



Discourses of the Popular and Idolized Musculature and the Regime of the Disciplined Male Body -A Reading of the Prevalent Trend amongst Men in Urban Post-Global India

Dr. Samarpita Ghosh-Ray

Principal,

Vivekananda College for Women, Barisha, Kolkata

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

*Discipline,
Spectacularization,
capitalism, masculine,
regime, commodification*

ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to explore extant literature, and through discourse analysis of the same brings to fore the socio-cultural and economic context that shapes the popular understanding of the idolized male body, that is mostly represented through heroic idols of Bollywood films. This purported screened popularization by commodifying market impulses that has led to a reigning obsession amongst contemporary young urban Indian male is embedded within the intersecting discourses of the nation-its past and the present. The spectacularizing and eroticization of the male body as discussed here, is informed by its colonial subjecthood, its postcolonial anxiety (to prove the worthiness of the new nation), and even by the market-inspired competitive zeal of its global consumerist present. It also represents a gendered competitiveness and narcissistic impulse of the male vis-à-vis the conventionally avowed visual appeal of female body and its attractiveness.

Introduction This paper explores the discourse of body building and body contouring regime and , the economic and social forces that informs the emergence of this idolized sculpted musculature in Bollywood films and consequently has its influence upon popular perceptions especially amongst the male urban youth of post-global India. This discourse of body shaping and display by men is braided

with intersecting discourses of the post colonial present, the memories of subjecthood of a colonized past and the masculine anxiety of competing with exhibitionist feminine body

Ethnographic studies of urban India reveals burgeoning opportunities in urban space for young men to engage in re-gendering and re-masculinizing bodies of their bodies by subjecting them to a recasting in favour of a smart , urban, suave new masculine prototype. This anxiety to re-invent the body as suitably trained and aestheticized reveals the reproduction of a heterosexual patriarchal social order and also the cultural and economic competence to produce a post-global, neo-liberal new India' s smart, urban discourse of masculinity. The appropriate embodiment of a muscular, gym-toned and manicured groomed and waxed male body is the celebrated masculine body type that has captured the imagination of urban metropolitan India's youth as the smart and idolized body. (Phillip, 56, 72,86, 92-4.) This has resulted in the growth of modern facilities for grooming, shaping and toning such manhood and body types and has influenced deeply the lifestyle and choices of urban men.(ibid)

The reconfigured remasculinization accords legitimacy to a certain hegemonic masculine discourse as reflected in contemporary preoccupations in urban and semi-urban India with notions of masculine fitness, health and body aestheticizing. These are deeply imbricated within nation's colonial past and the post -independent nationalist projects of building a robust nation .The latter understanding continues to inform the neoliberal subjects with renewed hauntings of a colonial past of weak feeble bodied famished bodies of vulnerable colonial subjects.(Haq 4-5, 14-17)

The Disciplining of the Body in the Domain of the Popular -its Regime and Intersection with plural discourses

The body politic of being disciplined within the prevalent discourse of health and fitness and subjection to the protocol of body aesthetics as a contemporary urban male fashion is best illustrated in Foucault's idea of disciplining the body and thus is extremely pertinent to understand the cultural construction of the masculine body to a disciplining regime. All that seek to aestheticize the body and keep its shape and retain its fitness are means of disciplining the body within a social political regime of desirable appearance. Clothing, cosmetics, slimming jogging are all means of disciplining this body type. The relationship between the body beautiful and the body ugly, between healthy and the unhealthy, the well and the badly dressed, the groomed and the unkempt, the muscular and the flabby are myriad

articulations of social relationships of norms and its deviations, and therefore the relationships aimed at normalizing the body are the norms imbricated in power within the social formation. (Fiske 1989 p 91-92, also see, Turner,1984).

The male body emerges as an economic body, as a saleable commodity invested with value, glamour and charm that can seduce real, potential or aspiring consumers. The obsession with a desired body and attempts to discipline it within a health regime (for a musculature, sculpted body) or a glamour paradigm (for a consumerist body) is characteristic of what Dyer as cited in Fiske argues as part of bourgeois ideology at work. Dyer, further argues that capitalism uses human labour and labour of the body to organize building and maintenance of the male body via aestheticization, spectacularization, eroticization, body sculpting etc. (ibid).

The body which is intimate is thus rendered social and serves as a kind of visual metaphor of identity inscribed with rich symbolic and cultural meanings. And as a social entity it is subjected to social regulations and structured by . moral imperatives of a body disciplining regime embedded within the discourse of capital. Through modern institutions like prisons hospitals state and also through other aesthetic and moral practices at microlevel such as tailoring and fashioning the body, codes are allowed to operate, co ordinate , manage and impose ways to constitute everyday embodiment (Entwistle 2002 p 137).

The male body in the constructionist sense within designated urban space like gymnasium salons etc are thereby ordered, produced and regulated through the discursive regime of media, market and the global market forces. Muscularity as popularized has thus emerged as a virtue for contemporary urban youth in India. This muscularity abhors excess, it should be ideally fatless, well structured well contoured, defined and endowed with an athletic built. This disciplined muscularity is slender but not thin and this ideal male body is to be moderately muscular, chest to be trapezium, robust chest, broad shoulders, fatless waist, strong legs. This obsession with muscularity stems from the need to look good and how well the body is maintained through a disciplinary regime of diet, exercise etc and finds its ideal embodiment in several contemporary male stars of popular films. Infact, it was Bollywood popular hero Salman Khan whose body in the film Maine Pyaar Kiya (1989) created a great uproar laden with its amorous appeal. It was for the first time that against a fully-clad heroine the camera voyeured his bare chest - as direct expression of this eroticized appeal. Thousands of posters were sold. The muscularity of

Salman Khan was first to discover 'male sexuality' in Hindi commercial films. This also led to a sudden mushrooming of health clubs, fitness centres and gyms all over India. (Anandolok,22/4/2002. p 6-14).

It has become a near imperative for aspiring actors of Bollywood to produce gym hardened washboard of six pack (abs) abdominal musculature. Beginning in the 1990s actors like Sanjay Dutt and most famously Salman Khan began muscling in a bid emulate their Hollywood peers Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Soon men across India began to emulate the Indian stars giving rise to fitness obsession and consequent proliferation of gyms and salons. Rachel Dwyer, an eminent scholar of Indian cinema, said early male stars like Dilip Kumar and Dev Anand never took off their shirts nor drew attention to their bodies. Now Indian actors are waxing their legs and chests and posing for suggestive photograph. A fit and muscular body has become a symbol of status that may be acclaimed as. 'very much a class thing' affirmed Dyer. The whole fitness cult in India has thus emerged as a marker of social mobility to rebuild capital-intensive bodies as per market imperatives. Prashant Talwalkar chief executive of one of India's biggest chains of fitness centres remarked that till 1990s body building was considered a practice among lower income group men. It was Salman who popularized weight lifting and a muscular physique. Salman has given rise to a popular demand amongst young men and boys to have a body like him. Most Bollywood's leading men exhibit their bodies on screens – sculpted by professional help and trainers. A competitive spree became noticeable among male stars as it was seen to represent a personal triumph of the new hero. The rising machismo is a part of self-promotion of male stars, as the media seizes on every little barrier broken to create a news around the sculpted male body. This exposure of skin and the body by the male star in response to the liberal market reforms and media proliferation is now a prevalent trend that runs ironically contrary to the continued conservatism practiced in films vis-à-vis display of sexual intimacy on screen. (22.7.12 The Telegraph 7 days p 12 Quest for Six Pack: Jim Yardley).

Looking at Fiske's reading of popular American actress-star Madonna and the sexual politics involved wherein she is seen to parody the patriarchal control over feminine sexuality via excess (Fiske 1996 in Storey), it may be argued that patriarchy that it is believed to control feminine sexuality ironically upturns it. It may be asked if male body eroticization is part of patriarchy's attempt to narcissistically celebrate its own body – asserting a kind of autoeroticism (see Fiske, *ibid*) – i.e. self control over his own body and sexuality, a sexual politics of male making or is it the counter hegemonic homoerotic

impulse that seeks to eroticize the male body as a part of homosexual pleasure, albeit in the domain of the visual. What may be also asked if the male body's eroticization is an anxious response to compete with female sexuality and if heterosexuality is ceding ground to oppositional readings.

It has also been suggested that the recent tendency amongst men, seeking to embrace physical strength, hardness and power is to reinforce the traditional masculine ideal – and at the same time to distinguish itself from ideas about femineity. The female form is traditionally conceived as soft and rounded, while the masculine form, in contrast, is taut and lean. The male preoccupation with abdominal stomach muscles in the face of decline in physical labour and increased girth, embodies an anxious attempt to hold on to this traditional masculine ideal of muscular strength and conditions (Wykes and Gunter, 2005 p 5). With heroes ceasing nearly to play working class, marginal roles where robust, muscular bodies typify the characters, the patriarchal anxiety to sustain masculine ideal and compete with women's bodies as equally exhibitionist has given rise to body building obsession among male Bollywood stars. Body morphing and conforming has contributed to this discourses of malleable masculinity in which most leading male heroes can be located . While sexualization of female bodies remain central, eroticization of male bodies reassure men of their sexual power (ibid p 39). These bodies, following Hollywood tradition (see Morris 2007 p 444) as in the case of several popular male stars of Bollywood, may be conceived as largely an 'object, spectacle, prosthesis, site of desire, commodity, product of labour – but it is first and foremost a way of making a living...the body is a means to a wider kind of independence' (ibid).

It is equally important to pay our attention to Hollywood, the prime source of body building practices by film actors and this has been the major source of inspiration for the Hindi film industry. Unlike routinely displayed non-white male bodies in the western, the plantation drama and jungle adventure films, until the 1980s bare white bodies were less common in cinema, the major visual narrative form of twentieth century except in two genres of the boxing film and the adventure film. The vulnerability of an exposed and bare white body, otherwise bereft of other status markers or symbols of wealth power, class and concomitant power borne by clothes and grooming tried to hide its inadequacies through its visual attractiveness, superior look and well built physique. In fear of being exposed as weak and delegitimated in comparison to the more able non-white bodies an attempt was to project white male bodies that were well-built and trained. The built body served to affirm supremacy of white male body

without loss of legitimacy on being risked of exposure. Popular heroes like Tarzan, Hercules, Rambo came to be played by actors with champion and/or built physique. The whites came to seize the dominant position in body building activity and gained pre-eminence in the field as its true representatives either as heroes of action films or on cover pages of magazines while marginalizing the non-white. Dyer argues “Body building in popular culture articulates white masculinity. The body shapes it cultivates and the way it presents them draw on a number of white traditions’ and also is sufficiently invocative of US-led global consumerist culture ‘and a fortiori Californian, lifestyle, with a characteristic emphasis on ideas of health, energy and naturalness...body building’s US-ness in its concatenation of labor and leisure pain and consumerism..’ (Dyer,2002, p 262 – p 264). This body is almost a recrafted and redesigned body under the auspices of a capitalist market and consumerist choices and proclivities.

It is this influence of US-led consumerist culture can be located in the contemporary body building practices of Bollywood male heroes. The influence of an US influenced disciplined ascetism and narcissistic Hedonism has come to characterize popular masculine images of newly affluent consumerist societies as in India . The virtues of white built bodies have come to be aspirational virtues for leading Bollywood actors as many of the formal properties of the built body carry connotations of whiteness. This body is that which is ideal, hard achieved, wealthy, hairless and tanned. And as ideal Whiteness is an aspirational structure, requiring ideals of contouring, maintaining and building it. All the rhetoric of bodybuilding is founded on this idealized type and most vividly seen in the aspirational motifs and its posing vocabulary in the public domain . Bodies that are striving to becoming the built bodies that are hard and contoured, often resembling armor are aspirational young male bodies for the youngmen of urban post-globalizing India..

Body building has three goals: mass (muscle size), definition (the clarity with which one muscle group stands out from another) and proportion (the visual balance between all the body’s muscle groups). The first two of these present a look of hardness: the skin stretched over pumped up muscle creates a taut surface, the separation of groups seems, as bodybuilding jargon has it, to “cut” into the body as stone. Definition and proportion also emphasize contour, of individual muscle groups and of the body as a whole. Posing conventions, maximizing size, tightening for definition further highlight these qualities, and the use of oil (or often in films water or sweat) on the body emphasizes it as surface and hence its shapes(Dyer,ibid p.265- 6)

The capital intensive regime separates this body from the indigenous wrestlers and muscle man or working class bodies.

Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone's iconic bodies of Hollywood carry signs of hard, planned labour and introduces a professionalized regime to the sculpting of a star body. The body having no signs of status inscribed on it, on sheer strength of its own visual appeal ensures to articulate its habitus. Dyer observes the body as a site, inscribed by affluence, treatments and cosmetic care. 'The built body is a wealthy body. It is well fed and enormous amounts of leisure time have been devoted to it. The huge firm muscles of Gordon Scott, Steve Reeves or Arnold Schwarzenegger make the simplest contrast with the thin or slack bodies of the native people in their films. Such muscles are a product and sign of affluence' (ibid p 266). And it is this hegemonic model of an US inspired sculpted, wealthy, affluent, well fed and well groomed body that Bollywood heroes seek to display. The body like the muscled body of Hollywood stars which is hairless and tanned, is an imperative for sculpted bodies that typically also connotes wealth and class '...the privileges of leisure (having the time to lie about acquiring a tan), wealth (buying that time, acquiring an artificial tan a traveling to the sun (and a healthy lifestyle..' (ibid p 266). The planned body of hero is thus allowed to gain a superiority endowed with virtues that has been purchased or secured through wealth, status time and professionalized care. It affirms the ability of the star body to intervene with his given natural body.

Dyer posits an analogous relation between built white body and the imperial enterprise The white man's body which is not naturally endowed but planned and achieved, landscaped, sculpted improvised and produced through discipline is parallel to the mission of colonial expansion through strength and planning .(ibid) And when this male body ideal finds a renewed legitimacy in the idiom of consumerist capitalist culture and assumes an importance in contouring star bodies one can be easily locate a transformation by Oriental other.

As an alternative reading it can be posed to ask if star bodies represents a post-colonial mimicry of Western heroes? The disciplined, sculpted and professionalized bodies of stars like and the heroic league of the Hindi film industry despite influences of US-dominated culture as may be countered is equally informed by a different project of nationhood from the creation and deployment of athletic bodies of male that has been endemic to anticolonial insurgency and struggle (see, Mills and Sen 2004 p 6). The gym shaped diet controlled bodies of heroes can be seen to be 'shaped by the demands of transnational encounters, but they are also culturally authenticated...Like the athletic bodies that were

created by colonial schools and the imperial experience of an earlier era...is susceptible to cosmopolitanism and multiple citizenship' (Mills and Sen 2004 p 10).

Studies have revealed how body discipline have historically been regarded as means and ends of nationalism. Physical fitness as embodiment of nationalism and nationalistic agenda have been common among North Indian wrestlers. The nationalism associated with wrestling, known as Bharatiya Kushti or Pahalwani takes shape in the context of gymnasium where young men engage in a complex regimen of physical fitness and training but there is an important sense in which the institutional structure of gymnasiums collectively defines an imagined community of men intent on building their bodies so as to rebuild the nation (Alter 2004 p 17).

The materiality of the nationalist body and its figurative expression of nation through sports like wrestling or yogic practices is different from professionalized body of contemporary times. While nationalist project disciplined male bodies, contemporary sculpted bodies are not subsumed by the political project of somatic nationalism. The disciplinary project of a regime of self control engages with the question of nationalism differently. It seeks to rebuild national character of the masculine body within a global capitalist regime –almost in a competitive gesture in view of global (Western) trends. Invested by power of capital, exhibitionist star bodies traversing national and international space can be seen as a site of identification, being instilled with notions of India's modernity and increasing visibility on the international arena..(Munshi, 2004 p 163).

The discourses of physical appearance and body care shifting from private to public space is best seen and read from the various new reporting on celebrity health practices and beauty regime. In contemporary India, the onset of the new physical perfection has rightly been termed the arrival of professional body; a body acquired, shaped and toned like any other professional skill. Nowhere is this more visible than in the case of the successful stars of Hindi cinema today for which the display of the body and the body in performance are integral to the spectacle. What is beyond debate is that today the worked out taut body has become a cultural icon in India: a statement to the world that its owner cares (Munshi 2004 p 170).

This craving for a well sculpted professionalized body might also be seen to stem from what Fanon saw as Blackman's attempt to reclaim manhood. The question arise if the Bollywood heroes penchant to re masculinize their bodies is a continuity of what Patha Chatterjee observed as cultural decolonization even after political one. This building of the body marked by leisure, comfort affluence perhaps reflects

once more the post colonial anxiety of the global nation that seek to exhibit its masculine idols – embodying the sale ability required in a global consumerist market. Ashis Nandy has argued how colonial man has been constructed as effeminate in the colonial discourse and the way to emancipation and empowerment is seen as the negation of this assertion. In many cultural systems potency and masculinity are seen synonymously. Such a perspective has legitimized the extremely macho style of anti-colonialist movements (see Yuval Davis 1997 p 60). The spirit of obsession with bodies by male stars of mainstream film industry can also be seen as a post colonial anxiety to liberate non-western male bodies from being portrayed as antithetical to idealized, strong, ordered, hygienic healthy and mature Western male bodies. Typified as weak, barbarous unclear diseased and infantile, (Mills and Sen 2004 p 1), the contoured musculature of glamourized male bodies seeks to purge the somatic stigma. It may be therefore summarized that such display of the body stems from a renewed post-colonial anxiety of the nonwhite world in a globalizing moment in response to western domination of the global market.

This reigning trend of spectacularized male body is true of Hollywood male stars like Rudolf Valentino, Fred Astaire, Rock Hudson, Marlon Brando, and Schwarzenegger. (Horrocks 1995 p 44 and Horrocks 1994 p 160)./ The fetishized, bare, sculpted, visually consumable male body is rendered to a commodity as it is drawn within the vortex of consumption and market. (ibid p 161 Horrocks 1994).

Body is not fixed and certainly defined as natural. Its changeable and negotiable possibilities is testified in the ancient art of medicine that seeks to amend to reduce the adverse experiences of pain or disease and physical damage. Amelioration of the negative possibilities of the body is an ancient art, as is the attempt to intervene to beautify or enhance its appearance. It is medical technology that gives us the ability to alter our bodies. But the present renegotiations of the body do not start from a natural state of body but is informed by a set of expectations about the body which are already deeply socialized (Evans 2002 p 2) Sculpting of male bodies is part of contemporary social expectations of an ideally designed body as exemplified by film stars who are not only supposed to look good, handsome and glamorous and act but also display a certain set code of desirable body shape or look. Traditionally, it is the female body, unlike the male body that has been regarded as unstable and permeable. Whereas the male body on the other hand is regarded as stable and bounded. The apparent instability and plasticity of female body is further reinforced through its reproductive ability and relation maintained with medical sciences (ibid). But men are not lagging behind and male bodies have opened itself to various conditioning as per social expectations.

Body as a complex of attributes can fluctuate in response to changing social norms and expectations that define an ideal body and technological expertise change allow individuals to consider diverse possibilities about physical existence. The contemporary west is excessively 'regulatory in its attitude towards the body' and prejudices against fat people or oddly shaped bodies indicate vigorous normalizing discourse about the appearance of the ideal modern body. This culture adopting a rigorous and proscriptive attitude of the body and the inclination to assume 'that the body should be a perfect, seamless demonstration of the virtue of efficient and perfect function' (ibid 2-3) is what produces the disciplined body, and enhance their marketability.

The sculpted body, as illustrated by film stars and models, that panders to the consumerist tendencies of late capital is not the real natural body, it is unnatural. It is constructed in response to the fantasies, needs and desires of late capitalism (ibid p 11). Anthropologist, Mary Douglas advanced a compelling account of what she described as two bodies – that constitute the totality of our experience of embodiment – the physical body (the biological, individual body) and the social body (the body demanded by our culture). The physical body secures meaning for the physical body and shapes our embodiment. The sculpted bare body or torso despite its bold, fleshy corporality is a social body whose embodiment is mediated by global capitalist and consumerist culture. This social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. This body is subjected to the social pressure of the glamour industry and global fashion trends, and provides itself as a site or a restricted medium inscribed by social and cultural practices of a well shaped contoured muscular body. The social situation imposes itself upon the body and constrains it to act in particular way thereby the body becomes a symbol of the situation within which it is socio-culturally reproduced. (Entwistle 2002, p 138).

In a bid to maintain a competitive edge the male popular stars of the Hindi film industry discipline their bodies. The desire for a well contoured and maintained body re subject them to disciplining health regimes. The dividing line between compliance and subversion within the male sculpted body can be discerned as a conflicting site of both giving in and also resisting dominant ideologies and ways of being. The stars of popular films, by succumbing to the prevalent masculine/heroic model succumb to dominant paradigms of the capitalist industry. It appears to be what Foucault would term as a 'technique of self production'. Foucault as cited argues that the 'technologies of the self allow individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as transform themselves in order to attain a certain state ...' The social acclaim and public adoration secured through manipulation of his body via a fitness schedule and

disciplinary regime of diet and exercise are part of star's active self production as a desirable and perfect body. (see,Thapar 2001 p 142-142).

The body appears as an erotic field or a spectacle offering visual pleasure. The saleability of the star body and its sculpted six pack abdomen is produced in response to the demand of the marketing style that dominates mainstream Hindi cinema. The body is duly commodified by subjecting it to particularly desirable physicality and fitness training body and its agility is an imperative for every successful male star and hence its subjection to a disciplining regime that demands a fit, well trained, muscular, agile, attractive body as per commodity aesthetics of market dominated culture.

In Foucauldian sense the heroic body becomes a site of disciplinary practice of physical training and fitness regime. The body of the star is subjected to its disciplinary discourse and the power of commerce can be held to be generative and productive of heroic subjectivity. The subjection of the body to disciplinary technologies produce what Foucault called 'docile bodies'. In Foucault's sense the body gets 'subjected, used ,transformed and improved' (as cited in Barker 2002 p 89) to produce what is a perfectly sculpted work. Discipline in this Foucauldian sense involves the organization of the subject through training, standardization etc. It brings to together knowledge power and control to produce subjects by categorization and naming them in an order through a rationality of efficiency. productivity and normalization. By normalization is meant a normative system of graded and measurable categories and intervals around which individual subjects may be distributed. Classificatory systems are essential to the process of normalization and thus to the production of a range of subjects (ibid).

Here, commodification of heroes' body and popular choice affirming it normalized a certain ideal of a desirable, consumable, eroticized bodily shape. The sculpted body the fit body, and the agile body becomes an unwritten convention that hierarchizes and encodes Bollywood heroes' bodies. The heroic bodies, therefore in Foucauldian sense is subject to market driven discourse, subject to rigor and discipline of a professionalized methodical fitness body building and body sculpting regime and finally subject to the power of capital that demands such exhibitionist bodies. Heroes emerges 'as discursive constructions and the products of power where discourse regulates what can be said and done under determinate social and cultural conditions' (ibid) This renders heroic bodies, subject to sculpting as docile bodies wherein the heroes as subjects are bodily produced or rendered as effect of discourse. This eroticization while rendering body commodified by a capitalist culture also speaks of a competitive anxiety on part of male icons and stars to look attractive and be more saleable.

Conclusion- The male body building and sculpting practice in the popular domain has multiple and interesting interface with multiple discourses of the global market driven ethos of commodification, the gendered and competitive masculine anxiety vis-à-vis other exhibitionist male hood and conventionally avowed feminine idol. It also resonates the colonial anguish of male subjects to rove its re masculinized self as a new affirmation in the post-colonial past. The capital invested sculpted and disciplined body as an affirmation of a stronger masculine embodiment espouses a new idiom of manhood in the present global times of a nation that seeks to rebuild itself competitively in the domain of the free market. In all of these the popular heroes of Bollywood films emerge as tropic symbols as metaphors of the new smart urban global Indian men.

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