



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)
UGC Approved Journal (SL NO. 2800)
Volume-III, Issue-VI, May 2017, Page No. 399-406
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

Sexual Objectification of Females in Bollywood Rap and Item Songs **Supriya Dwivedi**

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine the ways of objectifying females in Bollywood rap and item songs. Songs play a vital role in the life of human beings and could be the ways of expressing one's feelings. Songs also represent culture and traditions of a country. Bollywood movies and music videos contain different type of songs. Rap and item songs are in vogue now-a-days. These songs are full of obscene words which target women and portray them as object. A list of popular Bollywood rap and item songs from 2010 to 2016 was prepared and English translation of these songs was accumulated from google. English translation of the songs was used as data. Thematic analysis was used for the interpretation of data. Patterns regarding sexual objectification of females were identified from the data. Emphasis on women's body part, portrayal of women as intoxicating substance and food, use of obscene simile or metaphor and appreciation for white skin were the four themes derived from the patterns. Each theme was defined in accordance with codes of the data.

Key words: Sexual Objectification of Females, Rap Songs, Item Songs, and Thematic Analysis.

Sexual objectification of females refers to treating the fair sex as object and not as person. According to the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1797), "objectification involves the lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object." Looking at a person as an object merely for sexual pleasure or as an object for use is considered objectification involving beauty and appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). Fredrickson and Roberts (1970) developed "Objectification Theory" and postulated that women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by the male gender and the media. Weskot (1986) stated that objectification "is the socially sanctioned right of all males to sexualize all females, regardless of age or status."

The present study aimed at understanding the ways of objectifying females in today's Bollywood rap and item songs. The term Bollywood is used for Indian cinema. Rap songs are a kind of hip-hop where words are spoken in musical rhyme. Bollywood item songs are

the songs where a woman wearing provocative clothes, is served as a sex object among many men through obscene lyrics. Songs play a very important role in Bollywood movies because one third of the story is expressed by the songs of the movie. Portraying females as object and using obscene words for them is not new in Indian songs and this is getting worse day by day with the advent of the new trend of rap and item songs in Indian cinema. Bollywood songs and movies have been encouraging eve-teasing and sexual objectification of women for a long period of time. Not only India, other countries also promote the culture of objectifying females in their songs, advertisements, TV series and movies. Items songs in Indian cinema are getting a great appreciation of audience but it only makes the condition of females in the country deplorable. There is no link between item songs and the story of the Bollywood movies but such vulgar songs have become a compulsory part because of their popularity among people. In India, the number of researches done on rap and item songs are only few. There is a great need to analyze these songs critically in order to ameliorate the condition of females in the country. More over movies, songs and advertisements have great influence on youth. Young boys and girls consider actors as role model and follow these superstars in a blindfolded manner. When these youngsters see their role models involved in eve-teasing and treating women as an object in songs and movies, they try to follow the same thing. It has been found that male college undergraduates who viewed highly sexual hip-hop music videos expressed greater objectification of women, sexual permissiveness, and stereotypical gender attitudes than male participants who viewed less sexual hip-hop videos (Kistler and Lee, 2010). Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, (2005) argued that an examination of music videos is particularly important because of their popularity among adolescents and young adults, who are likely to refine their schemata regarding gender and sexuality. Women have been used in advertisements for promoting products and luring customers. It was mentioned in a study that sex is another emotion which has been successfully employed by advertisers in promoting jeans, perfumes, alcohol, watches, personal products and cars (Chatterji, 2006). Scholars who have conducted researches on media have provided evidences that most people rely on media to craft their opinions (Shade, 1995). Researchers have stated that cultural practice of objectifying female bodies originated to create, maintain and express patriarchy (Connell, 1987; Khun 1985; Stoltenberg 1989). It was reported that objectification may occur in many ways ranging from sexual violence to sexual evaluation (Fischer, Vidmar & Ellis, 1993). Kaschak (1992) stated that the most subtle and deniable way of objectification is enacted and is through gaze or visual inspection of the body.

Evidences of the previous researches on main stream films (Kuhn, 1985), visual arts (Berger, 1972) and music videos (Sommers-Flanagan, 1993) have made it very obvious that women's body is targeted for sexual objectification more often than men. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) reported that women who watch females as sex object internalize to varying degrees an outsider view and begin to self-objectify by treating themselves as an object to be looked at and evaluated on the basis of appearance. Researchers have found that women who get grossly involved in self-objectification are more likely to develop adverse psychological consequences including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (for

reviews, see Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gefand, & Magley, 1997; Koss, Bailey, Yuan, Herrera, & Lichter, 2003). Researchers have also reported that 60 percent of music videos deal with sexual feelings or impulses (Gruber and Grube, 2000). It was found that sexually objectified portrayals of women in advertisements affects people's views of sex and sexual behavior (Kuczynski, 2002). A research revealed that the media often portrays a narrow and unattainable standard of women's physical beauty and relates this standard with a woman's sexiness and worth (APA, 2007). Women's self-reported experiences of sexual victimization have been found to be greatly related to more self-objectification and body shame (Lindberg, Grabe, & Hyde, 2007). Researches have shown that exposure to sexually objectifying media is related to greater importance of physical beauty and appearance in defining an individual's own self-worth as well as in defining the value of females in general among African American adolescent girls (Gordon, 2008). A research reported that girls who are exposed to sexually objectifying images of females become more sexually aggressive, and start sexual experimentation in their earlier age (English, 2003). Researches have also found that younger women may report higher levels of sexual objectification, body surveillance, body shame, and eating disorder symptoms (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2009; McKinley, 2006). It was noted by a media researcher that media culture provides viewers with models of what is meant to be male or female which creates the ideals of what is desirable in women and men (Kellner, 2011). Studies also mentioned that women have been portrayed as sex objects by the use of revealing or provocative clothing, and displaying excessive skin exposure (King, Laake, & Bernard, 2006; Seidman, 1992; Smith, 2005). A review of studies examining depictions of women in the media including commercials, prime-time television programs, movies, music lyrics and videos, magazines, advertising, sports media, video games, and internet sites revealed that women more often than men are depicted in sexualizing and objectified manners such as wearing revealing and provocative clothing, portrayed in ways that emphasize their body parts and sexual readiness, serving as decorative objects (APA's (2007b). Pardun et al. (2005) found that in the context of media especially music contained more sexual content than any other media. African American women from the days of slavery to the present have led to media images and stereotypes of Black women as sexual aggressors and sexual savages (Greene, 1994; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). In contrast, Asian American women have often been portrayed in the media as sexually subservient, childlike, and exotic (Root, 1995). Moreover, women in lower social class positions are often considered gross, overly sexed, untamed, crude, and deserving of sexual exploitation and aggression (Pharr, 1988; Smith, 2008). In addition, women's self-reported experiences of sexual objectification have been found to be related to adverse psychological outcomes, including self-objectification, habitual body monitoring, body shame, internalization of the thin ideal, and disordered eating among both lesbian and heterosexual women (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Kozee & Tylka, 2006; Kozee et al., 2007; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005). Kistler and Lee (2010) discovered that men were more accepting of rape myths if they viewed sexual music videos rather than non-sexual videos. It was reported that due to industry and cultural expectations, a dominant way that female artists present themselves is through objectification of their

own bodies (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Women also objectify women, though not to the extent that men objectify women (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005b). Societal pressures for thinness, belief that smoking is a good method to control weight, and exposure to tobacco advertisements that promote women's cigarette use to attain sexiness and thinness have been shown to increase the odds of being a smoker among undergraduate women (Zucker et al., 2001; Zucker & Landry, 2007). Zucker and Landry (2007) also posited that women may cope with experiences of sexism by using substances as a numbing mechanism. Research shows that women who self-reported more sexist events which included experiences of sexual objectification in a daily diary had more feelings of anger and depression (Swim et al., 2001).

Method: A list of very popular rap and item songs from 2010 to 2016 was generated. Purposive sampling was used in order to select the songs. The songs were in native language (Hindi). English translation of all the songs was gathered from Google. All the songs (original version) were given to three university going students (knowing both the languages: Hindi and English) to translate in English in order to find out whether their English translation provides the same meaning of the songs as the Google translation. All the three students were told that they would be provided with few songs of Bollywood to translate in English. They were also told the purpose of the study. The songs got translated in English by all the three translators. After getting the assurance that the Google English translation of the songs contains same meaning as the English translation done by university students, it was used as data. The data were analyzed in terms of ways of objectifying females. The data were read many times thoroughly in order to find out the patterns of objectification of females. Thematic analysis was used for the interpretation of data. Lines of the songs objectifying females were noted down as data codes. Four themes were derived from these codes and each theme was defined.

Results:

Table-1. The following table shows the codes, themes and their definition derived from the patterns found in the data

Codes	Themes	Definition
"My heart goes, when your waist sways." "She aims with her sharp eyes." "The movement of your waist makes the whole state tremble." "I am too sexy for you." "I have hidden fire under my clothes." "This slender waist kills lakhs with a jerk." "The eyes of Laila are intoxicating." "Your lips are like fire." "Your body curves are killer." "Don't kiss my slippery waist." "This wet body of yours sets water on fire."	Emphasis on women's body part.	Emphasis on women's body part refers to excessive focus on female actors' waist, eyes, lips and body curves in obscene manner.

<p>“I am like country liquor. Swallow me!” “I am like a barbequed chicken. Swallow me with a glass of alcohol!” “People call me butter.” “When the pumpkin gets cut, it will be divided among all.” “Your botty is like apple.” “I am intoxicated.” “Biryani(a kind of food) of my youth.” “The addiction of girls is the most intoxicated drug.”</p>	<p>Portraying women as intoxicating substance and food</p>	<p>Portraying women as intoxicating substance and food refers to presenting actress as spicy food and liquor in songs.</p>
<p>“My youth is like a cutter. I will cut your heart.” “Make love to the daughter of grape.” “You look like a bomb in your short dress.” “She is a matchstick of beauty.” “She has become Jhandu balm (a very popular ointment in India) for you.” “I am a golden doll.” “You have become item bomb.” “My eyes are like scorpion. They give very poisonous wink.”</p>	<p>Using obscene simile or metaphor</p>	<p>Using obscene simile or metaphor refers to comparing women with fire crackers, pain relieving ointment and fatal instruments.</p>
<p>“Black glasses look good on your white face.” “White wrists drive me crazy.” “I have been robbed by golden face.” “We drink tea of that white lady.” “My white body shines.”</p>	<p>Appreciation for white skin</p>	<p>Appreciation for white skin refers to admiration of fair skin by the actress in flaunting manner.</p>

Graph.1

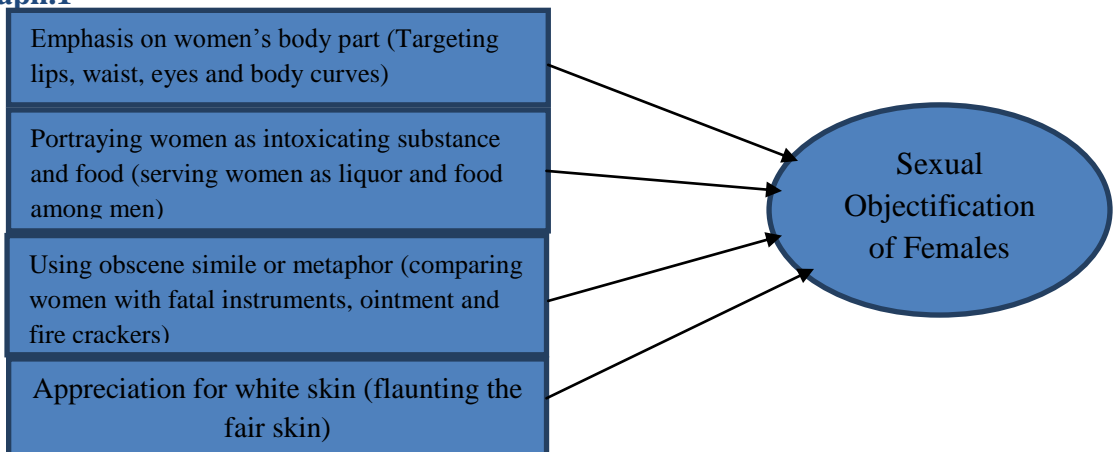


Table.1 and graph.1 show four ways of sexually objectifying females: emphasis on women's body part, portrayal of women as intoxicating substance and food, use of obscene simile or metaphor and appreciation for white skin.

Discussion: The present study tried to understand the ways of objectifying females in Bollywood rap and item songs. Thematic analysis of popular rap and item songs from 2010 to 2012 was done which resulted into four themes: emphasis on women's body part, portrayal of women as intoxicating substance or food, use of obscene simile or metaphor and appreciation for white skin. Sexual objectification of females refers to treating women as sex object and not as human being. Studies have shown that women get more sexually objectifying treatment as compared to men (Gardner, 1980; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Henley, 1977; Van Zoonen, 1994).

The codes of the first theme provides the evidence that today's Bollywood rap and item songs target women's different body parts and portray them as sex objects. The codes, "This slender waist kills lakhs with a jerk", "I am too sexy for you", "The eyes of Laila (name of a girl) are intoxicating", and "The movement of your waist makes the whole state tremble" taken from Bollywood rap and item songs, only indicates women as sex object and not as person. Content analyses of music videos consistently observed that they place a great deal of emphasis on women's sexual appeal and reinforce the stereotype of women as sex objects for the pleasure of male spectators (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Schmidt (2013) has shown in his work that music videos objectifying women in obscene manner has become the selling point for the entertainment market, and females of different races throughout the world have been found involved in such kind of videos. Stankiewicz (2008) argued that the regular images of women as sex objects in media may cause people to think that a woman's physique and sexuality are what makes her precious. Stankiewicz (2008) also stated that it is apparent that the link of sexuality and victimization in advertising affects the male psyche by causing them to heedlessly become desensitized to the synthesis of sex and violence. The codes of second theme present women as some intoxicating liquor or some kind of food. The evidences are obvious in the following codes: (1) "I am like country liquor. Swallow me!" (2) "I am like a barbequed chicken. Swallow me with a glass of alcohol!" (3) "People call me butter." (4) "When the pumpkin gets cut, it will be divided among all." In all the aforementioned examples, the women artists are objectifying themselves. A recent content analysis showed that female artists were even more likely to objectify themselves than male artists were to objectify female characters in their music videos (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). A semiotic analysis of Bollywood item songs showed how women are portrayed as mere sex objects (Sahu, 2015).

The codes of third theme portray women as deadly instruments, bomb and ointment which indicate that these rap and item songs do not consider women as person. It was reported by a research that objectification also occurs when a woman's body part is separated from her as a person and viewed as a mere instrument or regarded as these instruments were capable of representing her (Bartky, 1990). A content analysis of rap/hip hop music videos found the presence of misogyny, defined as sexualizing women and the

dominance of men over women (Conrad et al., 2009). A recent research using content analysis noticed different types of sexual objectification in the music videos of three musical genres: hip hop, pop, and country (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Nussbaum (1995) identifies seven features of objectification: (1) instrumentality, (2) denial of autonomy, (3) inertness, (4) fungibility, (5) violability, (6) ownership and (7) denial of subjectivity. Researchers also noted that sexually explicit and derogatory lyrics especially in hip hop music has been frequently criticized for degrading women and using obscene and offensive words which objectify and exploit women (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Moradi and Huang's (2008) review of the research reported that self-objectification has been found to be related to lower internal bodily awareness, more disconnection from bodily functions, decreased flow states, difficulties in task performance, increased body shame, more appearance anxiety, and both eating disorder and depressive symptoms among racial/ethnically diverse groups of women.

Adams and Fuller (2006) stated that rap music reduces women to objects "that are only good for sex and abuse," which "perpetuate ideas, values, beliefs and stereotypes that debase women."

The codes of forth theme which is 'appreciation for white skin' reveals that a great emphasis is put on skin colour and white skin is given more importance as compared to black or brown skin. The evidence is very obvious in the following codes: (1) "Black glasses look good on your white face." (2) "White wrists drive me crazy." A study supports the present finding which revealed that internalization of messages concerning racialized sexual objectification leads some women of color to see their sexuality as one of few assets (Thomas et al., 2004). Idealization of white complexion as a marker of beauty, shiny and bouncy hair as feminine capital, flawless skin as a source of female's confidence and idealization of thinness and body exposure as a standard of feminine beauty were the themes derived from the analysis of advertisements (Ullah & Khan, 2014). By analyzing advertisements these researchers showed how the body of actresses is used to sell products like beauty enhancing creams.

Conclusion: The present study reflects the ways of objectification of women in India by analyzing Bollywood rap and item songs. Obscene words and lewd remarks about women are so frequently used in such songs that it has become normal for both men and women to hear them. Most of the women and young girls do not even realize that they are being objectified by such vulgar words prevalent in the songs. Studies focusing on the objectification of women such as the present one will help in spreading awareness among both men and women that females are being treated as mere objects or sex objects and not as a person. Directors, producers and lyrics composers need to reflect on the content of movie and songs and video songs where women are served as sex object in order to please others. Both Noll (1997) and Sioux (2008) recommend that parents should encourage and assist young women in non-appearance related activities such as school achievement and community activism, and teach them to value their bodies for strength and effectiveness, not only appearance.

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