

# Relating with Anti-hero characters as depicted in blockbuster Hindi movies and looking up to them as role models: A study of male youth pursuing Engineering degree in Technical Institutes in and around Sangli Miraj and Kupwad city area, Maharashtra.

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**Abstract:** Hindi movie industry, popularly known as Bollywood, is one of the largest centres of film production not only in India but in the entire world. Of late, Bollywood has come up with a plethora of films based on Real life Anti heroes; protagonist represented as an amalgamation of both good and evil. The biography of a bad guy or a real life criminal is boldly explored in such anti-hero narratives.

This research includes fact finding inquiries related to adverse messages about righteousness, ethics, morals, and justice sent by Bollywood in anti hero narratives and how young males in society relate with them. Survey method was adopted in which Questionnaire based on four films with anti hero narratives was used as a research tool. Students pursuing Engineering degree in various branches of 4 different Engineering colleges in and around Sangli city were selected at random as respondents. Finally, 100 fully completed questionnaires were used for data analysis.

Movies with anti hero narrative play a great role in influencing young minds. They have the potency to draw youth into addictions and create a criminal out of an innocent youth.

The film makers and the stars that portray anti hero roles should adopt a less materialistic and more value centric approach while making such films. Censor board could be more strict with regards to factual content shown in Biopic and negative subliminal messages in the anti hero narratives. College going youth can also make informed choices before they watch movies with anti hero narrative.

This research was done on college going youth only and the films under consideration were real life stories of Anti heroes. Comprehensive research needs to be carried out to study the impact of Anti hero characters, real or fictitious, on youth in general.

**Key Words:** Youth, Anti hero, biopic, Bollywood.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

### 1.1 Description about the background

Hindi movie industry, popularly known as Bollywood, is one of the largest centers of film production not only in India but in the entire world. Bollywood, dominates the Indian film industry, and contributes to about 43% of the revenue made from the Indian media and entertainment industry. On an average, it produces over 250-300 movies annually. Movies include myriad and diverse themes such as mythology, history, romance, action, adventure, thriller etc. Since the beginning, Bollywood was always fascinated with the lives of Kings, Saints, Freedom fighters, or people who were successful in a particular field (like business, entertainment or sports). Raja Harishchandra (1913), Sant Tukaram, (1936) Guru (2007), Paan Singh Tomar (2012), Bhaag Milkha Bhaag (2013) and Mary Kom (2014), just to name a few.

Bollywood was and is still famous for producing “Masala” movies or movies for the masses. For ages they had and still have the same banal yet magical formula that contain drama, romance, ethics, emotional twists, comedy and action in varying degrees spiced up with a dash of song and dance sequels. Heroes in such movies are archetypes. They display and epitomize all the positive, ethical, humble and angelic traits in humans.

Kismet (1943) brought out a stark change in the character of the hero portrayed for so many decades. Starring Ashok Kumar, this movie put a stop to “heroic” characters, being the first anti-hero movie of Bollywood. It revolved around the story of a young thief, played by the iconic Ashok Kumar. The movie was also the first to show a mainstream “hero” playing the role of a villain. Despite shocked reactions from his fans, the movie was a big blockbuster hit. It was the first Bollywood movie to have hit the “crore club”, with earnings up to one crore. Kismet was also on screens for over three years, creating a record in its own time.

An antihero is a lead character in a story that lacks conventional heroic attributes such as idealism, courage and morality. He singularly exhibits many contradictory shades of character such as brute but romantic, unscrupulous yet principled, demonic and angelic, humanly frail yet superhumanly strong, and so on. An anti-hero is the protagonist represented as an amalgamation of both good and evil. His primary agenda is always self interest and therefore performs actions that defy conventional ethical codes or legal systems.

Scholar Richard Reynolds offered, "The negotiation of a character's heroism (or villainy) is fleshed out, as in all narratives, by the examination of moral choices made under pressure" (Zimmerman, 2004, p.34). A classic pop-culture look at the anti-hero came in 1971, with the film *Dirty Harry*.

Published in the 1985 edited work, *Moral Issues in Police Work*, University of Delaware professor Carl Klockars explained the character of Dirty Harry as a representation of noble-cause corruption. "The Dirty Harry problem asks when and to what extent the morally good end warrants or justifies an ethically, politically, or legally dangerous means to its achievement."

Affective disposition theory (ADT), which nicely explains enjoyment of traditional hero narratives, fails to clearly explain the antihero narratives, primarily because of the moral complexity of the protagonists. Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives, Article in Journal of Communication 62(6) · December 2012 Journal of Communication ISSN 0021-991 Daniel M. Shafer<sup>1</sup> & Arthur A. Raney<sup>2</sup>.

It was 'Satya' that introduced a new genre of film making, a film noir which became popularly known as the "Real life gangsters of the underworld". Even though the events depicted in the film were fictional, the characters were inspired from real life people that Ram Gopal Verma has encountered in his life. Some of these characters were based on people that Verma had met or heard about, some belonged to the underworld, some didn't. Manoj Bajpai's performance as the gangster Bhiku Mhatre made him a star overnight and the film was a block buster.

Of late, Bollywood has come up with a plethora of films based on Real life Anti heroes. The biography of a bad guy or a real life criminal is boldly explored in such anti-hero narratives.

- Once Upon a Time in Mumbai (2010) The film is loosely based on the lives of Mumbai underworld gangsters Haji Mastan and Dawood Ibrahim. Sultan (Haji Mastan) an orphan is a mobster but he has a very strict code of ethics and smuggles gold only. He manages to unify all the mobs of Mumbai, bringing them peace and keeping them from selling drugs and destroying lives. Shoaib is raised by a policeman...but he is completely amoral, angry and vicious. For a while, Shoaib goes to work for Sultan but, not surprisingly, they have a fall out and later clash
- Gangs of Wasseypur (2012). It focuses on the coal mafia of Dhanbad in Jharkhand, and depicts the power struggles, politics and a story of vengeance between three notorious crime families.
- Shootout at Wadala (2013) It follows the life of Manya Surve (John Abraham) showing his journey from a bright student to a dreaded gangster. Manya Surve died in 1982 in a brutal encounter by the Maharashtra Police which was the Mumbai city's third recorded encounter killing.
- Kick (2014) Devi, (Salman Khan, a man who cannot stay put as he is addicted to going on new adventures, breaks up with his girlfriend, Shaina, (Kacquiline Fernandes) who is a Warsaw-based psychiatrist, just to pursue his daredevil ambitions.
- Azhar (2016) Indian Hindi biographical sports drama film directed by Tony D'Souza. The story is inspired from the life of Indian cricketer and former national team captain Mohammad Azharuddin. The film also drew critics for its fictionalised interpretation of events.
- Padmavat (2018) Queen Padmavati is happily married to a Rajput ruler until a tyrant Sultan, Alauddin Khilji, enters their life and calls a war on their kingdom due to his obsession with the queen.

The challenge in producing Biopic is that they could be looked upon as insipid documentaries and fail on the box office. A biopic on a real life Anti Hero guarantees spice in the movie, but could be controversial in many aspects. Producers circumvent this challenge by adding a disclaimer at the beginning of the movie. Action, fiction and melodrama are often added to justify a shade of grey in the hero's behavior and to increase the impact of the story. For example: In the film Raees, the hero unknowingly becomes a conduit for the RDX smuggled into India before a series of blasts in a city (Read Mumbai blasts). In the climax scene, Raees surrenders to Police but in reality he was shot dead in a police encounter in Ahmedabad in 1997.

A slight change in the genuine history of the event or the characters projected assures legal protection and ensures box office success for the film.

Such deviations are sugar coated as artistic liberties taken by the writer or the director. Of late, films that promote a negative character under the garb of true life story have become regulars on Box office popularity charts.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem:

Hindi movies play a large and impressionable role in the lives of young people. Discussion on latest hit movies is a part of their daily 'gossip' that presents them with new ideas regarding dress codes, behavior and attitude. Bollywood is a constant point of reference to enhance their image with latest fashion, style and lingo. Gangster films are particularly popular with college students. Their routine conversation is sprinkled with one liners, dialogues and kitsch vocabulary from such movies. Moreover, cinema is a very catchy kind of entertainment, which not only leaves a lasting impression on young minds but subtly shapes up their ethical thought process and moral character.

Films justifying violence and kangaroo courts in case of forbidden justice are particularly popular with college students. Each year witnesses a block buster film glorifying anti heroes just for the sake of avarice and popularity. It has therefore become imperative to understand the impact of such films on the youth in particular.

### 1.3 Objectives of the study:

- To find out if the youth like and sympathize with the anti heroes even though they act an awful lot like villains
- To find out if the youth relate with anti heroes by imitating their traits and act in real life?
- To study if heroes that defy traditional norms of correct behavior in society become role models for youth

### 1.4 Research questions:

The researcher wants to find out how the youth relate with the protagonist in films with an anti hero narrative and do such characters influence their understanding of morality, nobility and sensitivity. It includes fact finding inquiries related to adverse messages about righteousness, ethics, morals, and justice sent by Bollywood and their perception by young males in society.

## 2. METHOD:

### 2.1 Research design:

**Geographical scope** The Sangli Miraj Kupwad city is located in Maharashtra state of India and is governed by Municipal Corporation which comes under Sangli Metropolitan Region.

As per provisional reports of Census India, the urban / metropolitan population of Sangli Miraj Kupwad city is 513,961 of which 259,320 are males and 254,641 are females.

Number of Polytechnic/Engineering colleges 12

Number of Multiplexes and Cinema screens 13

Researcher chose 4 commercially successful films between 2016-2019. Each film was a box office hit and glamorized an anti hero from different walks of life. 3 out of 4 films claim to be based on true life stories, of course with some artistic liberties taken by the director of the film.

### Movies on which the questionnaire was based:

- **Rustom** (2016 Indian) crime thriller film that stars Akshay Kumar as an Anti hero. Rustom Pavri (Akshay Kumar), an officer of the Indian Navy shoots his friend Vikram to death after discovering that his wife Cynthia had an affair with the rich businessman. The Commander surrenders himself to the Police immediately and admits to have killed Vikram but pleads 'not guilty' in court. The film is loosely based on the K. M. Nanavati v. State of Maharashtra court case. A sub plot of corruption in Navy deal has been introduced forcefully, to give a patriotic slant to Rustom's character and justify his action.
- **Raees** (2017) action crime film, a story of a Gujarati bootlegger turned gangster of the 1980s, whose character has been inspired by the real-life gangster Abdul Latif, who was an associate of Dawood Ibrahim. (The disclaimer still refuses so.) The man also had his hands full with many criminal activities such as kidnapping, gambling, extorting money from builders and businessmen, and contract killing; land deals, drugs, hawala etc. He was based in Ahmedabad and was politically well connected. Latif was also seen as a messiah, who provided jobs and justice to underprivileged Muslims in Ahmedabad who were ignored by the system. But it was also known that the man was highly communal in his operations - having engineered several riots and only employed Muslims in his criminal network. In 1986-87, he contested for 3 Municipal Corporation seats and won all seats. The only change that has been made is in the Climax where Raees surrenders to Police but in reality he was shot dead in a police encounter in Ahmedabad in 1997. He was the main culprit in supplying RDX used in the 1993 Mumbai blasts.
- **Sanju** (2018) Ranbir Kapoor starrer is a biopic based on film star Sanjay Dutt. How a famous actor from the Bollywood film industry, struggles with the legacy that is handed down to him by his illustrious parents, along with his personal dilemmas and vices. Many have slammed the movie saying that the movie defeats the high moral ground taken by the film industry which claims that movies show right direction to the society. Nothing

in the movie could be termed as “inspiration” for the youth. They raised concern about the influence such a tainted character could have on young minds. Many claimed that the biopic was more like a PR practice to “whitewash the tainted image of the protagonist”.

- **Kabir Singh** ( 2019) Indian Hindi-language romantic drama. It stars Shahid Kapoor and Kiara Advani. Kapoor plays Kabir Singh, a passionate medico, haughty and overconfident surgeon who spirals into self-destruction when his girlfriend, Preeti leaves him.

## 2.2 Methodology:

Survey method was adopted in which Questionnaire was used as a research tool.

A Questionnaire was formulated to analyze the Anti hero narratives in films such as, Rustom, Raees Sanju, and Kabir Singh”. Since the main lead is played by popular stars and all these films were box office hit movies, participants had watched at least 3 out of the 4 listed films. This fact was verified before the participant was chosen as a sample. A questionnaire based on the objectives of research was formulated. It had 3 different types of questions such as Checklist questions, scaled questions and open ended questions (3 in number).

The questionnaire was mailed to 100 male participants.

## 2.3 Sampling design:

**Universe** – Constitutionally, Indian Government recognizes all its citizens between the age group of 15 – 35 years as youth. But in focus are male youth, pursuing an engineering degree in reputed technical institutes in and around the city of Sangli. They were between the age group of 18-21.

**Technique** – Stratified Random Disproportionate

Students pursuing Engineering degree in various branches of 4 different Engineering colleges were selected at random. They filled up the questionnaire digitally or on hard copies.

**Sample size**– 100 fully completed questionnaires were used for data analysis.

## 3. ANALYSIS: Data analysis:

Quantitative analysis of checklist and scaled questions was done and results were presented in tabular form. Thematic analysis of qualitative or open ended questions was also presented.

### 3.1 Quantitative analysis of data

- Only 46% of the respondents have followed up the life story of the real people on whom the movies Raees, Sanju and Rustom are based. Those who haven't found out about the real characters are bound to take the story line at face value and look at it as genuine biography of the anti hero. They may ignorantly relate to the negative character without being aware of the so called artistic liberties taken by the director for the sake of profit and legal protection.
- 35% agreed that an Anti hero is created because he is a victim of circumstances like poverty, heart break, abuse or injustice. Not even one respondent opined that anti heroes are born evil or crooked. Majority stated that bad company can influence a person to get involved in crime.
- A whopping 63% were undecided whether it is justified to indulge in petty crime like boot legging and gambling to sustain one's family. They opined that it depended on the intensity of need, deprivation desperation, and unavailability of any other choices.

Their dilemma is evident when they relate affirmatively with the dialogue in the film Raees that obliquely appreciative of principled behavior in criminal activities.

- 71% are of the opinion that though an anti hero displays some of the characteristics and personality traits of a villain; he ultimately gives in to the goals and desires of a hero.
- Only 26% affirm that being a Robin Hood in society can justify crime. 28% are unsure about the same
- 76% of the respondents feel that entering into politics or contesting elections is the best way to white wash criminal deeds. It is difficult to decide whether reel life reflects real life or vice versa.
- It is heart-warming to know that 86% do not agree that Honor killing is the right approach to save a marriage that includes extra marital affairs. Respondents suggested counseling, separation or divorce as a solution to tackle marital discord. Obviously they did not relate with the story line of the film Rustom which happened in 1958
- 58% feel that no leniency should be shown for a murderer even if he is a committed family man, passionate patriot and decorated man in uniform. The law should be equally strict with him.
- 65% opined that being brash, brave, egoistic, dominating is sign of masculinity.

- 25% feel that following the girl relentlessly till she accepts the possessive advances as true love is a sure shot way to win a girl's heart. Being brash, bold dominant etc are alpha male traits and girls get attracted to such masochism.
- 58% understand the reality that alcohol and drugs impair decision making and affect performance. One cannot perform normal duties under the influence of alcohol or drugs. They felt that
- Kabir Singh performing perfect and miraculous surgeries under the influence of alcohol in the movie was farfetched and totally absurd.
- Surprisingly 56% opined that an alcoholic and drug abuser can give up his addiction easily without having to put up major efforts for de addiction. They had this romantic notion of 'True Love' being a cure to any addiction. The ease with which the hero gets rid of his addiction to drugs and cigarettes mocks the serious issues faced by millions who are struggling to give up their dependence on their vices.

### 3.3 Qualitative and thematic analysis of data

- What are your views on the dialogue in the movie Raees, "No occupation is small and no religion is bigger than one's business"
- 66% relate affirmatively with the catchy dialogue in the film Raees. "No occupation is small and no religion is bigger than one's business". It is shown as a mantra given by the anti hero's mother in his childhood. By cashing on the devotion that Indians generally have towards their mothers, the writer has justified the nefarious activities of Raees, projecting him to be devoted to his mother and principled even while committing criminal deeds. The world today is filled with inequality, competition, cynicism and struggle. Life has become complex and the grey shade is much more prominent in everyday lives. Achieving stupendous success without malice comes forth as an idea straight out of fiction. The moral dilemmas are very diffused and tangled. It seems youth today wants to have some semblance of clarity by accepting that it is okay to do bad things for the right reasons.
- In spite of having it all, cultured parents, name, money and opportunities, people like Sanju can make mistakes, lie, cheat, indulge in drugs and crime. But if they surrender before law and serve time, should they be admired? 55% are of the opinion that Sanjay Dutt is a good man at heart. Growing up, he underwent the agony of watching his mother die in pain. He entered Bollywood as an adolescent. The glitz and glamour he lived in, there were very few true friends. The tragedy and confusion experienced as a lonely teenager got him into wrong company. He was flawed but he was honest in confessing his mistakes and served his time for them. His courage and grit are worth admiring.
- Drinks, smoke, pubs, and girl friends are the activities to enjoy youthful life. Your comments on the statement please.
- Almost 76% of the students were cool about alcohol intake, smoking and having a girl friend. According to them, it is important to focus on education, participate in various co and extra -curricular activities for personality enhancement but youth is also the time to be adventurous and experiment with something that society looks down upon. Many idolized the way Kabir Singh looked cavalier and carefree as he puffed and blew out smoke. To enjoy the thrill of drinks and cigarette once in a while is a novel way to feel liberated. Having a girl friend boosts their self esteem and also offers a space/window before they totally commit themselves to the relationship. Where ever there is a party, it must have booze because they think alcohol makes it easier to meet other people, relaxes their social inhibitions, and helps them have more fun.

### 4. FINDINGS:

Of late there has been an explosion of historical and biopic Hindi films. Under the excuse of citing artistic liberty, each of such films puts forth a version of the past that's obscured by legend and skewed towards certain narratives. As seen in data analysis, youth are hardly enthusiastic to verify the story of the protagonist and accept everything at face value. Such movies, whether biopic or entirely fictionalized stories, tell the bad guy's version of story by highlighting him as a helpless and hapless victim of circumstances. Youth relating themselves with the anti hero could result in corruption of their moral values resulting in them choosing to tread on amoral path.

The messages given out by the film Raees are grossly misleading.

"No occupation is small and no religion is bigger than one's business", which could mean that if your business is crime, you can sacrifice all morals mandated by religion to stay true to this skewed mantra.

Raees could encourage delinquent and deprived children to indulge in petty crime.

Raees is a righteous don who kills truly evil people and is sentimental enough to get teary eyed before pumping bullets into his mentor. This could instigate one to take law in one's own hand or run kangaroo courts.

Crime can be the shortest route to a successful political career. Because a don, or criminal of sorts can earn respect by helping his community, turn into a Robin Hood and ultimately into a political bigwig.

Just as depicted in movies, the two most common contexts associated with alcohol use by students were to enjoy, party or to celebrate and to suppress negative emotions. Smoking is equated with being carefree and liberated. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' was their favorite saying. According to them, It is thrilling and adventurous to try out a cigarette or a drink because society is against it. By rejecting societal constraints and expectations imposed upon them they feel liberated like the anti hero who is an iconoclast. Having a girl friend just adds to the high headedness of being macho man. Inadvertently, movies are patronizing the use of cigarettes and alcohol which could very easily and quickly turn into a serious addiction.

One of the main things that attracts the youth to a character like Sanju is his feet of clay. There is no such thing as a perfect person, Sanju mirrors the moral complexities faced by the youth today. They're still developing, learning, growing. Mistakes are bound to be committed but in the end, they could trend towards heroism. This sliver of hope that they too may one day emerge as heroes in life makes them root for Sanju's redemption.

Kabir Singh glorifies the anti hero who has anger issues and exhibits pseudo machismo. His distorted version of eternal love involves stalking, cornering, abusing, calling names, invading privacy and even threatening the girl. Demanding attention, love and respect by aggression is a typically anti hero trait in Bollywood films where initially the heroine detests him for his brashness but ultimately succumbs to the romantic and soft hearted crude!. Will the youth relating to behavior develop toxic masculinity?

The only remedy for a heart break is addiction and promiscuity which can be given up in a jiffy if you get back your lost love. The movie does not show how this attitude is unacceptable and unreasonable and should not be copied or mimicked by the youth. This is a dangerous subliminal message to the youth.

The movie 'Roustum' is loosely based on the real life court case, K. M. Nanavati v. State of Maharashtra. The story is almost six decades old. The responses given by the youth show that they do not appreciate the idea of honour killing. The youth of today understand and accept that in addition to incompatibility and differences of opinion, an extra marital affair can also break down a marriage. Divorce is no longer looked upon as a blemish upon honour or family name. Killing the partner is definitely not a solution. Counselling, Separation and divorce are the solutions for marital discord.

## **5. RESULT:**

Movies with anti hero narrative play a great role in influencing young minds. Youth of today relate and empathize with the antiheroes because their moral complexity is closely mirrored by a protagonist who is flashy, loud and crude; everything that makes him stand out or attracts negative attention. He rejects societal constraints without trepidation, guilt or apology. By imitating them in dress style and behaviour, youth feel as if they are liberated.

Movies with Anti hero narratives have the potency to draw youth into addictions and create a criminal out of an innocent youth. While making biopic on anti heroes, the film makers usually introduce a slight change in the genuine history of the event or the characters projected. The actions of the anti hero may be questionable but their motives are always pure. The story ensures that good always triumphs over evil. An anti hero always pays for his bad deeds in the end, either by going to jail or getting killed. Moreover, producers of the film always choose a hero whom the youth idolize and follow. Thus the youth relate with their favorite hero who is depicted as slightly flawed, imperfect and a bit skewed, the anti hero; who does not have to carry the burden of being a perfect hero. But they just can't decide the extent to which an anti hero can go to defend his bad deeds against morality and nobility. By imitating the behavior of their favorite hero portraying the character of an anti hero in the film, the youth can inadvertently indulge in criminal acts.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS and CONCLUSION :**

The Censor Board has now introduced anti-drinking warnings in scenes where actors are depicted consuming alcohol. Filmmaker and producer Mahesh Bhatt said it would be wrong to implement the anti-drinking warnings when it was not even known if the anti-smoking warnings have had any impact on the society. Movies are patronizing the use of cigarettes and alcohol. What starts as a style statement or mirroring of the anti hero's habits could very easily and quickly turn into a serious addiction among youth.

Movies are available to all at an affordable rate. The adolescent and youth are primarily vulnerable to the influence of characters presented in movies. They could blindly believe whatever is presented by their favorite stars. In my opinion, the Censor Board should make the film makers completely accountable for presenting real stories in Anti hero narrative reels. Bollywood should show Social Responsibility to some extent by not presenting wrongful content under the pretext of 'Artistic Liberty'. Although profit is the ultimate goal in producing movies, the choice, and presentation of the story should be appropriate and more realistic. Film makers could adopt a less materialistic and value

centric stand while presenting anti hero narratives. Film stars should realize that apart from being mere artists, they shoulder a grave responsibility in shaping the character of the youth. As such they can show restraint and cautiously choose the roles they want to play. On their part, college going youth can also make informed choices before they watch movies with anti hero narrative. They can thus separate fact from fiction and not get blindly influenced by the character presented therein.

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