



*Lokesh Dharmani is a radio presenter, also, runs a recipe blog and a YouTube channel on traveling. He is a big supporter of gender equality.*

In these "me too" times, we often say, we must not only speak to our girls but also to our boys and funnily those same people "proposing" to converse with our boys have raved about a film called *Badhai Ho*, a film that celebrates everything that's wrong with our boys these days; equating machismo with toxic masculinity, treating women as objects and most disturbingly putting a man's honor or his family's shame in a woman's sexual life.

Have you ever wondered how we men vulgarly boast about our scores with women, and flare up when someone even makes a remotely sexual remark about our wives, mothers or sisters? In a scene in

*Badhai Ho* movie a school bully mocks a teenager for his middle aged parents expecting a baby. "Tera baap teri ma ke saath aaj kal chaiya chaiya kar raha hain?" Jokes the bully. The boy replies, "Nahi toh kya teri ma ke saath chaiya chaiya kare?" And all hell breaks loose ending in a nasty fight.

Why the first and perhaps the only retort to any fight is an attack on the women of the family? And why do we give so much importance to it anyway and then eventually feel offended? Our entire family's dignity depends on our women's shoulder. They hence become easy targets and means to settle scores between men and their egos. It happened in our epics; *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and it continues in modern times too, in films, conversations and expletives meant only for our women. Strangely the same rule doesn't apply for men. A man's active sexual life makes him a stud, funnily, a woman's makes her a slut, a sentiment that's normalized (never questioned) in this movie, especially the different kind of treatment, the middle aged couple gets by their relatives on their good news. The husband is held in high regard by other men in the family for "successfully batting" in his fifties. He is even asked to give tips on virility to a flaming gay man. The distasteful mockery (in name of good humor) against LGBTQIA+ in the film calls for another post altogether. The poor wife on the other hand has to dodge severe judgments for being too "adventurous" and "loose" for expecting at such an old age.

It's a fair argument that the film reflects the way our society functions, but shouldn't it question these double standards for men and women than further fueling them by making light of it?

Terrorism also exists in our society. We don't normalize it by making jokes about it.

Many of you might defend the movie citing how Neena Gupta's mother in law defends her character. However she never addresses the issue of different rules for men and women. Instead she praises Neena for being a dutiful daughter in law. And that's even more disturbing as it further cages our women into moral boxes, telling them how they should be. It's like Neena Gupta's duties towards her mother in law legitimize her sexual life with her husband. Or else it would be questioned. How are the two related is beyond me!!

In a scene the teenage brother of the hero calls his brother's girlfriend as "maal" (an object) and people laugh in the theater. He is later helped by the hero to "man up" by hitting the bullies in school and no one seems to have a problem with toxic masculinity here. We applaud it instead. These are the conversations we need to have with our boys that women are not "object", not even as a joke. Because a joke makes it normal, acceptable. We need to tell them that it's imperative to stand up for oneself but violence is not a sign of masculinity.

In fact, I remember vividly cringing in my seat, seething with anger while watching this particular scene in the movie, where the hero is teased by his friends for expecting another sibling. One of his friends, we are told, broke up with his girlfriend, because he couldn't sexually satisfy her. When the same friend corners the hero and makes fun of his parents, the hero attacks his friend's manhood by commenting on his poor virility and instructing him to send his girlfriend to his dad. The theatre exploded in a thunderous, vulgar applause, strangely matching the obscenity of the scene. The hero of the film is talking about attacking someone's wife to impregnate her and it all passes off as "Harmless entertainment"?

A woman, an unnamed, unknown woman who would be someone's wife for crying out loud, is used as a bait, as means to settle scores between men to satisfy their egos and no one seems to have a problem at all. Not even a single review of the movie that I read even bothered to mention this. People who use humor as defense, "calm down, it's meant to be funny" must understand that humor is a dangerous weapon that normalizes the crime against our women. It takes only a bunch of "wife slandering" WhatsApp jokes, a few memes and a couple of these douchebag films to establish that women are objects, second class citizens, who we can molest anywhere, anytime. And hence when a hero talks about impregnating someone else's wife, we find it funny than disturbing. There is a direct connect between these jokes and the rape scene in our country, because these jokes create the atmosphere for these crimes to flourish. *Badhaai Ho* as a concept was a great idea; to help us see our parents as people with needs and desires, full of romance, poetry and love. It was such a powerful scene when Neena Gupta single handedly decides to keep the baby and the husband lovingly agrees. But the funny-misogynistic narrative, the toxic tone of the film are both disturbing and highly questionable.