

# Cinematic Contrasts: Gender Dynamics in Workplace Leadership

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## Abstract

With a focus on the contemporary dynamics of gender roles and expectations at workplaces, this **thematic analysis** aims to examine the contrasting depictions of male and female characters in positions of power and authority. Study analyses a curated selection of 10 Bollywood movies from various genres between 2013 and 2023, and sheds light on gender depiction in workplace leadership and the underlying societal narratives. It delves into the nuanced characterizations, narratives, and storytelling techniques employed to depict workplace authority from male and female perspectives. The study illuminates how cinematic portrayals of gender-centric power dynamics in work settings have evolved and shaped audience perceptions, societal expectations, and aspirations. Furthermore, it explores whether the films reinforce or challenge conventional gender stereotypes. The findings provide valuable insights into the evolving gender role dynamics, power, and leadership in Indian popular culture and lay the groundwork for future research and dialogue on gender equality at workplaces and in media representation.

**Keywords:** gender roles, movies, leadership, gender stereotypes, societal norms.

## 1. Introduction

Mass media serves the purpose of extending outreach and influencing the populace of any country or culture, whether it is through newspapers, television, social media, radio, advertising, films, magazines, etc. Movies, among them all, still fairly dominate the other mediums in their appeal and reach to the masses. Movies are a reflection of the social realities that persist in different cultural landscapes (Kiran Walia, 2013) and have also become an effective medium for tapping the chronological change over the years and decades in different social areas. The role of movies has become quite prominent in shaping different opinions, ideas (Kiran Walia, 2013), judgments, and perceptions of its consumers. The choice of movies in the current research is due to their vast impact and acceptance by individuals across the globe. In a very limited time frame of two to three hours, movies are able to deliver strong messages and themes. A lot of the thoughts, emotions, and actions depicted in movies develop relatability with the audience and become impressionable for

a long period of time. Films have the power to influence the attitudes of one group towards another, sometimes considered the outgroup or the opposite group (Srividya Ramasubramanian, 2005). The present study seeks to focus on two prevailing social groups in our society, both with strong individual identities and characteristics. Both males and females are extremely relevant and complementary forces in a society and should be treated alike, especially when it comes to team structure and working. (Radu & Frăsineanu, 2017). The situation has changed over the years, but even today, male work and leadership are given more emphasis and value in comparison to female work. Women are still gravely underrepresented in high-paid jobs and positions in organisational setups (Radu & Frăsineanu, 2017).

Among the many pain points for a working woman, leadership becomes a major one. Leadership responsibilities at any level should always be assigned to the most competent, qualified, skilled, and dedicated individual at work. However, gender becomes another filter for leadership, making it difficult for women to reach the top of the workplace hierarchy. As cited by Radu and Frăsineanu (2017), women rarely see themselves reaching the top and have to be content with middle management positions. Moreover, they further reported that in only four countries (Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Finland), women represent 20 percent of board members. In other countries, the percentage is even lower. This scarce female leadership in teams can be attributed to strong stereotypes and biases that have prevailed over the years and still persist in the collective consciousness of society (Radu & Frăsineanu, 2017). The increasing research base over the years has shown a shift and positive inclination towards female leadership acceptability in work setups, owing to the collaborative and relationship-oriented leadership styles employed by female leaders. (Koenig et al., 2011; Babiak & Bajcar, 2019). Female-associated competencies like communication, collaborative working, friendliness, and cooperation are more conducive to team success and growth in comparison to male-centric competencies like delegation, logic, and rationality (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Babiak & Bajcar, 2019). However, cultural or societal stereotypes play their part in stirring biased evaluations and an unfavourable take on female leadership, as it seems incongruent with traditional feminine roles and qualities. (Koenig et al., 2011). This shows that even in current progressive times, females are still held back from leadership and career development due to likely reasons like traditional role congruency (Eagly & Karau, 2002), the glass ceiling, perceptual biases, etc.

With the evergreen popularity and reach of movies both in cinemas and over-the-top (OTT) platforms, they can be used as an effective medium for propagating perceptual change, ideological improvements, and positive outlook generation towards female leadership at workplaces. Current research seeks to initially understand if and how the cinematic landscape of movies related to male and female leadership has undergone a change in the past decade. Whether and by how far there are advancements in movies with female leadership in work teams. Additionally, it becomes necessary to seek out how male and female leadership have been presented in movies and what leadership styles can be drawn from them. The insights based on these findings will be utilised to develop an operational framework for leadership, which can generate a new perspective in leadership literature. Movies get direction and are products of different perspectives on board from various directorial team members, and which side of the story will be presented on screen depends on their perceptions, thinking patterns, and orientations. Thus, the analysis of gender-based leadership depictions on-screen cannot be fully comprehended without analysing the composition of these back-screen teams. It will provide a better understanding of why certain movies show a certain perspective and uncover male and female representation both

onscreen and offscreen. A compiled, comparative analysis of male and female leadership based on movies will help us generate a broader picture of the gender dynamics being showcased. This research can serve as the starting point for various movie directors and writers to understand the need for developing more movies that encourage female leadership and put forth strong female leadership role models to influence the mass mentality.

## 2. Review of Literature

Exploring through the cinematic lens, various organisational and team-related concepts, especially leadership, bring various perspectives together and form the basis for a better understanding of how masculine and feminine societal roles play out in the context of organisational leadership. Regional cinema, Bollywood, or Hollywood draw their depictions from the social scenarios being played out or from real life stories or biographies of people in that society. Various scholars (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021) hold similar notions and further suggest that movies gain their aesthetic power from their components like music, action, dialogue, etc., which impact the audience visually and narratively. Stuart Hall (1997) suggested three approaches to the representation of meaning, out of which the one that fits the majority of movies best is the reflective approach (Hall, 1997). A reflective approach focuses on representation based on social truths that prevail in reality. Just like this, cinematic roles and characters are an outcome of the gender roles that predominantly persist in a culture (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021). The movies on these premises can be seen as tools to be change agents or continue to showcase age-old conservative narratives with the passage of time. Cinematic representations of women as successful leaders can send out messages with a certain purpose and lay the groundwork for equal leadership opportunities for females in the public domain (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021). In recent years, films have taken baby steps to bring about change, altering conservative roles as Bollywood female role models play out as individuals and not ideal families or societal symbols (Gupta, 2015). Female centric films like *Queen*, *Gulaab Gang*, and *Kahaani* made a sincere effort to portray the multiplicities that prevailed in female roles, which are otherwise presented in a simplified and unchanged fashion. Such films, as analysed by Gupta (2015), show females as strong characters with identities beyond their daily struggles, with a prime focus on individual goals and callings. Such positive efforts need to be made in exploring the roles of women as leaders in organisations too. The depictions of leadership and teamwork are kept unattended by the Bollywood industry, with very few films that explore women as leaders or team leaders. Women are seen at the forefront as team players but not team leaders when it comes to movies. Owing to their mass reach, films can be instrumental in shaping the public's view of what an ideal leader can be (Lee, et al., 2019).

There are diverse gender-based depictions of how males and females should be when it comes to management, teamwork, leading, etc. As we have seen that these are nothing but reflections of our societally established roles and schemas, it becomes necessary to explore these roles and schemas too. Women are often underrepresented on the big screen, especially in powerful roles (Yang et al., 2020), and even when they are represented as leaders, they are often seen from a masculine perspective (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021). This shows that women as leaders are only accepted when they hold more masculine characteristics and traits, as stated by Ditaria (2016) and Zalsabila & Rochimah (2021). Women as leaders promote information sharing, encourage participation, and give their team members a chance to feel

pride in their work outcomes, thereby empowering their team. Contrary to these positives, women are depicted in movies as gentle, obedient, indecisive, incapable leaders, etc (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021). A major chunk of our history portrays men fitting into hero schemas and roles and shows them as either protectors or defenders. Such portrayals contribute to archetypes (schemas and images that can get activated when sufficient experience takes place) and become part of the "collective unconscious," as suggested by Jung (Goethals & Allison, 2012). If films encourage the stimulation of such leadership archetypes that subscribe to men, it will discourage female leadership figures in the real world. Men as leaders are pushed to be more confident, assertive, and aptly promote their abilities and skills, which are considered undesirable female characteristics (AAUW, 2016). Women in movies are seen in roles with attractive faces who support male characters and are hardly placed at the heart of the films (Gupta, 2015). The role of women is more concentrated in horror or romantic movies, which depict females in stereotypical and victimised roles (Tamborini, et al., 1987) rather than powerful roles like leadership. Further, women have gradually accepted these stereotypical portrayals, wherein females are shown in disempowered and helpless roles. Men are depicted in most movies with a saviour complex, and females are depicted as victims ready to be rescued (Prakash, 2020). Such unsatisfactory portrayals are a result of various underlying factors. Gender stereotypes, among them all, top the list. Stereotypes don't serve a positive purpose for either men or women. When men don't fit the gender stereotypes ascribed to them, they are evaluated as incapable, and these stereotypes obstruct a woman from pursuing her aspirations and becoming a leader, even when she perfectly fits as one (AAUW, 2016). Films may not outrightly show support for these stereotypes and consciously dismiss them as discriminatory, but they inherently show favouritism towards one gender as being better leaders as compared to the other. This is labelled "implicit bias" (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), which explains the unequal representation of females in leadership roles. Female representation in some films in bold and candid roles has improved (Prakash, 2020), indicating possible evolution in rural and urban social roles, but the compass of communal attitudes still remains stagnant (Gupta, 2015).

Current research necessitates an understanding of leadership styles and related notions that breed in our society to conjoin their relative effects on depictions in movies. Males and females carry different sets of personality traits and features, which contribute to divergent patterns of conduct in them. Women leaders are scarcely shown in a separate light from their respective roles as conventional females (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021). In terms of leadership, women are depicted as collaborative (Radu, et al., 2017), highly cooperative, respectful, and hardly hierarchical. (Eagly & Johannesen, 2001). Research suggests that men are shown to be more assertive (Radu, et al., 2017) and dominant, but females are more nurturing and communal in their orientation, and these female dominated characteristics, as cited in some research, are indicative of a good leader (Biddle, 2018). Women as leaders are not only underrepresented in movies but also in reality. Only four countries in the global frame: Finland, Sweden, Norway, and the UK—have more than 20% women as board members (Radu, et al., 2017). Female leaders have more features of transformational leadership (charisma, motivation, creativity, etc.) (Lee, et al., 2019). Contrary to popular belief, teams with female leaders are more satisfied and efficient than those with male managers. Men as leaders focus more on strategic planning and company vision and entail characteristics like task orientation and individualism (Radu, et al., 2017). Based on research by Radu, et al. (2017), characteristics like nurturing, honesty, imagination, and loyalty relate to female leaders, while competence and futuristic orientation are more associated with male leaders. Despite evidence of women possessing and showcasing

leadership and related skills, their stark invisibility in reality can point to global cultures and practices (Radu, et al., 2017). On a positive note, the meagre advancements in female leadership portrayal we observe on screen point to global demands and liberalisation blurring boundaries between movies across borders and the need for a more progressive outlook on female characters. (Prakash, 2020).

An alternate way of looking at female representation in movies in leadership roles and in general also depends on another key factor, directorial board representation, and other scarcely discussed but relevant roles behind the scenes like screenplay writers, cinematographers, editors, music composers, etc. Directorial roles, with special reference to screenplay writers, play a dominant role in female representation in movies. However, this percentage is found to have been quite lower than expected. Poor female representation in movies gets further substantiated due to highly critical reviews obtained from the audience owing to low budget expenditures on such movies (Yang et al., 2020). A large portion of past years saw the dominance of males in key roles as directors and cinematographers, expanding female underrepresentation to not just on-screen leadership but also off-screen. The Celluloid Ceiling study (2014) showed that in 2013, only 6% and 10% of females worked as directors and writers of the top 250 films, respectively (Lauzen, 2014). Leadership gaps in on-screen depiction were found in a prominent study, wherein males in their 40s, 50s, and 60s played significant leadership-based roles and had occupational power; however, an opposite trend was found for females (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005). This encourages orthodox gender roles and expectations regarding leadership and expects women to work as subordinates to men, validating existing norms. This conventional trend has undergone some change in the past decade. Indian films have now begun to promote female directors, costume designers, editors, and screenwriters, with scope for improvement in employing female lyricists and composers. Upcoming female directors include Zoya Akhtar, Meghna Gulzar, and Gauri Shinde, and as producers, Anushka Sharma, Gauri Khan, Deepika Padukone, and Priyanka Chopra are a few well-established names (Prakash, 2020). This disparity in off-screen composition of movies shows that, though leadership has improved in some areas behind the camera, there is still capacity and a need to accept improvements in ensuring that more females are involved in filmmaking, production, writing, music composition, etc. This will serve a direct purpose of improving the presence of women on the directorial board and an indirect effort in the direction of creating movies that are developed in the light of female perspectives, aspirations, goals, occupational and leadership aims, identity achievement, etc.

The overarching picture showcases the need to investigate the gaps in leadership styles and roles being played by both genders on screen, especially females. The portrayal of females in leadership positions on-screen and off screen has fairly improved in some cases, but tapping into the current films to gather better insights requires more efforts in this direction. This analysis will provide the basis for developing a leadership framework based on popular Bollywood films.

Every leader, irrespective of the work setup, leads and manages his team and the larger organisation according to certain orientations, belief systems, and values they hold in high esteem. All these stems from the subjective attributes, traits, social and cultural contexts, socialisation, and upbringing of these leaders. A leader is not a final product but is shaped by the lifelong experiences and developments they come across. Understanding the leader's orientation becomes highly important to predict their future course of action, directions, interpersonal connectivity with others, ability to develop

emotional connections and understanding, ideological perspectives, etc. Tasks or actions performed by the leaders in any context are prime drivers in helping organisations achieve their micro and macro goals. Male leaders highly prioritise competitiveness and winning against the opposition, but female leaders are more inclined to create positive organisational changes and build an organisation's image (Centre, 2016). Similar findings have been confirmed by Loden (1985), as cited by Qiu and Dooley (2018), who stated that men showcase competitiveness, authority, control, and analytical problem solving, ascribed to males (Qiu & Dooley, 2018). In a meta-analysis, findings suggested that men had a greater task orientation, while females were more inclined to an interpersonal style of management (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). A leader can perform competent tasks only with a sound cognitive bent while taking decisions and planning. Task and cognitive orientations are held in high regard when describing a successful manager in terms of competence, independence, and rationality. Moreover, these are more linked to males than females. (Noor, 2011) As stated by Weathersby (1999), a strong cognitive leader orientation further contributes to developing a strong vision for an organisation and motivating employees to subordinate personal goals to organisational ones. (Noor, 2011) A common observation depicts that society attributes cognitive and task-oriented styles like decision making, strategizing, resource allocation, etc. more to males than females. (Pfaf et al., 2013; Atwater, et al., 2004). However, when it comes to moral and emotional orientation in leadership, females are fairly ahead of males. This is due to the socialisation practises that promote the feeling of developing relational skills, which are considered more feminine. (Pfaf et al., 2013) Women also showcase empathy, care, and concern for people in suffering, which explains their bent towards an emotional leadership style (Luoto & Varella, 2021; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Leaders can be high performers but still not be effective enough if they lack the requisite amount of emotional understanding to be able to relate to their teams situationally. Moreover, females and males have been found to be supportive of the fact that mentoring, supporting, and communication are more feminine oriented (Atwater et al., 2004). A strong leader comprises a strong value system, character, moral high ground, and code of conduct; they seldom compromise one. These moral standings of the leader come to the fore, especially in the context of crises or challenging scenarios, and women are found to be high on integrity in such times, while men focus on bolstering the organisation at all costs (Centre, 2016). Additionally, women value character more than men and suggest that it is imperative for successful leadership (Mohan, et al., 2022). From the insights gained on leadership orientations, it can be largely concluded that women are more emotionally, relationally, and, to some extent, morally oriented when leading others, while males are more on the cognitive and task-oriented side of the continuum. However, despite having a socialisation based on a societal framework of feminine characteristics, later in their lives, females are encouraged by their parents and significant others to develop male oriented characteristics to advance in the corporate ladder (Pfaf et al., 2013). So, in some cases, women are considered relatively better leaders owing to their strong emotional orientations (Noor, 2011) and dual set of leadership characteristics.

## 2.1. *Research objectives*

- To identify the leadership styles presented for male and female leaders in the movie.
- To understand the difference between the portrayal of males and females in leadership role in Hindi cinema
- To determine the directorial composition and crew members of the ten selected movies.
- To gauge the change in gender dynamics over the span of past decade (with the view of leadership)

- To develop a comprehensive framework of leadership based on the movies analysed.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research is qualitative analysis, precisely thematic analysis, to examine Indian movies portraying men and women as leaders. It aims to understand through these movies how men and women are portrayed differently in leadership positions by the directorial teams and film crews i.e. the writers, directors, producers and sometimes the actors themselves. For this, 10 diverse movies from the last decade (2013-2023) were comprehensively curated- 5 showcasing a woman as a leader and 5 showcasing a man as a leader. After multiple screenings and careful examination of all movies, narratives in the form of dialogues were drawn out and codes were formed. A recurring pattern in the codes led the researchers to club these codes into 5 distinct themes which also reflects a framework to discuss leadership styles and qualities and can become a foundation for a new leadership theory. In order to map gender representation both on and off the screen, a deep dive on the directorial team and film crew of the movies was also undertaken. This research has been aptly substantiated by review of relevant literature as well.

### 4. Results

The obtained data has been presented in tabular form. Table 1 presents the operational definition as applicable in the context of the present study. Table 2 shows how the codes were classified into five broad themes. Table 3 lists the directors and crew members of the films used for analysis in this study.

**Table 1.** Operational Definitions

Sno.	Orientation	Operational Definition
1.	<b>TASK</b>	Task Orientation in a leader refers to a focus on setting clear objectives, organizing resources efficiently, and ensuring tasks are completed effectively. Such leaders emphasize productivity, deadlines, and goal attainment to drive team performance and achieve desired outcomes.
2.	<b>RELATIONAL</b>	Relational Orientation in a leader emphasizes building strong interpersonal connections with team members. They prioritize open communication, trust-building, and collaboration, recognizing that meaningful relationships are vital for motivating and empowering individuals, fostering a cohesive and engaged team
3.	<b>EMOTIONAL</b>	Emotional Orientation in a leader entail understanding and addressing the emotions of team members. They display empathy, offer support, and create a positive work environment, fostering a sense of well-being and camaraderie among the team, which leads to higher motivation and commitment.
4.	<b>COGNITIVE</b>	Cognitive Orientation in a leader involves approaching challenges with a thoughtful, analytical mindset. These leaders possess strong problem-solving skills, sound judgment, and the ability to consider diverse perspectives, leading to well-informed and effective decision-making.
5.	<b>MORAL</b>	Moral Orientation in a leader is characterized by a strong commitment to ethical principles and values. They lead by example, promote integrity, and hold themselves and others accountable for ethical conduct, thereby creating a culture of trust and fairness within the organization

**Table 2.** Code book

	MOVIES PORTRAYING MALE LEADERS	MOVIES PORTRAYING FEMALE LEADERS
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Themes	Codes	Codes
<b>Task Orientation</b>	<p><b>ARTICLE 15:</b> Assertive, Courageous, Non- bureaucratic, Visionary, Task oriented, Confident, Revolutionary</p> <p><b>URI:</b> Determined, Proactive. Energetic, Confident. Realist. Calculated risk taker, Goal focused, Uncompromising, Courageous</p> <p><b>M.S. DHONI:</b> Responsible, Task Ownership, Focused working, Achievement oriented, Sincere, Credible, Competent, Dedicated, Hardworking, Risk taker, Accountable, Professional attitude</p> <p><b>PADMAN:</b> Dedicated, Persistent, Experimental, Risk taker</p> <p><b>RUNWAY 3:</b> Skilled/talented/competent, takes control of the situation, Accountable for his actions, Dedicated, Disciplinarian, Risk taker, Dutiful</p>	<p><b>KATHAL:</b> Courageous, selectively assertive, Visionary</p> <p><b>MARDANI 2:</b> Courageous, Uncompromising, Determined, Straight headed, Firm, Upfront/straightforward, Diligent, Calls out her boss' defiance of her authority as the team leader, physically strong</p> <p><b>GULAB GANG:</b> Firm, Assertive, Over the top physical combat skills</p> <p><b>SHABASH MITHU-</b> Goal focused, Competent, Responsible, Persistent</p> <p><b>MISSION MANGAL-</b> Accountability, Ownership, Responsible, Determined, Confident, Time management, Efficient working</p>
<b>Relational orientation</b>	<p><b>ARTICLE 15:</b> Inclusive</p> <p><b>URI:</b> Motivator, Good informal communication, interpersonally intelligent, Ownership of results, Team and self-development, Clear delegation of work, Trusting of his team, good coordination, Tangible and informational support to team members</p> <p><b>M.S. DHONI:</b> Strong interpersonal relationship with team</p> <p><b>PADMAN:</b> Social change agent, Welfare ideology, Team development and training, Inclusive</p> <p><b>RUNWAY 34:</b> Ignorance towards subordinates, Good delegation of responsibility, Good informal communication</p>	<p><b>KATHAL:</b> Is victim of rampant sexism, Junior insubordination by male constable, Tussle between personal and professional life, defies promotion initially so as to be in equality with her partner and balance power dynamic</p> <p><b>MARDANI2:</b> Junior insubordination by male co-workers, Rampant sexism</p> <p><b>GULAB GANG:</b> Conditioned to be seated at a lower position (the floor) in front of elite/political leaders, Not scared of political authority, Nurturant</p> <p><b>SHABASH MITHU:</b> Team spirit, Respect towards team members, Collective working, Team development/training, Vocalising team needs, Creating team identity</p> <p><b>MISSION MANGAL:</b> Motivator, Nurturant, Lack of confidence in team, Informal Communication, Team Coordination</p>
<b>Emotional orientation</b>	<p><b>ARICLE 15:</b> Intuitive, Empathetic, Sensitive, Compassionate</p> <p><b>URI:</b> Strong willed, emotionally intelligent, Compassionate</p> <p><b>M.S. DHONI:</b> Empathetic, Sensitive, Humble, Strong willed</p> <p><b>PADMAN:</b> Sensitive</p> <p><b>RUNWAY 34:</b> Arrogant, Outspoken, Not a people pleaser, Emotionally intelligent, Non receptive of opinions</p>	<p><b>KATHAL:</b> Empathetic, Sensitive, Emotionally intelligent, Vulnerable, Humorous</p> <p><b>MARDANI 2:</b> Strong willed, Emotionally intelligent, Compassionate, Vulnerable, Intuitive</p> <p><b>GULAB GANG:</b> Emotionally intelligent, Compassionate</p> <p><b>SHABASH MITHU:</b> Self-aware, compassionate, Emotionally strong</p> <p><b>MISSION MANGAL:</b> Strong will</p>
<b>Cognitive orientation</b>	<p><b>ARTICLE 15:</b> Non-Conformist, Receptive, Clarity of thought, Vigilant, Nuanced thinking</p> <p><b>URI:</b> Strategic, Spontaneous, Tactical, Clarity of thought, Non-impulsive, Observant, Quick decision maker</p> <p><b>M.S. DHONI:</b> Futuristic, Strong decision maker, Visionary</p> <p><b>PADMAN:</b> Innovative, Non-conventional, Spontaneous, Consistent learner, Articulate communicator</p> <p><b>RUNWAY 34:</b> Highly Attentive, Vigilant, Sharp minded, Clarity of thought, Non-conformist, Informed decision maker</p>	<p><b>KATHAL:</b> Quick decisive thinking, Tactical, Spontaneous</p> <p><b>MARDANI 2:</b> Focused, Observant, Novelty and creativity in ideas</p> <p><b>GULAB GANG:</b></p> <p><b>SHABASH MITHU:</b> Resilient, Visionary, Innovative, Problem Solving</p> <p><b>MISSION MANGAL-</b> Creative, Innovative, Novelty in ideas</p>



Moral Orientation	ARTICLE 15: Righteous	KATHAL: Righteous, Conscientious
	URI: Inclusive, Fair, Non-discriminatory	MARDANI 2: Righteous, Trusting
	M.S. DHONI	GULAB GANG: Righteous
	PADMAN	SHABASH MITHU: Promotes equality and fairness
	RUNWAY 34: Truthful, Righteous	MISSION MANGAL

Table 3. Film crew of the selected movies							
Movie	Year of Release	Director	Producer	Writer	Editor	Budget (Cr)	Box office collection (Cr)
Movies Portraying Men as Leaders							
M.S. Dhoni	2016	Neeraj Pandey	Arun Pandey	Neeraj Pandey, Dilip Jha	Srinarayan Singh	104	216
Padman	2018	R. Balki	Twinkle Khanna	R. Balki, Swanand Kirkire	Chandan Arora	45	120
Uri	2019	Aditya Dhar	Ronnie Screwvala	Aditya Dhar	Shiv Kumar Panicker	25	360
Article 15	2019	Anubhav Sinha	Anubhav Sinha	Anubhav Sinha, Gaurav Solanki	Yasha Ramchandani	30	93
Runway 34	2022	Ajay Devgn	Ajay Devgn	Sandeep Kewlani, Aamil Keeyan Khan	Dharamendra Sharma	75	53
Movies Portraying Women as Leaders							
Gulab Gang	2014	Soumik Sen	Sohum Shah, Anubhav Sinha	Soumik Sen, Anubhav Sinha	Cheeragh Todiwala	29	16.5
Mission Mangal	2019	Jagan Shakti	Cape of Good Films (Akshay Kumar)	R Balki, Jagan Shakti, Nidhi Singh Dharma (F), Saketh Kondiparthi	Chandan Arora	70	291
Mardani2	2019	Gopi Putran	Aditya Chopra	Gopi Puthran	Monisha Baldawa	27	67
Shabash Mithu	2022	Srijit Mukherjee	Ajit Andhare	Priya Aven, Vijay Maurya	A Sreekar Prasad	48	3
Kathal	2023	Yashowardhan Mishra	Shobha Kapoor, Ekta Kapoor, Guneet Monga, Achin Jain	Ashok and Yashowardhan Mishra	Perna Saigal	10-15	

As presented in Table 3, it can be gathered that out of 24 core team members in male centric films, only 2 were females. (8.33%). Out of 30 core team members in female led movies, only 7 were females. (23.33%).

5. Analysis of Results

The primary objective of this study was to delve into the nuanced variations in how men and women are depicted in leadership roles within Hindi cinema. Movies, often serving as reflective windows into society, encapsulate real-life scenarios within a stylized reel framework. The personas and roles portrayed on the cinematic screen are a direct

manifestation of prevailing gender norms embedded in a given culture (Zalsabila & Rochimah, 2021). However, it is equally accurate to recognize that cinema wields the power to exert influence and catalyse transformative shifts in societal paradigms.

Thus, the analysis undertaken centres on a meticulous examination of the distinct portrayals of genders across five key parameters or leadership orientations. Moreover, it delves into the less conspicuous aspects, probing the underlying factors contributing to such portrayals. This entails an exploration of the team dynamics at play, uncovering the very team structure responsible for shaping the depicted narratives. Consequently, a scrutiny was applied to the composition of the directorial and film crews involved in the chosen cinematic works.

### 5.1. *Task Orientation*

According to the operational definition of the present study, "Task Orientation" in a leader refers to "a focus on setting clear objectives, organizing resources efficiently, and ensuring tasks are completed effectively. Such leaders emphasize productivity, deadlines, and goal attainment to drive team performance and achieve desired outcomes."

As depicted in movies, male leaders are frequently portrayed as assertive (a characterization that might be labeled as "aggressive" when applied to a female leader by many). They are often depicted as possessing qualities like courage, a revolutionary spirit, a willingness to break rules, a penchant for taking risks, and an overall "heroic persona." These male leaders are presented as being driven by their goals and exhibiting an unwavering stance. The portrayal of female leaders in terms of task orientation largely aligns with these traits, with only a few instances where women leaders display a form of "selective assertiveness."

In the movie "Kathal," for instance, Inspector Mahima Basor is assigned a case that her male superiors show no interest in: the recovery of 2 missing jackfruits belonging to the local MLA. This act of unexpected assertion is not commonly observed in movies featuring male leaders, where their decisions of both approval and denial are typically treated with respect.

Another discernible distinction lies in the portrayal of women leaders possessing exceptional combat skills, a facet less prominently emphasized in male-centric films. This could potentially underscore the notion that to be a leader, one must possess combat abilities akin to those of a hero. Whether it's Rajjo from "Gulab Gang" or Inspector Shivani from "Mardani 2," all these characters exhibit adeptness in hand-to-hand combat. Specifically talking about Mardani 2, the film's title is paradoxical and provocative because of the attribution of masculinity to a successful female leader (the word 'mard' in Hindi means 'male'), thus cleverly pointing towards gender discourses and stereotypes at play. (Tariq and Syed, 2017) But, taking a more optimistic viewpoint, these movies highlighted that bravery is not just a man's trait; it is a trait of leadership, irrespective of gender identities.

Task orientation in both male and female leaders showed similar representation, overall. All characters in the leadership positions were nuanced and layered, having complex problems. They had their own ways of working. Inspector Ayan Ranjan from the movie Article 15, Inspector Mahima from Kathal and Inspector Shivani from Mardani 2 were

transformational leaders, whose larger goal was bringing large, meaningful change, transcending daily affairs and problems (Covey, 1992).

M.S. Dhoni was a “team leader”, who was not threatened by special and new talent. He diversified his team, took tough decisions like retiring old players and worked for the larger good of the team. (Belbin, 1993). Vidya Balan’s character Tara Shinde who is the project director of Mars Orbiter Mission in the movie Mission Mangal is a democratic team leader. The final decision lay with her, but with the consensus and suggestions of her valuable and exceptional team members.

Thus, it can be said, as far as the task, productivity, deadlines, and goal attainment to drive team performance and achieve desired outcomes is concerned, both male and female leaders have been shown in equally respectable light.

## 5.2. Relational Orientation

Relational Orientation in a leader emphasizes building strong interpersonal connections with team members. They prioritize open communication, trust-building, and collaboration, recognizing that meaningful relationships are vital for motivating and empowering individuals, fostering a cohesive and engaged team.

Stark distinction can be seen in the portrayal of male and female leaders on this parameter. While male leaders had the opportunity to build an interpersonal relationship with their teams, by being good orators and motivators, women leaders first had to struggle to get acceptance as team leaders. Barring a few instances, female leaders were victims of rampant sexism and junior insubordination. In Mardani 2, a politician is seen saying

*“Police par bharosa nahi hai, aurat par to ratti barabar nahi” or “we don’t trust the police, let alone a female police officer”.*

The whole storyline is based on a villain who thinks women belong in the kitchen and must not overstep their boundaries. Inspector Shivani’s immediate boss tells her

*“Ask Shekhawat (a subordinate of Shivani) to choose the team”; to which she resists and tells him “Team mai lead kar rahi hun” i.e. “I am the one leading the team so I should be the one choosing the team”.*

A TV anchor and journalist describe Shivani as “Beautiful, Dashing”; overlooking her work and commenting on her appearance. She has to give an entire monologue speech to shut him down.

In Kathal, initially only Inspector Basor is seen taking her work seriously and other subordinate officers are busy solving their own personal problems. The local MLA is quite dismissive of her questions because she is both- “lower caste” and “lower gender”. Social dogma fuelled by patriarchy is subtly hinted at with the protagonist’s inability to marry her love interest since he is in a subordinate position to her and hence, earns less. She says:

*“Shaadi hone wali thi tabhi hamara promotion ho gaya, tabse ya to ghar vale taana dete hain ya colleagues” (We*

*were about to get married but my promotion happened. Since then either my family taunts me or my colleagues)*

Despite this, Basor remains collaborative and supportive, extending kindness and guidance to her subordinates. Her concern for junior officer Kunti, who hesitates to accept a promotion due to its impact on her personal life, highlights Basor's leadership style. A fellow police officer again makes unwarranted comments on Mahima's body saying

*"Kaafi maintain kiya hai aapne figure ko"*

i.e., you have maintained your figure very well. These comments were unsolicited and had nothing to do with the case at hand, showing that women officers have to deal with sexism every step of their way.

In contrast, Inspector Ayan Ranjan in "Article 15" assumes immediate authority over his team upon arrival in the village. He commands respect, attention, and even fear from his subordinates. His assertiveness, including the use of harsh language, meets little resistance or insubordination. In Uri, Captain Vihaan Shergill is again, a leader as soon as he steps in. He is sharp and intelligent and builds a great, in-sync team; because there is no resistance from the team at his leadership. In the case of M.S.Dhoni, he works to enhance an already-established cricket team, while Mitali Raj in "Shabash Mithu" must create a women's cricket team and strive for representation. This illustrates the unequal starting points for men and women in both fiction and reality.

Women leaders like Tara Shinde and Rajjo are also nurturant and caring for their teams as completely opposed to Captain Vikrant from Runway 34 who is arrogant and dismissive, which tells us that women bring an added layer of relational orientation to their teams.

As established in previous research, women are often depicted as collaborative, highly cooperative, respectful, and less hierarchical in their leadership styles (Radu et al., 2017; Eagly & Johannesen, 2001). In contrast, men are portrayed as more assertive and dominant. However, these characteristics aligned with female leadership, such as nurturing and communal attributes, have also been recognized as indicative of effective leadership (Biddle, 2018).

### 5.3. Emotional Orientation

According to the present research, "Emotional Orientation" in a leader entail understanding and addressing the emotions of team members. They display empathy, offer support, and create a positive work environment, fostering a sense of well-being and camaraderie among the team, which leads to higher motivation and commitment.

The traditional notion of "angry young men" is undergoing a transformation in contemporary cinema, thanks to the emergence of new-age films that depict men as intuitive, emotionally intelligent, and open to vulnerability. These portrayals showcase men's capacity to express their emotions, including crying, while still embodying strength and bravery.

Both male and female led movies beautifully portrayed the emotional orientation of leadership alike- sensitive, empathetic

and vulnerable leaders, who are also tough and strong willed.

Inspector Ayan Ranjan is extremely sensitive when explaining what rape is to a little girl, Inspector Mahima Basor is humorous and emotionally intelligent, she misleads the case to find the missing girls and not the lost jackfruits, even if it means suspension for her. “Padman” is sensitive to women's needs and pain and is constantly working to support them. Rajjo and Inspector Shivani are intelligent and compassionate women. Major Vihaan Shergill from Uri is seen to be using aggressive emotions of his team members in a very constructive way, he uses their angst and pain to get results and to fulfil their mission. He says

*“Sir mai inke gusse aur junoon ka sahi istemaal karna chahta hun.”*

That is an emotionally intelligent, constructive man. In a meta-analysis, findings suggested that men had a greater task orientation, while females were more inclined to an interpersonal style of management. (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). But these sets of movies show us a changing trend where both male and female leaders have an equal bend towards both task and emotional leadership.

#### 5.4. Cognitive Orientation

Cognitive Orientation in a leader involves approaching challenges with a thoughtful, analytical mindset. These leaders possess strong problem-solving skills, sound judgment, and the ability to consider diverse perspectives, leading to well-informed and effective decision-making.

As seen clearly from the code book, both male and female leaders show cognitive orientation, but it is much more pronounced and outright in case of male led films. It seems like a genuine effort to show men as visionary, futuristic, strategic, vigilant, observant, which are all essential characteristics of a cognitively sound leader. M.S. Dhoni talks about revamping the team and getting new players 3 years ahead of the world cup. He takes a controversial yet tough call to retire all “old and unfit” players. Padman's Lakshmi goes to top educational institutes and gives articulate speeches with a clear vision board in his mind. Uri's captain Vihaan is quick and spontaneous in taking very tough and risky decisions, like crossing the border on foot as opposed to in aircrafts as planned earlier.

However, these qualities were not so pronounced in the case of female leaders. Male leaders were non conformists and unconventional unapologetically while these traits were missing from the female characters.

However, creativity and innovation were more highlighted in the case of female leaders, barring the exception of Padman, whose story is based on social innovation and change. Tara Shinde, project director of the Mars Mission explains the mission plan using an analogy from the kitchen, which helped future orbital missions as well. Similarly, in Kathal the protagonist tactically turns the case into finding the lost girls instead of lost fruits. Inspector Shivani in Mardani uses social media to garner views and also catch the criminal.

Effective leadership requires a leader to possess a proficient cognitive aptitude while making decisions and strategizing.

Task and cognitive orientations are vital traits often associated with a successful manager's competence, autonomy, and rationality. Interestingly, these attributes tend to be more commonly associated with males than females, as noted by Noor (2011). Weathersby (1999) also emphasizes that a robust cognitive orientation in a leader contributes significantly to crafting a clear organizational vision and motivating employees to prioritize collective goals over personal ones (Noor, 2011). A prevalent observation is that society typically attributes cognitive and task-oriented skills like decision-making, strategic planning, and resource allocation more to males than females (Pfaf et al., 2013; Atwater et al., 2004).

### 5.5. Moral Orientation

Moral Orientation in a leader is characterized by a strong commitment to ethical principles and values. They lead by example, promote integrity, and hold themselves and others accountable for ethical conduct, thereby creating a culture of trust and fairness within the organization.

Both men and women leaders were seen as righteous and fair but there were more instances of conscientiousness in women leaders. Women leaders were seen as more inclusive, trusting and righteous. Female leaders are often perceived as possessing qualities such as inclusivity, trustworthiness, and a strong sense of righteousness. These ethical values of leaders become particularly prominent during crises or difficult situations, where women tend to exhibit a high degree of integrity. In contrast, male leaders are more inclined to prioritize strengthening the organization regardless of the consequences, as highlighted by the Centre (2016). Moreover, women tend to place a greater emphasis on the importance of character in leadership compared to men, as noted by Mohan et al. (2022). In an instance from the movie Kathal, Inspector Mahima Basor catches constable Dwivedi, who is also her romantic partner, brutally beating up a few poor kids for no reason. She shouts at him publicly and saves the children, not caring about the repercussions on her relationship. She says

*"Vardi mili hai, gareebo ko maarne ka license nahi "*

i.e., you have earned the officer uniform not the license to beat up poor people. Another instance of truthfulness comes from a male centric movie- Runway 34. Captain Vikrant Khanna's entire career, credibility and reputation is at stake due to grave allegations on him by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB). However, in the entire film, he makes no malicious attempt to justify his actions by false or dishonest means. He repeatedly states

*"Main jhooth nahi bolta"*

or I don't lie and his character stands by it. He goes through numerous moral dilemmas but his character stands by his stance; showing honesty and integrity.

Analysis of film crew and directorial team in the chosen set of films showed meagre participation of women in the making of these movies. Only 8-9% women were part of the crew of male centric films while only 23% women were involved in

making female centric films. This is far from 50% representation and doesn't even touch the 1/3rd mark. It is significant that more women writers and directors are roped in the filmmaking process in order to create narratives which are both true and inspirational for upcoming leaders.

## 6. Discussion

The study delves into the intriguing realm of workplace dynamics as portrayed in cinema, particularly examining the contrasting positions of male and female leaders. Through the lens of film, the evolving gender dynamics are scrutinized, shedding light on how cinematic narratives reflect changing societal perceptions. While traditional gender roles have often influenced on-screen depictions, recent cinematic works present a departure from conventional norms. Male leaders, once confined to the "angry young men" stereotype, are now portrayed as emotionally intelligent and vulnerable. Female leaders, on the other hand, are shown to possess qualities of strength, intelligence, and empathy. This cinematic evolution not only mirrors shifting gender dynamics but also challenges traditional workplace paradigms. As cinema evolves, it offers a unique perspective on the journey towards more inclusive and equitable leadership representations, prompting us to reflect on the real-world implications of these changing portrayals.

The cinematic portrayal of contrasting male and female leaders significantly influences real-world workplace practices. These on-screen depictions play a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes toward leadership roles, subsequently impacting how individuals perceive and interact with leaders in their own workplaces. As cinema challenges traditional gender roles and presents multifaceted portrayals of leadership, it fosters a more inclusive understanding of effective leadership qualities. Viewers, including aspiring leaders and current professionals, are exposed to diverse leadership styles and characteristics, encouraging them to reevaluate preconceived notions of gender-based leadership traits.

Furthermore, cinematic representations of female leaders as strong, intelligent, and empathetic challenge gender biases and inspire organizations to recognize and promote women into leadership positions. Male leaders' portrayal as emotionally intelligent and vulnerable encourages men to embrace a broader range of emotions and communication styles, fostering healthier workplace relationships.

## 7. Conclusion

These cinematic depictions contribute to a broader cultural shift, prompting organizations to adopt more inclusive leadership training, diversity initiatives, and policies that cater to a wide spectrum of leadership styles regardless of gender. By reshaping perceptions and expectations, cinema actively influences real workplace practices by paving the way for more balanced, effective, and inclusive leadership models.

## 8. Limitations of The Study



While this study provides valuable insights into the portrayal of gender and leadership within Hindi cinema, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis focuses on a specific set of movies, which might not represent the entire spectrum of Hindi cinema. Different time periods, genres, and demographics of films might yield different results. Moreover, the interpretation of movie characters and their leadership qualities can be subjective. Different viewers might perceive the same traits differently, impacting the reliability of the analysis. Additionally, the study primarily considers Hindi cinema, which might not fully encompass the diversity of Indian cinema. Cultural, regional, and linguistic differences could influence how leadership is portrayed. Despite these limitations, this study offers a valuable contribution to the discourse on gender portrayals and leadership in cinema.

## 9. Future Areas For Research

Current study provides strong direction and basis for future research in varied related areas. Current study does not account for changes in gender portrayal over time. A longitudinal approach could reveal evolving trends and shifts in societal perceptions. While the current analysis highlights certain trends, it may oversimplify the complexity of gender portrayals in cinema, overlooking the potential for multi-dimensional characters. Exploring this multi-dimensionality can be a focal point for upcoming researchers. Another future research area could be drawing how these portrayals are received by audiences. Audience interpretations and perceptions could add depth to the current findings. Present analysis relies heavily on qualitative examples from movies. Incorporating a quantitative analysis could provide a more comprehensive overview of gender portrayal trends. Going further, researchers could also compare Hindi cinema's portrayal of gender and leadership with other film industries or cultural contexts, broadening its cross-cultural insights. While movies reflect societal norms, they can also be influenced by market demands and creative choices that might not necessarily mirror reality. Understanding these market trends in-depth could further catalyse in building on the current study. Focus of this study is on binary gender roles, potentially excluding portrayals of non-binary and LGBTQ+ leaders that might challenge or enrich traditional portrayals. Capturing the portrayal of leaders from these non-mainstream communities could provide insights on current state of affairs and how they can be brought to the forefront.

Future research can consider a broader range of movies, incorporate quantitative measures, explore audience perspectives, and account for evolving societal attitudes.

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