

LEXICONS OF LUST: LINGUISTIC OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD ITEM SONGS THROUGH FEMINIST STYLISTICS

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Abstract

The paper examines the construction of female identity in the use of language in some of the Indian item songs published between 2018 and 2022 when sexism in examining women in the cataloguing of their identity in language is a major concern. On the basis of the theory of Feminist Stylistics developed by Sara Mills in her article, especially the analysing tool of cataloguing, the study will critically analyse why item songs utilise pejorative and objectifying lexical items that incapacitate women into exhibits and activate them using sexist metaphors. The purposive sample of popular Bollywood item songs was analyzed qualitatively and textually, which revealed the tendency of this naming women after dehumanizing and hypersexualized descriptors consistently. These wordings consider and propagate the patriarchal ideologies in the mass culture, and thus continue the objectification of women in the media. The results show that women are constantly referred to as food, cash, item, and beast of which they are deprived of agency and subjectivity. The paper has come to the conclusion that these cataloguing patterns help to reinforce the gendered stereotypes and, therefore, we should be more critical of the language that is being used in the world of entertainment. This study also argues how cataloguing can be seen as a language effect of perpetuating gendered power disparities within the South Asian pop culture.

Keywords *Item songs, Hindi Bollywood, lyrical representation, Sexual Objectification of Females, Feminist Stylistics.*

1. Introduction

Representation of women on popular media in South Asia, especially due to films created by Bollywood is a critical issue of consideration on feminist discourse in South Asia. Among other films, the item songs have become a genre into itself with its chorographic hypersexuality, suggestive lyrics and hypersexualized objectification of women. These songs are being called the song of 2018 but ironically, they uphold and promote utmost patriarchal thinking. They serve as a very specific kind of culture product, objectifying the female body and reinforcing the negative stereotypes. This paper examines how women are constructed linguistically in Bollywood item songs as a case study trying to explore how the language is used to objectify and encrust women by ascribing sexist labels to them and making metaphorical references to them.

And, on the larger dimension of feminist literary and linguistic criticism, this study takes Feminist Stylistics as promulgated by Sara Mills, paying extended focus on the analytical method of cataloguing. Cataloguing describes the process of arranging terms in list form or grouping together the terms that are employed to define the character of a female in a manner that makes them out to be inanimate objects, overdrawn roles or stereotypical character traits. This aspect of style is especially topical in the case of item songs when women are often called by a chain of insulting or metaphorical names. The entertainment value of such linguistic patterns is not only used to make people socially accustomed to the existence of gender

hierarchies. The framework developed by Mills allows paying closer attention to the fact that even lexical choices that may appear to be playful or artistic bear a significant socio-cultural impact, especially when it comes to gender representation.

Through a purposive sample of item songs published between 2018 and 2022, a time of not only increased activity in global feminist movements, including the MeToo movement, but also of continued production of content that perpetuates sexist tropes in mainstream Indian cinema, this study looks at the ways in which sexist lyrics in item songs have developed over time, and how item song lyrics remain a powerful tool through which to visibly manifest the popularization of sexist narratives across cultures, and especially Indian culture since the release of the first item song. By qualitative textual analysis, the study aims at revealing the frequentness of reoccurring patterns of lexical catalogue that reduce the female subject to the imagery that can be consumed and controlled. Women are often compared to money, candy, equipment, to beasts or other inanimates, which, again, are associated with objectifying the female and depriving them of agency. These catalogues are usually the part of wider tendency to depict women as second situated, accessible and attractive, which supports male sense of gaze and idea of consumerism.

This research will attempt to identify the effect of popular media in the normalization of sexism ideologies in South Asian context by studying the linguistic instruments applied in these songs. The results indicate that language is also very instrumental in reinstatement of the power hierarchy in terms of gender not just through the direct denigration but also due to disparagement associated with covert and repetitive practices of enumeration. Since this work adds to the burgeoning bibliography of feminist linguistic studies, it is illuminating in discovering the manner in which the stylized type of language in mass media may serve as the conveyor of misogyny in the form of entertainment. Finally, the paper is a demand on critical media literacy and responsible use of words in cultural productions.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What can be said about women who are linguistically indexed and objectified in the chosen Indian item songs published during 2018-2022?
2. Except for what kind of sexist naming and metaphoric descriptions prevail upon the image of women in the lyrics of these songs, and in what way do they express patriarchal attitudes?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To deconstruct the diction and catalogue methods to describe women in some Bollywood item songs released since 2018 to 2022.
2. To appreciate how the language used to express the female gender in such songs actually leads to the continuation of gender stereotypes and supports the patriarchal system of society with the aid of the Feminist Stylistics approach given by Sara Mills.

1.4 Significance

The given work is incredibly important when referring to feminist linguistic studies and the study of discourse in the media. In its approach to cataloguing of women in Bollywood item songs, it will reveal how language is employed strategically to re-confirm gendered power relationships and normalize objectification of women in the popular culture. The results illuminate the processes through which the daily source of amusement, especially the lyrics of songs, is turned into a conveyance of misogynistic plotlines in the pretense of glamour and pretend. The use of Feminist Stylistics by Sara Mills not only demonstrates the types of stylistic devices applied in this process of objectification but also inevitably widens the scope of the theory of Catherine Jessid, who first came up with the idea of cataloguing in the context of media texts in the South Asian context. The study adds value to studies on gender, linguistics

of media and critical discourse analysis by challenging the academics, media producers and consumers to re-examine their linguistic decisions that form the perception of the people about women. It has a pedagogical value, too, since it shows how the stylistic analysis can reveal the ideologies most texts have to hide and not keep them on the surface of academic poetry.

1.5 Delimitation

The current research will be limited to the examination of a chosen sample of Indian item songs that came out in 2018-2022. The study is bounded by item songs made during and after this period and it also does not denote analysis of the visual, musical, or choreographic interpretation to the songs. Only the lyrics and the way women are constructed linguistically are the center of the attention. The research also captures a single instrument of Feminist Stylistics: cataloguing by Sara Mills, without examining other elements, including transitivity or naming, outside the scope of the notion of cataloguing. Only the songs performed in Hindi or Hindi-English hybrid which are widely popular or received media coverage over the chosen time are analyzed. Therefore, the results of this research provide some insights into the existence of linguistic sexism in item songs in Bollywood, but one cannot deduce that they can represent the sexism of the South Asian media in general or the state of lyrical representation.

2. Literature Review

As a method of discovering language use in gendered ideology construction in texts, Mills (1995) proposed Feminist Stylistics. Among the most essential devices which she suggested, one should note cataloguing which means the listing of attributes, labels or metaphors that transform female characters into stereotypes or objects. According to Mills, this linguistic approach has a lot of influence in constructing the perceptions of readers on women by portraying them in such a way that they are restricted in their identities and capability to act. Her model has been used widely in various literary and media texts and this paper goes further to apply it to song lyrics, in this case Bollywood item numbers as one of the modern forms of social loci where gendering is performed.

Many researchers have criticized the Bollywood treatment of women and women are being depicted in items songs that have a showcasing role about the women portrayed as objects of both visual and vocal fantasy. Ghosh (2019) looked at the ways in which the number of items tends to place female characters in a passive and ornamental role and appeal to the male gaze as well as encourage heteronormative forces. Language in these songs, as Ghosh says, makes a significant role in dehumanizing women giving them a status of beast, currency or items to consume. This is consistent with the idea of catalogue, which portrays the women in the form of repetitious sexist metaphors to the point where they can be viewed as mere objects.

Both, Tannen (1990) and Cameron (1998) have considered the role of language, power, and gender and they think that, media texts reproduce the ideologies of the society and media texts are based on the existing ideologies. Cameron especially went to explain how gendered discourse does not only explain, but constructs reality. Language is used as a type of performative tool in the lyrics of a song and, in this case, determines the perception of gender roles by the listeners. Contrary to this, popular culture cannot be considered as a neutral process but rather an effective instrument of ideology that desensitizes people to the ideology of sexism by promoting seemingly harmless entertainment. This view confirms the research in the present study to argue that item song catalogue is not incidental, rather a systematic manner of linguistic marginality.

In their discourse analysis of Hindi film lyrics, Kumar and Mistry (2021) identified systematic commodification of women through the use of lexical choices in their lyrics as they refer to the

females as gold, sugar, machines, or wild animals, terms that deprive these genders of individuality and humanness. In their findings, they opined that the culture of light hearted sexism induced by such depictions tends to inure audiences to gender based inequalities. Their report, in particular is useful in the present study that develops the theme that the catalogue-like style in the use of lyrics in songs is a part of the symbolic violence done to the female gender by the use of language. This paper will uncover the role of the lexical patterns employed in the Bollywood item songs in expressing the large-scale orientations toward gender in such a way that is attributable to the lexical practices.

3. Methodology

The qualitative study took a stylistics and discourse analytical study to understand the issue of how women were linguistically made and indexed in some of the 2018 to 2022 item songs of Indian films. The research seeks to discuss the words and grammatical structures and sexist approach to cataloguing in song lyrics of the desire to objectify and dehumanize the female figures. The analysis of texts allows the study to find and explain the language decisions that contributes to the reaffirmation of patriarchal ideas through the media of Bollywood. Its methodology may be defined as interpretive, and it attempts to discover implied meanings of lexical structures and their ideological connotations in a feminist scheme.

3.1 Tools for Data Collection

The major form of data that is going to be used is textual analysis of lyrics of some Bollywood songs which come under item numbers. The lyrics were obtained using reputable sources of information (IN_ON) like official music network (e.g., T-Series, Zee Music Company) and lyric archives (e.g., Lyricsmint, Hindigeetmala). After gathering the lyrics, it was transcribed, translated when required and carefully analyzed to create a pattern in relation to sexist language, cataloguing, and metaphors that were used. It has performed the analysis on the word level and phrase level in the description of women, looking forward to derogatory, sexualized descriptions, and metaphorical names. This information was coded semi-manually and discussed through thematic studies as principles of the feminist stylistics.

3.2 Sample

The data sample of this study comprises ten very popular Bollywood item songs out of the released between 2018 and 2022. Songs were intentionally chosen due to their popularity, the content of the lyrics as well as their media presence. Investigating songs with objectified female characters, language objectifying mankind and metaphorical female portrayals were prioritized. Tracks that are possibly contained inside sample may be:

Table 1: Release Years of Selected Bollywood Item Songs

S.No.	Song Title	Film / Album	Release Year
1	<i>Chamma Chamma</i>	<i>Fraud Saiyaan</i>	2019
2	<i>Sawan Mein Lag Gayi Aag</i>	<i>Ginny Weds Sunny</i>	2020
3	<i>Zilla Hilela</i>	<i>Jabariya Jodi</i>	2019
4	<i>Zaalima Coca Cola</i>	<i>Bhuj: The Pride of India</i>	2021
5	<i>Masakali 2.0</i>	<i>Single (Remake)</i>	2020
6	<i>Tareefan</i>	<i>Veere Di Wedding</i>	2018
7	<i>Hello Ji</i>	<i>Ragini MMS Returns (Web Series)</i>	2019
8	<i>Firecracker</i>	<i>Jayeshbhai Jordaar</i>	2022
9	<i>Gat Gat</i>	<i>Bala</i>	2019
10	<i>Patola</i>	<i>Blackmail</i>	2018

These songs are a sample size of the item number culture of Bollywood and also full of linguistic content of feminist stylistics.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This paper is relevant to the idea of Feminist Stylistics theory (Sara Mills, 1995), yet the attention is paid to a particular analytical instrument which is known as cataloguing. Feminist stylistics aims to examine gender construction within the language and how we make semantic choices that induce or fail to induce accurate representation of women. Cataloguing here is defined as the repetition of lists, labels or metaphors which objectify and stereotype women down to a collection of categorizing appellations. This is a handy tool when determining how item songs place women linguistically against male gaze and patriarchal codes. The research identifies how gendered ideologies are propagated through objectified entertaining lyrics by including Mills concepts to the lyrics of Bollywood item numbers.

4. Catalogues

There is nothing on this planet without a name, everything in the world has a concrete name. There are proper nouns to address all the things within this world. However when we apply that rule to women we refer to them using different sexist names. Some people use some derogatory and depreciative words to address women. Mills (1995) has employed cataloguing in order to study the language of the liked literature on the discourse level. When comparing the numbers of the item of the Bollywood between 2018-2022, we see abundant footprints of the cataloguing of the females. The use of diminutives to refer to women is apparently demeaning the value and dignity of the female by this name on them. Women also carry an identity and their formal names hence they cannot be referred by their original names.

1. Chamma Chamma

The lyricist of the Item song Chamma Chamma of the movie of Fraud Saiyan has used derogatory word to address the girl. Here the lyricist has cherished the girl with catalogue in words as: “*Mujhko tu bana lay rani apna lover*” (Rani! make me your lover). In the above line the lyricist has addressed the girl as rani. In this, the lyricist has objectified the feminine as an object that one can call it by any name he/she wishes to. It is immature to address a human being using different names.

2. Sawan Me Lag Gai Aag

The song Sawan me lag gai aag in the film, Ginny Weds Suuny calls the female through such sexist and inappropriate words as: “*haye patakha me bomb ka dhamaka me*” (I am a fire-cracker I am explosive). The line quoted is an address to the female using the words, a firecracker and a bomb. This is where the lyricist has created the girl to call herself a firecracker and a bomb. Addressing a female using the said words is unbecoming. A female who appears hot and sexually attractive is referred to as bomb and firecracker. The widely used item songs means that the word bomb is now commonly used as slang in referring to the girls. The word bomb has shot out through lyrics in a long list of songs, raps and item numbers.

3. Zilla Hilela

The screenplay number of item Hilela Zilla, a Bollywood film Jabariya Jodi has the inference of using catalogue to address a female. The line in the song which is important is the: “*Gori lachkay*” (A white girl moves flexibly). The name is Gori where the girl has been referred to. The lyricist has referred to her as gori and not because it is her name but because he referred to her skin color. The process of calling a person by his/her skin color is what we can call objectification. Our society is highly favoring those people with fairer skin color. The white skin has forever been synonymous to the concept of attractiveness and fragility. The outlook and skin colour are factors through which people face judgments.

4. Zalima Coca Cola Pila Day

The evidence of cataloguing is carried in the lyrics of the item song Zaima Coca Cola pila Day of the Bollywood film Bhuj: The Pride of India. The song lyrics read: *Aray o manchali, bah anarkali* (Hey bold girl, Hey blossoming flower). The song line addresses the girl by terming her as manchali and anarkali. The name manchali bod and anarkali blossom are used to depict the brashness. In this case the author does not call the girl by her first name. He is using bold and delicate blossoming flower to describe the girl. The culture in our society says that to be bold is to be seducing. Men love the bold rebellious nature of the girls since the bold girls are easy to be approached. The second term, anarkali is the allusion to the much-raised love story of the Prince Saleem and the renowned dancer, Anarkali. Anarkali happened to be the lover of Prince Saleem and now the men call girls with the name of Anarkali as a matter of calling girls as their beloveds indirectly. It is inappropriate to refer to a girl using such type of terms.

5. Masakali

Catalogue is used very strongly in the lyrics of the item song Masakali of the film Marjaavaan. The song lyric is listed below: "*Masakali masakali, tu kahan chali, kahan chali*" (Hey dancing pigeon where are you going?). The song lyric makes the point of indicating that the lyricist has called the girl by the name masakali. Masakali in English is dancing pigeon. The pigeon is a nice, harmless and handsome bird. Stating the repeated using of pigeon which means referring to the girl, the lyricist is establishing the impression of delicate, beautiful, peaceful, friendly and innocent girl. The listeners are also able to be lured into the song through satisfaction of the imagery they are able to create through the words used by the lyricist. It is not nice to reduce the value of human being by assigning him/her the quality of a bird or an animal.

6. Tareefan

In the song line when referring to a female in the item number Tareefan in the film Veere Di Wedding, the lyricist pays a greeting in Baby form as: "*Baby mera mind tu kary blow*". (I am crazy about your beauty). The lyricist pronounces that the female blows the mind of the man. But the word which the lyricist employs in addressing the female is baby. The writer does this by terming her as a baby hence revealing that man is superior and that the female takes second position.

7. Hello Ji

The author of the item number Hello Ji in the movie Ragini MMS 2 addresses the female with catalogue that depicts the sexual desirability of the female. The related line of the song is: "*Me haan sohni babe*" (I am a beautiful babe). In this song, the songwriter has written babe to address the female. Babe is a slang term that is used to address a woman of sexual appeal. Terming a woman as babe appears to be a term of affection but this term explains sexuality of the female and portrays females as a sex object.

8. Firecracker

The writer of one of the tracks called Firecracker in film Jayeshbhai Jordar resorts to addressing the female by the term catalogue. The troubled line of the song is: "*Teekhay taur tariky, hai meri baby kay, my Baby kay*" (My baby is a racy manner guy). The said line in the song addresses the female as a baby. Using the word baby, the lyricist indirectly demonstrates the reliance of the female on her lover.

9. Gat Gat

The film Dream Girl has the term catalogue applied in relation to the female by the item number Gat Gat. The lyrics read: "*Nashay diye bottle*" (Alcohol bottle). The line outlined above implies that the girl is a bottle of alcohol. It is offending and unacceptable to call a girl bottle of alcohol. The analogy between a bottle of alcohol and a human being is illogical and uncondemnable. This type of sexiest words used to address females is useful to capture the

attention of people towards the song. The reference of a girl to alcohol makes the description of the audience more crazy.

10. Patola

The writer of song-number Patola of the Bollywood film Blackmail uses catalogue to refer to the female: “66 Jaddon niklay patola ban ky” (When she goes out like a beautiful doll), so goes the line in the song. The writer of the song refers to the girl as Patola. Patola is slang, which refers to the girl, who dresses up as a pretty and little doll. Men apply this slang when they want to comment on a sexy and hot looking girl. The lyricist has compared her to something non-living, doll by confessing that she has called a female patola. To apply the qualities of something which is inanimate to something which is alive is not a compliment.

There is a certain contribution in portraying various stereotypes and ideas about women by the lyricists with the help of sexist vocabulary and their daring use of words when it comes to the females. The lyricists of all the item numbers are all male and utilise the imagery that broke the body of females into the anatomical parts. Many of the songs have catalogues that address the females. The item numbers are interesting because of the catchy tunes and the daring lyrics and people feel attracted to the songs. Then the songs turn into the mouth piece of the people and subconsciously, themes and stereotypes that are being projected have negative impact or influence on the society.

Table 2: Catalogues Used for Women in Bollywood Item Songs and Their Frequency

Catalogue	Occurrences	Catalogue	Occurrences
Bijli	8	Kudi	1
Baby	7	Sohniye	1
Baby Girl	4	Billo	1
Heeriye	2	Goriya	1
Hottie	2	Babe	1
Gori	2	Kitty	1
Coca Cola	2	Afeem	1
Rani	2	Goriye	1
Bomb	2	Morni	1
Patlo	2	Param Sundari	1
Bottle of alcohol	2	Cake	1
Gilehri	1	Patola	1
Jungli	1	Sweetheart	1
Firecracker	1		

5. Findings and Conclusion

The encounter created by linguistic analysis of ten Bollywood item song videos of the year 2018-2022 shows the pattern of cataloguing of the women where they are systematically objectified and extreme dehumanization has taken place. The relevance of cataloguing based on the description provided by Sara Mills was evident in the excessive use of derogatory, sexualized, and metaphorical language that represented women as eatable products, ornamental objects or objects of delights. On analyzing the findings, it is important to note that women are commonly addressed by terminologies that compare them to:

Electric objects or forces (Bijli- 8 times)

Products or goods (Coca Cola, Bottle of alcohol, Afeem)

Small Creatures and animals (Gilehri, Jungli)

Imagery of fire, or a bomb (Firecracker, Bomb)

Decorative or desired items (Patola, Cake and Param Sundari)

Pet names and infantile calling terms (Baby- 7 times, Baby Girl, Sweet)

Hypersexualized descriptors (*Hottie, Gori, Sohniye, Kudi, Billo*)

These catalogues reflect an entrenched patriarchal ideology that reduces women to physical attributes or aesthetic appeal. Women are repeatedly named using terms that erase their individuality and agency, reinforcing their roles as passive objects meant to please or entertain the male gaze. Moreover, many of the catalogues are drawn from a mix of Hindi, Punjabi, and English, suggesting that linguistic hybridity is employed to broaden the songs' appeal while maintaining their objectifying content. The stylistic choice of using diminutives and metaphors reinforces the sexualization of women as universal and culturally acceptable.

Conclusion

The discussion has presented the conclusion that even today item songs in Bollywood are still providing strong mechanisms of the gendered objectification normalizations by their language constructions. Using the repetition of sexist, metaphorical and dehumanizing terms, the use of cataloguing refers to the objects as women, these pieces of music reduce female humans to objects of commerce and thereby perpetuate sex discrimination through imparting pleasure. The theoretical approach of Feminist Stylistics established by Sara Mills has provided an opportunity to realize how crucial the discourse in the field of femininity and desirability is to language. The patterns of catalogues used in the current study show that language is actually not neutralistic but ideologically charged, a part of the discourse that denigrates the identity of women and upholds patriarchal beliefs.

This study urges media literacy and feminist linguistic cognizance on the part of audience, makers and critics. Such destructive portrayals need to be refuted urgently and efforts must be made to produce material that will encourage both women and men to respect gender equity and gender in language and image. Future research opportunities on the topic of intersection of language, gender and popular culture in regional and digital spaces are also opened in the study.

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