

## Teaching Women's Filmmaking Online Conference

### Perceiving patriarchal forebearings of filmmaking in the Indian Film Industry: Contextualising Zoya Akhtar's *Dil Dhadakne Do*

#### Abstract

The phenomenon of the female auteur is a much-deliberated topic within cinema. Several feminist film theorists argue the counter-view whether a female director qualifies as an auteur – regardless of the many accomplished female directors doing so. Female directed cinema gives a counter-culture perspective, intrinsically making it counter cinema, also drawn to more critique than applause. Film theorist Peter Wollen points that “it is crucial to comprehend (auteur theory) as a system of differences and oppositions” (as cited in Chesley, E., 2017). In gaining a perspective from the Indian film industry, Indian cinema has very few female film makers if one excludes transnational women filmmakers from the list. Although Indian cinema is embedded in its largely patriarchal roots, several transnational women filmmakers have tried to stay afloat in roles of decision makers and trend setters. *European Journal of Women's Studies* points in an editorial (2016) that, “there have been numerous women directors in the avant-garde and in documentary where budgets are small or nearly non-existent, and scarce in narrative and commercial cinema where budgets are big.” In this analogy, it is important to critically position women filmmakers who choose their individual narrative styles to represent a worldview, against all odds. This paper attempts at understanding the auteurism of Zoya Akhtar with reference to her films. It aims at understanding Akhtar's works in several contexts – portrayal of the cinematic aesthetics, catering to both sets of audiences, creating commercially viable films, creating her female characters, all within the realm of interceding with industry's financial equations and patricentric force presented for a female auteur. Akhtar's creativity and individuality resonates in her directed works - *Luck By Chance*, *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, Bombay Talkies' *Sheila Ki Jawani*, Netflix originals' *Lust Stories*' short film segment, Amazon Prime's romantic drama web series *Made in Heaven*, and the juxtaposed portrayal of her female characters (Safeena Firdausi and Sky) in an otherwise male-driven plot of *Gully Boy*. This paper, with reference to her film *Dil Dhadakne Do* - cautiously showing the dysfunctional-dystopian family in its farcical nature, aims to identify if Akhtar limits herself in the art of filmmaking to fit into a mould or rises to the challenge offered by the industry's misogynous attitude. Besides Akhtar's presence in the industry and her creative authority in

filmmaking, the paper also looks at her portrayal of female characters. There is an attempt to determine Akhtar's directorial viewpoint in the film and from the perspective of the auteur theory and the female auteur, determining the standpoint she creates her female characters with.

## **Bibliography**

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