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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MARGINALIZED MASCULINITY ON SCREEN: INDIAN MALE PORTRAYALS IN HOLLYWOOD FILMS

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Abstract

This paper explores the representation of Indian male characters in Hollywood films and how such portrayals influence broader perceptions of Indian masculinity using R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic and marginalized masculinity. Indian male characters in Hollywood films are often given character traits which place them outside Hollywood's dominant heteronormative ideals. These portrayals come from the intersection of race, class, sexuality and ethnicity. Hollywood pushes certain groups of men, particularly racial minorities, outside the accepted ideal of masculinity. The roles given to Indian male characters often lack physical or sexual confidence and keep them on the margins of Hollywood's dominant and heteronormative masculinity. The paper uses textual analysis of select Hollywood films from the 1930s to the present, spanning the earliest portrayals of Indian men to those in recent years.

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Introduction:-

Although representation of Indian men in Western media (particularly Hollywood) has undergone various shifts throughout its cinematic history, there remains a persistent pattern of marginalization and emasculation. Unlike their western counterparts, Indian male characters in Hollywood are rarely depicted as sexually desirable or physically dominant. While Western male actors are frequently portrayed through idealized notions of masculinity embodied by muscular physiques, romantic agency, and assertiveness, Indian men in Hollywood seldom receive similar representation. They are depicted as stereotypical caricatures, such as nerds, cab drivers, shopkeepers, or a sidekick, lacking both sexual and narrative centrality. On the contrary, Indian women are portrayed as exotic, hyper-sexualized and dwell in a condition of virginal cleanliness.

They are depicted as free from sexual experience or knowledge until White masculine characters initiate them into the realm of sexuality (Singh, 2020). Indian men are usually shown as more effeminate, awkward and usually less desirable compared to their Western counterparts. As the film industry with the most global influence, Hollywood plays a significant role in tailoring narratives around race, gender, and identity. The falsified recurring portrayal of Indian men in Hollywood films reinforces dominant racial hierarchies. Indian men are tossed towards the lower end of entrenched ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Such representation reflects cultural biases and influences how they are perceived in global pop culture. This paper explores the construct of Indian male characters in Hollywood cinema through the lens of marginalized masculinity. Drawing on Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, the study examines how these portrayals shape cultural perceptions of Indian men. The study also calls for a reimagining of Indian masculinity within mainstream media.

Marginalized Masculinities:-

Masculinity is usually seen as traits, actions, or roles associated with men, and is shaped by society. From a theoretical perspective masculinity is socially constituted (Martin 1986). The impact of biology on masculinity is a highly debated topic. Masculinity is not specific to any one biological sex. People of any gender can exhibit masculine or feminine traits. The 1970s saw a surge of scholarly interest in masculinity in the US. Writers such as Jack Sawyer helped initiate the discourse of the male liberation movement. During this period, the literature on the female experience was expanding, and ideas like sex, gender, and gender identity were being distinguished. The first wave of critical masculinity studies began in the 1970s with the sex role paradigm which focused on issues of masculinity (Franklin 1987). Although there were variations in the studies conducted, their primary goals were to show how socialisation and sex role learning are socially constructed aspects of masculinity. There were also efforts made towards documenting how these processes are restrictive and possibly even detrimental to men's psychological and even physical health (Goldberg, 1976).

Franklin(1987) states two points when examining the meaning of masculinity in the United States. (1) The United States has lacked a unified definition of masculinity. (2) A sizable percentage of American men have recently been considered for participation in the masculine gender role. The author also outlines two major roles assumed by American males, namely, the White masculine role and the Black masculine role. He also mentions the omission of men from other races, as according to him, these men have not made an impact on American Society that the white and black men have contributed. While, what Franklin refers to as "others" have a significant population and contribution to present-day America, the white and black men still define the dominant trait of being masculine. Franklin outlines that what both these demographics consider to be masculine includes being able to accept specific obligations and expectations related to dominance, competitiveness, Calvinist work ethic, aggression, and violence. Rajan (2006) states that films construct masculinities in relation to societal norms, colonial legacies, diasporic identities and global media flow. Although her study focuses on South Asian Cinema, the broader implications of her writing resonate with the narrow framing of Indian masculinity in Hollywood. Cohan and Hark (2008) contend that portrayals of masculinity do more than show individual characters—they also reveal society's expectations for gender roles.

Cheng (1999) defines marginalization as the unequal treatment of disadvantaged or peripheral individuals within social hierarchies. Cheng also argues that if anyone wants to research gender, they should not presume that only men engage in "masculine" behaviours. In contrast, only women and all women engage in "feminine" behaviours. According to Stacey and Connell (1988), the definition of hegemonic masculinity changes with time and history. Cheng (1999: p.297) states, "Hegemonic masculinity then is the current ideal". Domination, aggression, competition, athletic ability, stoicism, and control are traits that define hegemonic masculinity. To show hegemonic masculinity, aggressive conduct—if not plain physical violence—is crucial. This gender performance must be continuously confirmed by "proving" that people are in charge of themselves and others. Being aggressive or violent toward those who are considered "feminine," such as women, gay men, and nerds, is one method to "prove" hegemonic masculinity. Indian characters in hegemonic masculinities are closely tied to the gendered performance of Euro-American males; other than being a white male, other demographic characteristics considered important include being able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian, or Jewish, belonging to the first world countries as opposed to the colonized men. The division of work reproduces the polarisation between highlighted femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Some professions, like the military, law enforcement, construction, and firefighting, are considered hegemonically masculine.

Within this hierarchy, Indian men, mainly represented in Hollywood, are positioned as marginal. The perceived distance between these characters and the hegemonic standard is racial, cultural, and sexual. They are rarely portrayed as occupying hyper-masculine professions or embodying traditional masculine power (e.g military leaders, action heroes or dominant romantic leads). It is very common to see Indian men being cast into roles of nerds, cab drivers and retailers, roles which are considered to be less masculine. Carrigan and Connell (1985) acknowledge that masculinities and femininities are varied. According to them, masculinities are not homogenous, unchanging, fixed, or undifferentiated. In any given period of history more than single manifestations of masculinities and femininities can coexist. This diversity gives rise to inter-group and intra-group conflict. The dominant group must find a rationale for its supremacy. Cheng (1999) states that adherence to hegemony determines whether a person belongs to the dominant or marginalized group. Members of the dominant group are frequently conformers. According to Madrid (1988), when someone is marginalized, they are viewed as one-dimensional and stereotypical.

The marginalization of Indian masculinity in Hollywood is a part of a broader historical precedent in which even Asian men have often been denied the dominant masculine role. Hiramoto and Pua (2019) point out how East Asian characters in James Bond films are constructed as racial caricatures, and East Asian women, in contrast, are hyper-sexualized. Paner (2018) and Shimizu (2012) dissect the marginalization and stereotyping of Asians in American film, emphasizing the damage caused by fictitious representations and how they carry over into real-world situations outside the cinema. Shah (2003) lays out four dominant stereotypes of Asian and Asian Americans shaped by predominantly white producers in Hollywood: (1) “Yellow Peril”, (2) “Dragon Lady”, (3) “Charlie Chan”, and (4) “Lotus Blossom”. He refers to these tropes as “controlling images”, arguing that these negative stereotypes give justifications for social control. Washington (2012) writes about the lack of interracial relationships between Black and Asian characters in American prime-time television shows. She notes not only in their scarcity, but also how, when such interracial relationships do appear, the narratives and characterizations tend to maintain hegemonic racial hierarchies.

Once Bruce Lee made his big feature in Hollywood with *Enter the Dragon* (1969), his appearance marked a pivotal moment in disrupting how Asians are perceived in pop culture. Lee’s portrayal of disciplined, physically dominant and charismatic East Asian masculinity challenged Hollywood’s longstanding emasculation of Asian men. In recent years, films like *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (2022) represented a significant shift in the visibility and validity of East Asian men as masculine figures. East Asian masculinities are only recently breaking free from erasure and caricature. The parallel struggles of Indian and East Asian men’s depiction of masculinity in Hollywood reflect how Hollywood continues to control the boundaries of hegemonic masculinities.

Marginalized sexualities :-

Sexuality plays a central role in the marginalisation of non-hegemonic masculinities. Males who fall outside hegemonically masculine norms are often framed as homosexual or asexual (Espiritu, 1996; Wong, 1999). Such framing strips Asian men of erotic agency and reinforces their outsider status within dominant narratives of masculinity. The sexual marginalisation of Indian men roots in colonial and racial hierarchies. At the start of the 17th century, Indian labourers were brought to the US by British colonisers as servants for East India Company personnel. During the American colonial era, there were records of some enslaved East Indians in the US (Assisi, 2022). Court documents from the 18th century show evidence that several Indians were kept as enslaved people in Delaware and Maryland (Meyers & Perreault, 2006). Following the Exclusion Act’s prohibition on Chinese immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s, North American firms seeking workers turned to India and other countries. Many Punjabis migrated to the US. These immigrants worked as farm labourers or loggers. They became considered the least desirable of all races, referred to as the “tide of turbans”. The majority of the immigrants were men, and it was illegal for them to bring wives or children with them. The law did not permit them to become US citizens. Due to anti-miscegenation legislation, they were not allowed to marry local women. The unmarried often found partners within Black or Hispanic communities (Vengoupal, 2021). This exclusion was not only legal but symbolic. In the cultural imagination, Indian men became perceived as outsiders racially, nationally and also sexually.

The complexity of the intergroup conflict among Asian Americans and Euro-Americans cannot be adequately explained by racism alone. In order to understand the dissension, it is necessary to examine the underlying historical intergroup geopolitical conflict (Cheng 1999). Although the US had a smaller military presence in Asia, Western missionaries in India made serious efforts to spread Christianity. Impressions made by Western media, advertisements, and Western higher education were more influential than the missionaries' efforts. This more complex type of colonialism came to be known as post-colonialism. Asians were devalued as conquered men on a collective basis. According to Bederman (2021), civilization is a socially constructed discourse of the dominant group. It associates white supremacy with the dominance of hegemonically masculine men. It is clear from studying history, particularly colonialism and its discourse of modernization and civilization, that the current incarnation of hegemonic masculinity is the most recent reintegration of a lengthy and intricate history of dominance against marginalized groups and alternative gender performances. These colonial legacies continue to inform the way Indian men are portrayed in Hollywood even today. Their characters are often denied centrality and rarely allowed to express physical or romantic intimacy without being seen as awkward or undesirable. In contrast, their western counterparts are frequently depicted as hyper-masculine, sexually desirable and assertive.

Examining Representations of Indian Masculinities in Hollywood Films:-

Building on this historical and cultural context of sexual and racial marginalization, the study seeks to examine how Indian male characters are represented in Hollywood cinema. Understanding these portrayals requires a focused analytical framework and a systematic approach to film selection and analysis. The following objectives and methodology outline how the study investigates the evolution of Indian masculinities on screen, the patterns of marginalization, and the ways in which these characters navigate or are constrained by dominant cinematic norms. The study aims to analyse the representation of Indian male characters in Hollywood cinema using Connell's theory of hegemonic and marginalized masculinity. The other objective is to explore the evolution of representation of Indian male characters in Hollywood. The study is conducted by analysing 11 Hollywood films featuring Indian male characters in prominent roles. These films span from the early 20th century (when Indian characters first appeared in Western cinema) to the present era. The theoretical framework for this analysis is grounded in Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's concept of marginalized and hegemonic masculinities, as outlined in her book *Masculinities* (1996). This diverse selection of films provides a historical cross-section of the evolving portrayal of Indian male characters in Western cinema. The films are selected based on the following criteria- (1) They feature Indian male characters in prominent roles. (2) They achieved mainstream commercial or critical success. (3) The Indian characters contribute significantly to the film's narrative.

The films selected for the study are as follows:-

- (1) Gunga Din (1939)
- (2) Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1942)
- (3) *The Party* (1968)
- (4) *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)
- (5) *Short Circuit* (1986)
- (6) *The Namesake* (2006)
- (7) *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)
- (8) *The Life of Pi* (2012)
- (9) *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014)
- (10) *The Gray Man* (2022)
- (11) *Monkey Man* (2024)

Gunga Din (Stevens, 1939):-

The film is adapted from Rudyard Kipling's colonial-era poem of the same name. The titular character Gunga Din is one of the earliest portrayals of an Indian character in Hollywood cinema. The role of Din is played by a white actor, Sam Jaffe. His skin is rendered brown through make-up to match the colour of Indian skin. The role has Jaffe portray exaggerated makeup and mannerisms that reduce Din to a racial caricature. The film portrays Din as a loyal servant, a water bearer to the British soldiers, reflecting the colonial perception of Indians as deferential, voiceless and eager to serve colonisers. Din's central desire in the film is to become a soldier —to fight and serve, and to fight with honour like the British men he idolises. In the final act, Din sacrifices his life by warning the British of an ambush by the "Thuggee" cult. His unwavering loyalty to the British is presented as noble. However, it ultimately serves as a validation of colonial rule. His depiction demonstrates how early Hollywood viewed Indian men and reinforces colonial hierarchies.

Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (Zoltan, 1942):-

The film is based on Rudyard Kipling's book of the same name, starring Sabu Dastagir as Mowgli, the main protagonist, marking one of the earliest appearances of an Indian actor in Hollywood. Mowgli is a young Indian boy who grew up in the woods of Seoni and was raised by wolves. His adventures include forming bonds with various animal companions. Mowgli is fully scantily clad except for a loincloth wrapped around his waist. While the film portrays Mowgli as brave and resourceful, it reflects colonial attitudes that see Indians as primal. His identity remains firmly tethered to the wild, an outsider to civilization. Through the Western gaze, Mowgli becomes a symbol of unsoiled nature —an innocent being. The Western gaze also eroticizes and simplifies the complexities of the lives of indigenous people. This portrayal of Mowgli aligns with Connell's concept of marginalized masculinity, a form of masculinity that is systematically excluded from dominant ideals due to culture and historical positioning. Although Mowgli is central to the film's story, he is denied access to the traits most closely associated with Hollywood's hegemonic masculinity. Instead, he is exhibited as docile, animalistic and peripheral to the valorized civilized world in the film. Such representation bolsters a racial and cultural hierarchy in which Indian men are delineated as physically present but socially absent from the dominant ideal.

The Party (Edwards, 1968):-

The central character in *The Party* is Bakshi, a socially inept Indian man. The role is played by Peter Sellers, an English actor. Just like in *Din* Sellers plays an even more exaggerated depiction of an Indian character. He employs a stereotypical English accent and awkward social mannerisms. His face is coloured brown to reflect the skin complexion of Indians. In the film, Bakshi is mistakenly invited to a high-society Hollywood party. The film centres on his social ineptitude and clumsiness, and its humour derives from his inability to conform to Western norms and behaviour. Bakshi is portrayed as alien, socially inept, awkward and infantilized. He is often the subject of ridicule rather than empathy. His character has no romantic arc, nor is he afforded emotional or intellectual depth. The film explores the themes of miscommunication and cultural differences and shows the Indian as an alien unable to navigate the Western world. Such a portrayal exemplifies how Indian men in mid-20th-century Hollywood were framed as objects of comedy and cultural confusion. They are usually shown as non-threatening, effeminate, and emasculated. Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, Bakshi's character exists entirely outside the dominant structure; he is excluded, mocked, and rendered invisible in terms of agency or desire. Such representation can influence the audience's perception of Indian men in pop.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (Spielberg, 1984):-

In the second instalment of the popular Hollywood franchise *Indiana Jones*, Famous Indian actor Amrish Puri plays the antagonist Mola Ram. Puri is well known for his villainous roles in numerous Bollywood films. Ram is portrayed with a terrifying presence and dread. Ram and his cult perform dark rituals, human sacrifices, and indulge in exaggerated savagery. The film shows Mola Ram as grotesque and terrifying. He is a symbol of mystic brutality rather than a human antagonist who has depth or motive in his character. While Mola Ram displays power and authority, his portrayal is not empowering. His masculinity is framed as deviant and threatening. His depiction aligns with the trope of the racialized "other" whose power must be subdued by the white hero. Antagonists in Hollywood films are often depicted with greater depth, expanding to emotional complexity, psychological nuance, or even charisma. Examples include Ivan Drago, with a striking physical appearance, in *Rocky IV* (1985), Gordon Gekko, a good-looking but ruthless corporate raider, in *Wall Street* (1987), and Hans Gruber, a calm and suave criminal mastermind, in *Die Hard* (1988). Mola Ram is presented as pure evil, irrational, inhuman, without much depth or charisma. The film was also widely criticized for its xenophobic depictions of India. The film associates Indian culture with barbarism and superstition. His presence underscores how even powerful Indian male characters are denied sexual or heroic agency in Hollywood narratives.

Short Circuit (Badham, 1986):-

Once again, in *Short Circuit*, the Indian character Ben Jabituya is played by American actor Fisher Stevens in "brownface". Another decision emblematic of Hollywood's historical tendency to exclude actual Indian actors while simultaneously caricaturing Indian identity. Jabituya is a colleague of fellow scientists, and the main protagonist is Newton. Jabitya is a scientist—a stereotypical nerd who is awkward and socially inept. He speaks in English with an exaggerated Indian accent and a tendency for malapropisms. These traits are implemented for comedic effect rather than building a character with depth and relatability. His portrayal fits squarely within the stereotype of the "nerdy, non-threatening Asian man," a trope that reinforces the perception of Indian men as intellectually competent but socially and sexually inept. Fisher also reprised the role in a 1988 sequel to the film. Ben's character arc lacks any romantic or sexual agency; instead, it is entirely framed in terms of comic absurdity and cultural otherness. Ben's "Indianness" is exaggerated to the point of parody. This portrayal reduces the character to a collection of surface-level quirks and reinforces the marginalization of Indian Masculinity in Western Media. This lack of emotional depth aligns with Connell's theory of marginalized masculinity, where racial and cultural minorities are systematically excluded from hegemonic masculine ideals. Such portrayals not only reflect a lack of representation but an active distortion that renders Indian men invisible in terms of power, desire and complexity. Fisher had later apologized for playing the role, stating his casting was insensitive.

The Namesake (Nair, 2006):-

Namesake is adapted from Jhumpa Lahiri's 2008 novel of the same name. The story follows the life of Ashok Ganguli, a first-generation Bengali immigrant. He, along with his son Gogol, moves to the US in search of better opportunities in life. The film explores cultural dislocation, the tension of cultural integration, and the challenges of identity formation within the Indian-American diaspora. Ashoke represents an emotionally restrained man shaped by duty, trauma, and resilience. Ashoke's masculinity is rooted in emotional restraint and familial responsibility. His masculinity is one which prioritizes stoicism and duty over intimacy. His identity is not hyper-masculine but relatively subdued. It is rooted in responsibility and personal sacrifice. Ashoke's character embodies the struggles of the immigrant experience, balancing his traditional values with the challenges of adapting to a new culture. While he

is portrayed with respect, he is not framed through the lens of sexual agency or physical assertiveness. Ashoke's son Gogol struggles with his ethnic identity and frequently feels torn between the Bengali customs of his Indian heritage and the American culture around him, also feeling ashamed by his Indian name. While Gogol has a romantic arc in the film, these relationships are shaped by tension about his perceived cultural differences and cultural baggage. The Namesake offers one of the more multidimensional representations of Indian men in Hollywood; they still exist outside the hegemonic masculinity. Ashoke's masculinity is gentle and stoic, lacking the physical dominance or sexual charisma associated with dominant Western male archetypes. Gogol's struggles throughout the film show how Indian men, even when assimilated, continue to remain "othered". Both characters fall outside Hollywood's dominant ideal. Neither is physically imposing nor sexually valorized. Their masculinity is defined by internal conflict, emotional restraint and social marginality. This representation fits well in the context of Connell's framework of marginalized masculinity, where men of colour are given only partial inclusion but are still denied full access to hegemonic ideals of power, desirability, and normative masculinity. The Namesake presents a shift from a stereotypical caricature to more complex, human portrayals, but the men still remain essentially positioned outside the sexualized, dominant framework of hegemonic masculinity.

Slumdog Millionaire (Boyle, 2008):-

The film is set in India and primarily casts Indian actors. The main protagonist, Jamal, is played by actor Dev Patel. Jamal resides in the slums of Mumbai with his brother Salim. They live a poverty-stricken life and turn to begging and crime. Jamal gets a chance to be a contestant in a popular TV show, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, where he gets a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to turn his life around by winning a huge cash prize. The film centres around Jamal's resilience and romantic devotion to his love interest Latika; he is portrayed as innocent, passive, and emotionally driven. Although Jamal is positioned as the romantic lead, his desire is framed as more of an emotional longing than a sexual agency. His love for Latika is portrayed as pure and chaste, almost childlike. It is devoid of erotic complexity. Jamal's love interest, Latika, also serves as a symbol or object of rescue rather than an autonomous partner. Such a depiction of a relational dynamic also reinforces a pattern where Indian men in Hollywood are permitted romantic narratives only when they conform to submissive, emotionally vulnerable, or morally pure masculinities. Despite being the film's protagonist, Jamal is denied the characteristics of physical dominance, assertiveness, or erotic charisma. This fits well with Connell's theory of marginalized masculinities. While the film humanizes its protagonist, it also perpetuates a limited and desexualized framing of Indian masculinity, one that fits the Western gaze's preference for docile and pitiable brown bodies over powerful and sexually assertive ones.

The Hundred-Foot Journey (Hallström, 2014):-

The Hundred-Foot Journey offers a rare portrayal of an Indian Male character who is both central to the film's narrative and also granted a romantic and professional agency. The protagonist, Hassan Kadam, is played by Manish Dayal. Hassan relocates to rural France with his family following a traumatic experience in India. In France, he meets his culinary rival Mirren, who owns a French restaurant beside his. Initially adversarial due to the competitive nature of their restaurants, their dynamic evolves into a mentor-mentee relationship. The characters begin to bridge the cultural gap and eventually develop a romantic relationship, culminating in a kiss on-screen. Their romance is portrayed with tenderness, mutual respect, and visible on-screen intimacy. This shows a notable departure from the desexualized representations typically assigned to Indian men in Hollywood. Hassan's character embodies traits of self-confidence, ambition, and sensitivity. Unlike earlier depictions of Indian men as being nerds, asexual, or subservient, Hassan is charismatic and skilled; he is shown as sexually desirable without being reduced to a stereotype. Although he does not fit into the mould of the hyper-masculine Hollywood action hero, Hassan asserts a soft masculinity that is both modern and multidimensional. The Hundred-Foot Journey signals a subtle shift in the Hollywood gaze, suggesting the possibility of a more empowered and complex representation of Indian men on screen.

The Life of Pi (Lee, 2012):-

Suraj Sharma plays the titular character Pi. The Indian boy is characterized as being deeply spiritual and intelligent. Raised in a multicultural environment, Pi is introduced to multiple religions. The plot revolves around Pi's struggle as he embarks on a life-changing journey of survival and self-discovery. After a shipwreck leaves Pi adrift on a small boat in the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger. The film's focus is on themes of faith, imagination, and endurance. The film places Pi within a metaphorical and philosophical framework rather than one grounded in physical action or romantic plot. Pi's journey is internal. The film emphasizes emotional and spiritual growth rather than external demonstrations of masculine power. Pi is not positioned as a romantic or sexual object. This deviates from the typical Western coming-of-age narrative where adolescents experience sexual awakening or romantic

entanglement. Pi's journey is devoid of such elements. His masculinity is depicted as introspective, empathetic, and emotionally complex, qualities which are often feminized or marginalized within the hegemonic framework.

The Gray Man (Russo and Russo, 2022):-

The Gray Man is an action thriller in which VenkateshPrabhuKasthuri Raja, professionally known as Dhanush, plays "Wolf," a skilled mercenary. Wolf's character is notable for traits such as combat expertise, discipline, and honourable conduct. These are traits typically associated with masculinity in the action genre. It is a rare departure from Hollywood's traditional depiction of Indian men. As a Lone Wolf, the character is portrayed as physically dominant, poised, and formidable. He also manages to defeat the film's main protagonist, played by Ryan Gosling, in hand-to-hand combat. Lone Wolf possesses many traits aligned with hegemonic masculinity—strength, stoicism, and martial prowess—but he is narratively marginal, with minimal backstory. His purpose in the film is functional: to serve as a stylish, exotic obstacle for the protagonist. From the perspective of Connell's theory, Wolf occupies a hybrid position. He is temporarily aligned with hegemonic masculinity through his competence and physical dominance, but still remains marginalized in racial narrative terms. At the end, the world is yet another hurdle for the white protagonist to defeat and become a hero. His presence marks progress in the physical representation of Indian masculinity, although there is a lack of focus on sexual desirability, keeping him out of the hegemonic core.

Monkey Man (Patel, 2024):-

Dev Patel made his debut feature film release with *Monkey Man*, which he directed. He also starred as the main protagonist in the film. It marks a striking departure from Hollywood's historical portrayal of Indian men as passive, desexualized, or peripheral. In *Monkey Man*, Patel plays Kid, a vengeful underground fighter navigating a violent criminal underworld. The film incorporates Indian mythology, political commentary, and Western action aesthetics to create a protagonist who is muscular, aggressive, emotionally intense, and physically dominant—traits traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity. Compared to earlier depictions of Indian men, who are usually emasculated or sidelined, *Monkey Man* offers a rare instance in which an Indian man occupies the whole narrative, physical, and emotional space of a traditional action hero. Kid is strong and motivated, driven by trauma, grief, and righteous anger. His body is glamorized through combat and cinematic framing, aligning with popular action heroes such as Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* (2006). While examining through Connell's lens, Kid challenges the historical positioning of Indian men within marginalized masculinity. He is central to the film's plot, desiring, aggressive, and sexually viable. The film signals an important cultural shift by showing that Indian male characters can now anchor Western action films without being reduced to comic relief, passive intellects, or background stereotypes. However, it is important to point out that Hollywood's traditional power structure did not initiate this significant transformation; rather, it was an Indian-origin filmmaker himself. Dev Patel takes a big step in suggesting that genuine representational change often comes from within the marginalized community. This also shows that for Indian men to be portrayed with depth, power, and sexual agency in Western media, it frequently requires Indian storytellers to take authorship of the narrative.

Early Depictions and Contemporary Shifts in Indian Masculinity:-

Connell's writing on hegemonic masculinity is crucial in understanding the structured absence and distortion when it comes to the depiction of masculinity of Indian men in Hollywood. Hegemonic masculinity is not simply about dominant traits attributed as masculine; it is about the position of power upheld through the subordination of alternative masculinities. These subordinated forms may include those influenced by race, ethnicity, class or sexuality. In Hollywood, Indian masculinity stands in contrast to the dominant model of masculinity, not because Indian men are one-dimensional or lack agency inherently. However, they are instead deliberately situated within a cinematic logic that upholds Hollywood's idealized masculinity as the default. The analysis of Hollywood films across nearly a century reveals persistent patterns in the representation of Indian men as marginalized, desexualized, and subordinate to the hegemonic norms of their Western counterparts. The analysis shows how Indian men are portrayed in Hollywood cinema from the early days of the industry to the present day. In early films such as *Gunga Din* (1939), the Indian character Din can be viewed through a postcolonial lens. The film is adapted from a poem by the same name written by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling worked in India during the British occupation. Americans were first exposed to Indian men as servants to the British when the East India Company brought enslaved Indians to the US. The preconceived notion that Indians were servants of Englishmen was prevalent in early Hollywood cinema. In Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*, also based on a book by Kipling of the same name, the main character Mowgli is still seen from a postcolonial perspective as an exotic "noble savage", a trope in Western literature and film that romanticises non-Western cultures. This depiction contrasts the primal purity associated with living in harmony with nature with the perceived corruption of civilisation. Indian male characters were portrayed as either loyal colonial subjects or primal innocents. Following World-War II, the US allowed Indian Immigrants to settle in America and

become American citizens following the Luce–Celler Act of 1946. Indian immigrants began assimilating into urban life, but were still seen as outsiders. In *The Party* (1968), we see the Indian character Bakshi, utterly devoid of Western social etiquette, trying to fit in among the Americans. Indian men in Hollywood were devoid of autonomy, complexity, or erotic presence. These roles fit Connell’s concept of marginalized masculinity, where men of colour are subordinated within Hollywood’s hierarchies of race, gender, and power. As Indian immigrants in America began seeking higher education, many ventured into the sciences and IT. According to Kendall (1999), a "nerd" is typically seen as an asexual, high achiever in school particularly in math and science, highly skilled with computers, and has a high IQ, but who is also socially awkward, collects knowledge-related items, particularly computers, enjoys science fiction, has poor personal hygiene, wears haphazard clothing and places an emphasis on functionality rather than sentimental and sensual décor. Jocks, unlike nerds, are portrayed as popular and athletic. The "jocks vs. nerds" stereotype has its roots in traditional notions of identity, social order, and high school groupings. It presents two groups with radically different traits. Jocks are typically portrayed as sexually attractive and incredibly self-assured. Their popularity and athleticism let them approach love and sexual endeavours with confidence and perhaps aggression. Conversely, nerds are sometimes depicted as sexually inexperienced, awkward, or even ugly, which serves to further marginalise them in the social hierarchy of high school or college. While Indian nerds in Hollywood are never in short supply, as seen in the example above in *Short Circuit*, Fisher Stevens plays Ben Jabituya, an Indian scientist and engineer in brownface; he is portrayed with a stereotypical "nerdy" personality, complete with an Indian accent.

The complicated intergroup interactions between sex, gender, sexuality, race, religion, coloniality, and class are exemplified by their marginalization as nerds. In addition to heavy, hazardous, filthy, skilful, and fascinating labour, hegemonic masculinity is linked to mobile and/or moving equipment, such as fighter jets, aircraft carriers, tanks, lathes, and welding torches. Light, less hazardous, clean, dull, and unskilled labour with stationary equipment, such as calculators, copiers, fax machines, and telephones, is linked to emphasized femininity (Game & Pringle, 1984). The "Indian-ness" of the characters was caricatured to show them as being alien and different, and always as something to be made fun of. To be an Indian character on screen meant adopting stereotypical Indian accents and mannerisms. These characters were usually, if not always, very shy, timid, and unconfident. They were rarely depicted as being sexually motivated or desirable. These characters were mostly one-dimensional. The 21st century marked a gradual shift toward more nuanced portrayals, driven by globalization and increasing cross-cultural awareness, as a result of mass adoption of internet technologies. The Indian characters on the screen began to have more nuanced personalities, rather than just another stereotypical Indian character thrown into the film for amusement. These changes can be seen in films such as *The Namesake* (2006), *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014), and *The Life of Pi* (2012).

In recent years, there have been few attempts to put Indian characters in high-stakes action scenarios, such as in *Extraction* (2021) and *Monkey Man* (2024). Gupta (2016) discusses the increase in the presence of Indian-American characters on American television, attributing it to societal shifts in the U.S., growing ethnic diversity, and the global expansion of the market for American TV Programs, suggesting a future with more nuanced and realistic depictions of Indian Americans on television. It should be noted that this pattern of marginalisation and desexualisation of Indian masculinity is not confined to Hollywood films but also to American Television. Characters such as Apu Nahasapeemapetilon in *The Simpsons*, Baljeet in *Phineas and Ferb*, and Raj Koothrappali in *The Big Bang Theory* and many other television shows typify the recurring trope: the Indian man as socially awkward, asexual, comical, and culturally alien. These characters are rarely given romantic or sexual plots, and when they are, it is often played for humour or discomfort. Just like their cinematic counterparts, these characters reinforce the emasculated masculinity of Indian men.

Davé (2013) and Gottschlich (2015) analyse popular Television shows such as *The Simpsons*, *ER*, *Numb3rs*, discussing how the Indian American Characters in these series reflect a broader stereotype, including the "model minority" myth, that often depict Indian men as highly educated and successful but also reinforce narrow, limiting views of their identity. The consistency of such tropes across media formats highlights the structural nature of the issue and emphasises a need for a broader re-evaluation of the framing of Indian men in global pop culture. These patterns also support Connell’s idea that hegemonic masculinity is shaped by history and culture. What counts as the "ideal" form of masculinity is not something fixed or natural. Instead, it is kept in place through media, social institutions, and repeated portrayals. Hollywood, being the most influential film industry in the world, not only shows images of masculinity but also plays an active role in creating and controlling its boundaries. This study highlights how Indian masculinity in Hollywood is not only pushed to the margins but is also deliberately

constructed. The analysis exposes the lack of proper representation and shows how Western media continue to promote racial and hierarchical versions of masculinity through repetition and omission.

Conclusion:-

While there is considerable improvement that can be seen in the portrayal of Indian men in Hollywood cinema, especially in the 21st century, the legacy of marginalisation, emasculation, and desexualisation remains deeply embedded. Indian masculinity has long been cast as subordinate to dominant Hollywood's masculine ideals. Even when Indian characters are granted complexity or romantic arcs, as seen in *The Namesake* or *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, they are rarely allowed the erotic or physical agency to a similar level that is afforded to Western male leads.

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity shows the structural nature of this marginalization. Indian men in Hollywood are systematically positioned as outsiders to dominant masculinity, ceded as passive, awkward, overly spiritual, or emotionally sensitive rather than sexually viable or physically commanding. In contrast, many Hollywood leads, such as James Bond, Frank Martin, and Tyler Durden, to name a few, ooze sex appeal with their body sexualized and glorified on the screen. Indian men in Hollywood are never portrayed in this way. As opposed to Indian men, Indian women are often fetishized and sexualized in Hollywood. This absence is all the more striking when contrasted with Indian cinema, where Indian male actors such as Shah Rukh Khan, HrithikRoshan, or John Abraham routinely embody sexualized, heroic, and emotionally rich masculinities. Thus showing that the issue is not about cultural incapacity but cinematic framing. Indian men are not inherently unfit for such characters; they are simply excluded from such roles in Hollywood. Indian men are mostly seen playing characters that are effeminate and non-threatening. Hollywood action stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone can be seen as heroes in violent, sexual, muscular, and physical ways. They serve as a role model for action-hero aspirants. Smaller and physically weaker men and women, homosexuals, and those from the third world, all of these variations are subjected to domination by physical strength and size, if not outright violence. (Cheng, 1999). There is no Indian character equivalent to Rambo and the likes in Hollywood cinema.

Balaji (2007) points out that Indian masculinity in global media is frequently filtered via a neoliberal, Western gaze. Such depiction flattens complexity in favour of marketable, sanitized Identities. While this reflects Connell's premise of marginalized masculinities, it also introduces a consumerist layer, where the Indian masculinity is made to fit in contrast with the dominant narratives. Hollywood's depiction of Indian men shows the process of global negotiations, how certain masculinities are exported while others are made invisible. Over the years, improvements have been made regarding the depiction of Indian men in Hollywood cinema, but there is still a long way to go. Indian men do not yet appear in hyper-masculine roles that live up to the hegemonic ideals of masculinity set by Hollywood's standards. Recent films such as *Monkey Man* challenge the status quo, but as the paper argues, such portrayals remain rare and are often authored by Indian creators themselves. Thus suggesting that representational equity still requires reclaiming narrative power from within the margins. Indian men are rarely shown in hyper-masculine roles that match Hollywood's dominant ideals of masculinity. They are seldom or, if at all, portrayed as sexually viable and desirable in the same way as their Western counterparts. Such portrayals can strongly influence how society views Indian men, particularly given Hollywood's worldwide reach. Hollywood continues to influence how people around the world see race, gender, and attractiveness. Absolute equality in representation will remain out of reach until Indian men are shown not only as intellectuals or supporting characters, but also as complete romantic and heroic leads with their own agency, depth, and desirability.

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