Feminist Filmmaking in Indian Cinema
The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to practice leadership through action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women’s Leadership’s website at http://iwl.rutgers.edu.
India Population Demographic

- According to Census 2011, 48.1 per cent of India’s urban population and 48.6 per cent of India’s rural population is female

- Nearly 20 per cent of country’s population identify as either Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, Atheist or a different religion altogether

SAP

- Mainstream Hindi cinema does NOT represent this population
- Wanted my project to address this gap in representation and portrayal of a large part of the population
- Also wanted to highlight the films and filmmakers that have actually been doing work bridging this gap, but whose work is lesser known in India and abroad
Research Insights

- Top-grossing films reinforce number of gender stereotypes; while independent, “parallel” films had fewer stereotypical conversations and portrayal, they still have limited reach

- When oppression of women is shown on screen, it’s mostly of upper class urban women

- Women, in these upper class, Hindutva state become repositories of community values and their bodies the carrier of cultural signs - reflected in films

- Muslim women are doubly marginalized - first as women, and second as members of minority that rarely finds accurate representation on the whole

- Bollywood films saturated with images of intense love between women in context of spaces that are non-normative, with social and cultural slurs. There is frequent slippage between female homosociality & homoeroticism
Feminist Filmmaking in India

- The term means many different things to different people
- While Indian film industries have some of the same problems that Hollywood does, a lot of its issues are also more cultural than Hollywood’s is
- In India’s context, feminist filmmaking will entail different approaches to address lack of accurate representation of women
- Concept and consequent breakdown of this gives us insight into thinking about what feminist leadership within filmmaking can possibly look like
  - Is it solely dependent on the script?
  - What role does feminist leadership on the production side play?
- Parched was a film on female friendships and sisterhood

- While quite explicit in portrayal of violence, sexual abuse - it did address these topics more boldly than most mainstream Hindi films do

- Explored female sexuality unapologetically
Impact

“I thought the film did a good job of showing how male opinions are just as important to the cycle of violence as the female opinion”

“I loved the complexity of the friendships between women”

“I think showing women’s bodies so openly was maybe an attempt to ‘de-sexualize’ the female body - perhaps a good thing”

“I think the film also did a good job of portraying the reasons why females decide to not stand up for themselves (lack of education, physical violence, fear of society, peer pressure, etc)”

“I loved the way female sexuality was showcased while not making it the sole issue. These discussions stayed culturally relevant and then showed why female support is needed”
Feminist Leadership

- Collaboration and community support at the heart of feminist leadership

- Partnerships I built over the course of this project, be it with my faculty advisor, with IWL staff or with my community mentor were ultimately central to the execution and completion of project and event.
Bibliography


