

CRISS-CROSS CORRIDORS OF TWO BOLLYWOOD FILMS: *KABIR SINGH* AND *JERSEY* THROUGH THE LENSES OF R.W. CONNELL'S THEORY OF MASCULINITIES.

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Abstract

Popular culture's (literary texts or media) representation of masculinity has a direct impact on the masses as being very powerful and influential agents. It has always generated discussion and intrigue at the same time. R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities provides insights into the perpetuation and challenge of hegemonic masculinity in popular culture. The present paper examines the two Indian films Kabir Singh and Jersey through R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities. The research paper aims to analyze the representation of masculinity in select movies. The research methodology involves content analysis and comparative analysis. The study uses a critical qualitative analysis of the movies to examine the characters, stories, and social circumstances in Jersey and Kabir Singh. It also tries to analyze the impact of the portrayal of masculinity in the movies on the viewer's perceptions of male identity. In the process, it attempts to identify the extent to which the movies reinforce or challenge existing norms and stereotypes of masculinity. The research clarifies how these films mirror and critique conventional ideas of masculinity in Indian culture. The paper argues that the films offer complex and nuanced representations of masculinities, challenging traditional gender norms while also reinforcing them to some extent. The study provides insights into how popular culture perpetuates and challenges hegemonic masculinity, offering implications for future research and social interventions aimed at promoting more inclusive and equitable gender norms.

Keywords: R.W. Connell, Masculinities, Hegemony, Subordinate, Bollywood, Kabir Singh, Jersey, marginalized.

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Introduction:

R. W. Connell is an Australian sociologist who developed the theory of masculinities, which explores how different forms of masculinity are constructed, maintained, and enforced in society. According to Connell, masculinity is not a fixed biological trait, but rather a social construct that is shaped by cultural, economic, and political factors. She defines masculinity as a socially constructed set of behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics that are associated with being male within a specific cultural and historical context, including the dominant form of masculinity known as hegemonic masculinity.

Popular culture's representation of masculinity has always generated discussion and intrigue. The study provides insights into the perpetuation and challenge of hegemonic masculinity in popular culture. The theory of masculinities by R.W. Connell offers a thorough framework for examining the complexity and variety of male identities. This study applies Connell's theory to critically examine the portrayal of masculinities. The selected movies are the best examples of how masculinity is created, negotiated, and challenged in Indian cinema. To provide a critical analysis of the chosen texts, and investigate their representations of masculinity through R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities, it is indispensable to briefly summarize the main features of the films *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey*.

1. *Kabir Singh*: Sandeep Reddy Vanga is the director of the 2019 Hindi film "Kabir Singh." Remade from the Telugu movie "Arjun Reddy." The film's main character is Kabir Singh, a talented but irritable medical student who, after experiencing heartbreak, descends into destructive behavior. Due to its portrayal of toxic masculinity and promotion of aggressive behavior, the movie enjoyed both commercial success and controversy.

2. *Jersey*: Gowtham Tinnanur is the director of the 2020 Hindi film *Jersey*. It is a remake of the same-named Telugu movie. The story of Arjun, a gifted cricketer in his mid-thirties, who attempts to make a return in the sport while dealing with personal and professional obstacles, is told in the film. *Jersey* won praise from critics for its subtle storytelling and emotional complexity.

Thus, *Kabir Singh* is a more commercial film that is driven by its star power and its controversial subject matter. *Jersey* is a more personal film that is focused on its characters and its message of hope. However, both films are worth watching for their unique strengths and weaknesses.

Theoretical Framework:

The present paper uses R.W. Connell's theory as an analytical framework to examine and contrast how masculinities are portrayed in *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey*.

The paper is based on the hypothesis *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey* represent different types of masculinities. *Kabir Singh* represents a toxic and hegemonic kind of masculinity and *Jersey* represents a more sensitive and progressive one providing a more complex and nuanced representation of male identity in cinema.

A great and extensive amount of research has been produced by applying Connell's gender and hegemonic masculinity theories to various texts. Many scholars have researched and analyzed the portrayal of masculinity in Indian cinema and how it reflects Indian society and its cultural norms. However, the research on the film *Jersey* has been overlooked, despite its potential to depict positive and non-hegemonic forms of masculinity. While some research has been conducted on exploring masculinity in Indian cinema, there is still a gap in the literature. Existing studies have predominantly focused on female victimization and feminist movements, leaving room for a more in-depth analysis of masculinity.

Connell's theory of masculinities emphasizes that masculinity is not a monolithic, fixed concept, but rather a complex and dynamic social process that is shaped by a variety of factors. It's important to note that these forms of masculinity are not mutually exclusive, and a person can embody multiple forms of masculinity at different times or in different contexts. Furthermore, the types of masculinity valued and privileged in a given society can change over time and are influenced by a variety of factors such as social, cultural, and economic changes.

The theory is more relevant than at any time in a world gender order that continues to favor men over women while also raising difficult issues for men and boys. This theory is the fundamental study of masculinity as a foundational factor in modern social inequality, as well as one of the most influential books in the social

sciences in recent times. The theory states, there is no such thing as a singular masculinity. According to the book, various types of masculinity vary over time, across cultures, and among individuals. The main ideas in this book are an important part of contemporary society's discussions and their applicability in our daily lives.

Analysis:

Underlying themes in both films explore the drawbacks and restrictions of carefully upholding hegemonic masculinity. The movie *Kabir Singh* illustrates how toxic masculinity can be harmful since Kabir's erratic actions have negative effects on his personal and professional life. The movie drew criticism for glorifying Kabir's abusive behavior and failing to appropriately explore its detrimental ramifications. However, *Jersey* adopts a more nuanced approach by emphasizing the value of emotional openness and personal development. The idea that masculinity should only be characterized by physical domination or strength is contested by Arjun's journey. The movie presents a more optimistic and inclusive view of masculinity by highlighting the importance of tenacity, emotional fortitude, and the capacity to face one's vulnerabilities.

Kabir Singh primarily maintains and portrays hegemonic masculinity because its protagonist exhibits aggressive and violent behavior. Through supporting players who facilitate and excuse the protagonist's harmful behavior, the film depicts complicit masculinity. In contrast, *Jersey* challenges conventional ideas of masculinity by focusing on vulnerability and personal development. It questions hegemonic masculinity's definition and offers glimpses of subordinated masculinity through people who negotiate their desires and social pressures. *Kabir Singh* presents a complex portrayal of masculinities, primarily focusing on hegemonic and toxic masculinity. The film depicts the consequences and negative impacts of these forms of masculinity on individuals' mental health, relationships, and overall well-being, while also highlighting the need for broader discussions on healthier and more inclusive forms of masculinity.

Jersey showcases the transformative potential of masculinities. Arjun's journey represents a shift from a single-dimensional understanding of masculinity to a more inclusive and balanced portrayal that encompasses emotional connection, sacrifice, and personal growth.

According to Connell's theory, there is a dominating kind of masculinity known as hegemonic masculinity that serves as the benchmark for all other masculinities. In the movie "Kabir Singh," the title character represents a typical manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. He is described as being violent,

domineering, and emotionally unstable, frequently using violence to impose his will. Kabir's actions conform to the stereotypical image of a macho, dominating male figure. However, *Jersey* challenges this idea by offering a more complex examination of masculinity. The main character, Arjun, is originally shown as a failing cricketer who battles with his self-esteem and societal expectations. He challenges the conventional notions of hegemonic masculinity as the plot develops by learning to embrace weakness and express his emotions.

Certain masculinities are marginalized or oppressed within the dominant system, according to Connell's theory. In "Kabir Singh," marginalized masculinities are only briefly explored. The interconnectedness of masculinity with other social identities is mostly ignored as the movie concentrates primarily on the experiences of wealthy, upper-caste, and heterosexual men. The film's ability to convey a thorough grasp of masculinity is constrained by this omission.

As opposed to this, *Jersey* focuses more on the experiences of marginalized masculinities. The main character, Arjun, is portrayed as an aging cricketer who has setbacks and social pressures as a result of his age, career, and financial difficulties. The movie offers a more nuanced picture of marginalized masculinities by reflecting on the difficulties faced by middle-aged men seeking to achieve success in a field that is dominated by young people.

The analysis of the portrayal of masculinity in *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey* using Connell's theory of masculinity as a framework revealed that both of the male protagonists of the movies depicted different forms of masculinity. Dominant forms of masculinity including the hegemonic and hypermasculine portraits were depicted in both the characters while also showing some moments of vulnerability and introspection. *Kabir Singh* is a romantic film whereas *Jersey* is a sports drama. Although their genres were different, the comparison between the two movies highlighted the nuances in the portrayal of masculinity across different contexts and genres within Indian cinema.

While the titular protagonist of *Kabir Singh* showed predominantly hegemonic masculinity, the protagonist of the film *Jersey* has depicted various masculinities at different points of time throughout the film. Thus, the comparison of masculinity in the movies *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey* has revealed significant insights into different forms of masculinity portrayed in Indian cinema.

Since the time Connell propounded her theory, the most traditional and most acceptable form of masculinity has been hegemonic masculinity. The ideals of hegemonic masculinity are unrealistic and unattainable by most of the common men. Hence there is a need to give importance to other forms of masculinity as well.

Arjun in *Jersey* represents a different form of masculinity from hegemonic masculinity as he represents a more inclusive, caring, and emotionally intelligent form of masculinity.

Kabir represents a traditional form of masculinity characterized by violence, aggression, and dominance. Hegemonic masculinity is defined by Carner as the idealized form of masculinity that represents the cultural norm and is often associated with power and privilege.

Kabir has been shown as being in total control of his life and his surroundings and his behavior is justified by his status as a successful doctor and his ability to win over the love of his life.

Arjun in *Jersey* is portrayed as a more sensitive and emotionally available character who challenges the traditional notion of masculinity. He is shown as a devoted husband and a father who values relationships and feelings over material success. This form of masculinity represents a shift towards a closer caring masculinity which is not defined by traditional gender roles but instead values relationships, emotions, and personal growth. Arjun is a stay-at-home father and he does not mind performing all the duties that supposedly a mother has to perform for their child such as dropping the child off at school or packing his school bag. He is involved in the upbringing of his child and he shares equal responsibility with his wife in looking after his son. This was against the hegemonic masculine order which stereotypes males as being independent and the primary breadwinners. Arjun is financially dependent on his wife hence society judges him at every step for not being a "successful man".

In addition to the analysis of *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey*, it is important to consider the broader societal context in which these movies are situated. Indian society, like many others, has a history of traditional gender roles that have perpetuated certain forms of masculinity while suppressing others. These gender roles have been shaped by cultural, social, and religious norms that have been passed down over generations.

There are several stereotypes placed on men which are that men are the breadwinners and they have to be tough, active, successful, and strong. These are the characteristics that are expected out of a man. The gender stereotypes based on physical appearance, social behavior, interests, and roles performed are different for men and women. Regarding the social behavior of men and women, society prescribes a set of rules such as that men should be physically violent and aggressive and men are not supposed to be emotional because men who are not aggressive or emotional are "unmanly".

Men feel a tremendous pressure on them to live up to the standards set by the society. Men are supposed to act brave and confident even if they feel nervous or scared inside. Several stereotypes believe that men should use violence to get respect if necessary. These gender-specific stereotypes put men and women into a box type of thinking. However, it should be remembered that there are more genders than just men and women.

People share the common belief that men do not have to cry, this belief is in itself toxic because it supports repressing emotions within oneself. Kabir has been seen repressing his emotions throughout the movie which ultimately leads to his downfall and consequent drug addictions. It adversely affects his mental health and he suffers from depression. Whereas, on the other side, Arjun from *Jersey*, openly expresses his emotions and is in a better state of mental health compared to Kabir. Arjun is a good-hearted human being, he tries to do the right thing every time. He is hard-working, self-sacrificing, loving, caring, protective about family, and fatherly. Men like Arjun who show traits of subordinate and marginalized masculinity are not given equal representation and importance compared to men who fit into the hegemonic form of masculinity like Kabir which is supposed to be the "macho man" representation.

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity helps to explain how these traditional gender roles are perpetuated and reinforced in society. It is important to recognize that the hegemonic form of masculinity, as exemplified by Kabir Singh, is not the only form of masculinity that exists. There are other forms of masculinity, such as the more inclusive and emotionally intelligent form represented by Arjun in *Jersey*, that challenge traditional gender roles and norms.

Conclusion:

This study reveals the researcher's some of perceptions of these portrayals and their impact on gender attitudes and behaviors. The researcher has made a conscious effort to remain free from bias and form impersonal opinions on the subject.

In conclusion, the comparison of masculinities in *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey* through the lens of Connell's theory provides important insights into the different forms of masculinity that exist in Indian society. It is crucial to recognize that the traditional hegemonic form of masculinity is not the only form of masculinity that exists and that other forms of masculinity challenge traditional gender roles and norms. Furthermore, media plays a significant role in shaping societal attitudes toward masculinity, and it is important to consider the impact of media in shaping our understanding of gender.

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The research summarizes the results of the investigation of *Kabir Singh* and *Jersey* in light of R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities. It draws attention to the divergent portrayals of masculinity in the two films and their effects on cultural attitudes and gender dynamics. The article focuses on the significance of critically engaging with the plots and characters depicted in popular culture as well as the necessity of having a nuanced grasp of masculinity in Indian cinema. The research highlights the complexity and variety of male identities in the Indian setting, adding to the body of knowledge on masculinity studies.

The research compels people to challenge the stereotypical portrayals of masculinity often perpetuated in the media, fostering greater inclusivity and breaking down harmful gender norms. The discussion has promoted a more nuanced understanding and representation of diverse masculinities.

The paper has discussed the formation, negotiation, and difficulties of various types of masculinity within the Indian cinematic environment by critically analyzing the representation of masculinity in these Hindi remakes of Telugu films. *Kabir Singh* represents a traditional, hegemonic form of masculinity characterized by aggression, dominance, and toxic behavior. In contrast, *Jersey* presents a different form of masculinity that challenges societal norms, emphasizing empathy, vulnerability, and personal growth. It's crucial to analyze these representations critically which proves that although *Kabir Singh* promotes harmful parts of masculinity, *Jersey* makes an effort to convey a more progressive and inclusive viewpoint. R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities gives a deeper understanding of the representations and how they both reflect and defy social standards.

The study gives insightful analysis of how masculinities are portrayed in popular culture and adds to the larger conversation about gender and society. It is crucial to talk about stopping the harmful effects of toxic masculinity on society. The hegemonic masculine male should not be considered the ideal form of masculinity. Such harmful representations in media affect the psyche of young teenagers. Society needs to broaden its view and be more accepting of the different forms of being a

male as there is no right way to be a man. Further research and exploration of Connell's theory can contribute to a deeper understanding of masculinities and their impact on society, encouraging positive change.

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