

## **Stockholm Syndrome : How it has been romanticized in the Bollywood films of the 21st century**

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Introduction: The film industry has been influential in creating changes and bringing about reformations in the society across time period. Mickey Angelov while talking about the influence of movies on society quotes John Guida, “Since the cinema industry is so big and because films have become such a big part of our lives, the overall impact and influence that movies have on our society is immense” . But these impacts can be positive as well as negative. Bollywood has always been claimed by a lot of critics to be romanticizing certain issues where it does not necessarily need to. One of them is the ‘Stockholm Syndrome’. Stockholm syndrome is a condition that causes hostages to develop a psychological alliance with their captors as a survival strategy during captivity. It is a psychological response wherein a captive begins to identify closely with his or her captors, as well as with their agenda and demands. The syndrome has been processed in various Bollywood movies starting right from *Mujhe Jeene Do* (1963) to the very recent *Hero* (2015), which is, in fact, a remake of the 1984 film with the same name. This paper aims at analysing four different Bollywood films of the 21st century with a plot involving Stockholm Syndrome and looking at how the syndrome has been romanticized in these films. The four films that are studied are Imtiaz Ali’s critically acclaimed “Highway” (2014), Sanjay Gadhvi's thriller, “Kidnap” (2008), the romantic comedy “Tere naal love ho gaya” (2012) and “Hero” (2015), the romantic action movie and Subhash Ghai's remake of the 1984 film with the

same name. The study looks into various features, situations and instances that these films offer to depict a romantic bond between the captor and the hostage that develops as the story moves further.

The kind hearted man behind a harsh crude abductor: The abductors in all these films are depicted as the male counterparts of the hostages. Stockholm Syndrome is one of the many ways cultivated by the filmmakers to justify often controversial choices made by certain characters and to bring the possibility of different kinds of relationships to the audience. And for this, the filmmakers always have a tendency to preserve a slot in their plot where perhaps a harsh childhood story of the abductor would be narrated during the intimate time spent with the hostage. Mahabir Bhati (played by Randeep Hooda) was from a poor rural family whose mother was used as a sex slave by the landlords. His father abused him until a point when Mahabir decided to run away and ended up becoming a criminal. Mahabir lets his guards down and starts caring for his hostage Veera (played by Alia Bhatt) when he becomes emotional seeing the way Veera cares for him, reminding him of his mother. During these moments he narrates some of his childhood anecdotes and Veera unravels the tragic life story of her rough Gujjar abductor in bits and pieces for the audience that convinces that Mahabir is actually a good man.

Similarly, in the film Kidnap, Kabir (played by Imran Khan), the abductor reveals that several years earlier Vikrant Raina (played by Sanjay Dutt), the father of the hostage Sonia (played by Minissha Lamba) had falsely accused Kabir of kidnapping Sonia when he tried to take Raina's car to take his friend to the hospital. Consequently, Kabir, who was an orphan, spent his formative years in jail where he had to undergo undue mental and physical torture. And now he was simply out to get even with Sonia's father by kidnapping her for real. The film uses the flashback technique to show Kabir's childhood in the orphanage and how Vikrant Raina used his

power to destroy the life of an innocent child who was only trying to help his friend. Initially Kabir is good with her but when she tries to stab him by pretending to flirt with him and stabs his leg he becomes furious and is almost about to molest her but controls himself and ties her up instead. He also does not demand a single penny for himself and donates all the money that he gets in his orphanage. Through these scenes the filmmaker tries to give the viewers a chance to sympathize with the abductor who has a morally strong character but ended up being a criminal only because life threw him into the gutter of misery.

On the other hand, in the remaining two films *Tere Naal Love Ho Gaya* and *Hero*, the protagonists are born and brought up in the families of criminals but are morally strong characters. While the abductor Sooraj (played by Sooraj Pancholi) in *Hero* is shown to be the Robin Hood who robs the rich men with black money and distributes it among the poor, Viren (played by Riteish Deshmukh) in *Tere Naal Love Ho Gaya* leaves behind his family and father's business of kidnapping people to earn money, and becomes a hardworking rickshaw driver in the city instead. But in real life, abductors are hardly like these characters who do not kidnap for money. "Sending girls the message that an abusive situation can turn into a love story if they just stick it out and show compassion is a dangerous game" (Harveston).

Freedom, self-discovery and wholeness amidst breathtaking sceneries: Oxford dictionary defines the word romanticize as, "deal with or describe in an idealized or unrealistic fashion; make (something) seem better or more appealing than it really is". The films try to posit kidnapping as a therapy. Mahabir continuously moves Veera through different cities and hill stations of North India, to avoid being tracked by police. As the days go by, Veera finds peace and a new-found freedom, and becomes comfortable with her captor, to the point that she confides in Mahabir the horrors of her childhood, when she was sexually abused by her own

uncle as a nine-year-old. She views the abduction as a blessing in disguise, since she finally has the chance to experience life and find herself. She says, “"Jahan se tum mujhe laye ho, main wahan wapis nahi jana chahti. Jahaan bhi le ja rahe ho wahaan pohochna nahi chahti. Par yeh raasta, yeh bahut achha hai, main chahti hoon ki ye raasta kabhi khatam na ho" ( The place you brought me from I don't want to go back. The place you are taking me to, I want to go there neither. But this road, this road is beautiful. I wish this road never ends.) (*Highway*).

Likewise, in *Tere Naal Love Ho Gaya*, Mini finds freedom and security with an unknown man. The security and safety that she couldn't get inside her father's huge bungalow with numerous security guards, she found it in an unknown place with her abductor. Mini was forced to marry the son of a rich businessman by her father and was always treated as an object for sale. She found her true love in Viren and a loving family in Viren's parents. She was not ready to leave the place when her father came to take her back.

It is strange how in all the three films except *Tere Naal Love Ho Gaya*, the hostages didn't escape even when they got a chance to. Veera, even to her own surprise, hides herself when the police check their truck. Radha (played by Athiya Shetty), the hostage in *Hero* jumps into the river with her abductor when her brother comes to rescue her. Similarly, Soniya in *Kidnap* tries to elope but stays back to heal her abductor who was shot. Mini, in order to escape the forced marriage, kidnaps herself at the hands of Viren who does not plan to do anything of that sort.

Captor and Hostage's affection towards each other, the climax of a Bollywood love story is a romantic number: While Sonia tries to seduce her abductor with a romantic song at the beach so that she can stab him and escape, Viren and Mini, and Sooraj and Radha dance together. Veera, on the other hand, tries to comfort Mahabir in an emotional song. Ardent emotional

attachment and involvement between people, especially that characterized by a high level of purity and devotion; love is found in these films. The happy and comforting times spent together against the backdrop of drama, conflict and heartbreak doesn't last long, and the two lovers go their separate ways. While Mahabir is shot to death and Sooraj is arrested by the cops, Viren separates himself from Mini to save her from his family of abductors. In Kidnap, we see both the protagonists being attracted to each other but the filmmaker does not focus on the blooming of love between the two. But he does romanticize it when the abductor comes to the girl's house to ask for forgiveness and says that he has started a new life leaving behind the past. We also see Sooraj who changes himself for Radha and starts a noble life.

Each of these films except Highway has an item song which is very typical of a Bollywood movie. There is a scene even in Highway where Alia Bhatt dances crazily in the middle of the highway when one of her abductors plays an English song.

A happy ending: A romantic film always has a happy ending. If the couple does not get together at the end, there has to be some kind of learning that encourages the person to live life better. While the couples of Hero and Tere Naal Love Ho Gaya end up getting married to each other, we see Kabir coming to Sonia as a completely new and changed person to ask for forgiveness. Although Mahabir dies, Veera evolves into a stronger woman who is now able to confront her uncle who molested her. Indian film critic, Anupama Chopra says that in Highway, Imtiaz Ali gives a portrait of two damaged souls who, through a journey across north India, help to heal each other.

## Conclusion

Stockholm Syndrome is an interesting interpersonal tie that the filmmakers make use of to justify often controversial choices made by certain characters to the audience. But the victims becoming relaxed in a very short period of time around their kidnappers, behaving like friends, chatting and laughing with them who threaten to kill them and their inexplicable stay even when given a chance to escape is both uncomfortable and unconvincing in these films. The filmmakers know the mind of the audience and there is always the notion of social stratification in the mind of the Indian audience. Hence, it becomes easier on the part of the filmmaker to suddenly drop the rickshaw driver into a family with riches as the character has already been shown to be morally strong, eventually carving an easier path for the lovers. The films seem so romanticized at times and drag themselves away from reality that we wish the characters had met under different circumstances.

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