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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

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**LIGHTS, CAMERA, MISCONCEPTION:  
UNLEASHING STORIES INFLUENCING LAW,  
JUSTICE AND MORALITY**

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**LIGHTS, CAMERA, MISCONCEPTION:  
UNLEASHING STORIES INFLUENCING LAW, JUSTICE AND MORALITY**

**ABSTRACT**

Where did you see a courtroom for the very first time in your life? We guess in a film. “*Tareek pe Tareek, Tareek pe Tareek milti rahi, lekin Insaaf nahi mila my lord*”, such dialogues from movies often exaggerate public’s minds. People from a non-legal background perceive legal procedures that significantly differ from real practices. Such unreal perceptions lead to misconceptions about the functioning of the legal system. This research paper explores how fictional stories inspire an unrealistic portrayal in the minds of the masses.

The research aims to critically analyse the role of fictional stories in shaping individuals to underestimate the principles and complexities of the rule of law, fostering unrealistic attitudes towards investigation techniques. “*Shareer mei 206 haddiyan hai, aur samvidhan mein 1670 kanoon..haddi se lekar kanoon sab todhta hoon*”<sup>1</sup>, a dialogue of Shootout at Wadala. This paper will study how the glamorisation of crime has affected the psyche of the public. Ultimately, The paper will delve into the verdict of the fictional presentation of the legal system in India by studying real-life incidents inspired by fiction.

Keywords: Public Perception, Law, Justice, Fictional media, movies, Bollywood, crime

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes, F. (Ed.). (n.d.-b). Law & order dialogues in Bollywood movies: Famous Hindi films. Filmy Quotes. <https://www.filmyquotes.com/categories/lawandorder/1>

## INTRODUCTION

*“ Mai Kanoon ki bazu nahi khud kanoon banoonga..aur aisa kanoon jo khud mujrimo ko pakdega, khud mukadma sunega...aur unka faisla bhi khud karega ”<sup>i2</sup>*

– A dialogue from *Shenshah* movie.

Bollywood has ruled people's brains and hearts by being a storyteller who preaches the political, cultural, and social fabric of our country. Indian Legal system has always fascinated the masses at large, different people across different parts of the country have different views on the judicial system.

Indian Film Industry truly bridges the gap between the things known and the things unknown through one of its myriad themes: Courtroom dramas. This genre truly is an engrossing genre that is a combination of intense narratives with dramatised and glorified pictures of the Indian Judicial and Legal system. But, The question here arises is, while scenes in this theme enthrall the audiences with dramatic, impassioned arguments and sometimes unrealistic satire, How are they influencing the masses in perceiving the whole judicial system? Are these judicial-themed films merely for entertainment, or do they play a role in moulding society's attitude towards the system of law?

The one-word answer is - Misconception. The ocean of entertainment always brings waves of misconceptions. Bollywood has led to so many misconceptions about the legal world in the minds of the Indian public through heroic stereotypes, unrealistic conduct of proceedings and investigations, showing swift black-and-white justice, and romanticising breaking the rule of law.

Judges, Advocates and Police officers are an integral part of the Indian legal fraternity, and so in the Courtroom tales. From showcasing a judge discussing his private matters in between an ongoing trial to advocates walking around the courtroom and shouting to prove their point, Bollywood has several times showcased an unrealistic and wrong portrayal of the Indian legal system, which has somehow left an unwanted impact on people's perceptions regarding the rule of law.

Moreover, these fiction films have a bizarre relationship with crime and glorify taking law and order into one's hands. While some films in the market criticise glamorising lawbreakers, the

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<sup>2</sup> Law & order dialogues in Bollywood movies: Famous Hindi films (no date) *Filmy Quotes*. Available at: <https://www.filmyquotes.com/categories/lawandorder/1> (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

majority of films blur the lines between good and evil, which often overshadows the judiciary's role and creates a wrongful and lenient perception of law and order.

## THE INDIAN REEL AND THE RULE OF LAW

*"We live in a box of space and time. Movies are the windows in its walls. They allow us to enter other one's mind, not simply in the sense of recognising the characters, although that is an important part of it, by seeing the world as another intellect sees it."* ~ Roger Ebert

Bringing out issues of social importance and shaping the perspective of society are key characteristics of Motion Picture. Our society is portrayed on a larger screen through absolute cinema, and people of all age groups are always fond of Movies and Cinematic media. Since we are marching as a young nation, we need to dwell upon the aspect of to what extent the cinematic presentations are representing reality, changing reality, and to what extent this change is functional and good for the community, humanity, and society at large.

Crime and courtroom dramas have always been a hot pick for writers and directors – producers, obviously because of their power to attract more audiences, engaging them with artful suspense. These movies possess inherent power to set a particular set of notions toward the legal system, negative as well as positive, the reason being the vulnerable set of the mindset of the society, comprehending a source of entertainment as a source of information.<sup>3</sup>

In India, **The Cinematograph Act of 1952** provides a set of guidelines that shape the public ideas, opinions and imagination via films by filmmakers. The main object of the statutory body CBFC is to certify films. The movie is certified depending upon the contents of the film, and upon checking the contents, the necessary actions are taken.

**Section 3** of the Act lays down that the Central Board of Film Certification consists of a chairman and ten to twenty-five members as appointed by the Union Government. **Section 5 - A** of the act lays down that the process of certification is done only for the films which have applied for the given examination of the movie for its exhibition The Act also mention Four Certificates which are to be given to the movies. U, UA, A, and S.

The Constitution of India guarantees and empowers the rights of artists to draw a picture of social reality in all its forms.

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<sup>3</sup> Fatima, S. (2020) *Indian judiciary and Cinema, Legal Desire Media and Insights*. Available at: <https://legaldesire.com/indian-judiciary-and-cinema/> (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

The implementation of the act has served next to no purpose. It has been evident that the censor board of India has duly been performing its duty; several scenes, foul language, et cetera, have been cut. particularly movies produced out of India have faced severe backlash from the Indian censor board, resulting in half of the movies being censored. There is no question of doubt that the censor board of India is duly performing its duties, but still, plots that are not obscene in humans also corrupt the minds of individuals, such as plots that mislead people or impose a stigma upon individuals. In such cases, the act doesn't empower the censor board of India to act. Thus, there is a lacuna in such cases where the scene portrayed is not obscene or inhumane but still can portray important authorities and organisations in a poor light and change the perceptions of the public.

### **THE BOLLY-COURTROOM CHAOS: DEPICTION VS. REALITY**

Hindi Cinema, also known as Bollywood, is one of India's most widely appreciated entertainment industries, and its impact and influence on the diverse Indians is beyond doubt. It has been one of the means to people's understanding of culture, country, and world. The fictional stories and characters depicted in movies of social and political genres not only entertain the audience but leave a long-lasting influence on their minds and feelings.

Indian Legal dramas have always been one of the favourite genres of audiences at large, and with this comes great responsibility on the shoulders of filmmakers, the responsibility of carefully and correctly depicting legal fraternity, legal proceedings and judicial system in films and dramas. Are the filmmakers realising their responsibility, or are they just impetuously projecting the legal system in films just for entertainment?

A movie can solidify new beliefs and reassert old truths. Therefore, we do not find a difference between what is truth and what is belief. A layman interrupting court proceedings or a lawyer pushing suspects towards the rape victim to identify the actual rapist, just for the sake of entertainment, we believe in false depictions and for the sake of engaging large amounts of masses moviemakers, falsely depict lies.

With its influence over the public at large, Bollywood, often dramatize judges, the legal fraternity and courtrooms, resulting in different perceptions in society. The influence of Bollywood is undisputable, from starting trends to trashing reputations and building stereotypes, Bollywood is always included.

A struggling lawyer filed a Public Interest Litigation Application, that too in a lower court for a few minutes of fame, but is held back by the stern judge who taunts him for spelling appeal instead of apple and prostitution instead of prosecution. When asked by the judge where the lawyer studied law, he replied, “*Meerut Law College*”!

This scene from a film gained a lot of laughs and applause in theatres, but people from real-life professions in the legal field were not so happy with this poor depiction of members of the legal fraternity.<sup>4</sup>

**‘Order! Order! Order!’** The Adalat of Bollywood is a place where the unthinkable can happen. The heroes ( lawyers depicted in movies ) are Robbin hood-styled characters, in reality, lawyers are different as they don’t shout or yell in front of a judge. A legal practitioner will never try to pull off a dramatic stunt, like instantly presenting surprise evidence or witness.

There is a procedure, and lawyers usually prepare their arguments beforehand. A lawyer, as shown in the majority of films, is always roaming in front of the judge in a great dramatic sense, this is not the reality, Advocates usually stand at their dice and speak factual sentences.

Procedures don’t happen in the way shown in courtroom dramas; a courtroom is far different from what is shown. Courtrooms are presented in a very untrue way; they are presented as very grand halls where two witness boxes are placed and wherein a huge crowd is sitting to witness the proceeding. The reality is far way different from what is shown.

“*The courtroom is visually abused*”, writes Satyajit Bhatkal, a lawyer turned into a producer. The stereotypical representation of the court includes advocates sitting under trees and running behind clients or an arrogant advocate ( majorly senior ) throwing tantrums. It is portrayed that judges always act lethargic and have no trust in the proceedings; there is compulsorily a picture of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr B.R Ambedkar. These visual representations have created false perceptions in the minds of viewers.<sup>5</sup>

Let’s take an example from the film ‘*Meri Jung*’, starring Anil Kapoor, In the movie, the lawyer consumed a complete flask of toxin only to prove that his client was not liable for the action of

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<sup>4</sup> Verma, S. (2018) *Order, order, order*, *Telegraph India*. Available at: [https://www.telegraphindia.com/7-days/order-order-order/cid/1535780#goog\\_rewarded](https://www.telegraphindia.com/7-days/order-order-order/cid/1535780#goog_rewarded) (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

<sup>5</sup> North East Film Journal (2023) *Can bollywood films teach us about courts, Law and Justice?*, *North East Film Journal*. Available at: <https://northeastfilmjournal.com/can-bollywood-films-teach-us-about-courts-law-and-justice> (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

poisoning the bottle. If any lawyer tried this tactic, he would be held liable for Contempt of Court because advocates are restrained from doing any such act that tampers the evidence. Similarly, in the movie, '*Kyunki Mai jhooth nahi bolta*', an advocate sets himself on fire before the judge during the proceedings in court to show to be true. If this act had happened in a real courtroom, the lawyer might've ended up in jail, and his practice license might have been cancelled.<sup>6</sup>

Filmmakers have a conception that if the film is up to actual proceedings in court, lawyers will be portrayed as they are, and if there is no overboard acting, the film will be considered boring. Even in today's contemporary times, filmmakers ignore factual details and put the Indian legal system in a different light by imparting misinformation, probably to attract viewers.

### **MEN IN KHAKI: PUBLIC LAW ENFORCERS OR SUPERHEROES?**

What comes to mind when you think of an ACP or a Police inspector? Let us guess: A stud man with dark glasses and a unique cut moustache dressed up in a *khaki uniform* (Indian Police Uniform). A super-cop taking the law into his hands and giving first-hand justice to the victims, or maybe a corrupt officer ostracizing the public.

Now, where is this rowdy image of Police officers coming from? We perceive what we see, and this image of police officers is shown to us through films in the name of mere entertainment.

The Police force is a body that looks after law enforcement, the protection of public order and the rule of law. Police Forces play a pivotal role in the criminal justice system of India, from enforcement of laws to making arrests and investigating crime, there is a lot in the box for forces of our country. In films, something opposite is portrayed: Police are helping hands of citizens of a nation, so our citizens must have full faith in the police system, but Indian films have always played a major role in tarnishing the Indian Police's image.

Member of Parliament, Mr. Shashi Tharoor, said in a parliamentary debate, "*There was no public uproar about the fact that the film opens with a scene of astonishing police brutality where the Indian Policeman is shown torturing the hero with electric shocks to get him to confess*". "*We took these scenes for granted. No one said how outrageous it is that our country*

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<sup>6</sup> Gupta, A. (no date) *Indian lawyers in popular Hindi cinema* Apar Gupta - SSRN ... Available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID1915875\\_code1545272.pdf?abstractid=1682507](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID1915875_code1545272.pdf?abstractid=1682507) (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

*should be shown in this way because the assumption appears to be, well, this happens all the time.”<sup>7</sup>*

The glorifying use of extrajudicial means and violence in resolving conflicts by police officers is depicted a lot in Bolly-films. For instance, in the Paatal Lok web series, a police constable thrashed an accused to get his name revealed. The policeman could easily check his ID proof or other documents to check his name, but they chose a violent method. This brutal treatment during police custody would be termed as ‘**Custodial Violence**’

Although all things depicted are mere fiction, a study revealed that movies and fiction can have profound effect on societal stereotypes. They can convert the attitude of people and form new opinions on various issues.

Cops in Bollywood movies are the epitome of toxic masculinity, “*Hum tumhe itne ched karenge, ki confuse ho jaoge ke saans kaha se lein aur paade kahan se*”, a popular dialogue from the movie Dabangg starring actor Salman Khan.

There's nothing less impactful than a didactic piece of fiction. The first prerogative of a storyteller must be to tell a story. If filmmakers would educate themselves a little bit, then they would be more aware of the politics in the stories that they're telling, and that would be better. For everybody, even if you want to espouse a kind of conservative thinking or, let's say, that yes, police cops should have the right to pick up anybody at any point in time and do whatever they want to do with them and do so with impunity. Just understand where this comes from. So, no, a filmmaker or a storyteller of any sort is under any obligation to necessarily put out the right point of view. But they have a responsibility. Once their work is out there, especially, they must stand by what they have made and accept the responsibility for the kind of impact it possibly has. So, they are free to say that custodial violence is amazing if that's what they think. But they must stand by it when somebody else says custodial violence is amazing. They cannot, at that point, be like their work is apolitical and it has no impact whatsoever. If we emphasise

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<sup>7</sup> Khandekar, O. (2020a) *Rethinking the angry young cop in indian cinema*, mint. Available at: <https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/art-and-culture/rethinking-the-angry-young-cop-in-indian-cinema-111634476144273.html> (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

that creators must take responsibility for what is in their stories, they would be more responsible with their storytelling in general.<sup>8</sup>

### **FICTION IGNITED CHAOS: FROM REEL TO REAL HORRORS**

All the research done over decades collectively suggests that crime's exposure through multimedia, especially movies, dramas, and television in the contemporary world, has resulted in an increase in violence and less or no fear of the law. Mass media has a great impact on the behaviours of masses of all age groups.

In India, there is no scarcity of fictional content. This fiction is so intriguing that it is followed by intellects of all ages, Masses get fascinated and fulfil their ulterior motives, they draw inspiration from fictional works.

Just as a coin has two sides, in the same way, one side of fictional serials, movies and dramas is to make the public aware of the heinous criminal activities happening across the country, and it discourages people from attempting any heinous crime in the society. The other side of the same coin is that it gives new ideas and techniques for attempting a crime and taking the law into their own hands.

A man from Delhi stalked and kidnapped a twenty-four-year-old woman who was employed at Snapdeal. On being interrogated by the police, he confessed that he wanted to marry the woman, and he took inspiration from Shahrukh Khan's character in the movie, "*Darr*".

A Delhi-based psychologist, Neelam Mishra, says that Crimes are potentially motivated by Bollywood films.

*"People following whatever makes them look powerful is the most common phenomenon of human psychology"*

A very recent Shradha Walker murder case had the whole country in shock. Shradha Walker was strangled to death by her boyfriend and live-in-partner Aftab, and later, her body was cut into 35 parts by him. The accused confessed that he drew inspiration from a crime-thriller series known as "*Dexter*".

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<sup>8</sup> Shah, A. (2024) *Courtrooms in film, Daksh*. Available at: <https://www.dakshindia.org/courtrooms-in-film/> (Accessed: 12 January 2025).

It is very upsetting to hear such cases happening across the country and the globe, the value of human life and the law is decreasing. Although, as told by the filmmakers, the fictional creations, some or another, draw inspiration from real-life incidents, it is still very evident that minds of all age groups, especially young ones, get very much inspired by main characters and imitate them in their respective real lives.

## THE VERDICT

Courtroom dramas and films related to law and justice are quite marketable in Bollywood, and they serve both as a source of entertainment as well as education. The law that exists in India is dynamic, and it keeps on evolving. Movies are a good and interesting source to disseminate awareness regarding these progressive laws. Hence, it is the duty of the makers to make sure that they impart the right education through their movies. Movies in which the protagonist does not follow the legal procedure to get justice often glorify vigilante justice. Such movies portray the procedures of law in a bad light, and they even motivate people to take the law into their own hands, which harms society at large.

Movies like *Simmba* and *Singham* that show fake encounters and incorrect ways of obtaining justice convince people to believe in these extra-judicial means to get justice. Such movies show lawyers and judges in a negative light and prove them to be futile. It also shows the legal fraternity of India in a crippling condition. Which in turn can influence people to prefer speedy justice obtained through improper and unlawful ways. The use of dialogues such as *"Sometimes, few things need to be done by going out of the way and not worrying about the law"* clearly supports vigilantism. People get so invested in the movies that sometimes they forget to draw a line between *fact and fiction*.

It was found in various surveys that most viewers of movies like *Simmba* and *Singham* were in support of fake encounters. Hence, this romanticisation of extra-judicial means to obtain speedy justice has a disastrous impact on the masses.

So, Indian Filmdom plays a very pivotal function in shaping the mindset of the public, but mostly, they portray lawyers as corrupt and unprofessional. This tarnishes the reputation of lawyers in the eyes of the public. The filmmakers have a right to make movies as given in **Article 19(1) of the Constitution of India**. The right should be absolutely enjoyed by the makers, but it's their bound duty to properly research all the aspects of the story they want to tell the world. It is very necessary to portray, glamorise or romanticise things mindfully so that it does not have negative repercussions and pessimistic perceptions in the minds of people.

## **CONCLUSION**

The movies related to law, police and the judicial system contain such characters, dialogues, actions and references, which results in low trust levels and inefficient perceptions.

The point of fiction is that the voices of those who have literally not been allowed to even file complaints get their voice out through fiction. Fiction should provide pavement to things that the legal framework cannot accommodate because there just isn't enough evidence that the judicial system can address. After all, there just isn't enough paperwork to do this. Work of fiction has the capability to do that. The storytellers must change their perspective to that, and once they start talking to the people who have had the experiences and hear what they dream of, what they would like to see, what they would like to forget, what they would like to remember fiction storytellers and filmmakers, will have better stories. We will move towards a better system of law enforcement as well because, ultimately, the only people who can actually hold law enforcement accountable are the society. It's not the judiciary or the legal fraternity or system of the country. We would like Fiction to talk to victims, prioritise victims' voices, and give voice to those who don't have voices.

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