PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN ARMED FORCES AND WOMEN IN THE MOVIE, “URI THE SURGICAL STRIKE”

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Abstract

Armed forces of India is one of the few organisations which the general public has faith in. This is mainly due to their selfless duty towards the protection of our country. Bollywood has made several movies on their bravery, selflessness and courage.

This research intends to reveal Bollywood's portrayal of the Indian armed forces, particularly the movie Uri the surgical strike. The research will focus on accuracy of real life events showed in the movie, accuracy of the soldiers' uniforms and exaggerated scenarios for cinematic effect and pushing the story forward.

This research also focuses on portrayal of women in this movie with respect to an officer's wife and daughter as well as an active service personnel.

Keywords: Indian armed forces and Bollywood.

INTRODUCTION

India is the world's largest movie producer that churns out more than 2000 films in a given year in several languages. And Bollywood is the most famous section of the Indian film industry as it produces movies in Hindi and gets global exposure for its work.

Bollywood is one of the biggest industries in our country. It has been with us for over 100 years and still going steady. Bollywood's movies are one the few things which are enjoyed by almost every Indian regardless of their income group, beliefs or ethnicity.

Within Bollywood there is one popular genre of films know was the war movies or armed forces centric movies. Bollywood loves to create as it receives highly positive responses from the audiences. In India the armed forces are seen as no less than real life superheroes due to their selfless duty in protecting the nation. Bollywood has made several films showcasing their bravery and sacrifices in the wars and battles fought against India's adversaries.

One of these movies is Uri the Surgical Strike, which is inspired from real life events i.e. the surgical strike conducted by the Indian Army after the Uri Military Base attack in 2016.

Uri the surgical strike, is one of the most sought after Bollywood films depicting war scenarios and is critically acclaimed as well. It is the first time a movie has made several young people kindle their interest in the armed forces and the lives of the personnel.

This movie was received a stronger audience response than expected as it was released shortly after the Indian Air force had conducted surgical strikes on the Jaish-e-Mohammad camps deep inside Pakistani territory. Uri the surgical Strike is based on a real life events. On 18th September, 2017, four terrorist from the Pakistani side entered India and carried out an attack on the Uri military base which led to the death of 19 Indian soldiers, many of them being shot while being asleep. 11 days later, India announced that they had conducted cross border surgical strikes deep inside Pakistani territory neutralising terrorist camps and killing 35-70 militants.

This movie has the likes of Vicky Kaushal, Paresh Rawal, Yami Gautam and many more starring. It has been directed and written by Aditya Dhar, and produced by Ronnie Screwwala. Vicky kaushal plays the role of Major Vihaan Singh Shergill, Yami Gautam plays Jasmine Almedia (RA&W agent), and Paresh Rawal plays the role of Govind Bharadwaj (National Security Advisor), Mohit Raina as Major Karan Kashyap (Major Vihaan’s brother in law.

Uri the Surgical Strike has been called as one of the best wartime movie by several IMdb users due to its realistic action sequences, solid storyline, great CGJ and an impressive cast.

This research aims to show how this movie is an unconventional approach to the Bollywood styled war movie but have reinstated certain stereotypes in the story to provide audiences. This research intends to show how different characters in different roles are portrayed i.e. women, army officers, politicians, the soldiers’ families and the government.

The research will be done to through interviews, surveys and reviews on websites like IMDb alongside reviews provided by critics.
In this research we aim to study audiences’ interpretation on how the armed forces and the women in the movie Uri The Surgical Strike are portrayed. The study will use a quantitative method of data collection via Google Forms survey where 65 people will be questioned on the above mentioned aspects of the movie. This will be used as the primary source of our data. The secondary source of data collection is top rated movie reviews on IMDb and film critique websites like WomensWeb.in.

Out of the 65 respondents, 60 have watched the movie and the remaining 5 have not. Thus this study will be based upon the answers the 60 respondents that have watched the movie.

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software has been used to interpret the respondents’ data into graphs and charts.

Results

With the help of this research by using online surveys and reviews from IMDb and film critics we see how the armed forces are portrayed differently along with the new standards it sets for Bollywood. A survey on Google forms was conducted to gather data to learn the audiences’ reaction to the film.

Diagram 1.1 and 1.2 show the age group of the respondents of the survey have watched the movie Uri the Surgical Strike.

1.1 Your age group

<table>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>54.5</td>
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<td>26-45</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>63.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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The primary aim of seeking the age group was to understand what viewers of different ages noticed in the movie and what do they think of the portrayal of the previously mentioned characters of the movie.

The survey conducted on Google forms out of the 60 responses gathered, 50.9% responded with saying the story line stood out for them. 21.8% of the respondents mentioned that the armed forces had been accurately depicted in the movie and 14.5% with realistic action sequences compared to the previous war movies they saw. The results are shown in diagram 2.1 and 2.2.

2.1 What was that one thing stood out for you with respect to the film

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<td>21.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action sequences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
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Diagram 1.1 and 1.2
The top rated 23 IMDb reviews, commended its storyline and realistic depiction of war like scenarios and named it a "great tribute" for the Indian Army.

A survey conducted on google forms (shown in diagram 3.1 and 3.2) garnered responses from 60 individuals; stated that 58.2% voted the movie as "worth a watch", 36.4% voted it to be as outstanding, overwhelmingly getting positive responses. However

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.1 What is your opinion on the film</th>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<td>1.8</td>
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<td>worth a watch</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>58.2</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 | What is your opinion on the film | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
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A) Portrayal of soldiers and their lives

Bollywood has been showcasing the tales of valour and bravery of the Indian army and other armed forces through the likes of Border (depicting Battle of Longewala), Lakshya (depicting Kargil war), Shaurya and many more.

A common theme in all these war movies is a stereotypical company commander of the rank of Major or Captain who is a young officer and is extremely dedicated about his job. He shown strict, stern and determined about his goals and as the protagonist for example, Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri played by Sunny Deol in the movie border. He usually plays the lead role in the movie with a wife/lover who is at home constantly missing him while he serves the nation.

A junior officer either a lieutenant or a captain who a close aid of the previously mentioned lead role company commander, a lot is shown about his family, like the relationship with his lover/new married wife or other members of the family. It’s usually him sellessly sacrificing his life to protect his senior officer and not worrying about his life despite having a family to take care of. For example Lieutenant Dharamvir Singh and Captain Bhairav Singh in the movie Border and Captain Jalal Akbar in the movie Lakshya starring Hritik Roshan. This can be summed up as a master-apprentice duo.

With these master and apprentice duo comes a senior commanding officer of either a Colonel rank or a Brigadier Rank. He is depicted as a middle aged man who is experienced, stern, and strict and a perfectionist. He is the one giving direct orders to the company commander and has high expectations from the soldiers on field. This commanding officer has high levels of affections.

However in Uri the surgical strike, Major Vihaan is not accompanied by any sort of junior officer who acts as an apprentice. Many of the times Major Vihaan is shown as the lone and the single authority in the company he commands.

In Uri the Surgical Strike, operations are handled and commanded by R&AW officers alongside the Chief of army staff instead of the previously mentioned strict old colonel or brigadier who pushes his juniors to strive for perfection.

Relationship between the soldiers and is mainly focused on the planning, execution and the aftermath of the respective operation, the surgical strike and does not include energy filled songs.

However snippets of Major Vihaan’s family to show his work and family life imbalance. It is presented by Major Vihaan’s mother suffering from stage 6 Alzheimer’s and him being unable to take care of her due to call of duty. This movie is devoid of any songs or dialogues which romanticizes the relationship between the soldiers, (songs like Kandho se milte kandhe and Sandese aate hain). The movie relies on showing state official dinners and casual parties as way to show the friendship and bond between the soldiers instead. This has in turn cut the play time of the film.

A) Realistic action sequences

Often in the older war movies it was showcased that the Indian Army on ground did not fare well against the enemy and the enemy army being a headache for them due to the Indian Army’s obsolete or lack of equipment, despite these odds the Indian army fought of their adversaries showcasing their love for India as their greatest weapon. Uri showed that the battalions of Para Special Forces are equipped with state of the art weapons like assault rifles, night vision glasses and anti-tank guided missiles and used them to rain fire at the adversaries.

Comparing the older armed forces centric movies like Border and Lakshya to Uri the surgical Strike, this movie has distanced itself from the classic over patriotic and dialogues and the trademark Bollywood “dhishoom dhishoom”. Uri mostly lacks the stereotypes of a wife/lover or mother missing her husband/partner or son while he is serving on the frontline.

A review from TheWeek magazine describes the action sequences of the movie as the “Zero Dark Thirty” of India due its covert strikes and the grey filter added throughout the movie.

B) Stereotypes of women

Women in this movie are shown in a very much unconventional manner as compared to other Bollywood movies trying to depict strong women. In older war movies, the roles of women were just restricted as a housewife mainly as a mother or a wife of the serving soldier.

The women were just shown as crying and missing their husbands or sons and their roles were added to increase the emotional aspect of the film. The best examples of this can be seen in the movie Border, which shows the soldiers’ wives waiting for them to return home.

In Uri the Surgical strike women served in R&AW with role of Pallavi Joshi played by Yami Gautam and Flight Lieutenant Seerat Kaur played by Kriti Kulhari and Riva Arora parrole of Suhani Kashyap, daughter of Neha Kashyap and Major Mohit Kashyap.

Uri the Surgical strike gave a new meaning to how women are portrayed in wartime movies. They have been shown doing heroic acts like flying helicopters, going on field to gather intelligence and much more.
Most importantly Suhani Kashyap, daughter of Major Mohit Kashyap learning martial arts and having aspirations of becoming the first female Chief of Army Staff of India. The scene where she mourns her father’s death after the terrorist attack by shouting slogans of her father’s regiment, Para SF.

Feminism in this movie is shown in an unconventional Bollywood way, for instance, Bollywood’s portrayal of feminism usually is of women battling all odds against men. However this movie showed women working at par with men. Pallavi Joshi helped Major Vihaan gather intelligence, Flight Lieutenant Seerat Kaur flew the helicopter to escort the paratroopers to conduct the strikes.

The Google forms survey had several respondents described the women as dedicated, patriotic, determined and also mentioned that feminism was not preachy and not overdone.

A movie review website, WomensWeb describes it as “The movie spoke of a New India and I think the movie set an example of how liberated, unorthodox, and balanced India can be. India has always reinvented itself in spite of all the challenges, oppression and radical forces it has faced.”

C) Audiences’ reaction on the film
This movie has been one of the biggest hits of 2019 and has been critically acclaimed. Uri received 8.2/10 stars on IMdB with several positive reviews for it. Many top rate hail it as cinematic master piece, a perfect tribute to the Indian Army, one of the best war movie.
Many of the reviews on IMdb have been towards the story line and screen play. Respondents on IMdb claim that the movie has a great storyline but a slight sloppy execution in terms of direction and screenplay.
Uri also has received it share of criticism as many of called this movie “a propaganda tool of the government” due to its close to release to the 2019 election as it is alleged that the government through these movies is trying to advertise its achievements.
Many have also called it a try hard Hollywood movie and a knock off of Zero Dark Thirty due to its greyish-blue filter on screen. Several reviews also called the action the story line over the toptop due to the scenes of an Indian Air force Helicopter being painted in Pakistan Air force’s colours before the strike takes place.

A survey conducted on google forms( shown in diagram 3.1 and 3.2) garnered responses from 60 individuals; stated that 58.2% voted the movie as “worth a watch”, 36.4% voted it to be as outstanding, overwhelmingly getting positive responses. However

D) Setting new standards for new movies in future
Uri the surgical strike is a movie based on the surgical strike conducted by the Indian army in Pakistan as a retaliation against the Uri military base attack which killed 19 Indian soldiers.
This movie has no extra plotlines to push the story forward. No drama, no romantic scenes or cuss words to show case soldiers’ strength. With game changing VFX, CGI and action scenes, this movie has set a new precedent for not just any war movie but also action movies in the near future.
The portrayal of women has been radical different in this movie. Movie have been shown in powerful roles and in positions instead of just being relegated to mothers, wives or love interests of their male counter parts in the movie.

CONCLUSION

This study was successful in examining how the armed forces and women in the movie Uri the Surgical Strike were portrayed on the basis of a quantitative survey on Google forms garnering 65 responses and taking reviews from IMdB and film critics’ responses from various websites to find audiences’ thoughts on the film with respect to the portrayal of armed forces and women and realistic action sequences.
With results of the of quantitative research prove that most of the respondents agreed that Uri The Surgical Strike was a different experience compared to the previous war movies they saw previously. Despite all the positive reviews of the movie, several critics and audiences accused the movie as “propaganda” due to its close release to the Indian general elections of 2019.

This study also provides gives an insight on how war movies are evolving in terms of portrayal of the armed forces, their families, women and action sequences.

REFERENCES