# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INDIAN CINEMA:
# A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TOP BOLLYWOOD MOVIES OF 2015

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## Abstract

*The influence of cinema in our lives is inevitable. It reflects on our lifestyle and society to a great extent. It won't be incorrect to say that women's projection in cinema depicts a lot about women's real life situation. This paper, therefore, attempts to identify the portrayal of women empowerment as projected in Indian Cinema. For the same, content analysis method has been adopted on highest grossing films of 2015. Four films, namely Bajrangi Bhaijaan, Prem Ratan Dhan Payo, Dilwale and Bajirao Mastani were studied.*

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Indian Cinema, Bollywood Films,  Bollywood Women Empowerment in Cinema

## Introduction

Feminist Theorists have been raising their voice, for centuries, on the importance of women empowerment. Cinema being one of the most influential form of communication, persuasion and motivation, has often been used as a platform to raise women issues. How women are represented through cinema remains an important area of concern. Women empowerment includes women's power relationships in family and leadership qualities. It is the belief that women have great potential and are better organized, both physically and mentally. Women's security, decision-making power, and mobility are three indicators for women's empowerment. In India, and more so for rural and less educated women, these three indicators are significantly low. Following are the Beijing conference 1995 indicators of women empowerment (Pandey*et. al.* 2016):

1.  Increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;

2.  Increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;

3.  Increase an decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care;

4.  Increase on decrease of work loads in new programmes;

5.  Change in roles and responsibility in family & community;

6.  Visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;

7.  Responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;

8.  Visible changes in women's participation level attending meeting, participating and demanding participation;

9.  Increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;

10. Increase access to and ability to gather information;

11. Formation of women collectives;

12. Positive changes in social attitudes;

13. Awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;

14. Women's decision-making over her work and income.

**Review of Literature**

Murphy (2015) revealed that women are seeing greater representation in roles valued for their intelligence, their strength, and their independence more frequently in later films than in earlier films, but that they are still not as well-rounded, or as important, as the men.

Ateya (2015) women' social class, job status, nature of job status, level of education and character traits are being positively depicted in movies than before. More women are depicted with high occupational prestige. Women are now shown as having higher levels of education, such as university and post-graduate degrees and fewer women are depicted as illiterate.

Ali, Khan and Ali (2014) studied women portrayal in Pakistani films (1988-1999) and identified that Pakistani films don't reflect the true essence of women in Pakistan and rather depicts women in a negative sense. Moreover women issues are not addressed and women roles are majorly based on assumptions

Sowmya Nanda kumar (2012) the research on the Stereotypical Portrayal of Women in Commercial Cinema, conducted content analysis of highest grossing all time blockbuster hit film all the time. In conclusion this work found women in various forms in Indian cinema in stereotypic roles.

**Objective and Methodology**

**Broad Objective**

The broad objective of this study is to analyze women empowerment through Top Bollywood Movies of 2015
Specific objectives

- To identify the total number of women in lead role, supporting role and minor roles in Top Bollywood Movies of 2015.
- To study the manner of presentation of women in Top Bollywood Movies of 2015.
- To explore the dimensions of women characters Top Bollywood Movies of 2015.

**Methodology**

The research method used for this study is Content Analysis of Top Bollywood Movies of 2015. Content Analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger 1986)

**Universe**: The universe selected for the research study is Bollywood films for content analysis.

**Sample:** The sample selected for content analysis is Top Bollywood Movies of 2015. These films are:
Bajrangi Bhaijaan, Baahubali: The Beginning, Prem Ratan Dhan Payo, Dilwale and Bajirao Mastani

**Research Tools -** Codebook, Code sheet, Statistical Tool SPSS, MS Excel etc.

**Tabulation and Analysis**

Table1:  Genre and Duration of Movies

| Name of the Movie | Genre | Duration (minutes) | Women Centric |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | Emotional Drama | 159 | No |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | Romantic Drama | 164 | No |
| Dilwale | Romantic Action Drama | 154 | No |
| Bajirao Mastani | Epic Historical Romance | 158 | No |

Table1 demonstrates the genre and duration of top bollywood movies of 2015. It is identified that out of the four selected movies, three movies (i.e. Prem Ratan Dhan Payo, Dilwale and  Bajirao Mastani) are centered on the theme of romance. Bajrangi Bhaijan which was the highest grossing is a dramatic movie without focusing on romance. Out of all four movies, none of the movie is centered on women.

Table 2: Total Women in Different Roles

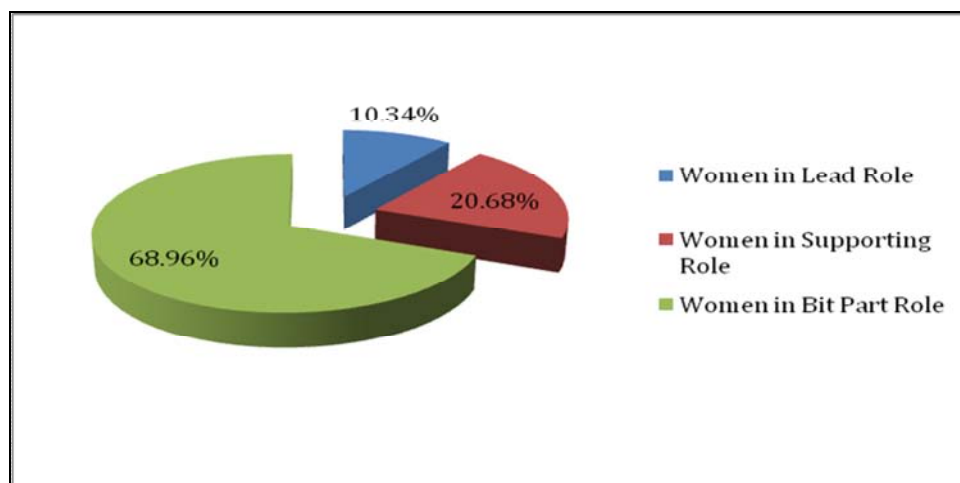| Name of the Movie | No of women in Lead Role | No of women in Supporting Role | No of women in Bit Part Role |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Dilwale | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Bajirao Mastani | 1 | 3 | 5 |



Fig.1: Women in Different Roles

Table 2 and Fig. 1 elaborate the projection of women in various roles. In the four selected movies, a total of 29 women characters have been identified in three roles i.e. in Lead Role, Supporting Role and Bit Part Role. Those actors have been considered in Bit Part role who didn't have more than 5-7 dialogues in the film. It is identified that maximum proportion of women (68.96%) have been shown in bit part roles. 6 out of the total 29 (20.68%) women characters are projected in supporting roles. Three out of the four movies have projected women in lead roles. It is noteworthy here that all four movies showcase male character in lead roles but three movies showcase females in lead role.

Table 3: Portrayed Social Class of women in movies

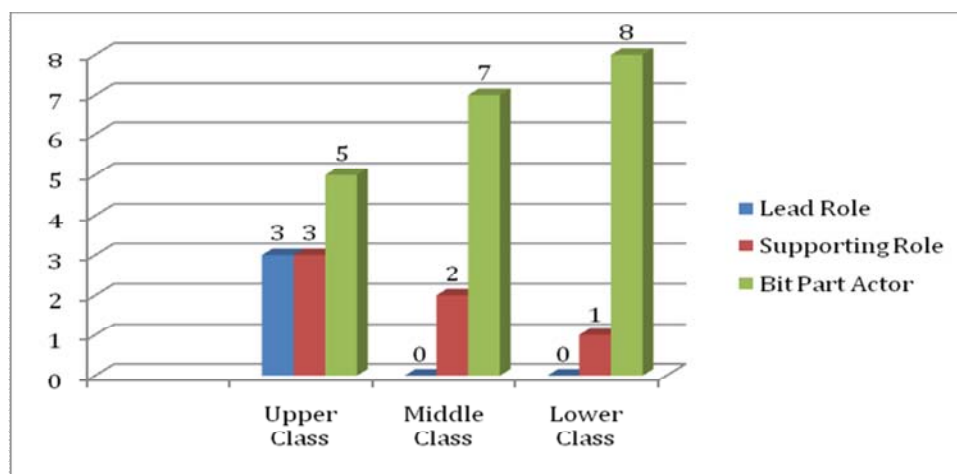| Name of the Movie | Lead Role | Supporting Role | Bit Part Actor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | | | |
| Upper Class | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Middle Class | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Lower Class | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | | | |
| Upper Class | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Middle Class | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Lower Class | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Dilwale | | | |
| Upper Class | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Middle Class | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Lower Class | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Bajirao Mastani | | | |
| Upper Class | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Middle Class | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lower Class | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 1 | 3 | 5 |



Fig. 2: Portrayed Social Class of women in movies

Table 3 and Fig.2 describes the social class of women in various roles. It is identified that all women characters in lead roles belong to upper class. On the other hand, comparatively very less proportion of women in supporting role and bit part role are shown as belonging to upper class. Subsequently, 2 (6.8%) women characters in supporting role and 7

(24.1%) women characters in bit part role belong to middle class. Lastly, 1 (3.4%) women character in supporting role and 8 (27.5%) out of the total women characters in bit part roles are in lower class.

Table 4: Portrayed Age of women in movies

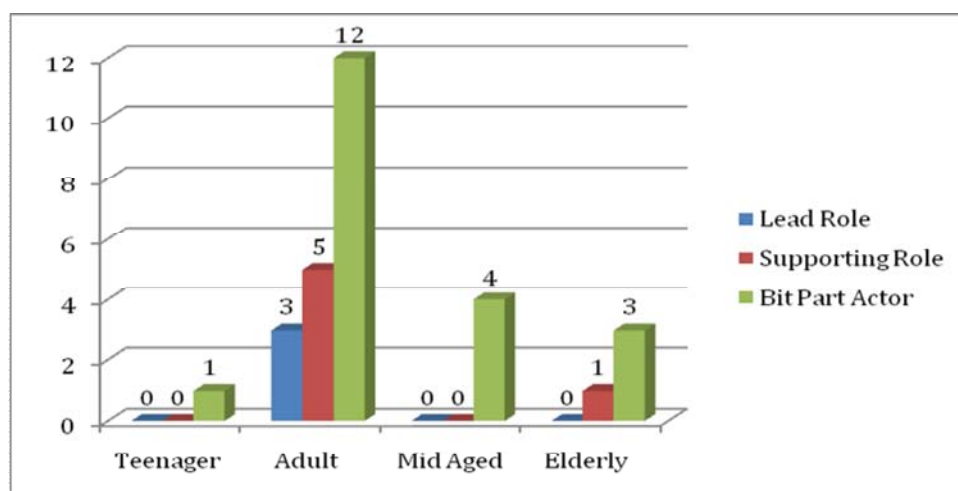| Name of the Movie | Lead Role | Supporting Role | Bit Part Actor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | | | |
| Adult | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Mid Aged | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Elderly | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | | | |
| Teenager | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Adult | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Mid Aged | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Elderly | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Dilwale | | | |
| Adult | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Mid Aged | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Elderly | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Bajirao Mastani | | | |
| Adult | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Mid Aged | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Elderly | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 1 | 3 | 5 |



Fig. 3: Portrayed Age of women in movies

Table 4 and Fig. 3 elaborate the age group of women in movies. It is identified that the maximum women 20 (68.9%) displayed in these movies are shown as adults. This is followed by 4 (13.7%) characters depicting mid-aged women and 4 (13.7%) characters depicting elderly women. It is identified that only 1 (3.4%) character is shown as that of a teenager.

Table 5: Relationship Status of women portrayed in movies

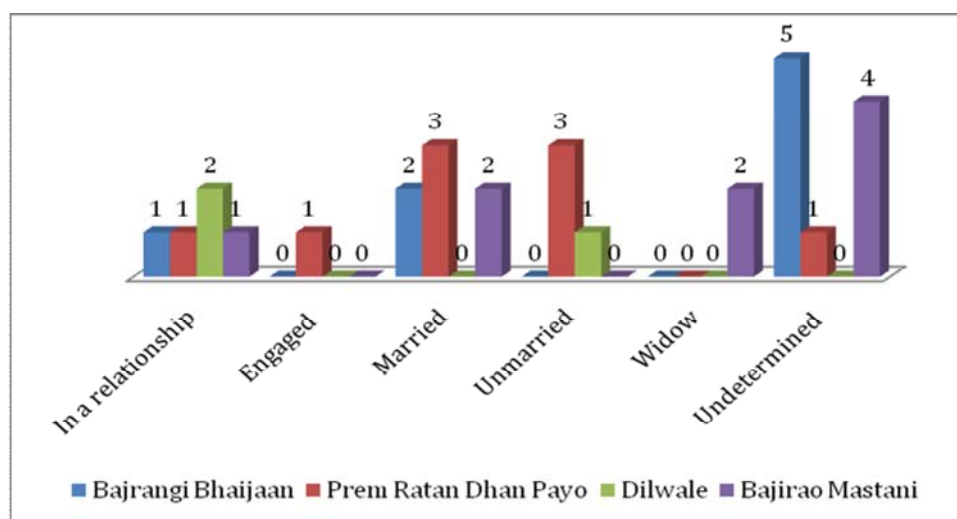| Movie | In a relationship | Engaged | Married | Unmarried | Widow | Undetermined |
|-------|-------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-------|--------------|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Dilwale | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Bajirao Mastani | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |



Fig. 4: Relationship Status of women portrayed in movies

Table 5 and Fig. 4 depict the relationship status of women portrayed in the movies. It is identified that the relationship status of maximum women 10 (34.4%) are undetermined in these movies. This is followed by 7 (24.1%) women who are shown as married in the movies. Apart from this, 5 (17.2%) women are shown in a relationship, 4 (13.7%) women are shown unmarried, 2 (6.8%) are shown as widow and 1 (3.4%) is shown engaged.

Table 6: Dress Sense of woman portrayed in movies

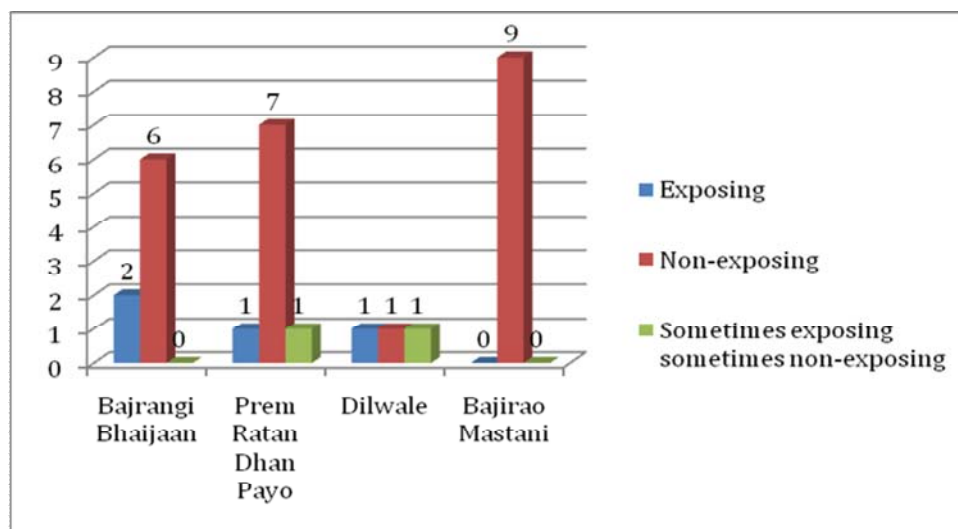| Costume | Exposing | Non-exposing | Sometimes exposing sometimes non-exposing |
|---------|----------|--------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | 1 | 7 | 1 |
| Dilwale | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Bajirao Mastani | 0 | 9 | 0 |

Fig. 5: Dress Sense of women portrayed in movies

Table 6 and Fig. 5 elaborate the dress sense of women portrayed in top bollywood movies of 2015. It is noteworthy that a very high proportion of women 23 (79.3%) are portrayed in non-exposing dresses. Out of the total, only 4 (13.7%) women are portrayed through exposing dresses and 2 (6.8%) are shown in both exposing and non-exposing dresses.

Table 7. Make-up  of women portrayed in movies

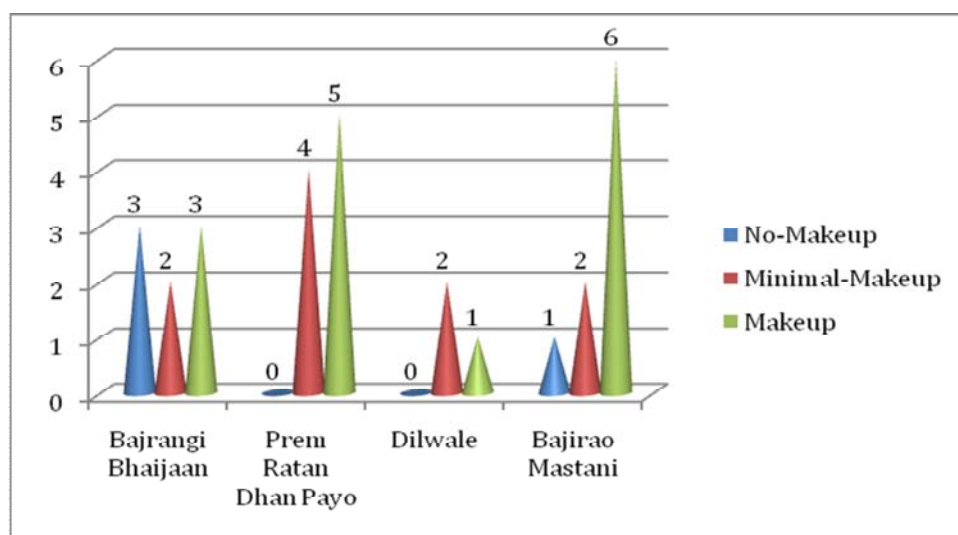| Movie | No-Makeup | Minimal-Makeup | Makeup |
|-------|-----------|----------------|--------|
| BajrangiBhaijaan | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| PremRatanDhanPayo | 0 | 4 | 5 |
| Dilwale | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| BajiraoMastani | 1 | 2 | 6 |



Fig. 6: Make-up of women portrayed in movies

Table 7 and Fig. 6 demonstrate the make-up of women in top bollywood movies of 2015. It shows that maximum women characters 15 (51.7%) have applied make-up in the movies.  However, a considerable proportion 34.4% is seen in minimal make-up. Only 4 (13.7%) characters are seen without make-up in the movies.

Table 8: Role portrayed in Personal Life

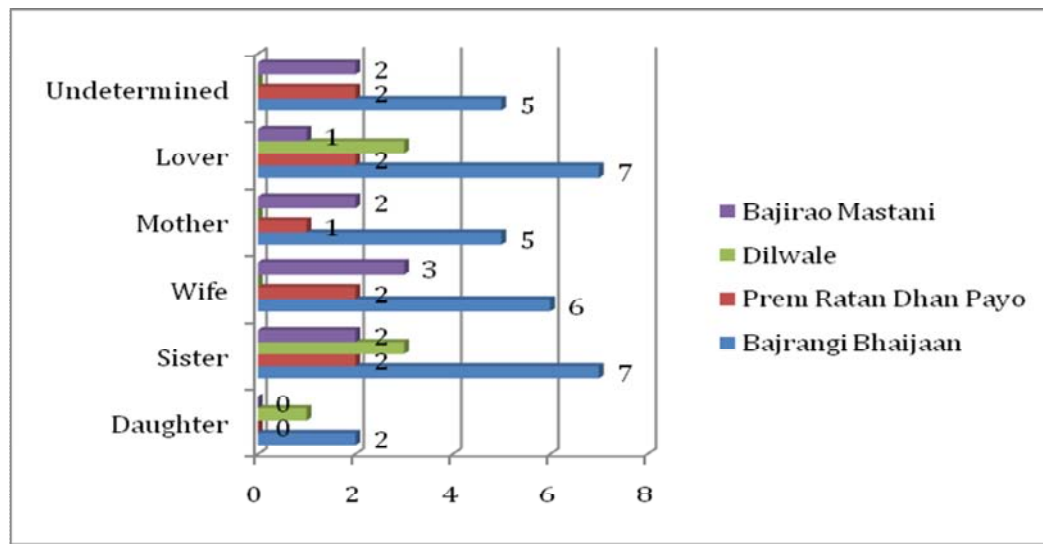| Movie | Daughter | Sister | Wife | Mother | Lover | Undetermined |
|-------|----------|--------|------|--------|-------|--------------|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Dilwale | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Bajirao Mastani | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |



Fig. 7: Role portrayed in Personal Life

Table 8 and Fig. 7 highlight the role portrayal of women in personal life. The female characters are seen playing the role of a daughter, sister, wife, mother and lover. An overlapping of roles have been also identified for instance one female character (Rasika of Bajrangi Bhaijan) was seen playing the role of daughter as well as of a lover.

Table 9: Role portrayed in Professional Life

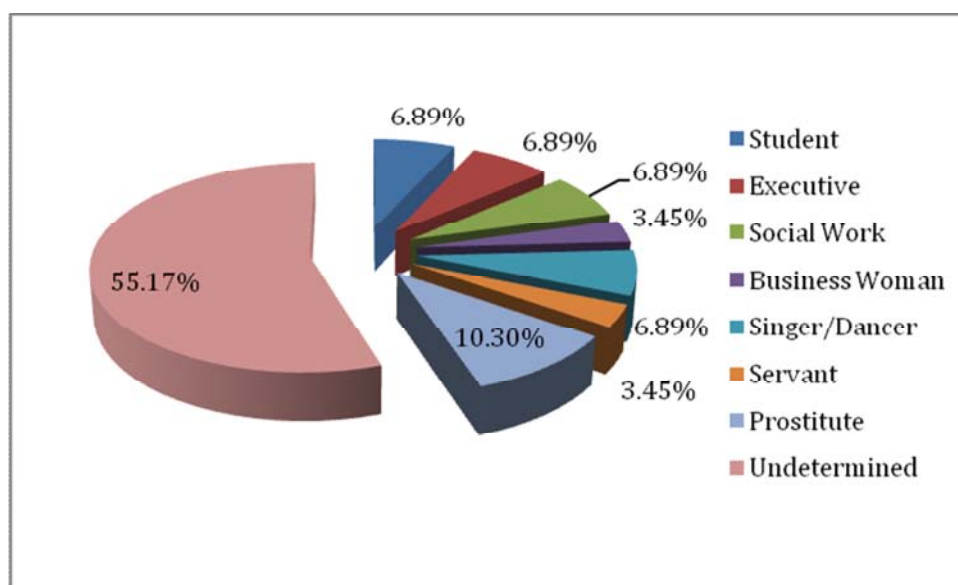| Movie | Student | Executive | Social Work | Business Woman | Singer/Dancer | Servant | Prostitute | Undetermined |
|-------|---------|-----------|-------------|----------------|---------------|---------|------------|--------------|
| Bajrangi Bhaijaan | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Dilwale | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Bajirao Mastani | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | | 7 |

Fig. 8: Role portrayed in Professional Life

Table 9 and Fig. 8 highlight the role portrayal of women in professional life. The various roles portrayed by women in professional life are that of a student, executive, social worker, business woman, singer, dancer, servant and prostitute. It is noteworthy that only one negative profession came into light after performing the analysis of top Bollywood movies of 2015.

Table 10: Indicators of Women Empowerment

| Indicators | Bajrangi Bhaijaan | Prem Ratan Dhan Payo | Dilwale | Bajirao Mastani |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self Confidence | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Knowledge and Awareness | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Time for Child Care | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Taking Responsibility of Family | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Taking Responsibility of community | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Active participation in social change | 0 | 2 | 0 | |
| Increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Increase access to and ability to gather information | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Formation of women collectives | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Decision-making over her work and income | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
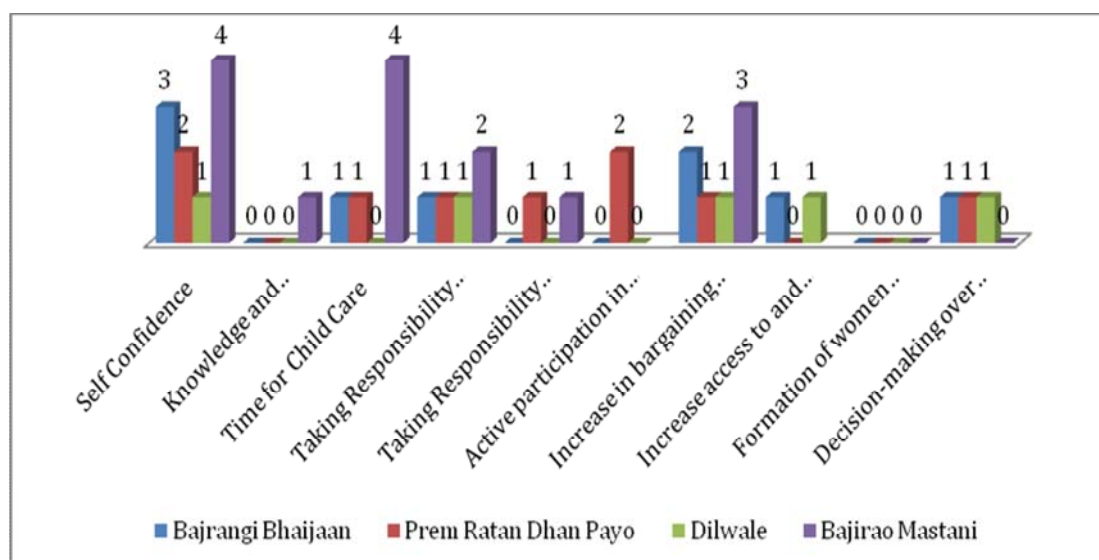
Fig. 9: Indicators of Women Empowerment

Table 10 and Fig. 9 throw light on the women empowering representation. It is noteworthy here that the top Bollywoodmoviesof 2015 depicts women in empowering roles in one way or the other. For instance, Maithili, the lead character of Prem Ratan Dhan Payo is shown as taking responsibility of community and actively participating for social welfare. Similarly, Mastani of Bajirao Mastani is shown as a bold woman who doesn't hesitate to fight for her family and community. Rasika of Bajrangi Bhaijaan represents amazing self confidence and sets example for negotiating power at home. MeeraDev Malik of Dilwale displays empowerment by taking care of her family and decision making over her work and income. Thus it won't be incorrect to state that all top bollywood movies of 2015 depicts women empowerment in one way or the other.

**Findings**

- It is identified that none of the top Bollywood movies (selected highest grossing) is centered on women.
- It is important to note that that all four movies showcase male character in lead roles but only three movies showcase females in lead role.
- An association between women in lead roles and upper class projection has been identified which, in a way, sidelines the capability of women of middle class.
- It is identified that the maximum proportion of women displayed in these movies are shown as adults.
- While the relationship status of a significant proportion of females remain undisclosed, almost all real-life relationship status are touched upon like that of one being married, unmarried, engaged and widow.
- It is noteworthy that a very high proportion of women are portrayed in non-exposing dresses.
- Women in these movies are shown as conscious of self as most of them are seen in full and minimal make-up.
- The female characters are seen playing the role of a daughter, sister, wife, mother and lover.
- The various roles portrayed by women in professional life are that of a student, executive, social worker, business woman, singer, dancer, servant and prostitute.
- All top Bollywood movies of 2015 depicts women empowerment in one way or the other.

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