Title: “It’s all about loving your parents” : the parent-child relationship in Bollywood productions

Author: Daria Szymura

“It’s all about loving your parents”
The parent-child relationship in Bollywood productions

The background

Indian culture is based on traditions written in sacred books of Hinduism and in cultural scripts. The relationship between parents and their children is an issue that is in good standing and is described throughout the ages. It is in many ways controversial for non-Indians, for instance taking into account the issue of dowry or gender of the new-borns.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the relationship between parents and children shown in several Bollywood productions from the year 2001 to 2016. The films were chosen by year of their release, their plot, and the visibility of the family relationship in the story. Moreover, all of the analysed films were watched by the author of the paper, which also had an impact on the choice of films.

1. Bollywood

Bollywood is one of the most famous Indian film industries known worldwide. The name of this industry is said to be a combination of the words Bombay, which is one of the biggest cities in India, and Hollywood, which is a film industry based in Los Angeles in the United
States of America. The term *Bollywood* was first used in 1970s by an author of a gossip column of a magazine, and, according to Jigna Desai (2005: 55), it is “Bombay’s Hindi-language cinema”. It is worth mentioning that there are many languages in India; thus, every film industry in India produces films in the language of the state in which they are located.

According to the article in *The Guardian* magazine (13th May 2017), Indian film industries produced around 1,900 films in 2016, and 340 of them were produced in *Bollywood*. The rest, which is around 1,560, were produced in other Indian film industries, for instance *Kollywood*, i.e. the Tamil-language cinematography. The overall number of Indian productions is larger than the number of films produced in Hollywood in a year, mostly due to the number of film industries in India, the most famous of which is still Bollywood.

Bollywood films are quite unique, especially when it comes to genres. There is a term used in the Indian film industry, *masala movie*, which means ‘the mix of many genres’ and was introduced in Bollywood in 1970s. Every film produced in India is a combination of several genres, depending on the plot. Usually, one film is a musical, a drama, and a comedy, sometimes with elements of action or even thriller. One of the most important elements of the film are songs, which convey a message understandable for the attentive audience. Due to the censorship in India, the songs may tell the audience the love story of two people or show suffering and pain; sometimes they may carry a political message, which is carefully hidden from the censors with the use of symbols.

The most famous Bollywood films are those about love. Romances between secret lovers, sad love stories, and problems concerning caste and family status in the society are the most common topics covered by the producers. Some people find hope in those films, as they lead them to believe that they can also marry a person chosen by themselves, not by their parents or their communities. The relationship between a man and a woman who love each other and fight for the right to be together is the most common theme in the industry. However, there is also another kind of relationship, which is shown very often in Bollywood films, but it is rather seen in a subplot. It is the parent-child relationship, which is not as popular a theme as the relationship between lovers.
2. The parent-child relationship in the Indian culture

The relationship between parents and their children is a very important issue in India. The culture, traditions, and also religions of India imply a strong bond between family members. Rajni Palriwala (2000: 49) says that “[f]amily and community are metaphors for the most sacred and most natural of relationships—between children and parents, wife and husband, sister and brother, devotee and god. These are the relationships which provide emotional security, material support, care, a sense of belonging, status, legitimacy and social identity”. Family in India is a basic social unit. However, contrary to contemporary nuclear families, traditional Indian family is extended and consists of many generations. It is the so-called “joint family”, which has been functioning in India for many years. Moreover, those families usually live in one big house or in the neighbourhood in order to maintain the relationship. All important events, such as weddings, funerals, festivals, are celebrated primarily with the family. Sarah Lamb (2007: 83) notices that “[m]ore than almost anything else, the joint, multigenerational, intimate family represents a traditional Indian past in contrast to an emerging modernity”. Nowadays, there is a clash between modernity and traditionality in India, which may be observed in people’s family life. It is also apparent that children behave in a different way towards their parents, they want to gain more independence; however, sometimes parents do not accept children’s decisions.

Children in India are taught that they owe debts to their parents for their care throughout the years.

 [...] adult children—most notably sons and daughters-in-law—live with and care for their aging parents. They do so out of love, a deep respect for elders, and a profound sense of moral, even spiritual, duty to attempt to repay the inerasable debts they owe their parents for all the effort, expense and affection their parents extended to produce and raise them. (Lamb 2007: 83)

It may be noticed that sons and their wives have a so-called duty, which they have to pay back to parents. The role of the parents is to bring up children, especially sons, to provide them with education and
basic social skills, and also to find a candidate for a wife or a husband for their offspring. It is said that during the whole childhood a person “incurs a debt” which should be repaid when a child becomes an adult by taking care of parents.

Interestingly, while the family remains one of the most important values in people’s everyday life, there are values such as honour, pride, respect of the society, which influence people’s lives. People behave according to certain social standards and rules, and they seek acceptance from the community.

*Ramayana*, one of the most famous epic poems of India, presents the picture of a royal family, in which the honour and rules are more important than family as such. The king of Ayodhya banishes his beloved son and orders him to leave the kingdom for 14 years. The banished son, Lord Rama, goes with his wife Sita and brother Lakshman to the forest, in which the three of them live. After many adventures Lord Rama returns to Ayodhya when the 14 years’ banishment is over.

Although in *Ramayana* love may be seen between the father and the son, there is also the kingdom and the issue of honour. As the king and the prince, they have to respect their subjects and they have to behave according to the set of rules. Although the king was heartbroken, he had to exile Lord Rama from Ayodhya. This epic poem shows that for Indian people honour is more important than family; thus, the Indians still think that it is necessary to exile their children if they did something bad, instead of forgiving them. *Ramayana* may be one of the greatest epic poems of the Indian culture, but the values shown in this poem may be seen as quite remote from the western standards.

### 2.1. The parent-child relationship depending on gender

Indian society is traditionally a patriarchal society in which the father is the breadwinner and he has the power of decision in the family. Nothing can be done without his consent and he is the person with the last word. Although in the Indian culture mothers are respected, women in general are discriminated, especially if they are unmarried and they do not have children.

Annually, many girls die because of abortion, because it is said that girls are the burden for the parents.
According to Sunil Gulati, Director, Census operations, the preference for the male child is still there. When this is supported by technology-assisted choice such as ultra-sound and amniocentesis, in spite of the legislative ban on the latter in several Indian states, the decision to get rid of the baby girl becomes that much easier. Haryana, for instance, has achieved the dubious distinction of topping the list of states with a fast-declining female ratio at 861 per 1,000 males. It is the worst when compared to the national female–male ratio of 933 females to 1,000 males. Unfortunately, this stems from the common notion that girls are a lifelong financial liability for the parents. (Chatterji 2007: 249)

Shoma A. Chatterji notices that girls are aborted because of causing a financial trouble. As the state Haryana, mentioned by the scholar, is one of the poorest states in India, it is apparent that poor families cannot afford to have daughters. Instead, they decide to abort girls to avoid future financial liability, i.e. dowry.

The most important event in the girls’ life is marriage. The responsibility of parents is to choose the appropriate candidate for the girl’s or the boy’s life partner. Mostly, the girl is chosen because of her appearance, skills and experience in housekeeping, her personality traits and the horoscope, but one of the most important things is the dowry. The higher the dowry’s amount is, the easier it is to find a husband for the girl. This issue of dowry causes many problems in the relationship between parents and their children. Fortunately, these issues change and nowadays, women have many more rights than they had in the past.

 [...] women now, compared to those a generation earlier, are much more likely to be older at marriage, to be more highly educated, and to be working—meaning that, in general, daughters-in-law today have more voice, authority, and agency than their mothers-in-law did, and are often not as disposed as their predecessors were to serve, defer to and live with their husbands’ parents. A second phenomenon is that many, even “most” (according to prevailing estimations), parents among the elite classes in India have children living and pursuing professions in distant cities, across India and abroad. (Lamb 2007: 84)

There is a huge difference between the relationship between parents and sons, and parents and daughters. The birth of a son is celebrated,
while the birth of a daughter is a reason to be ashamed of. The duty of the daughter is to learn how to keep the house, bring up children and make their husbands happy. She is obliged to acquire certain skills in order to become a wife and a mother in her future life. As it was mentioned, not only should they be prepared for their life as mothers and wives, but also there is an issue of dowry that the parents have to prepare for their daughters and they very often treat this dowry as the debt which the daughter must pay back. The household duties which the girls perform in their childhood are also a way to repay this debt. Nowadays, it is changing, and as Bonita Aleaz (2007: 118) claims, “[e]ven for marriage proposals the bride’s consent is sought by her parents and in most cases, it is the women who function as negotiators”.

As the parents still consider their daughters as more troublesome, they very often treat them differently than they treat sons. Girls are often not allowed to go to school, although these days it is changing, and more girls have access to education. It has to be mentioned that sons are considered more valuable for parents and thus, parents try to give their sons everything they want and need: the right to education, a good job, and a beautiful wife from a wealthy family. Sons are also the ones who inherit after their parents’ death, so that they have to fulfil their duties in order to get the family fortune.

Fortunately, there is a change in society’s point of view on gender. Nowadays, females have many more rights than they had in the past. As Aleaz (2007: 120) claims, “[t]he attitude of parents today has significantly changed towards the education of their daughters”. The constant struggle of women to get the right to education fructified in the right to gain knowledge and to attend classes. Shoma A. Chatterji (2007: 250) observes that “[...] daughters who are employed before their marriage provide tangible economic benefits to their parents. They are also in a position to save for their own dowry in case they agree with this system. [...] This effectively reduces the ‘burden’ their parents consider them to be”. The girls who support themselves are able to pay for their dowry, if needed.
3. The parent-child relationship in Bollywood productions

As it was mentioned, Bollywood produces and releases many films annually. Thus, it is not possible to mention all the films in which the relationship between parents and children is demonstrated. In this paper, only several of them will be presented and the described relationships will be divided into two categories. The first category is a traditional relationship, which consists of descriptions of relationships based on traditional values. The other category is a modern relationship, in which there will be described relationships based on modern values mixed up with traditional values.

3.1. Traditional relationship

A traditional relationship is the one in which parents have a plan for their children and the children agree to fulfil their parents’ dreams. Parents’ wishes are more important than children’s plans for their future, and all of them value honour, pride, and respect. Society’s opinion is slightly more important than the happiness of the family members.

3.1.1. Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham

This blockbuster from 2001 has been one of the most famous Bollywood productions of all times. It is a story of a wealthy Indian family, their struggles and the bonds between the members. Yash Raichand and his wife, Nandini, have two sons: older Rahul, who is adopted, and younger Rohan, their biological son. At the beginning it is shown that there is a conflict between the parents and their older son, and the first half of the film is a flashback to the source of the family conflict.

The father has a plan for his older son’s life. He wants Rahul to take over the family business and to marry his friend’s daughter, Naina. Rahul likes Naina very much and at first, it seems he is going to fulfil the wish of his father and marry her, but soon he meets a girl, Anjali, and the whole situation becomes complicated. Anjali belongs to the lower caste and she lives in a poor district of the city. Rahul falls in love with her and decides to marry her. Unfortunately, Yash does not accept his son’s decision, since the great value in his family is honour and tradition. Moreover, in families belonging to the high social group, there is
a need to preserve this state and marry within the community of people of the same status.

This thread shows how tradition may affect people’s relationships, especially in the family. The traditional Indian family values honour, traditions and customs, and social respect more than the happiness of its members, which may lead to misunderstandings and serious conflicts among the family members.

3.1.2. *Piku*

The film *Piku* was released in 2015 and was directed by Shoojit Sarcar. The leading actors, Amitabh Bachchan and Deepika Padukone, play a sick father and his daughter Piku. The mother died, so the father and Piku are all by themselves. Since the father suffers from many different diseases, Piku has to look after him and feels responsible for her child-ish parent.

Although, because of Piku’s independence, as she works and supports herself, this family does not seem very modern, their values are still traditional. Piku does not abandon her father, she stays with him even though it is hard for her to take care of him. It may be observed that their relationship changes throughout the story and they admit that they care for and love each other.

This relationship between the father and the daughter shows that family should be the most important thing in life, and respect towards parents is essential; however, sometimes Piku’s attitude may not seem to be respectful. Piku’s example is set for the young generation: that even though they have their careers and jobs, it is the family which is the greatest thing that they have. It also shows parents that they should respect and support their children, and let them be themselves, grow up and develop. Piku sacrifices her life and happiness; she stays with her father until he dies. After his death, Piku is free and she is finally able to live her own life.

3.1.3. *Vivah*

The parent-child relationship in the film *Vivah*, which was directed by Sooraj R. Barjatya, is another example of traditional values combined with respect towards modernity and children’s happiness. The story
“It’s all about loving your parents”…

from the year 2006 is about a married couple who have two daughters: a biological daughter Rajni, called by everyone Chhoti (‘Little’), and their adopted niece, Poonam.

Although the father, Krishnakant, wants to treat both daughters equally, his wife, Rama, pretends to ignore Poonam. Krishnakant has to fulfil the role of both parents to Poonam to make her feel that she is loved. As the daughters are grown-ups, Krishnakant tries to get them both married. Luckily, he manages to find a good man for the older daughter, Poonam. In India, the oldest child should get married first, because if he or she is single, it may bring bad luck to the rest of the children. That is why in the film the older girl has to get married first, even though she is not a biological child of Krishnakant and Rama. Moreover, there is the issue of the complexion in the film. Rama is worried that her daughter, whose skin is a little darker, will not find a good candidate for a husband. Krishnakant, however, tries to ensure his wife and daughter that he will find a husband for Chhoti. He does not seem to notice the darker complexion of his daughter. Instead, he treats her with love and respect, although it is Poonam who is his favourite child.

The relationship between the parents and the daughters is different. Poonam has a great relationship with her father, while Chhoti is more attached to her mother. Krishnakant loves his younger daughter and treats her well, whereas Rama hates Poonam and ignores her needs and feelings, treating her more like a servant than a daughter. The film also shows that daughters should be respected, loved, and treated well. The issue of dowry is also mentioned, but it is rejected by the husband’s family. It represents the change in society’s view on the issue of dowry.

3.1.4. 2 States
The film 2 States, which was released in 2014 and directed by Abhishek Verma, is not strictly about the relationship between parents and children, but it is a difficult love story between Krish, the boy from Punjab, which is the state in the north-west India, and Ananya, the girl from Tamil Nadu, which is the state from south-east India. The differences between those two people coming from different states is noticeable, but they manage to overcome them. The real obstacle is their parents, who
constantly try to stop the couple from the idea of marrying each other and try to discourage them.

In this film the strongest relationship may be seen between the main hero, Krish, and his mother Kavita. She is a possessive mother, who wants to protect her only son from the “witch” from Tamil Nadu, as she calls Krish’s girlfriend, Ananya. Kavita is a good example of an overprotective Indian mother. Kavita is worried that her relationship with her only child after his marriage would be changed for the worse. She would like him to live at home to take care of her.

In the film the father-son relationship is also worth mentioning. Vikram, Krish’s father, is disappointed with Krish. He has planned his son’s future which Krish does not want to follow. Krish’s father seems to be aggressive, he often shouts at his wife and son, so that Krish not only has to protect himself from his father, but he also serves as a guardian of his mother. The relationship between father and son is very difficult and it improves only at the end of the film.

3.2. Modern families
Modern families in India are considered to be those in which traditional values are not more important than the family members. It is the relationship in which parents are still following tradition, while children are modern and want to live their own life.

3.3. Dil Dhadakne Do
Dil Dhadakne Do was released in 2015 and directed by Zoya Akhtar. The plot is about a family which throws a big birthday party for the father. The family and friends gather on a ship and go on a cruise, during which there are some conflicts between the family members.

There is a conflict between the parents and their children. The daughter wants to get divorced as she falls in love with her friend, while the son falls in love with a dancer and wants to marry her. However, the parents have different plans for their children’s future. There is a constant struggle between what the children want and the respect towards the parents’ plans.

The parents, especially the father, are afraid of losing control over their children. Parents in India like to control their offspring even if
they are grown-ups. Still, the parents of the protagonists finally agree to their children’s plans, as the society is changing, and children are more independent nowadays.

The conflict between the parents and the children in *Dil Dhadakne Do* shows that the contemporary times are mixed up with tradition. It is the clash of generations and values and a major change which is under way in India these days. Parents have to respect their children’s lifestyle, their decisions and plans. Furthermore, the children follow their own ambitions and goals, no matter if they have their parents’ consent, or not. Nevertheless, the parents’ approval may be helpful to maintain a healthy relationship within a family.

### 3.4. *Kapoor and Sons*

The film *Kapoor and Sons* was released in 2016 and directed by Shakun Batra. It is about a modern family: the parents, their two sons, and a grandfather. The whole family gathers in India, because of the grandfather’s birthday. They seem to be a very happy family, without any conflicts, but it turns out that there are many conflicts between the family members.

One of the sons, Rahul, is afraid to tell his family that he is homosexual. He is a very successful writer which is painful for his brother, Arjun, who is jealous of Rahul’s success, as he is also a writer. When the parents get to know the truth about Rahul, they are disappointed and angry, because he opposes their plans for his life. Still, they praise him for his successful life as a writer, but are disappointed with his sexual orientation.

The parents expect that the younger son will achieve as much as his brother. They want him to follow their plans and fulfil their expectations, but Arjun decides to refuse them and do what he wants. Sunita and Harsh are very disappointed and they try to convince him that his plans are not good enough.

At the end of the story there is a family photo being taken, which shows how the family has to pretend that they are happy, devoid of any disagreements. There is still a lot of unhappiness covered with broad smiles, unacceptance, sorrow and other bad feelings which make the family still broken. It shows how family relationships are maintained in the eyes of society.
4. Conclusions

The parent-child relationships in Bollywood productions reflect the relationships between parents and children in Indian society. The family bonds presented in the films do not only show the current issues in families, but also encourage people to follow those patterns to some extent. Nowadays, there is a clash of modern and traditional values and thus both parents and children represent different generations and different values.

It became apparent that there have been many changes in family relationships throughout the years. However, the feelings, emotions, and certain values are still present in Indian families, but they are not as important as they used to be. The films show that times are changing, as well as family bonds. They have to be adjusted to people’s modern lifestyles. Moreover, the children nowadays are not willing to follow their parents’ footsteps; they rather establish their own life priorities and values.

The films presented and described in this paper show only a small part of the whole issue of the parent-child relationships in India. Still, it may be observed on the basis of the films mentioned in this paper that the bonds between parents and their children have changed, even though not so many years have passed between the first and the last film described. The relationships have to be adjusted to the contemporary times in which people live; thus, there may be a greater clash between Indian traditional family values and the modern lifestyle that the younger generation may choose.

Bibliography

Primary Sources
Verman, A., dir. 2 States. UTV Motion Pictures, 2014.
Summary: The aim of this paper is to show how the relationship between Indian parents and their children is presented in Bollywood productions and how it has changed in recent 20 years. In the Indian culture family bonds are very important and, despite the constant development of India and its opening up towards Western cultures, the Indian still obey their traditions. The respect of a child towards his or her parents is important in every culture, but in India there is a strong relationship between parents and their children. Bollywood films very often reflect the society’s views and current issues of today’s India. The productions of the Indian film industry in Mumbai have an impact on Indian people’s lives as well. The same concerns Indian families, because on the one hand, the films show how the Indian families function in the reality; on the other hand, Indian cinematography often inspires people and causes a change in people’s behaviour. The relationship between parents and children has also changed throughout the years. It may be seen in the modern cinematography that the parent-child bonds look different than they used to. This presentation consists of the analysis of a few Bollywood films in terms of the parent-child relationship and it is devoted to the issue of changes in the perception of the Indian family. As the Indian film director, Karan Johar, says: “it’s all about loving your parents”.

Keywords: Bollywood, parent-child relationship, family bonds, India

“It’s all about loving your parents”. Relacja rodzic–dziecko w produkcjach Bollywood

Streszczenie: Artykuł stanowi krótkie omówienie relacji rodzic–dziecko w bollywoodzkich produkcjach. Relacja pomiędzy rodzicami a dziećmi zmienia się zarówno w społeczeństwie indyjskim, jak i w kinematografii. Mimo że więzi między rodzicami a dzieć-
mi są bardzo silne, zmieniły się pod wpływem wartości wyznawanych w dzisiejszych Indiach. Filmy Bollywood często odzwierciedlają bieżące problemy czy poglądy społeczeństwa w Indiach, mają także wpływ na życie Indusów. Przedstawianie indyjskiej rodziny w filmach pokazuje z jednej strony to, w jaki sposób funkcjonują rodziny w tym kraju, a ponadto skłania do myślenia i pobudza do zmian. Relacja rodzic–dziecko zmieniła się w ostatnich latach, co jest widoczne we współczesnych filmach Bollywood. Artykuł zawiera analizę wybranych filmów bollywoodzkich pod względem relacji pomiędzy rodzicem a dzieckiem oraz poświęcony jest zmianom w postrzeganiu indyjskiej rodziny. Jak mówi indyjski reżyser Karan Johar: „Chodzi o to, by kochać swoich rodziców”.

Słowa kluczowe: Bollywood, relacje rodzic–dziecko, więzi rodzinne, Indie