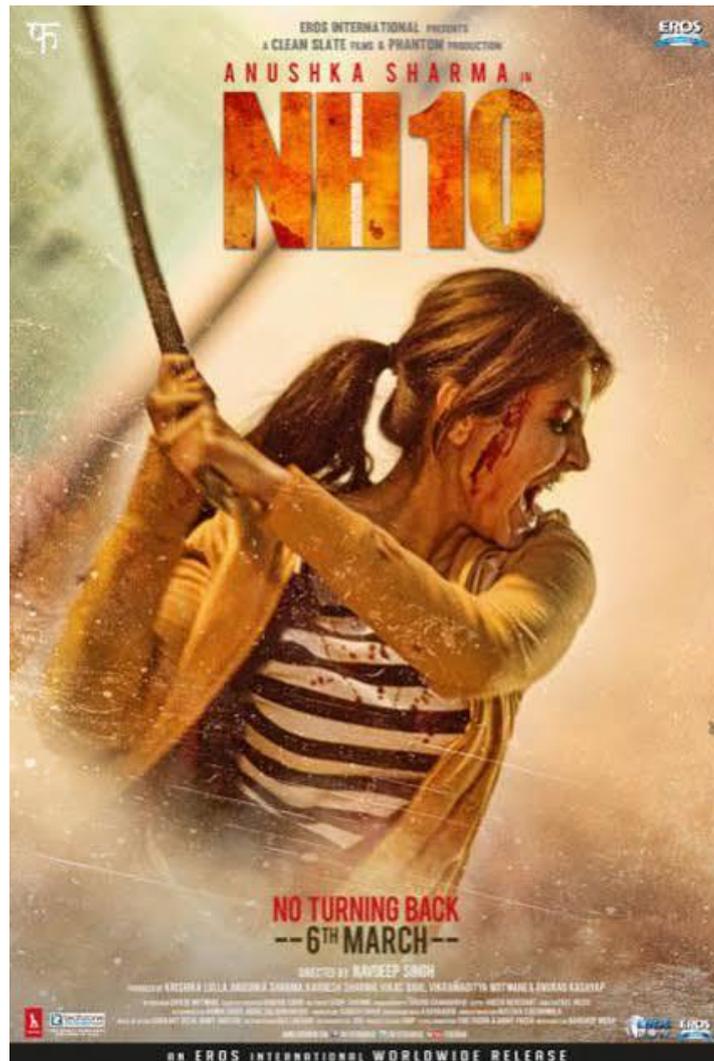


Deconstructing Gender Binaries: Representations in Select Bollywood Movies

Devika Sharma & Isha Malhotra



Courtesy:

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Abstract

The present paper examines a paradigm shift in the stereotypical gender roles in two Bollywood movies, focusing upon their deconstruction of gender binaries. *NH10* traces the evolution of a professional independent woman who after the death of her husband takes the “agency” into her hands and becomes an agent of change. She not only avenges the murder of her husband but also tries to bring justice in the highly regressive patriarchal rural setup.

Dangal deals with the real life story of Phogat family, a family of wrestlers belonging to Haryana, India. It presents the successful attempt made by Mahvir Singh Phogat, a masculine man. Breaking the gender stereotypes, he trains his daughters in a masculine game, wrestling. The paper will analyse how sex, gender and sexuality may be popularly perceived as joined, but they are “politically textualized and constructed.” It will make an attempt to use Judith Butler’s theory of “Undoing Gender” to break the artificial binaries and to further establish that sex, gender and sexuality is a construction and is not stable.

Keywords: *NH10*, *Dangal*, Gender roles; Bollywood; Deconstruction; Sex; Gender, Sexuality

Defining Gender Roles = Alternatives Seem Unnatural

Like all other social constructs gender is closely monitored by society. Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Practically everything in society is assigned a gender - toys, colours, clothes and behaviours are some of the obvious examples. Sara Alters and Wendy Schiff in their work *Essential Concepts for Healthy Living* defines gender roles as “patterns of behaviour, attitudes and personality attributes that are traditionally considered in a particular manner to be feminine or masculine.”(143)

This shows that accepted social gender roles and expectations are so deeply entrenched in our culture that the alternative seems unnatural. However, gender polarity often creates an artificial gap between men and women that are very difficult to change in time. These roles leads to the formation of gender identity of an individual which presents more of an internalised way of perceiving one’s own gender, which one way or the other is formed due to the social influences. This generalised setup is rightly observed by Levesque in his essay “Sex Roles and Gender Roles” as he says, “Individuals are deemed to adopt a gender role self-concept, which is the amount of gender stereotypical traits and behaviours that persons use to describe themselves and to influence their dispositions”.

Women as Inspiration



Mary Kom

Courtesy: <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/sports/in-other-news/081117/mc-mary-kom-wins-5th-gold-at-asian-womens-boxing-championships-1st-in-48kg-category.html>

Women in this period have become more like a female hero and as result have become inspiration to many. M.C. Mary Kom of Manipur, India chose a masculine game, i.e., boxing and marked her success by becoming the World Champion in 2008. Her success was further highlighted by the 2014 Bollywood film *Mary Kom*. The women in Bollywood has become louder in voice and actions and has equalised their level with the male protagonist, leaving the basis of gender roles of being bashful, timid and sheepish in question.

Portrait of Women as Equal to Men

As Shoma Chatterji a film scholar, author and freelance journalist of India in her interview says:

Actresses like Vidya Balan, Tabu have struck a balance between glamour and convention helped by their looks and the image they present. The woman is stronger, almost equal to a man in current films such as *Dhoom*, *Dhoom 2*, *Shaurya*, *Aitraz* where there is almost no difference between the heroine and the vamp because all the female stars are willing to step into negative roles if they are strong and make a lasting impression on the audience.

Shoma Chaterjee states that in order to understand the portrayal of women in Indian cinema, “one has to develop a mode of analysis that is culture-specific and situation-specific.” It clearly projects that one cannot understand the shift and transition on the macro level. The gender roles are undergoing the process of perpetual questioning as the roles being played by the women in movies are being liked by the viewers, forecasting the resent ideologies of people, which exhibits the acceptance of the androgynous world.

Media and the Focus on the Changing Roles

The focus on the changing roles of men and women has become more prominent in media with the dawn of twenty-first century. The trend of breaking away the stereotypical gender, that started in the western media, its representation has begun to show in Indian movies as well. West known for being a few steps ahead in breaking away the stereotypical gender roles has started affecting the Indian ideologies, says Sanjukta Dasgupta in her work *Media, Gender, and Popular Culture in India*, “In different categories of media-print, electronic, audiovisual, and virtual-the imprint of transition, though differing in degree, is too evident to be underestimated.”(Dasgupta 41) The change is evident in the representation of women in media from being a self-sacrificing mother, daughter and sister to a bold, courageous and dauntless protagonist who is no more bound to the feminine category of being too shy, pure and virgin.

Visual media is thus playing an active role in contesting the gender stereotypes and providing the society with the evidences of possibilities that are ignored on the basis of established stereotypes. The recent campaigns by Ministry of Human Resource Development, on radio and television like ‘Beti Bachao’(Save girl child), ‘Beti Padao’(Educate girl child) propagated by the government of India clearly marks towards the awareness being provided to the society in order to establish equality and importance in terms of sexes. Girls being the victim of child infanticide were seen as burden due to socio-economic reasons. The recent shift towards not only saving but educating them has marked the importance of an individual in a society which is equal to any other person in order to enhance the status of the society. The paper aims at moving beyond the straightjacket of ascribed stereotypical roles viz. masculinity and femininity for men and women respectively towards more fluid gender roles.

This study will deconstruct the possible changes that has occurred through the times with the help of two Bollywood Movies viz., NH10 and Dangal where the females have played the central roles, breaking the stereotypes of society.

I

NH10

One of the most profound films of the recent times questioning the gender construct of femininity and masculinity is *NH10*, starring Anushka Sharma as Meera. She is a Product Launcher by profession who is living happily with her husband Arjun. Irrespective of being an ideal type of Indian beauty, Meera proves out to be stronger and more powerful than usually expected. The movie traces the evolution of a professionally independent woman who takes the “agency” into her hands. She not only avenges the murder of her husband but also becomes an agent of change, as she tries to bring justice in the highly regressive patriarchal setup, where a brother kills his sister, in the case of honour killing, for she chooses to marry a man of her own choice.

The movie begins with Meera, having a sensual talk with her husband while on their way to a late night party, which is generally not expected from an ideal wife. She even discusses how the woman who has invited them has a big crush on Arjun. Arjun denies the fact but Meera mocks the situation by saying, “You’re a good looking guy. Even I like you.” (*NH10*) Meera stands away from the generalised setup as she accepts the possibilities of a woman having a crush on a man, be it her own husband. The couple caricatures the presence of Westernisation in the modern towns, where after the introduction of technology and multinational companies things has subsequently changed. After reaching the destined location, Arjun realises that he has forgotten his cell in the car and Meera smiles and gives it to him, showing the caring side of woman in a relationship. But when Arjun asks her if she’s been smoking again, she decides to hide it from her husband and denies it. As Patricia Mann says that, “ours is an era that will be remembered for romantic changes in basic social relationships, within families, workplaces, schools, and other public spheres of interaction.”(Mann 1) The change in the relationship of Meera and Arjun is visible, as the couple stays away from the stereotypical conventions of the society and tries to justify their relationship in the Post-modern era.

After getting a call from her office she instantly takes the decision of moving out for her work. She simply informs her husband rather than taking his approval and rejects his proposal of staying and not moving out late at night. This shows the change in the behaviour of a woman, where rather than taking permission she simply sticks to her decision projecting her confident, professional and independent side. As says Patricia Mann,

Women and men today, for example, quite typically pursue activities and relationships that lie outside traditional boundaries of male and female identities... Many if not most individuals quite effectively operate outside the parameters of traditional gendered, ethnic, class, professional, or kinship identities, relying instead upon highly fluid, ad hoc, tentative working identities. (Mann 6)

The conversation between Meera and Arjun provides a glimpse in how the roles between families especially spouses are constantly changing. The roles are not stable and constantly in a state of flux.

On her way to office, she gets attacked by the thugs, but interestingly, the movie walking on the grounds of presenting the unrepresentable grabs the attention of the viewers by working against the general theme of abduction, rape and murder. Instead of getting saved by her husband or some other hero, she gets saved by her own instant actions and driving skills. This is the first time when she projects her driving skills, which is generally normalised to be the talents possessed by men rather than the women. After this incident she proves out to be a fearless woman as rather than leaving her job or the idea of moving out late at night she files a complaint against the thugs. But this again leads to an expected fail for she remains unsuccessful in finding the ones who attacked her and seeking justice. The policeman who is expected to be the protector of the society irrespective of their class, race and gender rather asks her husband, “Why do you let her travel alone at night?” (NH10) and advises them to ask for the permission of keeping a gun, for her husband has a good contact with the higher authorities. While on their way back to their house Arjun asks him if she is comfortable in keeping a gun. Meera at this point shows her masculine side by accepting the proposal and showing her unexpected comfort for applying for the license of a gun and facing the evils rather than hiding from them, as she says, “The city's a growing child, after all. I'll have to get a gun.” (NH10)

A Shift from a Normal Life Issues to a New Ride of Rollercoaster

The story takes a shift from a normal life issues to a new ride of rollercoaster, when Meera’s husband plans a weekend out to celebrate her birthday. After the projection of Meera’s professional life the story shifts to the journey of the couple on a vacation, planned by Meera’s husband. The journey starts on a very happy note, Meera discovers a cigarette pack in the dashboard kept by her husband, who tells her that it is her birthday gift which proposes that he not only loves his wife but also supports her choices. This echoes the sayings of Patricia Mann, “Women and men are trying out various new public and private roles today.” (Mann 6-7) This projects that not only Meera but even Arjun fails to maintain the stereotypical image of a husband and tries to find a new way of living with his wife. This modern couple completely rejects the socio-constructs and still ends up leading happy and successful relationship. But this does not conclude with them leading a successful life, as the common theme of approaching danger starts getting projected in the film. While paying the toll tax Arjun finds that some men in the car killed the man when he asked them for the tax. And after that they get lost while finding the right path to their booked villa. Then a girl from nowhere comes straight in front of their car and runs away. All of these incidences build the atmosphere of approaching danger from which the couple certainly remains unaware.

Dependence of Women on Men for Security

Then they stop by a local restaurant to have lunch and freshen up. Meera removes the gun from her bag, to which Arjun presents his objection by saying, “What are you doing? You promised you’d always keep it in your handbag.” (NH10) To which Meera replies, “But you’re with me today, aren’t you? Hey, Arjun. I ... I didn’t mean it that way. It’s just very heavy.” (NH10) This shows the dependency of woman on man in terms of her security. Meera showcasing the ideology of society believes that no one can touch or harm her until and unless she is with her husband. After that she moves straight towards the washroom in order to smoke, where she finds the same girl who came in front of their car, pleading and begging for help from some people who were threatening her and her husband’s life, “They’ll kill my husband and me...Please, sister. We really need help.”(NH10) Meera dismisses her at once and returns back to her husband waiting for her. At that moment the same car who

killed the man at the toll post arrives with four men loaded in it. All of them start creating a mess and drag a girl out from the crowd.

Meera realises that she is the same girl who was asking for her help. The girl cries out a name, Mukesh, who turns out to be her husband and Mukesh gets slapped by the man dragging the couple into a car. Arjun, being the hero, following the rules of being a man tries to solve the matter out by intruding in between. Meera tries to stop him but fails in doing so and everything turns out to be a big mess, for the girl had married the boy without the permission of her family and was running away with him. The couple was being chased by her brother and their relatives, who were aiming at killing them, for they broke the societal rules by making the 'choice' and bringing dishonour to the family. Arjun does not stop and keeps getting involved in between the problem, whereas Meera gets nervous and continuously asks Arjun to come back. Their reactions to this situation can be normally attributed with the expected reaction of hero of getting involved in the activities where risk is involved and fear of a woman from getting involved in it. But looking from the other side it showcases the intelligence of the female character who at once senses the danger of getting into such matter, which Arjun completely fails to understand. The result also favours the latter explanation because he ends up getting slapped by the brother of the pleading girl.

Meera tries to get him away but completely fails to stop him from doing anything stupid. This situation does not end at once, for on their way to their destination Arjun traces the car and starts following it. Meera again tries to stop him but he ignores her advices and follows the car without giving it a thought.

MEERA: Arjun? Arjun, what are you doing? ...Have you gone mad? You're taking this too far. Baby listen, please don't do this. Why are you doing this, Arjun? Don't turn this into an ego issue...I don't want to go. Stop the car, I'm leaving. Are you insane or what? There were 5-6 of them....

ARJUN: Meera, just relax, okay.

MEERA: Arjun, please!!

ARJUN: I'm with you today, am I not?

MEERA: Listen. I didn't mean it like that. Is that why you're doing this?

ARJUN: Relax. They're just some village idiots. I'm just going to scare them a bit.

MEERA: No, don't!

ARJUN: Teach them a few manners, you know? (NH10)

Duty of the Man to Kill the Villains?

It can be formulated that it's the duty of the man to kill the villains and stop any such wrong activities. This statement completely fails, for Arjun completely fails to understand the fact that he is not the local citizen of that society and cannot save the couple on his own. Along with this he even fails to take the responsibility of his young wife, who constantly tries to remind him of their safety.

After stopping at a barren place, Arjun takes out the gun and decides to scare the illiterate men and teach them a lesson. Meera stands against the idea and tells him to get back

in the car at once, but nothing happens because Arjun moves out leaving her alone back in the car.

MEERA: Why are you even doing this? Arjun, no! Just stay in the car.

ARJUN: Lock the doors.

MEERA: You're such an idiot, Arjun! (*NH10*)

In this tense situation Meera gets traced by a man, a bit mentally disturbed and Arjun encounters the men brutally beating the couple to almost their deaths. Arjun gets scared of the sight and tries to run back, he finds Meera on the way who has come in search of him and both of them starts running back to their car. Arjun gets suddenly hit from back and then he wakes up in front of the thugs, searching their phones for their identification. Arjun's decision of going on with his desire to teach them a lesson goes perfectly with a man's way of reacting under such circumstances but his act of running back for the escape shows the complete opposite behaviour, usually not expected from a man.

The couple gets killed by the girl's brother in case of honour killing and then comes the decision of killing both Meera and Arjun. At this moment the role changes, as Arjun fails to cope up with the situation and becomes helpless. While Meera on the other hand becomes the agent of change, as she takes the control of the entire situation in her hands. Agency can be defined as "an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices." (Emma & Maria) After becoming the one in action she showcases her sharp wit by cleverly securing the gun and planning the run with her husband. But again they fail because of the mistake of her husband as he accidentally kills the mentally disturbed man, who was the little brother of one of the villains. This again projects the deviation from the general concept, where the mistakes are to be made by the women and not the men. Somehow they run away with the gun in their hands but ends up getting lost in the jungle and also part their ways in the process of running away from thugs. Meera showcasing the fragile side of female constantly searches for her husband out of fear.

Masculine Side

But her masculine side starts coming out as she shoots a man threatening her husband's life and shouts at a man approaching them, scaring him off to run away in search of support. Her husband gets injured and symbolically she becomes the one in action, taking decisions and planning their escape. This again shows the role of agency in the situation, as Meera after becoming the agent takes the responsibility of saving her husband's life. This can be understood in the words of Patricia Mann,

Agency refers to those individuals or group actions deemed significant within particular social or institutional setting. While we are accustomed to thinking in terms of distinct forms of agency, as in economic, ethical or sexual agency, I emphasise that there are also three distinct dimensions of agency operative either together or apart within the context of individual actions. Individual agency is always associated with one or more of the following dimensions: motivation, responsibility, and expectations of recognition or reward. (Mann 14)

A Whole New Phase of a Woman

The second half of the story presents a whole new phase of a woman. Meera completely transforms herself into a brave masculine woman taking care of her injured husband as well as planning their escape. This role reversal makes Meera reveal her characteristics which she would have never used in any case. After becoming the victim of her husband's stupidity, she faces the situation boldly. She places him safely under a railway bridge and tells him that she'll return back soon.

MEERA: Nothing's going to happen to you. I'll be back soon, I promise. Nothing's going to happen to you. You'll stay right here. Say, "Promise."

ARJUN: Promise, baby, promise.

MEERA: Nothing's going to happen to you, baby. (*NH10*)

Ironically it's Meera, a woman who becomes the one in charge of saving the life of a man and not the other way around. She even hands him the gun to scare the men off and moves out alone at night to bring help. This shows that she doesn't need the gun anymore, even without her husband, rather the man takes the place of a woman who needs it in order to sustain his living. At this time her husband wishes her "Happy Birthday" (*NH10*) and she turns away parting ways from the one she always wanted to rely upon. She takes a new birth on this day, as she again moves alone at night with about four villains chasing her to death. She finds the police but the officer turns out to be against her too. Again she fights with the circumstances and kills the officer.

The phase of her driving skills are projected again where she once again successfully escapes from the clutches of the murderers. After getting into a car wreck she climbs the mountain rather than hiding behind some bushes or trees. Her strength remains unquestionable for even after getting spotted and hit by stones, she climbs the mountain and turns back rather than running away. Her turn is not full of fear but rather with a power of a brave masculine lady who not only curses but also throws stones back at them.

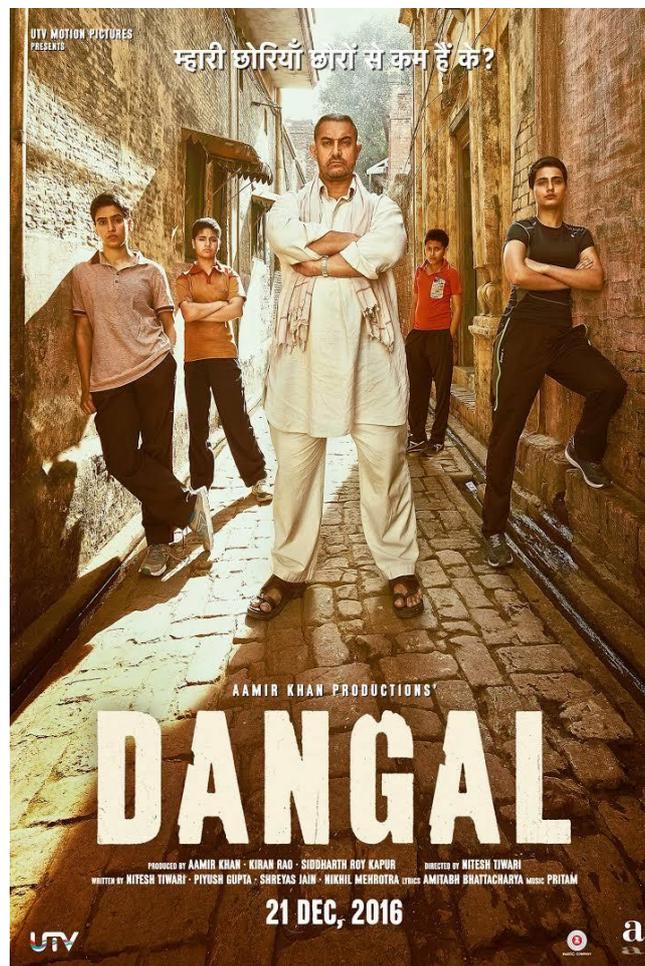
After failing to catch her, the murderer's moves towards the tunnel to catch her husband. This again shows the fall of four men against one woman. Rather than catching her they prefer to catch the half dead man whom she loved dearly. She ends up meeting the head of the village these ruffians belonged to and ironically the head turns out to be a woman rather than a man and also the mother of the girl who ran away with her husband. Where the woman blames the education for the unexpected decision of her daughter, her daughter-in-law presents her denial by preventing Meera from revealing her truth to her mother-in-law. All these three women showcases the different sides of women, where Meera presents the one being in the phase of acknowledging her masculinity, the head already had the masculine attributes but used them in generalising the stereotypes, as rather than stopping her son she supports him in killing her own daughter. At last her daughter-in-law projects the urge of getting liberated, as she saw the hope in her sister-in-law, who gets killed because of the choice she made. After discovering the truth Meera intelligently fights against the situation as she threatens the life of their dear grandson and marks her escape. But after finding her husband dead she comes back. She could have ran away easily but decides to return back like a hero to avenge the death of her husband and as a result kills the villains one by one with her own hands.

Sometimes, You Just Got to Do It

The main villain, the brother of the girl rejects the victory of woman over him and despite being injured tries to stand equal to her. Meera takes a rod and silently smokes in front of him, making him irritated, angry and further challenging his masculinity. The result turns out to be different than expected as he tries to run away from her, but Meera in her unforgiving phase hits him at once making him fall dead in front of her. The mother of the man runs out to find her son dead in front of her, to which she says, “She was my daughter. But sometimes, you just got to do it.” (NH10) Meera replies to her by saying, “Yeah, sometimes you just got to do it.”(NH10) and she turn back and moves forward as the sun rise with the advent of the new day in everyone’s life. The cause of fight could be grouped under two levels, one being the personal tragedy (as she avenges the death of her husband) and another the change in the society (where she fights against the case of honour killing).

II

Dangal



Courtesy:

https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q%3Dtbn:ANd9GcQIXnFIBKGWT1Byylu3qfxX6opQX6BmeeU_qsiE3X8rX9ZRr63r&imgrefurl=http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q%3Dtbn:ANd9GcQIXnFIBKGWT1Byylu3qfxX6opQX6BmeeU_qsiE3X8rX9ZRr63r&h=1080&w=720&tbnid=f8RFxbQD8Cd_JM:&tbnh=186&tbnw=124&usq=__8NI00tbiUGaFWSPn5-XHFkMKKJ8%3D&vet=10ahUKEwiSnYSfy8vaAhVB5YMKHR4MDQwQ_B0I6wEwDQ..i&docid=6K7KR7GqNo-kzM&itg=1&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiSnYSfy8vaAhVB5YMKHR4MDQwQ_B0I6wEwDQ

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **18:4 April 2018**

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The second movie taken for this ambition is *Dangal*. The film revolves around the life of Phogat family, a family of wrestles belonging to Haryana, India where Amir Khan plays the role of the male patriarch Mahavir Singh Phogat who trains his two daughters, Geeta and Babita in wrestling. Mahavir, a masculine man breaks the gender stereotypes and encourages his daughters to participate in professional wrestling. This stands against the ordinary setup because girls are raised as highly feminine beings and are encouraged to only maintain their beauty and body as they have to get married and give birth to babies in the future. Conventionally women have to stay away from such masculine sports but Geeta and Babita are encouraged to take it as a career which is traditionally considered an all men arena. Geeta and Babita towards the end evolve as Indian wrestlers and win gold medal in Commonwealth games for the country.

Mahavir Singh Phogat, National Level Wrestler

The movie begins with the story of Mahavir Singh Phogat, a National level wrestler who leaves the sport due to some economic reasons. Irrespective of this he never drops his dream of bringing gold medal in wrestling for the country. After facing failure in achieving his goal he tries to find a hope in his children, but his dreams starts to shatter when his wife rather than giving birth to sons gives birth to four daughters. This leaves Mahavir in a devastated position as he packs all his displayed medals in a box with his broken heart. He tells his wife that, “Both Geeta and Babita are very dear to me. But only a boy can fulfil my dream.” (*Dangal*) This shows the androcentric ideology of the society, where the gender domination is so rigid that it blocks the thinking process of a person and hence relates everything masculine to men and not to women. Mahavir despite loving his daughters fails to understand that an individual is capable of doing anything if given a chance.

In cue with the feminine notions the girls starts learning the housework and in meantime Mahavir gains weight and forgets about wrestling. Then occurs the most important incident in the life of Phogat family, Mahavir returns back to his home to find that his girls have beaten up two boys in their school. He asks the parents of the boys to forgive them and turns straight towards Geeta and Babita. Both the girls get terrified as they counter their doings by saying, “They started it. He called me a loser and Babita a witch. So, we beat the shit out of them.” (*Dangal*) But both the girls gets surprised when he asks how did they hit them rather than asking why did they hit them.

MAHAVIR: First tell me, how did you manage to do it.

GEETA: First he called me a loser but I remained quiet. But then he called Babita a witch. I grabbed him and punched him like this.

BABITA: Then the other guy attacked. I grabbed his hair and shoved him down and dug my elbow in his back. (*Dangal*)

Gender Roles

This sort of action goes against their feminine side, as per their learnings their work is to stay active in the house and passive in the world outside. So, according to their gender roles, beating the boys makes it difficult to group them under the category of being a woman but at the same time it does not provides us with the permission to call them men. This conflicted situation is what Judith Butler presents in her work *Gender Trouble*, “there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women.” (Mann 2) The understanding of this matter is seen in the happiness of Mahavir. That day he decides that his girls will bring gold medal for India. He tells his wife that

wrestling is in the blood of their daughters and they have the passion needed for it. While talking to his worried wife, his counter statement, “You think our girls are any lesser than boys?” (*Dangal*) reveals the change in the perception of the man who thought that wrestling is made for boys and not girls. Mahavir after tracing the strength of his daughters realises his mistake of following the crowd and rejecting the abilities of his daughters. Geeta and Babita on the other hand being way too young fails to understand that they’ve unknowingly showcased their strength, which marks them to be different from the other girls, busy exploring their feminine side only.

Geeta and Babita Training to be Wrestlers

But this revelation does not bring happiness in their life as his wife gets worried about their image in society. Mahavir asks for one year so that he could prove the society wrong. Next day he guides them with rules and asks them to follow a strict diet for they have to live a life of wrestler from now. Both Geeta and Babita get confused because this is not the way they are used too. He changes their attire and makes them wear shorts so that they could run without any problem and makes them workout every morning. This tires the girls and makes them beg their mother for saving their lives. He faces rejections from the society as he tries to ask them for the permission of letting his daughters play in their wrestling ring. As one of the men says, “Girls in the wrestling arena? Will you have me sin at this age?” (*Dangal*)

Mahavir’s attempt to train his daughters in wrestling finds support in the words of Judith Butler, who in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* problematises the western belief in the vertical alignment of sex, gender and sexuality as female, feminine and heterosexual. She states that “Man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.”(Butler 9) Also, the expected rejections from the society does not stop Mahavir as he builds an arena for the girls to practice wrestling on his own. He teaches them the basic rules of wrestling and finds the need of good practice. He gets his brother’s son so that the girls could find a tough competition and can practice more and become stronger. This presents the fight of a man for his daughters, so that he could make them able enough the stand in front of the society with their heads up.

Obstacles and Difficulties Faced

But all of this does not go as planned, as the girls find it difficult to cope up with their father’s ideology, which was going against the established stereotypical structure. Further, the reaction of the girls towards their father’s teachings shows the generalised setup in the thoughts of young children. Though Mahavir tries his level best to make them a good wrestler the girls find it difficult to survive under such conditions and as a result decides to confront their father.

GEETA: Papa, this wrestling isn’t working out for Babita.

BABITA: Ya, Papa... and Geeta gets so tired that she falls asleep in class. She can’t concentrate in her studies at all

GEETA: Babita’s body aches terribly. She keeps tossing and turning all night. Girls tease Geeta by calling her a man. Sad, isn’t it?

MAHAVIR: None of these seem like a problem. Tell me if there is a real problem

GEETA: Papa, our hair is getting ruined because of wrestling in the mud. She even has lice. I killed eight this evening

MAHAVIR: Now, that's a real problem (*Dangal*)

Next morning Mahavir gets their hair chopped which leaves the girls in great shock. Both the girls become the subject of mockery for the society. They get laughed at school too which provokes them to rebel against their father. Both the girls find the ways to escape the morning practice and live their life according to their choice. This shows the ability of the girls to follow as well as reject their father's rules according to their choice. They pretend to fall with a single blow of their brother, which leaves their father in a helpless state. From this time they take the "agency" in their hands and work accordingly, making their father unable to do anything even after understanding everything.

Choices in Conflict

Everything was going fine until one day when their father finds that they have skipped the practice to attend the wedding of their friend. Both the girls while sitting with the bride present the unhappy state of their life to which the bride responds with the sharp words which makes the girls think about the choice they have made. With tears in her eyes the bride says,

At least your father thinks about you. Otherwise, our reality is the moment a girl is born teach her to cook and clean, make her do all the household chores. And once she turns 14 marry her off. Get rid of the burden. And hand her over to a man, whom she has never met. Make her bear children and raise them. That's all she's good for. At least your father considers you his child. (*Dangal*)

Normative Sexuality in India

This legitimises the observation of Ratna Kapur who in her work *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism* states, "In India, motherhood, wifehood, domesticity, chastity, purity, and self-sacrifice constitute the primary features of normative sexuality." (Kapur 56) But the change in the Postmodern times is evident in the reaction of Geeta and Babita who reject the normalised style of living under their respective "gender template" and decide to make wrestling their profession. This choice shows the breaking away with the stereotypes, as the girls not only choose the masculine traits as their prime preference but also reject the generalised setup of woman rearing the family and sitting at home doing the household chores.

First Wrestling Match – Rigidity of Gender, and Success

After training them well Mahavir takes them for their first local wrestling match. He gets mocked and stopped by the man who says,

MAN: Mahavir Singh Phogat... Welcome! It's an honour that you have come to watch the competition

MAHAVIR: I've got a wrestler with me too

MAN: Name?

MAHAVIR: Geeta Kumari Phogat.

MAN: What?

MAHAVIR: Geeta Kumari Phogat.

MAN: You'll make a girl wrestle?

MAHAVIR: Yes, so? Write.

MAN: Sir. the day I organise a cooking competition that day bring Geeta. This is a wrestling competition! (*Dangal*)

This shows the rigidity of the gender roles which makes the society think such transgressions to be impossible. Somehow or the other they get the entry in the match, that never witnessed a girl fighting against the boy and subsequently becomes a great topic of discussion, attracting many viewers towards it. Geeta chooses the strongest contender and proves herself to be fearless. The referee asks the boy to play carefully for Geeta is a girl, “Go easy, she's a girl” to which she remarks that don't think that she is not strong enough, “Don't make that mistake”. (*Dangal*)

This incident clearly points toward the fact that how society makes clear demarcations as to the roles of men and women. Men are considered masculine and hence strong whereas women are considered feminine and by implication weak. But Geeta proved to be otherwise. She gave a tough competition to her male counterpart. Even after losing the match she gathered lots of applauses for giving a tough fight to the guy. And she never looked back again as she eventually wins one match after another and later gets selected for the state level championship and once again the life of the girls change. This further shows the determination of the girls on the choice they made. With the help of their father they start proving the society wrong that says that a man is a man and a woman can never be the one possessing such power.

Life in the Move

The father tries to get some funds from the sports club so that he could provide better training to the girls but fails because of the corruption in the department. This does not stop Mahavir Singh for he builds a mat ring at the home itself with the help of the mattresses. He mentions the rules and the points out of which point 5 is the most difficult and almost next to impossible one to achieve. After that he trains them for the first state level match and Geeta as usual secures the win. With time she becomes the senior player and finally wins the National championship. Babita on the other hand becomes the state champion and pursues to live with her father. Geeta leaves for Patiala for her further training for International Championship.

The life of Geeta again changes as she drools over the freedom she gets in the new place. This proves to be another important phase in the life of the family for everyone starts following their own ways. Geeta's exposure to city life makes her curious for exploring her feminine side as she grows back her hair, paints her nails, watches romantic movies and starts witnessing her feminine side which was doomed for a long time. Babita on the other hand lives determined to her goal and practices day and night in order to achieve her father's dream. Geeta returns back to her home to meet her family but her changed lifestyle comes in notice to everyone. She fights with her father in the arena and defeats him. Babita witnessing the change in her sister stands with her father while Geeta departs with losing trust in her family. Geeta being a revolutionist fights her own father in order to prove herself right, which she certainly does. This shows that even Geeta and Babita make the same choice, they differ on the basis of the way they acquire to accomplish it.

After some time Babita wins the nationals and joins Geeta in her academy. Geeta loses her first international match but remains unaffected by it. Babita traces the change and asks her to focus more. Slowly she starts losing all the matches. Her coach tells her not to

worry because some people are not made for international matches, “Some people are not made for international victory.” (*Dangal*) This leaves Geeta hopeless as she tries to acquire some motivation from her sister, who asks her to talk to their father. She calls her father and asks him to forgive her for not focusing on the game. Then came the time for another International match which was held after six months. She gets serious once again and chops her hair, this time with her own choice. Her father leaves for Patiala and starts training her for the match. This makes the girls trespass the academy in the morning and as a result both of them get caught by the coach. Her father saves them from getting dismissed and promises for not creating any disturbance in future. But this does not mean that they break the link completely as they remain in contact through cell phone and that’s how Mahavir continues to train her daughters for the match. The shift of Geeta’s focus again presents her own choice, which she makes in order to achieve her goal. Babita remains the same that shows the steady determined personality in order to achieve her goal.

Angry and Jealous Coach

Finally the day comes, the first match witnesses Geeta’s unexpected win because of the choices she makes. She chooses the advices of her father rather than that of her coach and wins the second match too. The coach gets jealous and locks Geeta’s father before the beginning of the last match. Geeta tries to find her father but fails and as a result fights with the opponent with her own strategies. In this fight she recalls her father saying, “Remember!”, “Your papa won't be there to save you every time”, “I can only teach you to fight”, “But you have to fight yourself”, “Make the effort....save yourself”. (*Dangal*) Geeta marks her ultimate win by reversing the impossible into possible, she scores the 5 points by building the arch and throwing the opponent down on her back. With this Geeta became the first Indian woman to win gold medal in Commonwealth Games, 2010.

Challenging the Stereotypes

Thus, the entire movie clearly challenges the stereotypes where woman irrespective of their gender fights against the restrictions of the society. The achievement of Geeta and Babita clearly points towards the possibility of gender transgression and the projection of such realistic stories marks to be the valid reasons for raising the voice against gender stereotyping. This clearly points to the fact that gender is not something essential but is socially constructed. To quote Butler, “Gender ought not be constructed as a stable identity or focus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts.”(Butler 191) *Dangal* became the block buster of 21st century which clearly presented the acceptance of such transgressions by the society. The focus has shifted from gender rules to the individual preferences, where fighting is no more the ability of man only. It depends upon the choice one makes and men like Mahavir and women like Geeta and Babita are the exponents of breaking away with such stereotypes.

To Conclude

The paper presents the evident change in the role of men and women in the recent era with the help of the two Bollywood movies. These relationship changes are evident in both the movies as in *NH10* both Meera and Arjun lead a relation that stands against the traditional norms and values and in *Dangal* both the girls gets supported by their father in choosing wrestling as their profession. Such types of transgressions have become explicit in the present times and its representation in media has further enhanced its effect.

NH10 showcases the change through the character of Meera who becomes the agent of change and fights at both the personal and social level. *Dangal* on the other hand presents the real life incidence of gender transgression, where the two girls Geeta and Babita not only chooses wrestling as their profession but also brings gold medal for the country. Thus, the study has tried to establish that gender is a construct generalised by the society, which has to be done away with in order to live more fuller and androgynous lives.

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