

## Redefining Masculinity: A Critical Analysis of Pankaj Tripathi's Cinematic Representations in Contemporary Bollywood

Ms. Ifa Qazi<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Madhu Pandey<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This research seeks to explore the concept of masculinity through Pankaj Tripathi's character portrayals in Hindi cinemas. His roles redefine traditional masculinity by presenting emotional and empathetic male characters. The analysis was done by examining the dialogues delivered by him in the selected movies *Bareilly ki Barfi*, *Mimi*, *Stree*, and *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* between 2017 to 2021 years' time period. The study further analysed his dialogues and roles using thematic analysis in which the identified themes were further understood through social learning theory and gender role strain theory. The research was also additionally interpreted through experts to deepen the understanding of the themes and pattern of redefined patterns of masculinity through Bollywood movies.

**Keywords:** *Masculinity, Indian Cinema, Bollywood, Gender Roles*

**M**asculinity refers to the socially constructed attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with being a man. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity describes the dominant, idealized form of masculinity in each society that subordinates other masculinities and femininities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). However, masculinity is not a fixed entity but a fluid, plural, and context-dependent construct. Multiple masculinities can coexist, shaped by factors like class, race, culture and sexuality. Traditional norms of masculinity in India emphasize traits like strength, aggression, stoicism, and sexual prowess (Dasgupta & Gokulsing, 2014). Men are expected to be breadwinners, protectors, and authority figures in the family and society. However, these rigid gender roles are being challenged by contemporary realities. Socio-economic changes, feminist movements, and media representations are redefining acceptable ways of being a man. Emergent masculinities embrace qualities like emotional sensitivity, domesticity, and respect for women's autonomy.

Psychological research sheds light on the development and consequences of masculine gender norms. Social learning theory posits that children learn gender roles through observing and imitating same-sex models (Bandura, 1977). Psychoanalytic theories suggest that boys forge masculine identities by repressing feminine traits and identifying with the father figure (Chodorow, 1978). However, strict adherence to traditional masculinity can have negative psychological outcomes. Gender role strain occurs when men struggle to live

<sup>1</sup>Student, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Lucknow Campus

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Lucknow Campus

\*Corresponding Author

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up to societal expectations of manhood (Pleck, 1995). Conformity to certain masculine norms is linked to aggression, risk-taking, and poor mental health (Mahalik et al., 2003). Alternatively, androgyny, or the integration of masculine and feminine attributes, is associated with better psychological adjustment. Recent approaches emphasize the diversity and fluidity of masculinities across and within individuals.

### ***Research Objectives***

- To analyse how Pankaj Tripathi's roles challenge redefine masculinity.
- To understand the interpretations of identified themes of redefined masculinity from various experts from different fields.
- To understand the interpretations of identified themes of redefined masculinity using two psychological theories- social learning theory (year) and gender role strain (year).

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research work emphasizes how PT's movie has redefined masculinity in Indian cinemas. To meet the objective total 4 movies from 2017 to year 2021 were selected and analysed. Each selected movie was surveyed by a total number of 10 Psychologists, 10 Sociologists, 10 Anthropologists, 10 Industry Experts, 10 General Public. The present research is based on both qualitative analyses to understand how the masculinity patterns have emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selected movies were further discussed in themes, key dialogues and visual representation of collected data. The participants were purposively selected for the survey, and they were provided with informed consents. In the first part of the analysis the experts have given the rating from 1 to 5 on each selected movie. The participants have to rate on how well the selected movies align with the idea that Pankaj Tripathi's roles in the movies redefine masculinity in Indian cinemas. To survey the people, a self-developed semi-structured questionnaire. The score of 1 denoted strongly disagree, 2 slightly disagree, 3 neutral, 4 slightly agree and 5 denoted strongly agree. Highest score on each movie will be 50 and lowest score on each movie will be 10. The rating scores between 1 to 25 will be least aligned, 26-35 moderately aligned 36-50 perfectly aligned. In the last table with consolidated data the highest score will be 250 and the lowest score will be 50. The rating score of consolidated data is 50-116 not aligned 117-183 as moderately aligned and 184-250 as Strongly aligned. In the second part of the analysis, from 4 movies only 3 dialogues from each movie were selected. The identified themes were understood using psychological theories (Gender Strain theory as well as Social learning theory). **Gender Strain Theory** Pleck (1995) proposed that societal expectations of masculinity create psychological distress in men when they fail to meet traditional gender norms, leading to strain and maladaptive behaviors. **Social Learning Theory** Bandura (1977) argued that individuals learn behaviors, including gender roles, through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from their social environment.

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

1. Pankaj Tripathi's movies were only selected between the year 2017 to 2021.
2. The dialogues which were analysed to identify the themes were only delivered by Pankaj Tripathi only.
3. Only 10 experts from each domain are to be selected for the survey from some parts of Awadh Region (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Ayodhya) and for film critics the participants were selected from Maharashtra (East Mumbai).

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4. Four selected films featuring Pankaj Tripathi were analyzed:

- Bareilly Ki Barfi (2017)
- Stree (2018)
- Gunjan Saxena (2020)
- Mimi (2021)

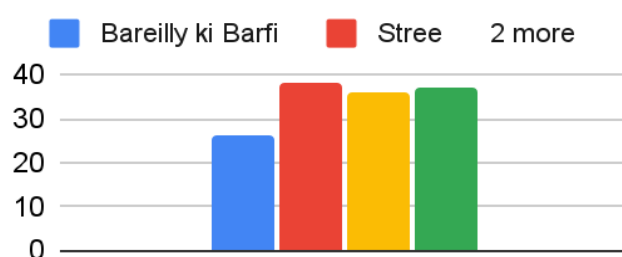
### Exclusion Criteria

1. Movies other than Hindi language were excluded.
2. Series

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

*Table 01: shows the total scores given by each Psychologists on every movie*

| Bareilly ki Barfi | Stree | Gunjan Saxena | Mimi |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|------|
| 26                | 38    | 36            | 37   |

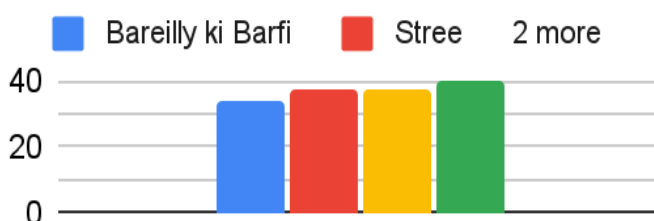


*Figure 1: Shows the bar graph representation of data of table 01.*

The table 01, elicits the survey scores of total 10 Psychologists selected from a few regions of Awadh Region (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Ayodhya). In this table the selected psychologists have rated each movie on 1 to 5 rating scale which means that maximum scores obtained on each movie was to be 50 and minimum was 10. The total obtained score in the movie **Bareilly ki Barfi is 26, Stree is 38, Gunjan Saxena is 36 and Mimi is 37.** With the obtained results it can be understood that psychologists define **Bareilly ki Barfi** as moderately aligned with the idea of redefining masculinity. Psychologists also rate Stree, Gunjan Saxena and Mimi as perfectly aligned with the idea of Pankaj Tripathi's movies and his roles played for redefining masculinity in the Indian cinemas.

*Table 02 shows the total scores given by each Sociologists on every movie*

| Bareilly ki Barfi | Stree | Gunjan Saxena | Mimi |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|------|
| 34                | 37    | 37            | 40   |



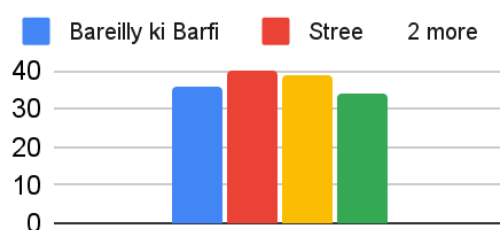
*Figure 02: Showing the bar graph representation of table 02.*

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The table 02, elicits the survey scores of total 10 Sociologists selected from a few regions of Awadh Region (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Ayodhya). In this table the selected psychologists have rated each movie on 1 to 5 rating scale where maximum score to be obtained on each movie was 50 and minimum was 10. The total obtained score in the movie **Bareilly ki Barfi** is 34, **Stree** is 37, **Gunjan Saxena** is 37 and **Mimi** is 40. With the obtained results it can be understood that sociologists define **Bareilly ki barfi** as **moderately aligned** and the other 3 movies as **strongly aligned** with the idea of redefining masculinity from Pankaj Tripathi's movies and his roles played for redefining masculinity in the Indian cinemas.

*Table 03 shows the total scores given by each Student on every movie*

| Bareilly ki Barfi | Stree | Gunjan Saxena | Mimi |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|------|
| 36                | 40    | 39            | 34   |

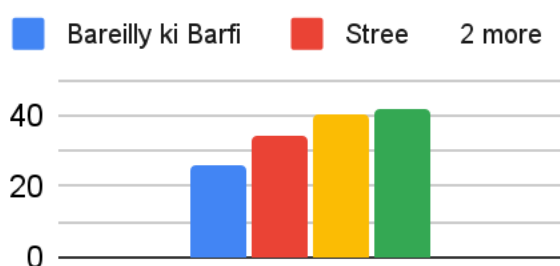


*Figure 03: Showing the bar graph representation of data of table 03.*

The table 3, elicits the survey scores of total 10 Students selected from few regions of Awadh Region (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Ayodhya). In this table the selected students have rated each movie on a scale of 1 to 5 which means the maximum score on each movie was 50 and minimum was 10. The total obtained score in the movies **Bareilly ki Barfi** is 36, **Stree** is 40, **Gunjan Saxena** is 39 and **Mimi** is 34. With the obtained results it can be understood that students define **Bareilly ki Barfi**, **Stree**, **Gunjan Saxena** and **Mimi** as perfectly aligned with the idea of redefining masculinity in Indian cinemas.

*Table 04 shows the total scores given by each Anthropologist on every movie.*

| Bareilly ki Barfi | Stree | Gunjan Saxena | Mimi |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|------|
| 26                | 34    | 40            | 42   |



*Figure 04: Showing the bar graph representation of data of table 04.*

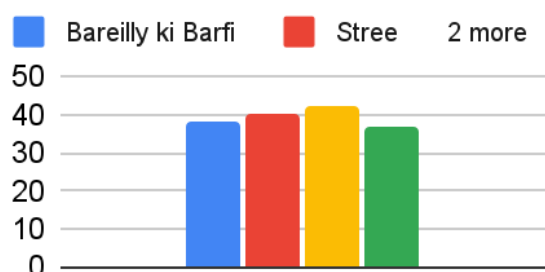
The table 4, elicits the survey scores of total 10 Anthropologists selected from a few regions of Awadh Region (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Ayodhya). In this table the selected Anthropologists rated each movie on a scale of 1 to 5 where the maximum score on each

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movie was 50 and minimum was 10. The total obtained score in the movie **Bareilly ki Barfi** is **26**, **Stree** is **34**, **Gunjan Saxena** is **40** and **Mimi** is **42**. With the obtained results it can be understood that anthropologists define **Bareilly ki Barfi** as **moderately aligned with redefining masculinity** and other chosen movies **Stree**, **Gunjan Saxena** and **Mimi** as **perfectly aligned** with the idea of redefining masculinity in Indian cinemas.

*Table 05 shows the total scores given by each Film industry expert on every movie.*

| Bareilly ki Barfi | Stree | Gunjan Saxena | Mimi |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|------|
| 38                | 40    | 42            | 37   |

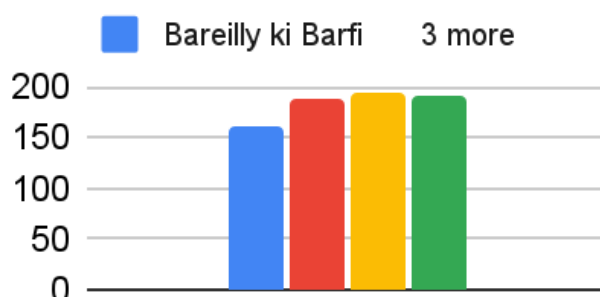


*Figure 05: Showing the bar graph representation of data of table 05.*

The table 5, elicits the survey scores of total 10 Film industry experts (Film Critics, Directors and Actors) selected from East Mumbai. In this table the selected experts have rated each movie on a scale of 1 to 5. Maximum score on each movie was 50 and minimum was 10. The total obtained score in the movie **Bareilly ki Barfi** is **38**, **Stree** is **40**, **Gunjan Saxena** is **42** and **Mimi** is **37**. With the obtained results it can be understood that film industry experts define **Bareilly ki Barfi**, **Stree**, **Gunjan Saxena** and **Mimi** as **perfectly aligned** with the idea of redefining masculinity in Indian cinemas.

*Table 06 shows the total scores of consolidated data of all the above tables on each movie.*

| Bareilly ki Barfi | Stree | Gunjan Saxena | Mimi |
|-------------------|-------|---------------|------|
| 160               | 189   | 194           | 190  |



*Figure 06: Showing the bar graph representation of data of table 06.*

The table 06, elicits the survey scores of total consolidated data from Table 1 till table 5 for all the 4 selected movies Bareilly ki Barfi, Stree, Gunjan Saxena and Mimi. In this table the experts have rated each movie on a scale of 1 to 5. The total obtained score in the movie **Bareilly ki Barfi** is **160**, **Stree** is **189**, **Gunjan Saxena** is **194** and **Mimi** is **190**. Maximum score on each movie was 250 and minimum was 50. With the obtained results it can be

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understood that consolidated data presents **Bareilly ki Barfi** is moderately aligned with the theme redefining masculinity and Stress, Gunjan Saxena and Mimi as perfectly aligned with the idea of redefining masculinity in Indian cinemas through the movies of Pankaj Tripathi.

**Table 07: Elicits the identified themes and psychological understanding of the selected dialogues from the four movies through Gender Strain Theory (1992) and Social Learning Theory (1977).**

| Sr No | Movie Title              | Dialogue  | Psychological Theory   | Thematic Analysis                     |
|-------|--------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1     | Bareilly Ki Barfi (2017) | "Akele rehne ki aadat ho jaaye, toh aadmi zyada ummeed nahi karta."     | Gender Strain Theory (Pressure to conform to masculinity standards)                              | Independence and Emotional Resilience |
|       |                          | "Agar ek ladki apni marzi se jeena chahti hai toh usme bura kya hai?"   | Social Learning Theory (Encouraging equality through modeled behavior)                           | Encouragement of Female Autonomy      |
|       |                          | "Mard woh hota hai jo kisi ladki ki pasand se insecure na ho."          | Gender Strain Theory (Redefining traditional masculinity to reduce strain)                       | Secure and Supportive Masculinity     |
| 2     | Stree                    | "Mard woh hota hai jo raat ko bhi aurat ka samman kare."                | Social Learning Theory (Promoting respectful masculinity through observation)                    | Respectful Masculinity                |
|       |                          | "Darna zaroori nahi, samajhna zaroori hai."                             | Gender Strain Theory (Reducing toxic masculinity pressures by promoting understanding over fear) | Rationality over Fear                 |
|       |                          | "Aurat sirf shakti nahi, sammaan bhi chahti hai."                       | Social Learning Theory (Modeling respectful gender interactions)                                 | Recognition and Respect for Women     |
| 3     | Gunjan Saxena            | "Beta, plane ladka udaye ya ladki, usse pilot hi kehte hain."           | Social Learning Theory (Demonstrating gender equality through supportive role models)            | Gender Neutrality                     |
|       |                          | "Agar sapna dekhne ki himmat hai, toh poora karne ki bhi honi chahiye." | Gender Strain Theory (Challenging restrictive gender expectations through ambition)              | Courage and Willpower                 |

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|   |      |  |   |   |
|---|------|--|---|---|
|   |      | "Jo log darr ke peeche hat jaate hain, woh kabhi jeet nahi paate."                     | Gender Strain Theory (Encouraging overcoming traditional fears associated with gender roles)    | Overcoming Gender-Based Limitations                   |
| 4 | Mimi | "Baap sirf khoon se nahi, soch se bhi banta hai."                                      | Social Learning Theory (Encouraging nurturing behavior in males through positive role modeling) | Redefining Fatherhood                                 |
|   |      | "Bachcha sirf maa ka nahi hota, jo paal pos ke bada kare, woh bhi maa baap hote hain." | Gender Strain Theory (Reducing strain by normalizing nurturing roles for males)                 | Nurturing Masculinity                                 |
|   |      | "Jo rishta ek baar jud jaye, uska koi bhi kaagaz nahi hota."                           | Social Learning Theory (Reinforcing emotional bonds beyond traditional norms)                   | Emotional Bonding and Non-Traditional Family Dynamics |

The table 07 highlights the identified themes derived from Tripathi's movies from the selected movies. The recognized themes are- Independence and Emotional Resilience, Encouragement of Female Autonomy, Secure and Supportive Masculinity, Respectful Masculinity, Rationality over Fear, Recognition and Respect for Women, Gender-Neutral Aspirations, Courage and Willpower, Overcoming Gender-Based Limitations, Redefining Fatherhood, Nurturing Masculinity, Emotional Bonding and Non-Traditional Family Dynamics.

Further, these themes are understood from two psychological theories lens for deeper understanding which are Joseph Pleck's Gender Strain Theory (1981) and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). The GST, emphasises on the psychological challenges confronted by men faced due to unyielded expectations framed by the society which are knotted to the traditional thought of masculinity. Themes like independence, emotional resilience, nurturing masculinity, and courage, as seen in films like *Bareilly Ki Barfi* (2017), which elicits the competition of the gender and endorse helpful within the masculinity roles for the opposite genders. In the similar fashion, *Gunjan Saxena* (2020) underlines the theme of courage and willpower which shows the breaking of the stereotypical thinking for gender-based roles. In another movie *Mimi* (2021) defined that bond of fatherhood beyond the blood relationship and emphasizes on the parents' shared responsibilities. These depictions of Tripathi's characters in various movies echoes liberal and advanced reflection of masculinity which can explicitly reduce the psychological strains created on men's thought process by challenging unbending customs within the society.

Another important lens for reviewing these obtained themes is analysed through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). This theory states that every behaviour is learned by individuals through modelling and observation within the society. The analysed roles can serve as an example for redefined understanding of male patterns. In the movie *Gunjan Saxena* (2020) Tripathi makes an attempt to promote neutrality in genders whereas, in another movie *Stree* (2018) women should be respected under all circumstances and if any



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women have experienced any kind of injustice and offence she should raise voice against such unfairness. Therefore, it is obvious that through the choice of roles Tripathi made it becomes very apparent that masculinity is redefined and with new patterns of empathy, equality offering justice to females and moreover promoting neutrality within all the genders.

### *Interpretation*

The findings suggest that psychologists perceive Pankaj Tripathi's roles as clear challenges to traditional masculinity. In the movie *Stree*, the 38 scores were obtained which resulted in the highest rank which elicits that portraying Tripathi's character, Rudra, as intelligent, witty and adaptable rather than physically dominant that directly opposes the Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, in another movie *Mimi* (the obtained score was 37) and in the movie *Gunjan Saxena* (the score was 36) which presents Tripathi as nurturing, emotionally intelligent and willing to challenge gender norms. As professionals trained in human behavior, psychologists recognize these roles as departures from traditional male stereotypes (Kimmel, 2018). Sociologists, analyzing social structures, also acknowledge this shift. Their evaluations align with social learning theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), which emphasizes how people model behaviors they observe. Tripathi's characters serve as alternative masculine figures, subtly shaping public perceptions of gender. His performances contribute to a broader discourse on gender equality and equality, challenging institutionalized norms. Students rated all films with very high scores, suggesting participants from young viewers are more open to evolving masculinity. This generational shift in gender attitudes reflects a growing acceptance of non-traditional male roles. Anthropologists, examining cultural contexts, highlight how media representations challenge deeply embedded gender norms while remaining accessible to audiences. Their particularly high scores for both the movies *Mimi* and *Gunjan Saxena* indicate that direct confrontations with institutional gender barriers make these portrayals especially impactful. Industry experts, with their understanding of character development and performance, rated Tripathi's character in portraying an exemplary role for redefined masculinity who promotes feminism under all circumstances. Their evaluations suggest that his nuanced performances not only challenge gender norms but also elevate the artistic depth of these films. This highlights cinema's power to influence cultural perceptions of masculinity within the society through intentional storytelling and performance direction.

### *Limitations and Future Scope*

- **Limited Sample Size and Geographic Scope** – The study primarily focuses on experts and audiences from select regions of Awadh (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur, Ayodhya) and film industry experts from East Mumbai, which may not represent the diverse perspectives of audiences across India.
- **Limited Movie Selection** – The research is restricted to four films featuring Pankaj Tripathi from 2017 to 2021, which may not capture the full spectrum of masculinity representations in his broader filmography or Bollywood at large.
- **Exclusion of Audience Reception Studies** – The study primarily relies on expert analysis and survey responses, without incorporating a large-scale audience reception study that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of public perceptions.
- **Potential Cultural and Contextual Bias** – The analysis is based on Indian cultural norms and interpretations of masculinity, which may not align with global perspectives on gender and masculinity in cinema.



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- **Lack of Longitudinal Perspective** – The study does not explore how the portrayal of masculinity in Bollywood has evolved over time or how Pankaj Tripathi's roles compare with past depictions of masculinity in Indian cinema.

### CONCLUSION

The present research study clearly analyses the patterns of masculinity which Tripathi wants to present within the society. The obtained results present the viewpoints of audience perceptions belonging to different professions like psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists who were selected from a few regions of Awadh (Lucknow, Barabanki, Sitapur and Ayodhya) and various experts (film critics, directors and actors) from film industry belonging to East Mumbai. The results serve as an understanding that among the audience Pankaj Tripathi's choice of roles is making an effective effort in redefining masculinity patterns within the society as well as is helpful in raising awareness about the shifts within the society (Sharma & Mishra, 2023). Since, media is a very significant and effective mode of communicating the messages so more such scripts can be delivered for challenging rigidity among the male and female genders (Baruah, 2012). This study can also help in understanding the redefining the curriculum development in film related studies and development of unbiased discourses based on gender. Consequently, through strong and good roles played by males in Bollywood, society can be sensitized towards gender neutrality.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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