"You Go Girl!" nationalism and women's empowerment in the Bollywood film Kya Kehna

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Abstract
This essay puts forth an analysis of the recent portrayal of an unwed mother in the Bollywood film, Kya Kehna! (Kundan Shah, 2000, henceforth KK). The title, which is readily translated to the rhetorical, “What can you say?” has additional significance here as a laudatory exclamation directed at the film's young heroine. Targeting a younger audience, the film was hailed as a challenging exploration of female sexuality and women's empowerment. The film in fact reaffirms traditional stereotypes of women in which their behavior is carefully controlled within a patriarchal framework. In spite of the awkward fact that the main character's state of motherhood is the result of pre-marital sex, nationalist mechanisms are put into play to glorify the ideal of Woman-as-Mother. Unwed motherhood is not unheard of as a half-hidden side-plot of Hindi film, but it is very unusual to find it as the main narrative focus. A close textual reading of KK will enable a detailed comparison with an earlier film that apparently served as a template for the later production. Julie (K. S. Sethumadhavan, 1975), is a film that handled the same subject with a sensitivity unmatched in the more recent film. Further, placing KK alongside other contemporaneous releases, will show how-in even a film that does not foreground political, patriotic, or religious storylines-nationalist subtexts can be discerned in its handling of pre-marital sex, religion, and in the staging of its conclusion. The influences of economic liberalization, rising Hindutva sentiment in India (and commensurate communal tensions) as well as the impact of the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) community are all factors that play a part in the shaping of current Bollywood ideology, and their effects are visible in this film. Finally, viewer response and the concept of women’s “uplift” will be addressed.

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8. Kya Kehna! Yes, it has some weirdly hilarious (not attempted to be) scenes and music stolen from English songs. But the movie deals with the issue of how pre-marital pregnancy is a taboo in our society. The stigma shown is very real and it definitely gives you something to think about. Source: youtube. 9. Mohabbatein. Shyam Benegal offers a masterpiece depicting the sad status of rural women in the country. The movie deals with the issue of women's 'fertility rights' empowerment. Five women with five sorrowful stories. You can't ignore this piece of art or the actors who starred in the film. Source: youtube. 13. Jungle. To the surprise of audiences, this film was a hit. Given that Fardeen Khan is not an accomplished actor, but he did do well in this one. It is sort of fashionable to talk about feminism and women empowerment these days. Everybody seems to have an opinion on how a woman's life could and should be. Social media, TV debates and drawing rooms are the latest battleground of the war of sexes. As everyone holds an opinion of their own, there's no common ground in sight so far. And as everybody is jumping in the debate these days, we thought of bringing in Hindi cinema, one of the key cultural influences on the Indian society. And it's indeed sad that after sifting through last two decades of Hindi cinema we could find o 4. "Kya Kehna" (2000). Zinta played an unmarried pregnant teenager in this controversial movie, proving once again that she can play daring characters who fight against injustice and social discrimination. 5. "Dil Chahta Hai" (2001). Zinta set quite the trend with her looks in the movie—the adorable curls and casual western clothes made her portrayal of the modern Indian woman fascinating and captured the hearts of millennials everywhere. Of course, her chemistry with Aamir Khan was off the charts too. 6. "Kal Ho Naa Ho" (2003). Naina Catherine Kapoor Patel, probably the longest character name