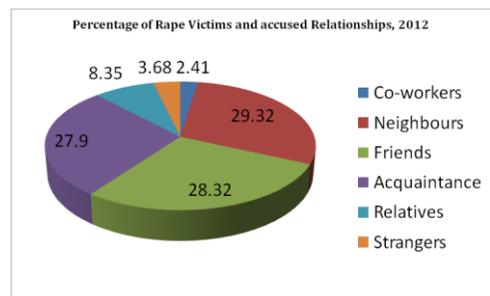


Figure 1: Analysis as per the news report in 2012 of sexually and mentally harassed victims in the society is depicted through pie-chart

Source: Delhi Police (The Hindu news Staff Reporter New Delhi, January 2013)

Given data depicts that highest number of accused relationships is because of the known person such as neighbours, friends, relatives, and other known people whereas only 3.68% of cases are found to be committed by strangers. This means that women are yet facing difficulties within the family as compared to people connecting outside. The problem does not lie in parents not supporting their children, but both generation needs to understand the consequences of not opening up amongst each other. This paper thus helps in understanding women portrayal within family and their submissive behaviour that reflects in society.

Conclusion

Even though women's organizations, feminists, and researchers have initiated paradigm shifts in understanding and ending VAW (violence against women) in India, it remains one of the worst forms of suppression

challenged by women. Women are yet observed and considered under some restriction to peruse their life accordingly. They do not hold the key to their freedom, doesn't matter she is independent or dependent. They always work under the shell of society that includes family, relatives, friends, boss, in-laws, and the list is added but never shrink. The above mention abusive nature leads to a deterioration of one's mental health which is found to be a dangerous issue at present time. Consequently, it is found that keeping healthy mental health is more prominent than any other health issue says WHO. Indeed, maximum people have accepted these movies yet such abuses are not in limelight and thus, not given much concern. This research is an attempt to explore the possibility of women suppression through various levels of abusive forms. These are yet carried by some misogynist creatures under the patriarchal norms.

One can relate it through their sufferings and suppression keeping in mind that forced sexual intimacy is not just the factor to go through an emotional breakdown. Indeed, psychological abuse has been extremely damaging than any other form of abuse. It disturbs the whole biological function. This can however be related to the movie *Dear Zindagi* as mentioned above. Alia Bhatt though having soothing surroundings and a self-satisfying job still suffers from mental trauma for which she has to consult Shahrukh Khan who was a counsellor. This research is a result of havoc that is created in the circumference of women's life. The purpose to choose this particular obstacle in research is the interest and gap that have been found in earlier researches. Despite having so many works done on women suffering using different approaches, there is still a thin gap in highlighting the causes and effects of different forms of suppression that women are still going through. These causes are explained and visualize using a media Bollywood movie which is evaluated by applying audience response theory in a narrative form. "The fact that cinema is a mediator of social realities and personal dreams, collective concern, and individual aspirations make it assume a seminal dimension as a humanistic discourse which has potential to redirect the cultural and material fabric of our everyday lives".

To conclude women does not only need a friendly environment in their work zone but also within their family

to avoid disruption in their well-being. Not just parents and elder members are solely responsible for filling the gap but so does the children too. It should always be two-way communication. The abuses are not necessarily visible, there are some invisible abuses that women many times face vulnerably. They say happiness is a key to success but, happiness shared alone is a key to self-destruction in no time. Thus, to conclude, women should be considered as human beings and should be given space to discover their intellects and power to walk parallel and equal to men. So, before, the time crosses, the family should give it a thought that keeping behind a cage is not an option for a healthy relationship with their children. It only helps in moving closer to the stranger and far from family.

This research was an attempt to introduce one with many other fits of abuses than just physical and sexual abuse that arises within the family and ultimately leads women to find a shelter outside either with friends or strangers. Ask yourself first that have you encounter any women who have not been abused in any above forms in their home? If you get the answer 'No', you get the purpose of voicing this article.

References

1. Hoffman, P. (2014). "Psychological abuse of women by spouses and Live-In Lovers". *Women and Therapy*, 3(1), pp-37-49, http://doi.org/10.1300/j015V03N01_05
2. Krug, et all. (2002). World Health Organization. *Geneva*, pp-33-34
3. Murthy, C.S.H.N. (2015). "Rethinking What is Special about Indian Cinema". *Media Asia*, Vol 42, Issue (1-2), <http://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2015.1100377>
4. Sharma, I. (2015). "Violence against Women: Where are the Solutions"? *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol 57, Issue (2), pp-131-139.
5. Sharon, S.P. (2014). "Domestic Violence against Women in India: A Family Menace". *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, Vol 4, Issue (12).
6. True, Jacqui. "What Is Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)?" *Violence against Women*, 2020, doi:10.1093/went/9780199378944.003.0001.

7. Wollstonecraft, M. (1957). *A Vindication of the rights of woman*, ed. Carol H. Poston. New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 47.
8. Yadav, S. (2019). Endearing Happiness in Dear Zindagi, a movie with a method for Millenials. *ArsArtium: An International Peer Reviewed-cum-*

Referred Research Journal of English Studies and Culture, Vol 7, pp-72-78.

Secondary Sources

1. www.indicine.com
2. www.bollymoviereviewz.com
3. www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com
4. www.ncdsv.org