

**REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA:
CHARACTERISATION, SONGS, DANCE AND DRESS IN
YASH RAJ FILMS FROM 1997 TO 2007**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Gender Studies

in the

Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Howard College Campus

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January 2009

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated in the text, is my own original work. This research has also not been submitted to any other institution for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on a content analysis through which representation of women in Bollywood cinema is examined. Bollywood has been a major point of reference for Indian culture in the last century and will undoubtedly persist for years to come. To an extent, Bollywood has shaped the way in which people read Indian culture as well as reflecting India's events, traditions, values and customs by the mere fact that it is a pervasive and inescapable force in Indian society. Women have been and to an extent still are represented as mere wallpaper in Bollywood films. Issues around gender, gender-based violence, femininity, women's rights and sexuality (outside of being a sexpot) are often ignored and in most cases, subverted. Feminist discourse in the west has taken this up in relation to Hollywood (cf. Mulvey, 1975; Kuhn, 1984; Kaplan, 2000) however, discussions of gender in eastern cinema has yet to be fully developed. Even though there is a body of work in this field (cf. Butalia, 1984; Datta, 2000) there is room for far more in-depth investigation. This study explores the ways in which women are represented and misrepresented in Bollywood cinema by looking at the main features which make Bollywood what it is: the stock characters, song and dance routines and elaborate dress. Each of these elements is discussed by using one or two films to illustrate the formula that is used in Bollywood cinema to undermine women.

Keywords: Bollywood (film centre of India situated in Mumbai), gender representation, filmic elements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My supervisors: Professor Thenjiwe Magwaza and Nisha Ramlutchman.

Thenji, your patience is that of a woman made of steel. Your knowledge and brilliance has guided me immensely.

Nisha, this dissertation is as much yours as it is mine. You have led me immeasurably through this dissertation and the last two years of my life.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal Graduate Assistance Program and the National Research Foundation for priceless financial assistance.

Aldonna Murugan for your perpetual assistance, patience and prayers.

Mum and Dad I cannot begin to explain how appreciative I am of the life and love you have given me. You have provided me with stability, a sound head and the greatest gifts of all – love and education. You are the inspiration for all I do.

Yuri, my Gandalf. I can safely say that I know no better person in the world. You are my life. Yashin, thank you for putting up with Yuri putting up with me and for the constant concern.

The Fellowship of Irui for believing that I could do this, even when I didn't. Timone for your constant nagging and bullying to finish, and Rani for your offerings of squeaky toys as empirical evidence.

My friends, thanks for keeping the madness alive when the academia had taken over. Special thanks to Soraya, Sudhir, Libby and Julia for keeping my feet on the ground and head in the clouds. Adeel, thank you for being the person you are. Your constant support has led me through this with relative ease. I love you so very much.

Dedicated to
my family for being so extraordinary.

In memory of
Vanisha Ramkisson
(1973 - 2002)

"To begin with, you've got to understand that a seagull is an unlimited idea of freedom, an image of the Great Gull, and your whole body, from wingtip to wingtip, is nothing more than your thought itself."

- Richard Bach

Jonathan Livingstone Seagull

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Introduction



Fig. 1.

Source: *Bandini* (1963)

Fair-skinned and doe-eyed:

The idea of the ideal Indian beauty
has been perpetuated since the early
days of Bollywood cinema.

Cinema is a facet of the media which is a large socio-cultural factor. It can be seen as one of the most effective mediums of visual communications today.

It is more or less accepted that film's function in our culture goes beyond that of being, simply, an exhibited aesthetic object...film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways on which our culture makes sense of itself (Turner, 1999:3),

and because of this, there has been a growing prominence of academic discourse surrounding film, not only in terms of structure and art, but also its effects on the public and on culture. The latter has gained more academic attention in recent history. "In such instances, film is not even the final target of inquiry, but part of a wider argument about *representation* – the social process of making images, sounds, signs, stand for something – in film or television" (Turner, 1999:47) and included in this is representation of women in film. Feminist discourse concerning film has taken these areas into consideration as areas of debate in which power struggles are exercised and the significance

rests in inquiring as to how the field is interpreted and what people, be they scholars, viewers or filmmakers, can learn from it.

From this inquiry into representation within film studies, we can focus on a derivative of film studies, which is feminist film studies. Feminist studies as a larger field of study has become a 'global movement' in which femininity in all walks of life have been scrutinised. Feminist film studies, being a microcosm of this, have examined representation of women on screen, television and writings on gender and film. This is because "film can be considered a language of its own, but the language that it uses still symbolises the same binary order that has dominated our society with its phallogocentric perspective" (Fram-Kulik, 2002:1). Many theorists have addressed the topic of women in film (cf. Mulvey, 1975; Kuhn, 1984, 1994; Kaplan, 1983; Humm, 1997; de Lauretis, 1984). The impact of cinema on critical studies over the years has been significant and has focused on the misrepresentation or lack of representation of women in film. The reasoning behind this being, as Kaplan (1983:33) suggests, is that "all dominant images are basically male constructs". The gendered nature of film is one that has been documented and questioned greatly.

Bollywood¹ cinema, in turn, has been as inspected in a similar manner to any other category of cinema. Even though studies on Bollywood were previously seen as not viable, due to the escapist nature of the medium, the growing interest in India's development has led to an international concern over the media that comes out of India, especially their largest export, Bollywood cinema. There has been much research on Bollywood cinema as a whole (cf. Sircar, 1995; Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998; Kabir, 2001; Pendakur, 2003; Ganti, 2004), mostly explaining what it is, how it works and the culture behind Bollywood. Due to the emergent Indian Diasporas all over the world, Bollywood has started to export more films and gain more western influences, which also been a focal

¹ Bollywood is the Indian version of Hollywood, named after Bombay (now Mumbai) where it originated. It is the largest Indian cinematic form and is mainly in Hindi (the national language of India) and is one of the largest producing movie industries in the world.

point that researchers have discovered and begun to explore. The significance of studying Bollywood has never been more pertinent, not only because of the growth of Bollywood as an industry but because of its following and significance in reading culture and making sense of society and its workings.

Of late, focus has shifted from merely discussing Bollywood as a cinematic domain to the roles of women in Bollywood. Since this shift, there has been increasing research done in this sphere (cf. Butalia, 1984; Chatterji, 1998; Datta, 2000; Radhakrishnan, 2001). The focus of these writers has been mainly on the representation of women in Bollywood in their traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother, as well as of the increasing influence of western culture, which created the character of the vamp. As much as there has been a large amount of research done in terms of the roles of women in Bollywood, the field is still wide open to a great deal of investigation.

This study has a few assumptions attached to it, and due to the fluid nature of film and culture, should not be taken as gospel. In this study, I assume that the reader has had contact with Bollywood films and therefore, I would not need to delve into how the films work as a filmic practice. I also assume that the reader is not looking for a universal mode in which to interpret or receive answers about the way in which women are represented in Bollywood because this is a microcosm of a larger body of work, to which I am merely adding, as one person's perspective, using textual analysis. It is based on the premise that "femininity is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one" (Moi, 1982:209) and draws from what I have observed Bollywood to be, and takes a closer look at Bollywood in relation to theory. The study, however, does not assume that women (and Indian women in particular) are a homogenous group. "Women are separated by (among other factors), class, race, age, education and culture" (Ramlutchman, 2006:5). What I do present in this enquiry is one point of view, coming from the view of a middle-class, educated South African woman of Indian descent. My point of view is not necessarily a universal

one and definitely does not assume that women experience oppression in the same manner all over the world.

Western feminisms have unwittingly tended to assume that the struggle and plight of all women are the same. In this way, the experiences of colour and women from underprivileged backgrounds are not given the importance they deserve. It cannot be assumed that all women experience the same things in the same way" (Moodley, 2004:30).

This understanding of feminism as articulated by Moodley (2004) implies that looking at representation from one point of view is not a universal view. In fact, I would assume that it is as far from universal as possible, seeing as though the majority of people watching films are not scrutinising it as I would be, but accepting the norms that the films present, seeing as though film is primarily for entertainment.

The focus of this study is visual representation of women in Bollywood cinema, focusing on Yash Raj Films² from 1997 to 2007, and I aim to analyse the chosen films in terms of female characterisation (the roles of daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, vamp, courtesan and widow), song and dance routines, which are an integral part of what makes Bollywood unique and so culture-specific, and dress codes. The study concentrates on these visual representations in terms of theories of feminists such as Mulvey³ and Kuhn, who see dominant cinema as a misogynist practice, theories of representation and stereotyping (cf. Hall, 1997), ideology (cf. Eagleton, 1991), Hinduism, family and tradition (cf. Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998) and patriarchy (cf. Walby, 1994). These theories form the basis of the analysis and will inform the study to answer the question of how women are represented visually in Bollywood cinema.

The films I will be focusing on in this investigation are:

² Yash Raj Films is a film production company in India, set up by Yash Chopra; active since 1973. The production company makes many of Bollywood's all time favourite films.

³ Mulvey has come under much criticism, which is not unfounded. However, seeing as though this study is not based purely on her work, I use her theories regardless of the criticism because the core of her theories is applicable to the study more so than most others'. See Studlar, G. 1988. *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic*. University of Illinois, reprinted in paperback, Columbia University Press.

Dil To Pagal Hai (The Heart is Crazy) (1997)

Mohabbatein (Love Stories) (2000)

Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai (It's My Friend's Wedding) (2002)

Mujhse Dosti Karoge! (Be My Friend) (2002)

Hum Tum (You and I) (2004)

Aaja Nachle (Come, Let's Dance) (2007)

Laga Chunari Mein Daag (My Veil is Stained) (2007)

These films are ones which follow the traditional Bollywood (or any dominant cinema) formula, which is; exposition, development, complication, climax and resolution. Bollywood films differ from traditional Hollywood in that there are songs to pinpoint each change in narrative structure and to guide the development in an entertaining manner. They celebrate what Bollywood is seen as; a gala of colour, song and dance, and merriment. All of the films have happy endings and are what majority of the audience attending a screening of a Bollywood film would expect.

The women in these films as seen in a viewing of the above films prior to the start of the study are presented simply and in the manner in which most cinemas deals with women and contain traits which are the generally accepted codes of femininity. Throughout history, it has been articulated that "truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights...all they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children" (Friedan, 1963) and this is the premise of femininity this dissertation will be taking into consideration. In considering these films, I aim to provide an insight towards the way in which women are represented in majority of Bollywood films because it is generally seen as though "it is the women who define the boundaries of 'Indianness'" (Sharpe, 2005:67). I do know that this is not the case all the time and there are films which do show women as being more than the woman as described by Friedan. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4. As depicted in fig. 1 (pg 1), the ideal Indian women has been articulated through film

from the early days of Bollywood, and is one who has what is seen as truly feminine qualities, which will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

The methodology used in this study is one of textual or content analysis and I aim to take this further by looking at content analysis from a gendered perspective. The hypothesis in this instance is that the media addresses us in various ways, and that it is through a thorough and critical content analysis that a researcher can see the relation between what is shown on screen and what is inferred. Even though examining media texts does heavily rely on audience response, this is not the desirable method for this study. "Cinema's success involves, undoubtedly among other things, the manipulation of visual pleasure" (Carroll, 1990:350) and this give rise to the question about whether viewers, being so exposed and accustomed to portrayal of women being submissive has made audiences desensitised to it. Also, "film culture...serves to prevent viewers from grasping structures of domination, promoting a false consciousness, which can be manipulated" (Manuel, 1993:47) and this essentially means that films tend to serve the dominant ideology of the time, drawing people into a false sense of security under the overriding structures, even if the overriding structure is detrimental to the people. I am also not entirely ignoring filmic techniques, however and am bearing in mind that camera angles, the way shots are framed and the manner in which each scene is shot is important. "The camera (technology), the look (voyeurism), and the scopic drive itself partake of the phallic and thus somehow are entities or figures of a masculine nature" (de Lauretis, 1985:161). However, to go into detail of this would be outside the scope of the study.

Using these premise as a starting point, I attempt in this study to answer the questions: how does Bollywood cinema represent women, are women in Bollywood cinema constructed mainly for the male gaze, and to what extent have women overcome negative representation in film?

Chapter 1 is a review of literature which has informed this study. This chapter encompasses feminist film theory from which the critical information about the representation of women in Hollywood and Bollywood is drawn. Theorists such as Laura Mulvey (1975) and Annette Kuhn (1984, 1994) have studied portrayals of women in classic or traditional Hollywood cinema over many years and their studies have informed much of the study surrounding Bollywood, seeing as though both cinematic forms are similar in their dominance. This then brings me to focus on Urvashi Butalia (1984) and Sangeeta Datta (2000), whose seminal works on depictions of women in Bollywood (also informed by Mulvey and Kuhn) have informed much of the study surrounding women in Bollywood since their writings. These theorists and their works have located my study in the framework of their thoughts and ideas of women in cinema being represented mainly for the male gaze. This discussion also includes my own analysis of these writings and how they relate to this study.

Chapter 2 goes on to a description of various theories in academia which are applicable to this study. Ideology, representation and stereotyping (Hall, 1997) are theories which have formed the basis for much literary study in the media, and are theories which are pertinent to this study. This is because no study on representation of any group or individual can be undertaken without looking at the impact of theories surrounding these topics. Representation is brought about through ideology and stereotyping is a part of representation which, as Mulvey et al. (see Chapter 1) suggest, is the keystone in representation of women in cinema. Hinduism, mythology, notions of family and traditions (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998) are facets of Indian lifestyle which informs much of what Bollywood symbolises. The overriding experience in Bollywood and indeed, most of Indian cinema in general, is to create what can be termed 'The Great Indian Dream', just as Hollywood tries to create 'The American Dream' through film. The 'Indian Dream' is one that encompasses a nation regulated by Hinduism, Hindu mythology, family sticking together and tradition being paramount. Patriarchy (cf. Walby, 1994) is then brought into play, because it is through patriarchy that these

cultural systems are in place. The importance of patriarchy on the family system, its hold on religious aspects of life, the rule of men over women in the sphere of cinema and thus the means of making meaning are notions that do not need to be explained because they are clear, throughout history. In this chapter, I attempt to draw all of these concepts together to form an understanding about how the media works to serve the ideology of patriarchy, and to understand how this functions as a tool in Bollywood.

Chapter 3 delves into the methodology used to conduct this study. In this case, I have decided to use textual or content analysis, for reasons already explained. The chapter outlines how I am going to process the study, through a groundwork study of the literature (Chapters 1 and 2) and critical viewings of the films. The chapter will include the basis as to why and how I am going to study female characterisation, song and dance routines and finally, dress codes in the films in order to reveal the manner in which women are represented in Bollywood films.

Chapter 4 is the actual investigation of the films and through explaining the findings through several viewings of the films, I aim to ascertain the way in which women are represented in Bollywood films by discussing the following topics. The roles of women are to be intensely analysed, looking at women in their generic roles of daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, vamp, courtesan and widow, as well as an investigation as to whether there are other character types in these films. The discussion will then address song and dance routines, to which there are many types, being; the imaginary dance, traditional Indian dance, rain dance, field dance and western dance. These dance types not only provide a visual playground for critical analysis, they depict character types as well. Finally, I will be examining dress codes in Bollywood cinema and how each dress type; depicts character and provides visual stimuli for the viewer and the male protagonists in the film. I will then draw together the findings from the analysis and the relevant theory in order to answer the questions at hand.

This dissertation, *Representations of Women in Bollywood Cinema: Characterisation, Song, Dance and Dress in Yash Raj Films from 1997 to 2007* is based on the premise that representation of women in Bollywood cinema centres on the conflict between representation of women as prescribed by theories of patriarchy as well as Bollywood cinematic conventions, and the need to break the mould of Bollywood's conventions if true emancipation for women is to be worked towards and eventually realised. While there may be some women in film who do indeed break this mould, this investigation is to ascertain, not only the way in which women are represented but to what extent are they emancipated. This study is born out of my interest in Bollywood and how women are represented in the media, as well as how women can be emancipated through the media.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Although Bollywood is a field that has only recently been examined in academic discourse in the English-speaking world,⁴ numerous authors and scholars (cf. Sircar, 1995; Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998; Kabir, 2001; Pendakur, 2003, Ganti, 2004) have brought forward their views on Bollywood in general and a number have dealt with the topic in specific areas such as the industry as an economic whole, filmic techniques and narrative. Feminism has been widely documented and the area of gender studies allows for a wider feminist reading of films. However, few writers have dealt with the two topics together – Bollywood and Women and although there have been many writers who have tapped into this, adding to this field of inquiry would be beneficial so as to draw more attention to it. Seeing as though it would be a challenging task to present *all* possible perspectives on the subject,⁵ I have selected writings that I have come across in both gender and Bollywood fields which seem applicable to my study, which I will comment on and review in detail.

Accordingly, this chapter examines various works pertaining to the study: Bollywood research conducted in India and outside of India as part of the Indian Diaspora, and theorists that look at the structures of dominant cinema and take a feminist approach in analysing dominant cinema. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will be examining and focusing specifically on a few theorists. These include; Laura Mulvey (1975), Annette Kuhn (1985 & 1994), Urvashi Butalia (1984) and Sangeeta Datta (2000). The reason I have chosen these theorists is that not only do they form the foundation of the theory that informs this dissertation, their theories are important in order to understand the position

⁴ The reason I am using the English-speaking world is because the literature written in other languages have either not been translated or are not available to me for the purpose of this study.

⁵ Many researchers have explored topics within Bollywood and women such as sexuality (cf. Bagchi, 1996). However, this is outside the scope of the study and will not be delved into.

from which I am coming in. The link between these writers and this dissertation are twofold: Mulvey and Kuhn provide a basis for the teachings about women in cinema which are pivotal to any study undertaken about women in cinema, and seeing as though Hollywood is the dominant cinema in the west; it can be linked to Bollywood, being the dominant cinema in India. Butalia and Datta have opened up the floor to feminist discourse in and around Bollywood and Indian cinema and have foreground work that informs studies on representation women in Indian cinema with more attention to detail on the culture specifics of Indian cinema.

1.2. Laura Mulvey (1975)

Laura Mulvey was born in Oxford and studied History at Oxford University. She started writing on feminist film theory in the 70's and since developing ideas about 'spectorial identification'⁶ and the male gaze, she and husband, Peter Wollen, joined heads and directed films dealing with the position of women in relation to patriarchy, symbolic language and male fantasy.⁷

There has been little literature on feminism and film theory that have been as influential on contemporary thinking and study as Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey, 1975). First presented as a paper at the University of Wisconsin and subsequently published in *Screen* and then *Women and the Cinema*, the essay examines psychoanalytic, Althusserian and feminist theories. This essay is of great importance because "film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (Mulvey, 1975:57). Mulvey (in Humm, 1997:17) "figures cinema as irreducibly shaped by sexual difference arguing that film is constructed around looks or gazes, which in turn shape editing and narrative, and further, these looks are completely and eternally

⁶ This is when the audience is invited to gaze at will for self gratification by identifying with the character on screen, a term that is used in conjunction with 'the male gaze'.

⁷ <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/566978/>

of men looking at women". Film is based on gratification and entertainment and, according to Mulvey, in mainstream cinema, male gratification and entertainment takes preference.

1.2.1. Mulvey and Althusser

Mulvey's essay first delves into Althusserian analysis by using terminology of 'consumable commodity' and women in film being just that – consumable commodities in terms of body and character within the plot of the film. In his essay, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971),⁸ Althusser argues that humans perceive existence as being a network of systems of representation called Institutional State Apparatuses (ISA's). Cinema falls under this category which offers humans a visual sense of self through 'recognition' of the image of the self on screen. Embedded in this is the construction of individuals as subjects which are constructed by the lens and the director. In this framework lies Hollywood as well as Bollywood cinema. Mulvey states "However self-conscious and ironic Hollywood managed to be, it always restricted itself to a formal mise-en-scène reflecting the dominant ideological concept of the cinema" (Mulvey, 1975:58). In my preliminary observations of the Bollywood films that are to be examined and by looking at what Mulvey states about Hollywood, it can be perceived that both Hollywood and Bollywood have a dominant ideology which is overtly patriarchal. "Woman...stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning but not maker of meaning" (Mulvey, 1975:58). This will be further explained in Chapter 4.

⁸ Discussing Althusser's theories in detail is outside the scope of the dissertation and will therefore not be discussed. For further information see Althusser, L. 1971. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. In: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Monthly Review Press.

1.2.2 Mulvey and Psychoanalysis

Interwoven with Althusserian theory of 'interpellation' – that is the idea that the spectator's pleasure is shaped by a film's language – is Jacques Lacan's⁹ theory that the unconscious is structured like a language. Mulvey links film techniques directly with psychoanalytic desires in terms of content and mechanisms. The psychoanalytic aspect of the human is explained as being a major part of what makes people able to identify with the image on screen as well as identify power relations on screen. Mulvey (1975), on examining development of gender in the psyche, states that the sight of ourselves (as the sight of a child looking into a mirror in early stages) creates a social construction or symbolic order (the law of the father) which enables the viewer to come to a sense of 'I' or 'me' intrinsically embedded in language. The next step is to recognise the 'other' which is 'they' or 'you' – also known as difference. The difference, as seen by Mulvey in terms of psychoanalytic theory is the image of the male child recognising his penis (the phallus) and the female lack thereof. Hence, woman is identified as 'other'¹⁰ by virtue of her lack of a phallus or 'castration'. "She can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it" (Mulvey, 1975:58) even in film and other forms of representation, which are controlled by men. Theories of psychoanalysis see the male as physically and symbolically dominant over the female; he has a penis and she does not. This makes her the 'other' and therefore, inferior. Furthermore, his fear of castration, as is embodied in the female, leads him to further subjugate her; first through physical strength, then, over time, through ideological mechanisms.

According to Lacan "language privileges the masculine over the feminine" (Humm, 1997:23). In turn, Mulvey argues that narrative (which is part of the

⁹ Jacques Lacan's theories are based on Sigmund Freud's theories. Lacan broke down Freud's ideas and discussed them in greater detail. I will not delve into a discussion about Lacan as it is outside the scope of the dissertation. For more information see: Lacan, J. 1968. *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. See Chapter 2 (2.3.3.)

¹⁰ I will delve into a discussion of 'the other' in Chapter 2 in detail under *Representation* as described by Stuart Hall (1997)

language of a film) is what links the viewer to the screen. "Film's stylistic agency comes from its narrative strategies which claim individuals as subjects" (Humm, 1997:24). Woman in the narrative, according to Mulvey, tends to be the subject which is on display for consumption.



Fig. 2
Devdas (2002)
 Statuesque in lavish clothing:
 The ideal Indian woman poses.
 Source: www.neetalulla.com

In terms of filmic mechanism in Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis, the spectator is drawn into the narrative via traditional film techniques which allow for internalisation and identification with the subject on screen. The reason that psychoanalysis is so important in terms of representation (cf. Hall, 1997) is because the recognition of the woman as having the lack of a phallus and the notion of difference is so imperative in the self-recognition phase of a person's life and this carries over from recognition into representation. This is because representation is the act of putting forth one's perceptions of how society is recognised. As pictured above (fig. 2.), even advertising incorporates actresses as a fetish; Aishwarya Rai (above) is used to advertised Neeta Lulla designs and the image is taken from a scene in a film. She is glamorised and turned into a spectacle.

The psychoanalytic take on women in film is necessary to identify the origins of filmic suppression of women. However, psychoanalysis has its limitations. It is a

vast field with many variables and seeing as though I am discussing specific films in terms of tangible aspects of them, I will not be analysing the films in the psychoanalytic sense. Mulvey's work, nevertheless, is the basis for the thoughts I keep in mind as I examine Bollywood cinema's representation of women. Mulvey's theories fit into this study as being the starting point from which ideas on how mainstream cinema represents women and why are born. She explains a lot in terms of how women are seen on screen in terms of ideological tools and the psychoanalytic approach explains reasons as to why this is so. Taking this into consideration is important for this study.

1.3. Annette Kuhn (1985 & 1994)

Annette Kuhn was born in England and studied Sociology at Goldsmiths College in London and Sheffield University. Kuhn started to focus on feminism and materialism in her later studies and branched off into film. She is a professor of film at Lancaster University and is currently the co-editor of *Screen*.¹¹

In her analysis of the film industry and proposal of creating a new feminist cinema, Kuhn examines Hollywood which is a well established form of entertainment and communication. It is imperative to understand the established workings of dominant cinema in order to critique it. Kuhn specifically looks at women in Hollywood cinema and their roles, not only as actresses but as movie makers as well. The reason Kuhn's writing fit into my study is because Bollywood, like Hollywood is the dominant form of cinema in its country and is widely disseminated. It follows similar production patterns as well as in terms of ownership and creation of meaning. Kuhn's work is overtly materialist and Marxist feminist. She also briefly looks at psychoanalysis and extends Mulvey's discussion of psychoanalysis in terms of cinema by looking at the 'female gaze'.

¹¹ <http://www.counterpoint-online.org/cgi-bin/item.cgi?id=558>

1.3.1. Kuhn and the Institution of Dominant Cinema

A lot of Kuhn's work in *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (1994) deals with the institution of Hollywood, which can be applied to Bollywood. She states that Hollywood has a history that has "become solidified and institutionalised" (Kuhn, 1994:3) and that the institution of dominant cinema (in her case, Hollywood) relies on the acceptance of the norms of dominant cinema by the masses in order to operate. Hollywood's hegemonic status in society leads it to be dominant and its norms being reiterated with each film that it produces. Hence little room is left for debate. In this case, ideology is one of the leading theories which inform Kuhn's work. Kuhn (1994) states that ideology is a factor that makes the image of women a commodity through the connections that people make via upbringing, socialisation and meaning. Narrative also has an impact on the way viewers perceive the image of woman. In traditional narrative cinema, the viewer is made a voyeur by secretly looking in on the slice of life on the screen and is drawn into the story as the omnipresent eye via the darkened cinema. The narrative progresses logically and more often than not chronologically so as to make viewers identify with the characters. Closure is a huge part of this as resolution restores natural order. This is done by containing women into the cycle of patriarchy at the end which will be further explained later on in this discussion.

1.3.2. Kuhn and Psychoanalysis

In *Women's Pictures* (1994) Kuhn takes Mulvey's work a step further in looking at psychoanalysis, which makes it a lot clearer and applicable to the study of Bollywood cinema. She looks at the narcissistic pleasures of looking by men looking at women as well as women looking at women.¹² In terms of Indian cinema, it is not merely that men look at women and women watch themselves

¹² Where Kuhn and Mulvey's work differ greatly is that Kuhn discusses the possibility of the female voyeur whereas Mulvey does not discuss the female as a prospective viewer, let alone voyeur.

being looked at (Berger, 1972) but men looking at women as well as women looking at women. For Mulvey, the act of looking takes the form of voyeurism and is sometimes narcissistic in that one looks at representations of the human body; women also enjoy the image by either identifying with it and, in turn, wanting to be the image (liking being looked at) or adopting a masculine subject position of voyeur and enjoying the image for objectification of the 'other'. Hence, the woman on screen is a form of spectacle for both male and female viewers. As shown in fig. 3 (below), scenes that are not always related to the narrative of the film turn the heroine into a spectacle for men via sexually charged images. This, as Kuhn (1994) argues, is true in Hollywood and can be applied to Bollywood.



Fig. 3
Source: *Kisna* (2005)
The camera watching Lakshmi have a bath:
The height of the male gaze.

1.3.3. The Power of the Image (1985)

In her 1985 book *The Power of the Image*, Kuhn explores the image of women as a commodity which mass audiences buy into. She discusses representation as a business which is controlled by the system of patriarchy and that the star system and glamour are in conformity with patriarchy. In capitalism, which forms of dominant cinema operate, gender is constructed in the way the owners want

gender to be seen. In the case of women, images produced and sold in cinema construct women as 'other'. Kuhn states that showing women off in the way dominant cinema does "promote[s] an impossible image of ideal womanhood and [is] complicit in the widespread idea that all women...are reducible to a set of bodily attributes" (Kuhn, 1985:3). The image of women as an image with what is seen as beautiful legs, breasts, face or whichever body part is emphasised by the camera (e.g. legs, midriff, etc.) is cut up, marketed and sold to viewers who, if they buy into it, are buying the ideology behind it which states that woman is 'other' in her ability to be purchased. "'Mainstream' images in our culture bear the traces of the capitalist and patriarchal social relations in which they are produced, exchanged and consumed" (Kuhn, 1985:10). This is highly evident in film.

Kuhn also writes about the problem of creating the image of glamour and the star system as being one of oppression. She argues that women on screen are sold in pieces, the camera emphasising the body parts of the star which is most attractive and woman being the sum of the bodily attributes that can be marketed. According to Kuhn's discussion, Aishwarya Rai,¹³ (see fig. 4) for example, is sold as a star with what is seen as the perfect body by virtue of the fact that she is a former Miss World title holder. The image is falsified and is sold as having the existing qualities being enhanced. Through airbrushing, makeup and the fact that she is a star she is the image that is desired yet unattainable. Nobody knows the real Aishwarya Rai but viewers 'know' her through her physical attributes and the fact that her name is in lights. Male voyeuristic desire could be readily projected "because of the inherent "iconicity of the actress" (Mishra, 2002:63). Men are told to want her and women are told to envy her.

¹³ Aishwarya Rai is a model turned actress. She was crowned Miss World 1994 and has since then, become an international idol and representative of Bollywood. She has also been offered a role in the James Bond series of films and has starred in many films outside of India including a Hollywood film *The Last Legion* (2007).



Fig. 4
Time Magazine (1998)
 Aishwarya Rai as a newcomer actress:
 Former Miss World making her breakthrough
 into Bollywood cinema as the new **face** of film
 Source: www.timesofindia.com

Kuhn and Mulvey's influences on the western mode of thinking about film are pivotal. However, their theories alone will not be sufficient in order to fully examine Bollywood, because their analyses are largely from a western and Hollywood perspective alone. This is why I have reviewed the following Indian writers who have examined feminism and Bollywood cinema.

1.4. Urvashi Butalia (1984)

Butalia was born in India and studied literature at The University of Delhi. She is a Masters graduate in South Asian studies from the University of London. She is an activist in many aspects of human rights and is currently a consultant for Oxfam India.¹⁴

¹⁴ http://www.lettre-ulysses-award.org/jury06/bio_butalia.html

Butalia's 1984 article *Women in Indian Cinema* still has prevalence today as it is a general discussion of women and how they are embodied in Indian cinema. She discusses topics such as culture, religion and traditions, which should be examined when thinking and theorising about Bollywood. She affirms that although women are becoming increasingly visible in cinema, we have to question what kind of visibility it is and who the image of the visible woman is serving. She says that "in spite of increased visibility, Indian women are not, in general, autonomous and self defined in films" (Butalia, 1984:109). They are seen as either good or bad and not in between and they seldom question that role or the men who control the representation of that role. The good ones are:

more often than not (self sacrificing) mothers, (dutiful) daughters, (loyal) sisters or (obedient and respectful) wives... Bad women, other than being modern, are often single, sometimes widowed...westernised (synonymous with being fast and 'loose'), independent (a male preserve), aggressive (a male quality) and they may even smoke or drink (Butalia, 1984:109).

Butalia goes on to explain that film, since being influenced by Hollywood has begun to show seemingly strong women who have ambitions but these ambitions are almost always dashed by the fact that she is an Indian women and for Indian women, that kind of thing is just not done. She also writes about alternate Indian cinema and how these low-budget and high-conscientising films have begun to articulate social dilemmas but how they have "little impact in the home, where it is most important" (Butalia, 1984:110) because of the lack of funding and the fact that the films do not cater to the masses who want to see the typical Bollywood melodrama.

1.5. Sangeeta Datta (2000)

Datta is an Indian national living in England. She is a film historian and belongs to the film society, *In Focus*, which offers a forum for South Asian cinema and diasporic Indian cinema. She is currently a post doctoral fellow at the University of Sussex.¹⁵

¹⁵ <http://www.indiaclub.com/shop/AuthorSelect.asp?Author=Sangeeta+Datta>

In her article *Globalisation and Representations of Women in Indian Cinema* (2000) Datta looks at generic depictions of women in Indian cinema and Bollywood in particular. She talks about globalisation and the impact that has had on Indian cinema's representation of women which I will not delve into here. I focus on her discussion of the broad-spectrum representation of women in Bollywood film. First she discusses "the village belle" (Datta, 2000:72) and how women are portrayed as simple, traditional, motherly and dutiful. Women in Bollywood, according to Datta "serve to maintain male domination. In Indian mainstream cinema we continue to see a patriarchal version of female sexuality" (2000:74). Even strong female characters in modern films are turned into "dreamy eyed lovelorn girl[s]" (Datta, 2000:74). As seen in fig. 5 (pg. 21), through prayer, song and dance sequences, flimsy characterisation and the love story being led by the male protagonist, even in modern and seemingly progressive films, "though the narrative attempts to appear emancipated and contemporary, it presents a conservative ideology in valorising the male and objectifying the female...casting women as embodying and sustaining tradition" (Datta, 2000:74). In Datta's (2000) view, the majority of Bollywood films represent the female protagonist as being soft, beautiful and traditional.

Datta's (2000) grouse is that this recycling of old stereotypes of the valiant male and the conservative sari-clad female and with the recycling of these stereotypes there is little room for women to make their mark as strong individuals.



Fig. 5

Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)

The good daughter-in-law: dressed in a salwaar-khameez and performing her prayers.

Datta also looks at what it means to be feminine in Bollywood terms. The female characters “do not articulate a new subjectivity but remain limited as the filmmaker’s imaginary feminine... The subjects of these stories are deprived of any agency as their voices are manipulated to fit in the designed narratives” (Datta, 2000:76-77). She argues that Indian female stars (and characters) are continually objectified through the parading of the body in barely-there sari blouses, Hindu tradition governing their lives and marriage being the point of their existence. This establishes the lack of control of the female star over her own body, ideology and future.

The Indian woman is always seen as either a good Hindu with the purpose of marriage and child-bearing being the crux of her existence and “the idealising of concepts like duty and tradition limit the possibilities for any emancipatory journey for the heroine” (Datta: 2000:78). This, she suggests is evident in any Bollywood film that one happens to pick up off a video store shelf. Datta also puts forward the theory of female directors in Indian cinema buying into this norm because of the guarantee of market success. They seldom challenge the patriarchal status quo and if it is done, it is done in a limited and flimsy manner. She says that we “urgently need films in which female spectators can identify

with the images and situations other than these stipulated by the male hegemonic gaze" (Ibid. 80). However, we cannot do this until we fully deconstruct Bollywood cinema and examine the major aspects of it that uphold patriarchal values.¹⁶

1.6. Conclusion

All four of the above theorists have brought significant ideas to the field of feminism and film theory which are valuable to my study and are noteworthy to academia in general. Mulvey's theory of the male gaze using psychoanalysis is pertinent, because even though people have agency and are able to make personal choices and form opinions, a lot of this is greatly influenced by the psyche and ideologies instilled in us through socialization at a young age. Kuhn, on the other hand takes a very different approach in her understanding an explanation of the way in which people see women in film. She employs the perception that Hollywood (being the most pervasive and influential form of film) permeates society and instils subliminal perceptions of women's role in cinema and society. Her reckoning is that Hollywood as well as other omnipresent forms of cinema (Bollywood falling into this category as well, has the ideological power to influence opinions. Butalia examines how women are treated in Indian cinema in terms of visibility and Datta's analysis on Bollywood, following on from Butalia, looks at the way in which women are represented in the way her body, life path and character is owned by men.

The mere fact that I could not, in my searching, find information that is in support of the type of representation women receive in Indian cinema shows that there is indeed a problem with the way in which mainstream Indian cinema portrays women. Bearing all of these theories in mind, the next chapter will ascertain the

¹⁶ Discussions on the creation of film containing feminist discourse has been researched in great detail by Teresa De Lauretis, Laura Mulvey, E. Ann Kaplan and Annette Kuhn but this is outside of the world of Bollywood cinema and thus will not be discussed here.

elements of representation and Indian cinema that we have to keep in mind when looking at topics such as this.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I aim to ascertain the elements of cinema which are important to examine before delving into an analysis of Bollywood cinema. The elements that I will be looking at are; representation, ideology and stereotyping as well as Hindu mythology and structures of Indian families, tradition and the overriding system of patriarchy which is backed up by the previously mentioned elements. This chapter does not only attempt to give a breakdown of these hypotheses, but to integrate them into a study of Bollywood so as to form an understanding of how they fit together in examining portrayal of women on screen.

2.2. Ideology, Representation and Stereotyping

Ideology, representation and stereotyping are three of the most important theoretical aspects of film and it is imperative to look at them when doing a content analysis like the one I am doing, seeing as though it is ideology that structures the modes of representation and stereotyping. "Most women, no matter where they are in the world, still live in heavily misogynist and racist cultures" (Kaplan, 2004:1244) and this is echoed in film. As long as people continue to buy into stereotyping in film, the representations become the norm and thus patriarchal hegemony¹⁷ occurs. As the cycle continues, the ideas are disseminated through various forms such as cinema. Linked to cinema and ideology is representation and linked to representation is stereotyping.

¹⁷ Hegemony occurs when a ruling ideology is bought into via Ideological State Apparatuses by the masses. Cinema is one of the apparatus used by ruling powers in order to keep themselves in power.

2.2.1. Ideology

Theories of ideology can be used to explain aspects of life that we take for granted as being accepted as 'normal' or things that have, by some means or the other become 'normalised' (cf. Althusser, 1971). Ideology is a term that is used to describe a worldview that is held and followed by people. People can have different ideologies. For example, a scholar or Marx would have a Marxist ideology of the world, which entails action and thought that would be deemed appropriate for a Marxist. By the same token, one that has a patriarchal ideology of the world will carry out his life in that manner. Cinema, as I have discovered through reading and experience, falls under a patriarchal ideology. "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, since those who controlled economic production and distribution could also regulate the production and distribution of ideas" (Marx in: McLellan, 1995:12) and in the case of Bollywood, the 'ruling class' are the men who own the industry, as seen in fig. 6 (pg. 27). This is evident in the number of acclaimed male directors and producers as opposed to female ones, as well as the box office success of films by males compared to females.



Fig. 6
Filmfare Magazine (October 2007)
Cover picture: The 'Big 6' of India – An all male selection made by the industry and the public.
Source: www.lagerahorajubhai.com

Ideology is a human construct. It is a system of beliefs which is created by the ruling powers of a society, be they in the majority or not. "Ideology makes things seem natural" (Pendakur, 2003:148). Religion and culture is very much embedded in ideology and Bollywood is embedded in religion and culture. It is a language which people conform to. "Ideology is someone *e/se's* thought, seldom our own" (McLellan, 1995:1) and this enables the owner of the ideology to perpetrate it through power. Ideology can sometimes be "functional for legitimising an unjust social order" (Eagleton, 1991:44). For the purpose of keeping the ruling ideology in place, it is rationalised, enforced and naturalised. Rationalisation is "an explanation that is either logically consistent or ethically acceptable for attitudes, ideas, feelings, etc..." (Eagleton, 1991:51). By naturalisation, I speak of the way in which an act is made to be the way of being through time and consensus. Both rationalisation and naturalisation are facets of ideology that make whatever ideology is being communicated not only make sense, but become a way of life. In cinema this is done through constant depiction of the ideology in a certain manner with engaging, emotional stories that make it seem real. In Bollywood, the ideology of patriarchy is depicted through religion, mythology, the upholding of family values and traditions.

2.2.2. Representation and Stereotyping

The images and the sounds in film have a large impact on how we see the world and the representations used are inadvertently a comment on society. However inadvertent, though, these representations add greatly to our worldview and how we perceive society. In society, issues of gender are represented in cinema all the time. More often than not, the images used are ones that perpetuate the patriarchal system in which we live, as well as dictate the way we see gender roles. Branston & Stafford (1999:125) speak of representation as "how the media re-present events, and how the media represent people and groups". In terms of cinema this is true. Representation is, on a deeper level "the social classification of particular groups and people as often highly simplified and generalised signs,

which implicitly or explicitly represent a set of values, judgements and assumptions concerning their behaviour, characteristics or history" (Fourie, 2001:471).

Representation is a broad subject and I am therefore narrowing it down to what is known as a *constructionalist* view of representation. This view is that "representation can never really just be the truth or a version of the truth that someone wants you to hear" (Ramlutchman, 2006:28). Here, the viewer is seen as an active participant and not merely a blinded recipient of information and images. He/she has the ability to accept or reject and form an opinion on these images. As de Lauretis (1984:37) argues,

cinema has been studied as an apparatus of representation, an image machine developed to construct images or visions of social reality and the spectators' place in it. But, insofar as cinema is directly implicated in the production and reproduction of meanings, values, and ideology in *both* sociality and subjectivity, it should be better understood as a signifying practice

and this is why ideology is imperative to studies of cinema and to inquiries into gender and film.

Semiotics¹⁸ is an approach to representation which I am also going to look at briefly. Hall (1997), on examining Saussure's theories of linguistics, argues the use of language "as a model of how culture works" (de Lauretis, 1984:234). This links directly to the image on screen and the way in which the language of speech/the written word in conjunction with the language of images is utilised to set up stereotypes.

An aspect of representation that is imperative to the study of film is Hall's idea of classificatory systems and keeping roles of society at a common denominator and in their boxes, so that there is no disruption in the order of society. He argues that "culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture" (Hall, 1997:236). This also goes for all types of stereotyping in film. This makes it easier for the rulers to

¹⁸ For further reference, please see Chapter 3.

control society and thus maintain power. This ensures a constant spectatorship as long as people are not questioning what they see on the screen.

Hall also looks at naturalisation, which links into my analysis of ideology above. Hall looked at naturalisation in terms of racial representation as the fixing of 'difference', as discussed above, as an inflexible classification. Difference is seen as "permanent and fixed" (Hall, 1997:245) and thus the representations that are attributed to the group which is 'other' (in Hall's case, 'Black' people and in this case, women), are unyielding to change and "it is an attempt to halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological closure" (Hall, 1997:245). Hall describes difference as being linked with questions of power and in this case it is power of male over female in ideological terms rather than physical.

Intrinsically linked to representation in cinema comes stereotyping. Stereotyping is the labelling of something or someone as a general, two dimensional figure that shows limited and specifically *selected* aspects of what or whoever is being represented. Stereotyping the 'other' is a way in which communicators gain and maintain control over the subject which is being portrayed as 'other'. Reducing a woman to her bodily attributes alone is a stereotype that gains attention and maintains control. "Stereotypes dehumanise women into erotic commodities for the satisfaction of male sexual desire" (Sircar, 1995:320) and this is backed up by the fact that the stereotype is accepted and entertained by viewers.

Holt (1998:31) suggests

the term stereotype is now so generally used in media studies, with the presumption that its meaning and implications are unproblematic, the term has acquired a meaning and focus that will not satisfactorily be replaced by other available conceptions...it [stereotyping] is a term particularly relevant to visual media and mass communicative processes of standardised information.

The stereotypes set up by the media have become the accepted norm and this is very difficult to change because beliefs such as this are so deeply entrenched in language, culture and life in general.

2.3. Bollywood Techniques and the aforementioned argument

In examining representation of women in Bollywood, I could not ignore the general techniques and methods of Bollywood cinema. For as long as the advent of film in India, women have been subjugated. This is done by many means, which will be looked at in more depth in chapter four. It is imperative, though to understand the inner workings of symbolism in Indian cinema in order to read the texts properly. Here, I attempt to combine the above theories with the structures of control mentioned in this section so as to come to an understanding of how these theories work in Bollywood cinema. The cinematic techniques I will be looking at are; Hinduism and Hindu mythology, the family system and the upholding of tradition and embedded in all the above, patriarchy.

2.3.1 Hinduism and Mythology¹⁹

Hinduism and the stories surrounding it are integral in Indian cinema and especially Bollywood seeing as though it is a national medium of communication. Each film begins with a short incantation invoking the blessing of one deity or the other. A lot of the time, the name of the production company is a religious name or is linked to a religious symbol. Karan Johar's production company *Dharma Productions* begin their films with the *Gaytri Mantra*²⁰ and its logo is a wooden carving of Lord Ganesha.²¹ These incantations set the stage for the film as being "of India" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:39) and brings into play all the morals and rituals that Bollywood takes for granted as being 'good'. "Hinduism emphasises the importance of duty and moral obligation" (Chirkut, 2006, 119) and this is evident in the majority of Bollywood films.

¹⁹ I will not delve into this deeply as it is outside the scope of the study. I will be discussing only the aspects of Hinduism and Hindu mythology that pertain to this study.

²⁰ The Universal Prayer in Hinduism, much like the Lord's Prayer in Christianity.

²¹ Lord Ganesha is a Hindu deity; a figure of a man with the head of an elephant. He is said to be the remover of obstacles.

The roots of Indian theatre came from the scriptures; the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.²² Seeing as though Indian cinema is rooted in its theatrical counterpart it is only logical that Bollywood would pay homage to that tradition. These texts “have informed and influenced Indian cinema since its beginnings” (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:41). Both texts embody the Hindu understandings of beliefs like *dharma*, *izzat* and *laj* which will be further explained below. The stories are told time and time again in order to teach people right and wrong, like parables. The influence of these beliefs have been fundamental in many films, in which good prevails over evil; ‘good’ being defined as Hindu and bad being not Hindu. The protagonists have prayer as a way of life and the villains are never shown praying. The image (fig 7, pg 32), shows statues of Radha and Krishna (to be discussed below) and relates to how this divine couple are shown as guiding characters in Bollywood film. This is a recurring theme which occurs frequently in the films which will be discussed in Chapter 4.



Fig. 7

Source: *Mujhse Dosti Karoge* (2005)

“...traditional religiosity underpins an appeal to the audience’s voyeurism as well as to a devotional fervour” (Rajadhyaksha, 1994:519).

²² Both are Hindu texts which tell stories very similar to parables, teachings and ways of living which make a person a virtuous Hindu.

Dharma is a term that is used to describe the Hindu belief of a 'universal law' which governs all people's actions. It is similar to destiny or fate in that it prescribes actions to get a desired result. If a mother sacrifices her child for the good of the village as Radha does in *Mother India* (1957)²³ it is seen as her *dharma* or duty to protect the village. If a wife throws herself onto her husband's funeral pyre, it is seen as her duty to her husband's memory and his family's honour.²⁴ This is an essential part of Hinduism in that people have a duty to themselves and the people around them. How women fit into this is that women have to adhere to their *dharma* and duty as mothers, sisters, wives, etc. in order to attain spiritual upliftment. "This is what sustains world order...The destruction of evil by good, either by oneself or by divine intervention, is a constant theme of Hinduism and of Indian popular cinema" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:41). The use of *dharma* in films drives the characters to do good and is depicted as a rigid way in which people should behave, thus reiterating patriarchal social order.

Izzat is a term that is used to describe a Hindu-specific type of reputation or honour. This is closely linked to female behaviour and "the need to preserve honour is expressed through 'elaborate, codified behaviour patterns that require the woman to remain secluded, confined to the domestic domain and dependent on the husband' (Gokuksing & Dissanayake, 1988:77). A woman holds her family *izzat* in her behaviour and choices.

Laj is similar to *izzat* in that it encompasses honour but a direct translation of this is 'shame' or 'honour' in the sense of being aware of public opinion and disgrace if she deviates from social norms. *Laj* is a woman's duty (Bagchi, 1996). The idea that "the ideal woman is obedient and pious" (Ahmed, 1992:307) is one that is constantly bought into by Indian people and cinema. Hindi cinema, as explained by Sircar (1995:330), "still reinforces the idea that the ideal 'Indian woman'

²³ *Mother India* (1957) is one of the first Bollywood films to gain international attention and tells of a woman who upholds her village's pride. She is seen as the mother of India in her devotion to her family and honour.

²⁴ This is known as *Sati* and is a very much disputed issue in India and around the world.

should rather die than face dishonour". The 2002 film, *Lajja* goes into the workings of *laj* in society. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Mythology has a large bearing on Bollywood cinema and its narratives, characterisation and influences. One of the aspects of mythological influences is the role of women in the light of Hindu mythological characters, Sita and Radha. Sita, a divine being from the *Ramayana* is seen as the ideal woman. She is also represented as being the ideal wife who is loyal to her husband and "obeys his wishes unquestioningly. The *Ramayana* says that a wife's god is her husband...Her life is of less consequence than her husband's happiness" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:75). Bollywood has come to embrace this as a naturalised component of Hindu tradition and beliefs and is portrayed as such in films. It has "perpetuated this ideal of a wife's selfless devotion" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:75).

Another character from Hindu mythology to which women are attributed is Radha. Radha is Lord Krishna's²⁵ best friend and love. In Hindu mythology, Radha was not Krishna's wife but they remained in love with each other until their death and she was his most loyal devotee. Radha did not exist outside of Krishna's frame of reference. They are seen as a universally Hindu symbol of pure and divine love.

Myths have covered up ruling ideologies under their guise for ages and have been accepted by believers unquestioningly. Myths in Indian culture have served to subordinate minorities.

By posing as 'natural' and 'common-sensical', myths obscure their ideological role in helping to shore up systems of belief that sustain the power of the powerful. The diversity of real women, potentially challenging to male authority, is transformed into manageable myths of 'femininity' or 'the feminine' (Macdonald, 1995:2).

²⁵ Lord Krishna is a deity in Hinduism, who is said to have been an Avatar (a God on earth), who preached a Hindu lifestyle.

What is being implied here is that by shrouding women's roles in society under an illusion of what is meant to be feminine through myths, the reality of what women could be is veiled and thus ignored. It is easy to see how people who watch films without a critical eye can get sucked into the world of the film and through accepted myths and religious iconicity could unquestioningly take what is being said as being the norm.

2.3.2. Family and Tradition

In Indian cinema, family is seen as superseding any individual goal or ambition. If things are done for the self in an Indian home, it is seen as being disrespectful to the family. This I know from growing up in an Indian home. In Deepa Mehta's 2004 parody of Bollywood, *Hollywood/Bollywood*, a character states: "Family is paramount", suggesting that self-sacrifice in order for harmony to exist in the family is a priority.

Family, in Indian culture is built on tradition and this, in turn, goes hand in hand with *dharma*, *izzat* and *laj*. All of these traditions and beliefs are built on patriarchy. "The assertion of tradition is contingent on demonstrating that women can exercise their choice, but it is a choice that should not undermine patriarchal authority" (Sharpe, 2005:70). The family is headed by the father and the rest of the family follow what it is that he wants for his family and this is overtly represented in Bollywood films as being the norm. "The middle/upper class Hindu patriarchal morality is viewed as 'normalcy' and any deviation is castigated" (Radhakrishnan, 2001:4) meaning that any behaviour deviating from the 'normalcy' of patriarchal morality is frowned upon.

"The Hindi film always reverts to tradition, demonstrating the respectful return to the status quo that the audience demands" (Kabir, 2001:2). Tradition is followed unquestioningly. "A feature that unites all Hindus is their acceptance of certain scriptures" (Chirkut, 2006:118). Embedded in the blind faith in the 'tried and

tested' methods of tradition is the equally blind faith in the word of the father. Generally, audiences of Bollywood cinema find comfort in following traditions and their world would be jarred by a character breaking tradition. "It is the continued use of traditional elements that explains the ongoing popularity of Hindi films (Booth, 1995:172). Films which deviate from this are censured. The 2006 film *Water* (a Canadian film which comments on the state of widows in India) was received with abomination. The filming of the movie was halted as a result of villagers in Varanasi burning down the set stating it is a scar on the face of Hindu culture. "Hindi films are located by their traditional content and narrative conventions within an old and deeply rooted set of Indian cultural meanings and values" (Booth, 1995:187). Most people go to the cinema to have their beliefs and worldviews reiterated. Anything deviant is either deemed as anti-Hindu or anti-Indian.

2.3.3. Patriarchy

Entrenched in the ideas of family, tradition and religion is patriarchy. Patriarchy exists in all cultures and according to most theorists, is "derived from cultural factors" (no author, 1994:7). These factors are explained as being questions of a) nature and b) psyche.

- a) Nature: Women "tend to be identified with nature, [an involuntary process] and men with culture [a process of thinking and development]" (no author, 1994:7). Women are associated with natural processes such as childbirth and care giving. Women's association with the natural, however not 'natural' that it be a woman's role, "is a symbolic component of patriarchy" (no author, 1994:7). In terms of nature versus culture, women's domestic sphere work in raising a family is seen as not being real work compared to man's work which yields monetary results and is public.
- b) Psyche: This has already been explained in Chapter 1 via Mulvey's take on film and psychoanalysis. Basically it is women being depicted as being

non-male. A further look into psychoanalysis shows that women are seen as being emotional, domestic and irrational whereas men are seen as educated, worldly and rational. "Rationality could be seen as an expression of male dominance of Western intellectual culture as 'male reason'" (no author, 1994:9). This is true, not only in Western culture but all over the world. Women are seen as creating disorder as a result of having an emotional disposition and therefore inferior.

Walby (1994), a theorist on patriarchy, agrees with these notions but delves more into the link between capitalism as a form of patriarchal control.²⁶ She looks at forces of society which enforce patriarchal ideology through force, legislation and the media. She discusses patriarchy being reinforced by "non-admittance of women to forms of training...certain occupations...discrimination in hiring practices, [etc.]" (Walby, 1994:23).

How patriarchy works in Indian and specifically Hindu culture is through capitalist modes as well as the argument of women being of nature as opposed to culture. It is deeply rooted, however, in religion, tradition and the family structure. Tying this in with the mentioned Marxist feminist perspective, whoever owns the means of productions owns the means of shaping meaning thus Hindu mythology, the role of the family and tradition being so deeply entrenched in Indian culture is manipulated in film so as to legitimately portray women as being weak, domesticated and subservient.

Patriarchy extends from the household into film when representing women in everyday activities. Chatterji (1998:4) suggests that women are represented in "extreme polarities of good/bad, black/white, mother/whore, etc. and kinds of

²⁶ This is the basis of Marxist feminism, also known as Material feminism; whoever owns the means of productions owns the means of shaping meaning. Martha E. Gimenez, 1998. *Marxist / Materialist Feminism*. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/mar.html> or *The Radical Women Manifesto: Socialist Feminist Theory, Program and Organizational Structure* by Radical Women in Books. Red Letter Press.

images they are invested with – such as the *sati-savitri*²⁷ image of the wife, the glamour puss for the westernised girl, sacrificing widowed mother clothed in white, etc”. Sometimes, “women characters *do not appear at all* or in certain ways, are not represented in films...very rarely in Indian popular cinema, will one have an audience to a female character reading the daily newspaper, even if she is portrayed as a journalist or politician”. *Manusmriti*²⁸ is a term that brings together all the aspects of Indian patriarchy perfectly. It prescribes that women are to be given no autonomy. Doniger & Smith (In Pendukar, 2001:148) explain:

A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in her own house. In childhood, a woman should be under her father's control, in youth, under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons. She should not have independence.

Gokulsing & Dissanayake (1998:76) follow on from this argument in stating that in Indian cinema “a woman must not strive to separate herself from her husband, her sons. She is told to be always cheerful, efficient in the management of household affairs...she is expected to be unwaveringly obedient to her husband and when he is dead she must make every effort to honour his memory”. Norms of women being good wives, daughters, sisters and widows and bad vamps have permeated Indian consciousness because “these norms governed the lives of women in traditional India and they find clear articulation in Indian cinema, especially in popular films” (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:76).

2.4. Conclusion

As mentioned before, cinema is a powerful medium with much hypothesis written about the practice of it. Here, in looking at representation of women in Bollywood cinema, I have examined the theoretical basis for the discussion from both a western and an Indian perspective. “Cinema is a system of production of meaning, above and beyond a mechanical process of image generation, and one

²⁷ Sati means companion and Savitri is a deity who is seen as the ideal wife. Hence sati-savitri: ideal companion

²⁸ The ‘Laws of Manu’ which dictate laws, rules and codes of conduct to be applied by individuals, communities and the nations, and they dictate how a woman should behave.

that has a unique ability to play with the suppression of knowledge in favour of belief" (Mulvey, 1993:12). Also indicated is the way in which society engages the role of women – women are not seen as equal in *society* and thus are not likely to be seen as equal in film, which is a depiction of society. Using this as a basis, the analysis to follow will have these ideas expanded into full length discussions on each of the ideas above in relation to the films I have examined. The next chapter will examine the methodology used to analyse the films in relation to this theory.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to explain the methods I used in which to analyse the films as well as why these methods and the study is important and viable.

3.1.1. What is 'content analysis'?

Content analysis can be seen as

...dynamic process of the production of meanings, inscribed within the larger context of social relations. The text is not seen as a closed work, but as a discourse, a play of signification, dynamism and contradiction... It emphasises the aesthetic object as a social phenomenon that is created and understood through language. Rather than seeing cinematic language as a transparent instrument of expression, textual analysis emphasises the materiality of language. The text is thus seen as a social space through which various languages (social, cultural, political, aesthetic) circulate and interact (Fairclough, 2003:23).

It is, as I have seen it practiced and experienced an analysis which requires the researcher to read texts in the manner that deconstructs each text, views it in the theoretical terms they have employed and analyse in terms of specific interpretation. It is an important *modus operandi* for researchers because it forms "a large part of the work in literary criticism and intellectual cultural history" (Berelson, 1953:114). Content analysis is particularly significant in an analysis of representation. It "helps in decoding representations, and allows the researcher to explore all levels of significance" (Munshi, n.d.). Basically, content analysis is a powerful tool used in order to make inferences as objectively as the researcher can, using prior knowledge or specific theory/literature on which to base the reading of the text.

3.1.2. Using content analysis in this context

Content analysis is very important when looking at visual texts. "There is no such thing as unmediated access to reality" (Dyer, 1993:3 in O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2006:73) and a content analysis is the closest form of analysis to a raw reading of a film. The methodology that is used is critical content analysis of the films in terms of the following bullet points. Content analysis or textual analysis is a sort of qualitative data collection which requires a thorough investigation of the subject matter. This is generally done where "very few reliable quantitative data have been hitherto available" (Mitchell, 1967:232). Content analysis is important in the examination of film because film is a text that needs to be broken down in order to understand its inner workings.

I am examining:

- Analysis of archetypical female characterisation

Here I am examining the female characters in Bollywood films and how they are represented in the films as well as character and functions in the larger narrative; their definition in the world of the film. The questions here are: what archetype does the specific female character represent? What purpose does she play in the film? What are her limitations in terms of the text and Indian expectations of women? I am discussing woman as she is represented in each role in each film.

- Song and dance routines

These are an integral part of Indian films. Song and dance routines help establish relationships and provide escapism, a world of fantasy and entertainment. These routines also, however, seem to provide a fetish-like fantasy for the male viewer as it is the women who dance. "Men are characterised as active agents. Women are displayed in order to be looked at" (Carroll, 1990:351). I am examining this in the films to ascertain to what extent this is true.

- Dress

This also ties in with the song and dance routine. Within the Bollywood paradigm, one's dress indicates social status, religious and cultural background and levels of attractiveness. This is indicative of what Bollywood envisages beauty and attractiveness. This is a facet of Bollywood cinema that has not been dealt with in-depth and I aim to ascertain what each type of dress is indicative of; western dress, traditional dress and modernisation of the Indian women through jeans and skirts.

3.2. Reasons for choosing content analysis

I found, throughout my university career (2002 – 2008), that film, like all cultural mediums, cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Film is a medium that contains images which are fraught with meaning. I found content analysis to be the best method for investigation into the workings of Bollywood cinema, because of reasons to follow. "While we accept that audiences make different readings, we argue that it is still valid to explore texts through examining their textual codes and social/historical contexts, in a process of textual analysis. In doing so, we can look for a text's 'dominant' reading" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2006:97).

Content analysis is "based on a basic communications model of sender/message/receiver" (White & Marsh, 2006:22). This means that there are fewer variables involved when the researcher is doing a straightforward content analysis and there is no room for outside interference. The only three domains that exist are the texts, the viewer and the context in which the texts are read. This makes for a far less complicated analysis than if audience reception were to be conducted. The research then "draws on frameworks within the recipient for understanding" and "drawing on related research and existing relevant theory, a researcher first establishes one or more hypotheses that can be contested using content analysis" (White & Marsh, 2006:28, 30) and this is important because I am looking for specific details within a certain framework and context.

Mingled with the model of content analysis is semiotic analysis. However, I felt that the use of semiotic analysis needn't be in-depth because of the nature of the study – I am looking at content and meaning in terms of relevant theory rather than looking at the content and context in terms of semiotics as a practice. Semiotics is the study of signification and communication, signs and symbols, both individually and grouped into sign systems. It includes the study of how meaning is constructed and understood.²⁹ 'Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (Eco, 1976, 7) and seeing as though cinema is a sign and a signifier of culture, it is imperative to keep semiotics in mind when analysing film. "It is not [purely] linguistically based and is therefore applicable to understanding visual representation" (Tomaselli, 1999:23). Even though I am not fully delving into a semiotic analysis, it is nevertheless important to note its significance and why a researcher has to keep semiotics in mind when doing a content analysis.

When looking at a film in terms of semiotics, it has two important dimensions: the text as a product and the text as the interface between the reader or viewer and the signs fixed in the message. Because signs are unstable and change over time or depending on the sender/receiver, the researcher has to keep a set idea in mind so as to not diverge from the chosen context. For example, what I have done in this dissertation is I have narrowed my focus of Bollywood down to a) Yash Raj Films, b) films from 1997 to 2007 and c) characterisation, songs and dress. So basically, I am not delving entirely into a semiotic analysis but keeping in mind that the world of messages and mediums is loaded with variables which I have to then narrow down and I have to look at the film texts and what their signs signify in terms of the assorted subsections that will be presented in the next chapter.

²⁹ To delve into a full semiotic analysis would be beyond the scope of the study. For more information please refer to Saussure, F. 2006. *Writings in General Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The reason I chose content analysis over my other option, which is audience reception analysis is because, as mentioned before, I did not want the variables that others' understanding of Bollywood would give me. The viewer might fully buy into Mulvey's notion of the male gaze and read the film in exactly the manner in which I have already established that the layman reads cinema and this would be pointless to the study because this theory has already been proven time and time again (see Chapter 2). Those viewers might take up what is known as the 'preferred reading' in terms of the ideological powers in place, which are overruled by patriarchy. "Whether a subject will respond to a text as an 'ideal reader',³⁰ taking up the 'preferred meaning'" (Price, 1999:584), which, in this case, is one paying specific attention to detail on *visual* analysis of characterisation, songs and dress, is questionable. "Consistency in methods of constructing women does not imply consistency in response" (Macdonald, 1995:5) and another viewer might not respond to the films in the manner in which this study requires. Another reason is because Bollywood films are each approximately three hours long and content analysis is "useful in dealing with large volumes of data" (Stemler, 2001) and allows the researcher to infer knowledge and deduce information easily.

Content analysis allows the researcher a lot more freedom in reading and analysing the texts at hand. It allows the researcher to "make informed guesses...such as the values, attitudes, stereotypes, symbols and worldviews of a context" (Loizos, 2000:134) and to provide a clean-cut analysis about the issues which the researcher wants to put forward, as opposed to dealing with unpredictable audiences or interviewees.

³⁰ The concept of the ideal reader is one which describes the reader as being one who will read the text with as little expectations and preconceptions about the text as possible.

3.3. Methods

Working on the premise that discourse does not need to be verbal or written text, I aim to study Bollywood film as text which communicates ideology. I came into the study knowing that Bollywood contains misogynist practices in its representation of women, but I didn't know how to pinpoint how this is done or by what means. I read up on as much literature as I could find about Bollywood and Hinduism (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998), women in film (Mulvey, 1975, Kuhn, 1985, 1994) and women in Bollywood (Butalia, 1984, Datta, 2000) as well as reading into theories of representation and stereotyping (Hall, 1997), patriarchy (Walby, 1994) and content analysis (White & Marsh, 2006, Fairclough, 2003) in order to make informed decisions about a) which films to choose and b) how to analyse them.

I chose the films on the basis that they are all from the film company, Yash Raj Films, which is the leading production company in Bollywood cinema. They produce approximately three to five films a year and most of them are blockbusters in and outside of India. Yash Raj Films can be seen as the global representative of Bollywood. This is traditional Bollywood and the films they produce have followed the same *masala*³¹ technique for many years. I chose seven films based on various factors.

All of the films are well-known amongst people who follow Bollywood films and they are in good circulation in South Africa. I found good copies of all of them and good translations in subtitles were available. The academic reasons I chose these films are because each film holds a facet of representation of women which I needed to focus on such as characterisation of the mother, daughter, vamp and courtesan, as well as containing song and dance routines and modes of dress I needed to focus on. However, I did need to pick a few films which

³¹ The *masala* formula is one that most Bollywood filmmakers use; it is a formula which contains a mix of family drama romance, action and the spectacle of song-and-dance (cf. Dasgupta 1996). This mixture is referred to as *masala* because *masala* is a mixture of spices.

broke some barriers and I chose *Aaja Nachle* because it showed a strong woman and failed at the box office. This will be further extrapolated in Chapter 4. The reason I am looking into so many films is because "no single film can ever offer a complete view of a situation" (Tomaselli, 1999:53). Using a wide range of films is a far better option than using one or two, because of this.

On a preliminary viewing of the films, I discovered the many ways in which this is done, including narrative, plot, characterisation, visual modes such as dress and song and dance routines, and casting, to name a few, and I decided to narrow the study down to characterisation, song and dance sequences and dress codes. I then watched the films a second time to determine which films are going to be used for which subsection. As mentioned before, there is cultural specificity of Indian cinema and that leads to the need for a different sort of analysis than one would use for a Hollywood film.

The table below illustrates the variables used in examining the films:

Films	Characterisation					
	daughter	wife	mother	vamp	courtesan	widow
Dil To Pagal Hai (1997)				x		
Mohabbatein (2000)	x	x		x		x
Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai (2002)	x				x	
Mujhse Dosti Karoge! (2002)						
Hum Tum (2004)			x			x
Aaja Nachle (2007)						
Laga Chunari Mein Daag (2007)	x		x		x	
Films	Song and Dance Routines					
	imagine	tradition	rain	field	western	
Dil To Pagal Hai (1997)	x			x		
Mohabbatein (2000)		x	x			
Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai (2002)						
Mujhse Dosti Karoge! (2002)				x	x	
Hum Tum (2004)						

Aaja Nachle (2007)			x		
Laga Chunari Mein Daag (2007)					
Films	Dress				
	western	sari	choli	salwaar	
Dil To Pagal Hai (1997)	x				
Mohabbatein (2000)		x			
Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai (2002)					
Mujhse Dosti Karoge! (2002)			x	x	
Hum Tum (2004)					
Aaja Nachle (2007)					
Laga Chunari Mein Daag (2007)					

Fig. 8

A second viewing of the films to determine categories and sub-categories.

I then went onto linking the films to the theory I read in order to analyse the data in terms of literature, rather than just my own viewpoint or the viewpoint of the filmmakers. "It is not possible to reconstruct the original text once it is coded" (Loizos 2000:133), hence, in viewing the films critically, instead of trying to find answers by reconstructing the coding to suit my hypothesis, a rigorous analysis had to be conducted to answer the following questions as set out during the formulation of the topic:

1. Through a discussion of the various aspects in various films of Bollywood cinema how does Bollywood cinema represent women?
2. Are women in Bollywood cinema constructed mainly for the male gaze?
3. To what extent have women overcome negative representation in film?

In order to do this, I had to watch each film three or four times to pick up on the intricacies of representation of women. "Textual analysis focuses solely on the textual context and the textual processes used – the language, the way it was photographed, the kinds of camera movements involved and so on. However, it is impossible to make full sense of a text (to give it a meaning) in isolation. Texts

produce meanings by referring to the world outside themselves and by using pre-existing codes of representation" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2006: 92-93). I had to keep many things in mind, such as the changeable nature of culture and the nature of content analysis, which is dependent on the researcher's response to both the text and the literature used to analyse the text.

The result of this analysis is continued in Chapter 4.

3.4. Limitations

The limitations of this study have been few but major ones.

Firstly, the topic is not one that has been studied in-depth in South African academia; hence getting hold of literature was difficult. The shortest wait for books to arrive or to be ordered was two weeks.

Secondly, the study of film requires immaculate copies of films. Due to piracy of Bollywood films in South Africa being rife, it was a grim task to get hold of the films in good condition and of acceptable quality.

Thirdly, translations are a major problem. If the researcher does not understand the culture and/or language, a reading of the films can be taken in a very different and a perhaps incorrect manner. One who does not have well translated subtitles fares worse than someone who does not understand the language because meaning is inferred through subtitles as well.

Fourthly, the changeable nature of culture and the fact that I am of a far removed diasporic group of Indians, I found myself not understanding some references and the changing trends in dress or customs in India. Also, in accordance with the changeability, the body is a "variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated...a signifying practice within the field of gender hierarchy"

(Butler, 1990:139) and sometimes the signs confused me, in that I did not understand what was happening in Indian cinema at the time and had to do much research to understand a scene or a specific type of representation in its context.

Fifthly and finally, "we can be so familiar with the medium that we are 'anaesthetized' to the mediation it involves: we 'don't know what we're missing'. Insofar as we are numbed to the processes involved we cannot be said to be exercising 'choices' in its use" (Chandler, 1996) – a viewer can become so accustomed to the medium; they are desensitised to its ideologies and hidden subtexts. Even I have found myself falling prey to this at times, seeing as though Bollywood films have been an integral part of my exposure to Indian culture from a young age. It is for this reason I opted to numerous viewings of the films, each time making note of new intricacies I might have missed in previous viewings. The researcher can be so familiar with the codes, representation and practice of the film that intricacies slip through the fingers and are passed over, being seen as the 'normal' way in which to do things. This temptation must be resisted and a close, divorced reading has to ensue. Also, dealing with the nature of the medium, "photography, film, video and sound recording – media technologies – have a different relationship to the real world than other means of representation such as language, painting and sculpture. They can reproduce reality in a mimetic way, and they therefore appear to show us unmediated reality" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2006:77). It is indeed enticing to view a film for pure enjoyment, but reading texts which seem unmediated and 'natural' must somewhat be seen as the enemy and deconstructed from the start, in order for the researcher not to fall into the trap of being an inactive viewer.

3.5. Validity

"While we accept that audiences make different readings, we argue that it is still valid to explore texts through examining their textual codes and social/historical

contexts, in a process of textual analysis. In doing so, we can look for a text's 'dominant' reading" (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2006:97), meaning that reading film through textual analysis can show a viewer what the makers intended viewers to perceive from the film, and in turn, equip the researcher with methods in which to deconstruct and analyse it.

"Cinema is taken by feminists to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity, as well as about men and masculinity." (Smelik, 1999:25). It has become increasingly important to study cinema in terms of gender, and seeing as though both gender and cinema are always in a state of flux, research has to be in keeping with the changes in these fields and has to be constantly updated. There is also much importance of looking at *visual* representation of women in cinema because "these images are concentrated, symbolic and highly charged; they have super-powered meaning. In mainstream film we are clearly intended to identify with and recognise certain character types and gender types" (Nelmes, 1996:242) and these 'super-powered' meanings require academic inquiry so as to discover the way in which they work.

In terms of the validity of this study, examining Bollywood is becoming increasingly important and necessary. Bollywood and Hollywood have been described as "same wood, different tree" because of the similarities in their popular and mass production nature. Both are successful beyond imagination across the globe. However, the structural differences separate Bollywood from Hollywood and thus make a lot of literature written about Hollywood inapplicable to Bollywood. While most film theory dealing with representation, women and popular cinema are standard and apply to all forms of popular cinema, Bollywood is that different tree; an entirely distinctive alien ideology, with techniques, norms and values that have been transplanted into western literature. The differences between Hollywood and Bollywood are massive and this is why it is necessary to separate content analysis of Hollywood from content analysis of Bollywood so that the study takes Indian-specific contexts, traditions, beliefs and structures into

account instead of making the representation of women in film a generic discussion. We cannot take the word of theorists who have studied Hollywood and apply it to Bollywood. "A Bollywood film is something to think *with*, even more than something to think *about*" (Chakravarty, 2007:108) and therefore, this study is vital.

According to Lentin (1995:3), "feminists should use any and every research method as long as written accounts of feminist research locate the feminist researcher within her research as an essential feature of what feminism is about", seeing as though women are a highly marginalised group and feminists even more so for choosing to fight the status quo, every single type of methodology available should be utilised at every opportunity so as to get a full view of women's lived and represented realities. Content analysis is a way in which feminism and women's lived realities and represented realities can be communicated. It is also imperative to study this field in the manner in which the subject matter is dealt with in this dissertation because "critical studies of popular Indian cinema tend to concentrate on the structural complexities of film plots and often ignore the extra-narrative texts that are provided by the songs. However the plot of a film is deliberately engineered so as to provide openings for a song and dance number at regular intervals" (Nelmes, 1996:369). And so the finer points of Bollywood, which are easily overlooked by the naked eye, have to be scrutinised. There is a need to dissect every form of representation of women in order to answer questions about the way in which they are represented.

3.5. Conclusion

Content analysis is an important tool in which to carry out the research that I have conducted. It allows for integration of theory and film, viewing the films in relation to the hypotheses and allows for a seamless study without the variables attached to audience reception. It is also important to mention that Bollywood, as

academic discourse, needs to be studied and scrutinised so as to not only create a body of work around Bollywood but women in Bollywood too. Using the information in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, the next chapter will analyse the films in terms of these theories, using this methodology.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Films

4.1. Introduction

Bearing in mind the theories and literature in the previous two chapters, this chapter explores specifics in representation of women in Bollywood; their prescribed roles and the scenarios where these roles are most evident. I examine my findings from the movies of Yash Raj Films from 1997 to 2007, already mentioned in Chapter 3. The discussion will explore visual representation of women in films in terms of characterisation, song and dance routines and dress.

The films chosen are ones which follow the known Bollywood 'masala' formula. There is a commonality in theme of all these films in that they are all love stories with a happy ending, which have become the selling point of Yash Raj Films. A more important common theme in these films is that their representation of women is layered with both reverence and disparagement, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Cinema is a commodity and over the years, Bollywood has become one of the most major commodities across the globe and not just in India. "If a film is to have resonance for an audience, it must contain elements with which they can identify or empathise" (Nelmes, 1996:242), therefore, the messages conveyed in mainstream film, Bollywood included, are generally what the standard audience member wants to see. "The popular cinema, itself a commodity, can form a bridge between the commodity as spectacle and the figure of woman as spectacle on the screen" (Mulvey, 1993:7) and images of women are part of this commodity that Bollywood has become. The visual content of the films studied are not purely designed for the male gaze, however, they do make the most of the way in which scenes are plotted in order for the female form to be accentuated. "Scenes are blocked, paced and staged, and the camera is set up

relative to that blocking in order to maximise the display potential of the female form" (Carroll, 1990:351). These are further expanded in the sections below.

The Bollywood actress is seen as one who should be physically appealing. She is "the ideal type of a[n Indian] beauty – fair skinned with big doe eyes" (Sharpe, 2005:71). There are not many actresses which do not fit this mould. Those who do not, are generally made to look more fair skinned than they really are and to add to this, makeup and airbrushing 'perfect' their look.

Characterisation can be seen as a visual aspect of Bollywood because character is depicted, not only through dialogue but by visual aspects such as actions, dress and demeanour. This is a very important aspect because in culture, all of the visual aspects depict a person's character before they even speak. Women tend to be typecast in this case. Song and dance routines are the largest visual aspect of Bollywood, because not only are they an imperative and distinctive feature in Bollywood, they are the most telling in visual aesthetics and meaning. Dress, although slightly less substantial than characterisation and song and dance routines, is also a powerful and telling tool which Bollywood utilises in order to portray characters. All of the above are visual facets of Bollywood which portray women in a subjugated manner.

4.2. Female Characterisation

The roles that are prescribed to women are clearly articulated in *Devdas* (2002):³²

Devdas: Women are mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. If she is not any of those she is a whore.

In the films studied, it was found that women are typecast into various roles, which remain constant through each film depending on the need of each stereotype. "The roles of women are generally limited to that of "daughter (*beti*),

³² *Devdas* (2002) is the third film remake of the 1917 Bengali novella, *Devdas* by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay.

wife (*patni*) and mother (*ma*)...a female should be subject on childhood to her father, in her youth to her husband and when her husband is dead, to her children" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:76). There are a few roles (to be discussed in 4.5.) which deviate from this, and even then, women are typecast. There are; daughters, wives, mothers, courtesans, vamps and widows.

The woman in the 1950s was either docile or a vamp—the former with a shy expression on a down-turned face, fully clad in sari, with big vermillion and flowers; the latter in short "indecent" attire, with a sensuous gaze and pouting smile and without vermillion and flowers. Since the 1990s the modern woman is one who no longer wears the sari; she appears without vermillion, a Hindu marker, thus affirming her secularity, and she does not necessarily sport a shy look (though it is the preferred pose). But her societal status has not changed in any drastic way as her roles are defined even now by men. (Radhakrishnan, 2001:3).

If a woman is none of the above, she is an insignificant character in the film. This will be extrapolated below.

Another aspect of Bollywood that was found in terms of characterisation is that different actresses stick to certain typecasts. One actress will probably end up playing the same kind of role throughout her career. Aishwarya Rai is generally a protagonist and the love interest of the male protagonist, Kiron Kher³³ is typecast as a mother figure and Bipasha Basu³⁴ is a vamp. Famous actresses or 'stars', "above all...are part of the labour that produces film as a commodity that can be sold for profit in the marketplace. Stars are involved in making themselves into commodities" (Dyer, 1986:5).

4.2.1. Woman as daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother

a) The daughter

The archetype of the daughter, wife, daughter-in law and mother is, although seemingly diverse, the same character at different stages of her life. She is generally the protagonist and is the figure of virtue, piousness and is a

³³ Kiron Kher is an older film and theatre actress who is generally typecast as a mother figure.

³⁴ Bipasha Basu is a model and actress who is considered to have the most attractive body in Bollywood.

respectable Hindu woman. She carries with her, all the traditions and values that are expected of an Indian Hindu woman. Indian culture "endorses a predominantly patriarchal point of view" (Mishra, 2002:69) and she is subject to these rules. She is subservient and her main objective is to please her family and her in-laws. In the movies studied, this archetype is apparent in each one. The daughter is typified in Anjali's character in *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai*, Megha's character in *Mohabbatein* and Vaibhavari in *Laga Chunari Mein Daag*, the mother being Bobby in *Hum Tum* and Sabitri in *Laga Chunari Mein Daag*, and the wife and daughter-in-law being Kiran in *Mohabbatein*.

Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai is a feel-good Hindi remake of the 1997 film *My Best Friend's Wedding*. It depicts the daughter figure completely in that Anjali is a respectful Hindu girl who dreams of getting married, cries while watching films, dresses in a traditionally feminine fashion and obeys her parents. She is very one-dimensional because we never see what her character is like. She has no real personality or power of decision making and she is torn between the man she loves who has never admitted to loving her, and the man she has an arranged marriage³⁵ with. Her disposition is that of a subservient child who unquestioningly accepts her fate to be in a marriage based on her giving up her lifelong love.



Fig. 9

Source: *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai* (2002)

Anjali: a dutiful and pious daughter.

³⁵ Traditionally, arranged marriage are arranged by parents, but nowadays a couple decides whether they like the person or not and have a say in whether they marry.

The above characteristics are evident in a few specific scenes. Scene one is where she calls her best friend, who she is in love with to tell him that she is getting married. She clutches her Indian Bride Barbie doll and speaks softly. "There is an implicit directive to work within the formal determinants of Hindu culture" (Mishra, 2002:63) and this is indicative of a proper Indian woman who is Hindu and marriage is her main hope and dream. Scene two is a scene in which Anjali finds out that her fiancé has had a bachelor party with a courtesan present. It is not her who agrees to go ahead with the wedding after this indiscretion on the behalf of her fiancé but her father's decision based on her fiancé's apology to her father. Scene three where her limited role as a daughter is evident is the one in which her fiancé realises that she is in love with someone else, and without her consent releases her from her proposal to him. She does not have a say in the matter and is completely under the control of her father and fiancé. "Her limited success is due to her sexual allure" (D'Souza, 2001:3) and this is what makes her the female protagonist – she is the love interest in the triangle and the catalyst for the action.

Another example of the dutiful daughter is depicted in *Mohabbatein* in the character of Megha (Aishwarya Rai). She is the daughter of a traditionalist college dean, Narayan Shankar (Amithabh Bachchan), who believes that love is a sign of weakness, and that it only leads to pain. When Megha falls in love and eventually admits it to her father, her father forbids her from seeing the man she loves and she commits suicide in the hopes that her death will make him see the beauty of love and how it can change a person. She is represented in the film as a ghost who guides her lover to change her father, as her death did nothing but entrench his belief further. Her existence in the world of the film is purely to change the way in which her father thinks and to make him a better man. This self-sacrifice is a common characteristic of women in Yash Raj Films, who are seen as performing duties by giving up their dreams, lives and wants for their parents.



Fig. 10
Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)
Megha, the self-sacrificing daughter.

The fact that she is a ghost in the film shows that she is merely a vehicle for the action to take place. Her father is only changed at the end as a result of Megha's boyfriend who, guided by her ghost, is able to make Narayan Shankar see what Megha was trying to convince him of. She is depicted as virtuous, virginal and ethereal.



Fig. 11
Source: *Laga Chunari Mein Daag* (2007)
Vaibhavari: The dutiful daughter.

Vaibhavari (Rani Mukherjee) in *Laga Chunari Mein Daag* is a very different sort of dutiful daughter. She is a college student, although we do not see her attending classes (as is usually the case with students or working women), and

when her family encounters financial problems, she gives up her studies to ease her family's burden and to let her sister continue studying. She moves to the city and as a result of not being qualified, she does not get a job. She has to turn to being a call girl in order to send her family money to ease their financial worries. She changes from being a traditional and traditionally dressed village girl to being a courtesan in western dress and makeup, compromising her respectability as a Hindu woman, her self-respect and her own expectations of herself. She does this and does not see anything wrong about going to this length to support her family, because, as she sees it, she is doing what is right by her family even though her life is compromised. She even leaves the man she falls in love with because of her profession and the fact that she knows she is not seen as respectable. Vaibhavari performs one of the most selfless acts and is, at the end, seen as a perfect daughter for pulling her family out of a compromising situation.

b) The daughter-in-law and wife

After playing the role of the daughter, women in Indian films eventually become wives/daughters-in-law. In this case, I will be examining the role of Kiran in *Mohabbatein*. She is a 19 year old woman who married a soldier in the Indian Army. She is actually a widow; however, her father-in-law refuses to admit that his son is dead unless he sees his son's body. She is made to play the part of a dutiful wife, patiently waiting for her husband and being a subservient daughter-in-law. She is first seen at a train station by Karan, who falls in love with her at first sight. She is dressed in bridal finery and is waiting for her husband, after observing *Karwa Chauth*.³⁶ He does not approach her. Instead, he asks a villager about her and finds out her story through this villager. During this narration, we see how she exists inside her dead husband's home; quiet, observing prayers and taking care of her nephew. We find out that she is a dancer, yet she does not dance anymore, due to the fact that she has to maintain a certain facade of being a wife, which includes giving up all that she used to enjoy as a single woman.

³⁶ An annual fast and prayer which involves a wife not eating from sunrise to sunset, abstaining from all pleasures, until her husband feeds her at the end of the day. This is an offering to God to ensure her husband's long life and happiness.

Dancing is seen as a lavish form of showing off the body and this is not acceptable for a married woman.



Fig. 12
Source: *Mohabbatein* (2002)
Kiran as the dutiful wife, head covered
and waiting for her husband's return from
the army.

As a wife or mother who follows her duties, "she is likened to Sita"³⁷ (Patel, 2005:3). Kiran is not free and she is made out to be pious and dutiful, like the female deities who unquestioningly served their husbands. Bollywood, by nature, is an industry which perpetuates the ideology of nationality, tradition and religion being the overriding concerns. These include the invisibility of women as individuals and rather as being the quintessence of Indian tradition being upheld. Through Kiran being pious and unquestioningly serving her father-in-law, she is powerless. She belongs to her husband (in this case, exists in his memory) and her father-in-law. "Millions of urban women are working outside the house, running households and sharing the breadwinning role. But one hardly ever sees a young woman like that in today's films" (Khanna, 2004:2).

³⁷ Sita, according to Hindu parables, was the wife of Lord Rama, who conquered the demon, Ravana. She was accused of being unfaithful and was asked to walk through fire to prove her chastity. As the myth goes, she was faithful so she was unharmed.



Fig. 13
Source: *Mohabbatein* (2002)
Kiran serving her father-in-law:
a main duty for a daughter-in-law.

c) The mother

The mother is possibly one of the most respected figures in Indian cinema. She is the backbone of the family, yet her archetype is merely a support structure for her family and she is seen as mother and only as mother, not as a woman by herself. She carries with her the traditions and rituals of the past, as well as the obligation of carrying the pride of India. "‘Hinduisation’ of the nation-state on India and also the infiltration of Hindu values into Indian cultures abroad relies partially upon projecting its women as pure, traditional women behind whom lurks the ghost of the mythic ‘Bharata Mata’ or the ancient goddess, Mother India" (Jha, 2001:3). The role of the mother is clearly articulated in Bobby (Khiron Kher) in *Hum Tum*.

Bobby is the mother of the female protagonist in the film. She is said to have worked very hard to help her husband put their daughter through school and, in this case is seen as "a figure of working class authenticity" (Sharpe, 2005:73). She is strong and goes wherever her children go. In the film, her daughter and son-in-law move to Paris, and although she wants to stay in India, she goes with them. Even when Bobby is outside of India, she dresses in traditional Indian wear, speaks Hindi and conducts her prayers, being "an emblem of the preservation of Indian culture" (Jha, 2001:3). For this "the mother is always revered as a vital source in society" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:77). She is

the preserver of family, traditions and culture. This may seem like a good thing but she does not exist for herself. This figure is "idealised as bride, mother, and producer of sons; as long suffering, stoical, loving, redemptive and conservatively wedded to the maintenance of the status quo" (Mishra, 2006:20). Her role is limited in that she is nothing but those things. "There is something in the empowering presence of the Mother" (Mishra, 2002:64), however, this empowerment comes from her being able to support and take care of her husband, in-laws and children.



Fig. 14

Source: *Hum Tum* (2004)

Bobby: She is likened to Mother India, a legendary beauty and figurehead of Indian tradition.

Another role of the mother in Yash Raj Films is the role of Sabitri Sahay (Jaya Bachchan) in *Laga Chunari Mein Daag*. She is the mother of two daughters, which is seen as a negative in Indian society, as she is meant to be the producer of sons. When her family hits financial crisis, she works as a seamstress and stops her eldest daughter, Vaibhavari from studying. When Vaibhavari turns to being a call girl in the city, Sabitri, knowing what her daughter is up to, turns her back on it and refuses to support her, knowing full well that Vaibhavari is only doing it because of her family's financial burden. Her strength as a mother is

shown by her sticking to Hindu values, rather than helping her daughter and understanding why Vaibhavari had to turn to being a call girl.



Fig. 15
Source: *Laga Chunari Mein Daag* (2007)
Sabitri: Working to keep her family
Afloat and sticking to tradition.

Sabitri is seen as the proverbial Hindu mother who works to support her family, giving up her own dreams for her family and upholding Hindu traditions.

"Women's roles are prescriptive as well as descriptive, including *Sita-Savitri* (selfless, sacrificing), [and] *Shakuntala* (virtuous, loyal)," (Dwyer, 2000:18) but the role of a woman which is positive is hardly seen as assertive or wanting more than is given to her. As a whole, the role of the virtuous woman – be it in the form of daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mother, is a generic and two dimensional one which is exemplified in the films and characters shown in this analysis.

4.2.2. Woman as Vamp

The opposite of the daughter or wife or mother figure is the vamp. "She [the vamp] flouts tradition...drinks, smokes, visits nightclubs and is quick to fall in and out of love. She is portrayed as a morally degraded person..." (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:77). The vamp is seen as westernised and represents all that is evil about the west permeating traditional and pure Hindu society. Bindu (in Kabir, 2001:98), a former vamp playing actress states:

The vamp is usually a loner. You hardly ever know who her parents are, or what kind of family she is from...She will try and come between the hero and heroine and try and seduce the hero and separate him from his sweetheart... Sometimes the vamp is a cabaret dancer. She lives in a world that has no connection with good people and good society.

The vamp is either punished or reformed by the end of the film. The vamp is clearly articulated in Nisha from *Dil To Pagal Hai* and Ishika from *Mohabbatein*



Fig. 16

Source: *Dil To Pagal Hai* (1997)

Nisha: She bears all to snag Rahul.

Nisha (Karishma Kapoor) in *Dil To Pagal Hai* is a modern dancer who is in love with her dance company director, Rahul. She is his best friend, drinks, is portrayed as loud and dresses in skimpy outfits. She is always around men, has no poise, and is never shown praying. She is the polar opposite of the woman who Rahul loves, Pooja, incidentally meaning prayer (Madhuri Dixit), who could also fit into the aforementioned description of the daughter. Nisha tries very hard throughout her time on screen to get Rahul's attention by pestering him, teasing him with body-bearing outfits and by dancing seductively. She is set opposite Pooja who prays, is a *kathak*³⁸ dancer who dances for her own enjoyment, wears traditional Indian outfits and is shown as being a respectful and devoted Hindu woman. We see Pooja playing the role of daughter to her adoptive parents, yet we never see Nisha's parents. Furthermore, Nisha falls in love with Rahul. She, by being the instigator of her own love story by taking it into her own hands, is

³⁸ A traditional form of Indian dance which is traditionally used in theatre, prayer and storytelling.

seen as forward and brash. Women are rarely permitted to fall in love. If a woman did, "it followed the *Radha-Krishna* model [see Chapter 2]...all consuming, absolutely pure, and eternal and this is the kind of love depicted in mainstream Indian films." (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:76). Women who seek love outside of these boundaries are punished.

This portrayal of her character places her in a box of being "self-centred, conniving and evil" (Ramlutchman, 2006:50). She is set in juxtaposition to the heroine. As a result of being a vamp, her love for the hero goes unrequited. "The vamp is almost always punished for her 'unacceptable behaviour'" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:77). This kind of resolution and the portrayal of the vamp show how Bollywood continually, as Ramlutchman (2006:50) suggests, "reverts to traditional representations" of women as being one-dimensional and existing only in the binary of good/bad. Nisha is the type of vamp which existed in the 90's, which today can be seen as more of an anti-heroine than vamp, because she is far more toned down in terms of her 'vampishness'. Nowadays, vamps can be seen as being far more negative.



Fig. 17
Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)
Ishika: Dances to lure her catch.

Ishika Dhanrajgir (Shamita Shetty) is a rich girl who attends a private girls' college in India. She is, like Nisha, a dancer, westernised and flaunts her money

as well as her bodily assets. She dresses in skimpy outfits and is verbose, until she meets Vikram, who is of a middle-class background, who makes her realise the error of her ways. "No attempt is made to flesh out her character...it is as if she is and can *only* be described through and by her 'unacceptable behaviour'" (Ramlutchman, 2006:50). By the end of the film, she is tamed, adorns herself in Indian traditional garments and tones down her western behaviour. She is an example of the vamp turned good. She is transformed by her love for Vikram. Kannan & Mishra (2000:3) argue that the heroine "can be anything but a 'woman' if she is not forgiving, caring, a sex object, strictly monogamous, and an all-loving mother". Again, we do not see her family or see her praying, but at the end, we see her transformed to a respectable woman with an Indian outfit and covering her body, while still remaining exposed enough to be looked at.



Fig. 18

Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)

Ishika: Transformed from being a vamp to a traditional woman.

The vamp provides guilt-free lust for the male viewer because her purpose is to titillate and attract the male gaze. She is not a real person, she is not anyone's daughter, wife, sister or mother hence she is attainable and it is acceptable to

look at her in an unsavoury manner under the veil of the darkened cinema. She is one catered entirely for the male gaze.

4.2.3. The Courtesan

The courtesan is the fourth major characterisation that women face in Bollywood. She is a consort to the male protagonist and almost always falls in love with him and her love being unreciprocated. She sees to the "ministering to the physical and emotional needs of men... [she] is represented as existing outside the normal domain of domesticity and she is deeply attracted to the protagonist...he usually does not fall in love with her" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:78). The courtesan is sometimes seen as a pitiful yet good character whose circumstances have made her what she is. She is sometimes the most developed of the female characters in films, yet she is untouchable due to her unsavoury trade.

Before delving into the courtesan in the films studied, I must first outline the role of the courtesan as seen in the past. This is evident in Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit) in *Devdas* (2002). She is untouchable by Hindu standards yet is pure of heart, is educated in literature, poetry, art, dance and song. To Devdas, the courtesan is seen as a way to make the protagonist forget about his childhood sweetheart. She dances for him, sings seductive songs to him and flaunts her body in lavish outfits. Although these outfits can be seen as bridal, she is never a bride and portrays what men want to see. She is essentially an actress who sees to the physical and emotional desires of the protagonist in the absence of his female counterparts.



Fig. 19
Source: *Devdas* (2002)
Chandramukhi: A classic depiction
of the courtesan.

The modern day courtesan is far less developed and is shown for sheer visual enjoyment. This is apparent in *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai*, in which an unknown woman is hired to dance at a bachelor party. She is visually, and in character, vastly different from the olden day courtesan. Here, she has no name, is hired to come to a house instead of men going to her place of work, dresses in western garb and does not sing or read to her clients as the former did. She is placed on screen for the male gaze. Camera angles and close ups of her body give the male viewer as much enjoyment as possible. Her song (*Sharara* meaning 'spark') tells of a woman who is so hot, that men cannot touch her without getting burned.



Fig. 20
Source: *Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai* (2002)
The modern day courtesan.

The role of the modern day courtesan is also depicted in *Laga Chunari Mein Daag*, where Vaibhavari Sahay (Rani Mukherjee) becomes a call girl to support her family. She is not the dancing courtesan who cannot be touched, though. Her

role is more of an exclusive prostitute than courtesan, as she provides sexual pleasure to men for a fee as well as being an escort. She changes her name from Vaibhavari (a traditional Indian name) to Natasha (an Indo-Westernised name), and from a traditional village girl in traditional dress to figure-hugging black dresses and vamp-ish makeup, suggesting impurity.



Fig. 21
Source: *Laga Chunari Mein Daag* (2007)
Vaibhavari to Natasha: The courtesan of modern-day India.

As Natasha, she is confident and outgoing. She gets what she wants and is financially and physically in control of her life, which is seen as a negative. When a respectable lawyer falls in love with her, she shuns him for fear of him finding out her profession. However, in the end he reveals that he knew she was a prostitute all along and marries her, thus taking her out of her profession and 'rescuing' her from her plight, making her a respectable Hindu woman, returning her to being Vaibhavari who wears traditional Indian dress. This is not an example of the typical courtesan as she eventually gets married, but for the time she is Natasha, she is the proverbial courtesan, made for male enjoyment. Yash Raj has somewhat turned the convention of the courtesan on its head and Vaibhavari getting married is something that was unheard of in the past.

However trapped she might be, this might just be a step in the right direction, but nevertheless fits into the notion of the bad woman being tamed in the end.

The courtesan, although a legendary and highly developed character is one who is on screen for the enjoyment of men. She is a glorified prostitute and has no part to play in the action of the story. "Culture cannot endorse or celebrate the courtesan in social practice: no courtesan can become a mother or a wife; she can only be the desirable Other through whom live, often absent in arranged marriages, can be given felt expression" (Mishra, 2006:17) and the courtesan is the woman who exists outside of what is acceptable for an Indian woman.

4.2.4. The Widow

The widow is a very subtle, yet important role in Indian cinema. The widow is one who has been cast aside from Hindu society and is not allowed to live a 'normal' life. She wears white, is not allowed to have long hair (anything that would make her seem attractive) and is seen as a burden on both, her own family and in-laws. In India, widows are generally sent to live at a temple, where she is meant to wait out her death, repenting for whatever she might have done wrong as a wife for her husband to die before her. Widows are essentially punished for being bad wives.³⁹

The traditional representation of widows in Bollywood films can be seen in the film *Baabul* (2006),⁴⁰ which is not a Yash Raj film. Here, Pushpa (Sarika) is a young widow, who is kept at home and is not invited to any family functions as she is seen to be bad luck for a widow to attend.

³⁹ Deepa Mehta's film *Water* (2006) deals with the issue of how widows are treated in India, as mentioned in Chapter 2. However, this is not a Bollywood film and a discussion of this would be outside the scope of this study.

⁴⁰ *Baabul* is a 2006 film by Ravi Chopra which deals with a widow whose father-in-law, heart broken by her grief for his son's death, breaks tradition and decides to get her married so that she would not be lonely.



Fig. 22

Source: *Baabul* (2006)

Widows are meant to be alone
at family gatherings.

However, Yash Raj Films rarely deals with the role of the widow and she is hardly seen in her full capacity as a widow, and is rather seen as the widow who needs to be rescued from her obvious predicament at being on the brink of banishment from society.

In *Mohabbatein*, Kiran is a widow whose father-in-law refuses to admit that his son is dead (see 4.2.1). She is young, beautiful and is the object of affection of one of the male protagonists, Karan. She performs all the duties she is meant to and when her father-in-law finally relents and declares her a widow, she isn't one for long and runs straight to the waiting arms of Karan, who rescues her from certain exile from society. Her identity is defined by her in-laws.



Fig. 23

Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)

Kiran: Being declared widow.

In *Hum Tum*, Rhea (Rani Mukherjee) is a widow who escapes the scourge of traditional widowhood by running away to France, where she and her mother live, cut off from all ties to India; her reasons being that she did not want to be pitied, cast aside or remarried for the sake of not being alone. She is depicted as a strong woman who has full control of her life, but incomplete and constantly crying, until Karan (Saif Ali Khan) comes into her life and fills her life with love and laughter again. She is never depicted as the traditional widow: she does not wear Indian clothing at all, in fact and this is symbolic of the overriding ideology in India – widows are either traditional, kept women, or westernised and remarry.



Fig. 24
Source: *Hum Tum* (2004)
As a widow, Rhea is demure
and quiet.

Noticed in examining the role that Rani Mukherjee played is the similarity between the way in which widows and prostitutes are portrayed through symbolism. The two images below show Mukherjee in two separate roles; one as a widow and the other as a prostitute. In *Baabul*, she washes off her *sindoor*, a sign of marriage, in the shower. This signifies her character, Malvika ending her life as a married woman, going into widowhood and to an extent, losing her

identity. In *Laga Chunari Mein Daag*, Vaibhavari steps into the shower after her first night as a call girl, washing away her sin and cleansing herself. It is also, to an extent, symbolic of her washing away her identity as Vaibhavari and assuming the identity of Natasha. I find this interesting because in both these films, the imagery is almost identical and the symbolism likens the widow to the prostitute. In the past, and even now, albeit on a smaller level than historically, younger widows became prostitutes so as to survive. They were pimped by *hijras*⁴¹ who sold them to wealthy men.



Fig. 25
Source: *Baabul* (2006)
She washes out her sindoor.



Fig. 26
Source: *Laga Chunari Mein Daag* (2007)
She washes off her sin

The subject of widows in India is one that is generally tiptoed around and in film; the widow is generally not a young woman, but an old grandmother or mother who has children to live for. In Yash Raj Films, she is generally the woman who has lost her husband and is in need of rescuing from another male who will take her under his wing.

⁴¹ A *hijra* is a man similar to a eunuch, who dresses as a woman and apparently has the ability to bless or curse people and is paid to entertain people. Nowadays they are pimps and brothel entertainers.

4.2.5. Discussion

In the above discussion of the various character types in Yash Raj Films, we can ascertain that Bollywood does indeed reiterate stereotypical roles in the women who are shown in each film. While femininity is “acquired and reproduced through socialisation (Macdonald, 1995:13), Bollywood sets up stereotypes which contain a ‘kernel of truth’, leading the viewer to presume that they are not entirely false. Through reinforcement of ideology, which in this case is patriarchy, notions of tradition and Hinduism, Bollywood represents these stereotypes and give us “a limited amount of role models” (Macdonald, 1995:13). This, in turn, naturalises the perception that women are two-dimensional and can only fit into these roles, because even though the theory of the hypodermic needle⁴² in media has been disproved years ago,⁴³ the media nonetheless *encourages* the viewer to “adopt behaviour that reinforces gender specific roles, and to internalise the appropriateness of this as part of their own sense of identity” (Macdonald, 1995:13). This brings together the discussion in Chapter 2 in which Datta and Butalia iterate what I have discussed above in terms of women being seen as the image of ideal Hindu beauty and duty or the antithesis, which is vamp.

As explained in Chapter 2, this analysis brings together what Mulvey and Kuhn explain about women in mainstream cinema being created and maintained for the male gaze. Mulvey argues “classic American film gives priority to male perspectives, both narratively, by giving male stars the more interesting roles and visually, by making women the object of a dominant male gaze” (Macdonald, 1995:27). This is a fitting analysis of Bollywood, as Bollywood is the dominant cinematic form in India, much like Hollywood is in the west. Women in Bollywood

⁴² The hypodermic needle theory of communication: The belief that whatever the media injects into the public has a direct and altering effect. E.g. A violent film will drive people to kill others. See Davis, D.K. & Baron, S.J. 1981. ‘A History of Our Understanding of Mass Communication’. In: Davis, D.K. & Baron and S.J. (Eds.). *Mass Communication and Everyday Life: A Perspective on Theory and Effects*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

⁴³ Replaced by the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*; whatever the media puts out, the audiences choose how to act on it. See Berger, A.A. 1995. *Cultural Criticism*. London: SAGE Publications.

are reduced from being whole, three-dimensional human beings to being character descriptions and this in turn becomes embedded in the culture which followers of cinema become attached to.

4.3. Song & Dance Routines

In my experience, if one does not remember a certain Bollywood film entirely, the chances are they remember the song and dance numbers. Choreographers in the Bollywood industry are world renowned and well known. Testament to the fact that the song and dance routines are such an integral part of Bollywood is that one cannot separate the film from its songs. The tradition of song and dance being used as a medium of expression in drama dates back to the beginnings of theatre in both eastern and western practice. Eastern theatre used dance in very much the same way as western theatre did. The dances were religious and performed to call upon some supreme being. This tradition has not left Indian theatre and has spilled over into film, which is essentially an extension of theatre. Dance has evolved from being of religious significance to being for entertainment value, yet still holds the same amount of importance in terms of analysis. Music is an element of Bollywood which is "one component in a much larger conglomerate of culturally coded elements which can be collectively employed to produce expressive and narrative meaning" (Booth, 2000:128).

The songs "are often fantasies of the protagonist as well as the audience" (Dudrah, 2006:50). Apart from the songs being integral to the film in terms of Bollywood's non-western style, they push the stories forward and the audience have come to expect them. A soundtrack of about six or seven songs is the standard fare set for an average film. All modes of Bollywood storytelling are "bound together in a coherent whole by songs...if you miss a song, you have missed an important link between one part of the narration and the next" (Dudhra, 2006:48-49).

The entire package of a song and dance routine is a part of what makes a Bollywood film sell. "A film is unlikely to attain mass popularity if it has no songs...without them the average Indian movie-goer finds films boring" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:98). Part of this appeal is the women in the song and dance routines. They can be either the beautiful female protagonist dancing in a field, in the imagination of the male protagonist or doing a sexy yet traditional dance that moves the male protagonist to fall in love with her. In an average film "dancing exemplifies the objectification of woman: she is a spectacle, par excellence – a body to be looked at, the locus of sensuality, the object of desire" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:101). She is there to be looked at, admired, and envied. "The gyrations are repeated and the use of the eyes, lips [and hips] all suggest sexuality" (Kabir, 2001:198). The men in the dances are usually the ones watching the woman or guiding her into movements which allow for full exposure of her sexuality.

Hindi films rely on song and dance sequences to convey sexuality more so than Hollywood relies on visual coding such as a couple lying in bed together or a shot of clothes strewn across a floor. India has stringent censorship laws when it comes to physical contact on screen. Actors/characters are rarely allowed to kiss or fondle in any sexual manner⁴⁴ and even though this has occurred in some films such as *Dhoom II* (2007),⁴⁵ it is explicitly frowned upon. So "producers developed an overly suggestive body language to compensate for the prohibition of physical contact, and used songs for such expressions" (Skillman, 1986:138). This is played out by use of blatant gestures and connotations to show sexuality between couples, as well as to show off a woman's body and desirability without taking off any clothing.

⁴⁴ The Central Board of Film Certification orders directors to remove any action it deems offensive and to avoid films being censored, directors generally leave out anything that might cause the film to receive bad reviews. (www.bollyWHAT.com)

⁴⁵ *Dhoom II* (2007) is a film about a train heist and shows a scene in which two characters kiss. This caused uproar from the audiences as well as film authorities.

In this section, I will be looking at the various types of dance and how they portray women; the imaginary dance, the traditional Indian dance, the rain dance, the field dance and the western dance.

4.3.1. The imaginary dance

Imagined dances form a large part of Bollywood's dance sequence repertoire. These are spaces where the characters of the films are allowed to indulge in private fantasies which are 'not permitted' outside of the imagination. The song and dance that goes with this is generally the male protagonist's fantasy. "Songs were used to express sentiments which could not be spoken, and when dramatised in film, the body language, covered by the veil of a song, suggested a display of affection which was forbidden in public" (Skillman, 1986:138).



Fig. 27
Source: *Dil To Pagal Hai* (1997)
The protagonists act out their
love through a dance in their imaginations.

In *Dil To Pagal Hai*, the protagonists start realising their love for each other and the scene in which both of them start realising this cuts to a dance which takes place in their imagination. During the course of this song and dance routine, there are many outfit changes, location changes and Pooja's sexuality is on display because, even though in reality she is a good Hindu woman, in her imagination she can parade her body and her desires, as can her male counterpart, Rahul (Shahrukh Khan). She openly reveals her desires for him in

this song and dance routine and lets loose her inhibitions. However, at the end of the song, she goes back to being subdued and hushed about her love for Rahul.

The dance which takes place in the imagination is a commonly used technique which allows both the male and female protagonists to indulge in each other's love and desire for one another and allows for sexuality to be on display with no guilt incurred.

4.3.2. The traditional Indian dance

Traditional Indian dance is seen to be one of the most alluring factors of films. *Kathak* and its offshoots which are less classical are portrayed in almost every Bollywood film, are seen as a sign of Hindu tradition and are in a subtle way, titillating for the viewer as the dress is traditional yet enticing and the moves are suggestive of attraction. In *Mohabbatien* Kiran dances for the man she loves and performs a mad, frenzied dance, keeping her eyes fixed on him the entire dance. The moves are traditional *kathak* steps and movements, yet this dance shows off her body, her moves and her desire for Karan through the dance.

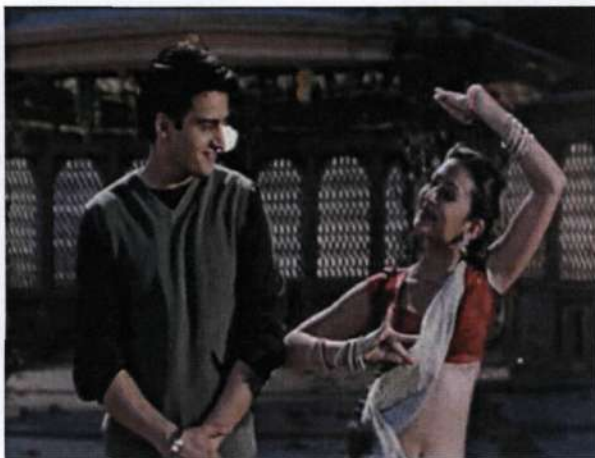


Fig. 28
Kiran in *Mohabbatien* (2000) (source):
Bells on her ankles and a tucked in sari.

"The female body as a spectacle is a public representation; a putting before the public of an erotic imagery that does not violate the code that prohibits the

representation of the private" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:79). This pseudo-erotic dance is as powerful, if not more, in grasping a male audience member's attention as an imagination dance due to its traditional roots legitimising the gaze.

Traditional dances also take place in the space where a courtesan resides, called a *khota*. The *khota* "provides a space where dance and song, were desire and passion, where sex and poetry can fuse into one, uninhibited by religion or family" (Mishra, 2006:17).

4.3.3. The rain dance

Very popular and somewhat expected by the audience is the rain dance. The rain dance is one that is "legitimised by a sudden, torrential downpour that soaks the woman's flimsy sari, and allows for a very provocative and sexually tantalising exposure of the female body" (Richards in Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:79). The song is usually provocative and alluring with a dance to match the rousing nature of the song. Her song is performed in a sweet yet sensual and orgasmic fashion. "It suggests how something as mundane as rain can be elevated to the level of a powerful emotional experience" (Pendakur, 2003:161).

In Bollywood films "...the rain just pours out to get the stars wet so that we can take a peek at their bodies" (Pendakur, 2003:161). The outfits are generally traditional Indian outfits generally cover up the body in what is seen as a respectful manner. When wet, however, one can see through the thin shawl and the wearer's figure is subtly revealed.



Fig. 29
Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)
Kiran's figure is exposed
under a thin and wet sari.

The rain dance is sometimes a figment of the male character's imagination. The sexuality that is exuded in the song relates his desires to the audience. "These dream sequences provide the freedom to indulge in the exploration of forbidden pleasures which include the display of the female body as well as the expression of sexual desire" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1988:79). More often than not, there is no link between the narrative or plot and the rain dance. It is merely a voyeuristic tool that sexualises the woman in question. "It is there, simply as an ingredient to make a film appear better to the distributors, to make the film more saleable to them, and hopefully to contribute to its eventual box office success" (Pendakur, 2003:161). It invites the stares of the male audience as well as the female audience who admire her expression of sexuality, her beautiful outfits and to some extent want to be her in that moment. Her body drenched in water exudes sexuality and heightens the experience of forbidden sexuality in the audience. She surrenders to the elements and to her lover.

In *Mohabbatein*, Kiran dances for Karan and after he leaves her on the balcony, she dances in the rain in her flimsy sari, which allows the viewer to indulge in glances at her body. Her thin sari reveals a conventionally beautiful figure, which

is a perfect example of how this scene constructed for the male gaze and how women are made to envy Kiran.



Fig. 30
Source: *Aaja Nachle* (2007)
She is the object of desire
and in the rain she surrenders to him.

In *Aaja Nachle*, Dhiya (Madhuri Dixit) dances with her newfound lover. The entire song spans a few weeks of action in the film, plotting their relationship developing, until the rain starts and she surrenders to her lover, Steve (Felix D'Alviella), as pictured above. Dhiya allows her sexuality to be displayed through her enjoyment of the rain.

4.3.4. The field dance

The female protagonist usually has a song to herself in which she revels in her own beauty and femininity. This is sometimes linked with the rain dance, resulting in clothes clinging to the body and emphasising the feminine form. Usually this occurs after the female protagonist realises her feelings and emotions towards the male. It is usually a light hearted and joyous scene, filled with various fantasies and incorporating a number of costume changes



Fig. 31

Source: *Dil To Pagal Hai* (1997)

Pooja dancing in the field:

She dances as if to the audience.

In *Dil To Pagal Hai*, Pooja dances in the field dreaming about her prospective lover whom she has not met yet. In this dream of her lover and her wedding, she dances, as if for him but in reality, for the audience. She wears traditional Indian dress during this song and dance, using her veil to frame her body. She dances as if nobody is watching her, and in this song and dance routine, her secret desires pour out to the audience. Also in this sequence, there is a scene where she stands in bridal finery and a man riding a white horse rides past her, taking her veil (a sign of a woman's innocence) with her. This is symbolic of her desires, that she wants someone to take her innocence away.

The lyrics and her gyrations are an invitation showing that she is available but unattainable. This may seem powerful in that she is taking back agency but she is doing this by putting her body and sexuality on display and holding possible suitors at arm's length, using her body as the projectile. In the context of the film, she displays all this sexuality and strength by using it however she succumbs to the charms of the male protagonist shortly after this song is sung, making her claims in the song seemingly worthless. What Mulvey (1975:64) says about Hollywood is applicable here; "she is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised. But as the narrative progresses, she falls in love with the male protagonist and becomes his property".



Fig.32

Source: *Aaja Nachle* (2007)

She dances to herself while
her lover watches on in secret.

In *Aaja Nachle*, Dhiya dances at her dancing school and is the teacher's pet. She is portrayed as the best dancer and is the one the camera focuses on. However, during rehearsal one day, while dancing, she is isolated and we, the audience, see a man taking photos of her. This can be seen as the ultimate in voyeurism and the man taking the pictures watches Dhiya's every move. She dances innocently, almost to herself, but when the photographer starts taking pictures of her, single movements are separated from her overall movements and gestures like the one pictured in Fig. 32 show off her beauty and sexuality, perfectly framed under the guise of a photograph.

The field dance allows for voyeurism to occur within the film as well as presenting an open chance for the audience to indulge in the sexuality and the beauty of the dancer. She is on display in a seemingly innocent framework, but is objectified throughout the song.

4.3.5. The western dance

If a heroine performs a western style dance, it is generally at a modern place, which calls for this type of dance or to show her sexual allure. By and large, the

vamp performs dances in a western style, which has been discussed. However, the heroine sometimes does too, depending on which time period or place the song is set. She “breaks into sexy hip wiggling and breast-shaking. The moment the dance is over, she returns to her demure charm” (Das Gupta, 1980:35). One such dance is Tina’s dance in *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* Tina (Kareena Kapoor) is a small town girl who is a dancer in a dance troupe. She dresses in a suggestive manner, but not so much as the aforementioned vamp. She is depicted as shallow and silly, but is not the proverbial vamp. She is shown as being religious, virtuous and a true friend.

Her dance occurs at the beginning of the film. It is an instrumental song, using mainly drums, bass and keyboard. She dances alone in a school gymnasium in workout clothes; a top barely covering her breasts and low riding pants. She parades more than dances and she looks straight at the camera at most times, inviting the viewer to look at her, longingly.

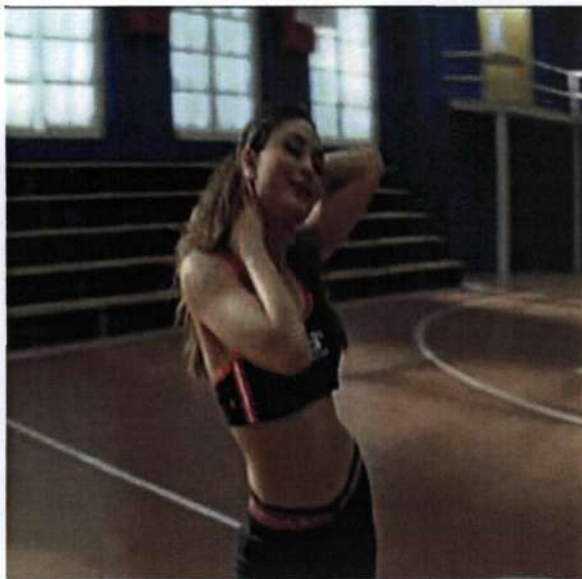


Fig. 33

Source: *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* (2002)

Tina performing

Terrific Tina

This kind of dance is put into a film when the actress performing the dance is a superstar famous for her sculpted body, like Kareena Kapoor. This scene has not

much relevance to the story but invites the viewer to look at what the protagonist will be lauding over for the rest of the film.

In the case of *Aaja Nachle*, Dhiya is presented through the opening credits as being a dancing instructor in New York. She and her dance troupe perform an entire sequence in Dhiya's dance studio and this shows Dhiya instructing them but being the one the camera focuses on, rather than the dancers. She is a few steps in front of her troupe and every now and then, singled out by the camera. Here, we are allowed to view her talent and beauty. The fact that the dance is a western one is not entirely inconsequential – it denotes a change from the Dhiya the audience will meet when the scene changes to one of India and Dhiya's past. In this case, the western dance signifies, not a bad character, but a character that has divorced herself from India for reasons yet to be explained.



Fig. 34
Source: *Aaja Nachle* (2007)
Dhiya dancing for the West
in New York

By and large, the western dance used to be to portray a vamp but nowadays it is used in other contexts such as the dancer being in a different country or performing as a professional dancer, but the premise is still the same; it is a display of sexuality in a manner different to the traditional methods and this can allow for a western or NRI audience to be invited.

4.4. Costumes

Costume designers in the Bollywood industry are as well known and respected as directors and dance choreographers. Designers such as Ritu Kumar (née Beri) and Manish Malhotra are household names in Indian culture. "Of all the pleasures associated with watching popular Hindi films, viewing costumes is among the most obvious and influential" (Wilkinson-Weber, 2006:582).

There can be many costume changes within a song and dance sequence and many costumes used throughout a film, signifying different things. "Costume changes in Hindi film act as signifiers of melodramatic character types, they encode emotion; they allow the heroine, in particular, to indulge in masquerade (Dwyer & Patel, 2002:93) and "they embody morality" (Wilkinson-Weber, 2006:589). As it has been and will be discussed, costumes can separate the daughter from the mother; the mother from the vamp; the wife from the courtesan and so on. The costumes not only permit the viewer to indulge in women dressed in beautiful outfits, they signify character, intention, sexuality and morality of the character.

Not many theorists have dealt with dress and its influence on visual representation of women in Bollywood. Many have merely touched on it such as Wilkinson-Weber (2006) and Dwyer & Patel (2002) but none that I have found have seriously delved into full content analysis of dress on its own. My aim in this section is to critically analyse dress in Yash Raj Films by looking at the different types of dress and what each signifies from my reading of the films. The subcategories are; western dress, *sari*, *salwaar kameez* and *choli* (the meanings and descriptions of which will be explained below). I will also be looking at how a character is transformed from being one type of character to another through dress.

4.4.1. The Westerner

Western dress is something that has been looked down upon in Indian cinema until recently, seeing as though it was generally used to depict the vamp or the anti-heroine. With the growing Non-Resident Indian (NRI) population in England, United States of America, South Africa and even Australia, western dress has become somewhat of a norm. However, western dress is seen in film as acceptable only in certain contexts: to portray an NRI and to show a young tomboyish girl. Outside of these contexts, western dress is used to portray a vamp (see 4.2.2). Here, we look again at Nisha in *Dil To Pagal Hai* whose skimpy outfits and boisterous behaviour earn her the title of the vamp. In most of the scenes she is in, she is dressed in flashy dresses, barely covering her breasts and buttocks. This is not much different from the cuts of some Indian outfits, but the fact that it is western dress suggests a non-Indian woman and a therefore non-ideal woman. Western dress does not only depict character but gives the audience a full figure to look at. "She is the subject of a transaction in which her own commodification is ultimately the object" (Doane, 1987:30), meaning that she dresses to gain the attention of the male viewer, but she is commodifying herself in the process.



Fig. 35
Source: *Dil To Pagal Hai* (1997)
Nisha – the vamp in a
revealing dress.

4.4.2. The Sari

The use of *saris* in film is age old and it is indeed the most common and identifiable of Indian dress. A *sari* is a six yard piece of material which is usually tucked into an underskirt, wrapped around the lower body and slung over the shoulder and torso. In everyday life, it is the married and older women who wear saris. In film, however, saris are used to depict not only being married but depict a virtuous character (as seen in 4.2.1) and a chance for the audience to get the occasional flashes of tummy, cleavage and bare back through the way in which the sari is draped. "It is no doubt possible to rely on the sari as the orientalist fantasy of the sensuous, exotic eastern woman" (Puwar, 2002:65). This form of dress denotes a demure sexuality that is only visible in the way in which the sari is draped.⁴⁶ In *Mohabbatein*, Megha's transformation from a young girl to a woman is shown in her wearing a sari instead of a *salwaar khammeez* (explained in 4.4.4), yet the saris she wears are chiffon, see through and draped in such a manner that it is figure-hugging.

Looking at her dress more symbolically, it is seen as a sign of elegance to wear a sari and women who have come of age usually wear saris and different colours denote different things. In the parts of the film where she is represented as being alive (through flashback technique) she wears pale colours denoting a modest persona. When she tries on her late mother's wedding sari, it is bright red and vibrant, which is the traditional bridal colour in India, showing that the woman getting married is bringing the goddess *Lakshmi*⁴⁷ into her in-law's home. When Megha commits suicide, she is wearing white, which is the colour of mourning in India. Widows generally wear white from the time their husbands die until their death. When she is represented as a ghost, Megha wears saris which are light, soft and almost ethereal in appearance. Here, one can see how dress is used as a mechanism to signify character, role in society and presence in the film.

⁴⁶ Saris can be draped in various ways. The most common is the style already explained. It can be draped to show more skin and can also be draped in order to be danced in.

⁴⁷ Lakshmi is the deity of Light and Wealth.



Fig. 36
Source: *Mohabbatein* (2000)
Megha's figure is fully visible

4.4.3. The Choli

The Ghaghara choli (choli) is a festive outfit which is generally worn by unmarried women and is an ensemble which is worn for specific occasions such as weddings and prayers. It consists of a blouse which generally covers the breasts from cleft to just underneath the breast, a shawl and a skirt which sits on the hip. It is also used a lot in Bollywood as dress for imagination sequences and majority of these cholis are duplicated and sold in boutiques whose dressmakers buy the design after the film has been released. These outfits rarely appear unless it is a song and dance routine. They are not regularly denotative of character but can be in some cases.

In *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* Tina wears a choli for her pre-wedding party. She is represented throughout the film as a flirtatious 'fashionista' and her love for the male protagonist, Raj, drives her to becoming more Indian. In this scene, which is a song and dance routine, she wears a red choli which shows her change to a respectable Hindu woman, yet it is still as revealing, if not more revealing than most of the western outfits she wears through the course of the film. As shown in the image below, the outfit shows her entire midriff. In the film, we also get a

glimpse of her back being bare because the blouse is so small. She dances around Raj and he sings to her as she dances. "Men are characterised as active agents. Women are displayed in order to be looked at" (Carroll, 1990:351). This is a technique widely used in all of the films studied to show as much skin as possible while remaining rooted in tradition. By comparison, Pooja (Rani Mukherjee) is dressed in an equally beautiful choli but covers more skin, making her 'less attractive' than Tina. Tina is the one who is meant to be looked at in this scene.



Fig.37

Source: *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* (2002)

Tina's choli reveals more than her Western dresses but is traditional and is therefore acceptable.

4.4.4. The salwaar kameez

Salwaar kameez, (a long blouse, pants and shawl set) often referred to as a *Punjabi* in South Africa,⁴⁸ is a form of traditional dress usually reserved for unmarried women. It is an everyday dress which is worn on any occasion and is usually used to indicate a person attending religious event or a virtuous young

⁴⁸ The reason for this is because South Africans have been removed from India for up to seven generations and in the time of South African Indian's ancestors, this dress was generally worn by people from the province of Punjab in northern India, who are referred to as *Punjabi*.

woman. This dress does not show much skin but its figure-hugging qualities and low cuts allow for maximum view of cleavage and one's back. The purpose of the salwaar khameez is perhaps not merely to draw the viewer's eye to her body but to her sense of Indian-ness.

In *Laga Chunari Mein Daag*, Vaibhavari wears salwaar khameez at the beginning of the film where she is shown as being a respectable Hindu village girl. She is depicted as wearing bright colours associated with village life and is shown dancing throughout the village market, living a carefree life. Here, the attraction to Vaibhavari is not in her body but in her traditionality. This is then juxtaposed later on when she changes into Natasha and starts wearing western clothes in bold, darker colours such as black and maroon.

The title, *Laga Chunari Mein Daag* means 'my veil has been stained'. The symbolism here is that Vaibhavari's *chunari* (veil), being a sign of respect in Hindu culture, is stained by the profession she chooses. Here, we see the veil covering her assets, but later on, it is cast away and she becomes a prostitute, which figuratively stains her veil. She puts her veil back on at the end of the film when she is rescued from her profession and married. "The film thus gives reassurance to the 'family audience' which is the mainstay of the film industry" (Das Gupta, 1980:29). The fact that Das Gupta is writing about film in the 1970's and this film was made in 2007 shows that not much has changed since then.



Fig. 38
Laga Chunari Mein Daag (2007)
 Vaibhavari is innocent and
 carefree here in her Indian garb.

However, in *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* Tina's appearance in salwaar khameez is one that makes the viewer notice her body as well as traditionality. She meets Raj and when she gets his attention with her beauty, she changes into traditional dress to show that not only is she beautiful, she is an honourable Hindu woman as well. In this scene, as shown below, she practically models into the room and stands next to him, her almost see through salwaar khameez showing the outlines of her midriff and cleavage. The veil is placed as a scarf would be and billows behind her as she walks, accentuating her long, thick black hair, which is seen as a positive feature in Indian women.



Fig. 39

Source: *Mujhse Dosti Karoge!* (2002)

Tina is traditional and still sexy in a salwar kameez.

4.4.5. Transformation of character through dress

We have already seen how different dress denotes different characters, different roles and serves various purposes. However, in Bollywood, this is taken a step further and certain films suggest that dress defines a person and can be the defining point in their fate.

One such film is *Aaja Nachle*, in which Anokhi (Konkona Sen Sharma) is a village girl and her love story with Imraan is a subplot of the film, yet takes up a large part of the film. She wears dark coloured salwar kameez, two sizes too big for her slender body, wears her hair unplaited and knotted, plays cricket with the boys in the village, fights with the boys when she loses and is loud and boisterous. She is not illustrated as a vamp, as she is in traditional dress and is a simple village girl, but she is depicted as silly, unkempt and unattractive because of her dress and behaviour. She is in love with the village's most eligible bachelor, Imraan (Kunal Kapoor) and he does not notice her.

However, when Dhiya, the film's female protagonist, tells her that Imraan does not love her because she dresses badly and behaves in an unsavoury manner,

she changes her appearance and behaviour to be more acceptable. She starts to wear slender fitting salwaar khameez in lighter colours, combs her hair and plaits it, starts wearing jewellery and makeup and makes a concerted effort to talk less and softer. This is when Imraan notices her, indicating that it is attractive to be seen and not heard. Anokhi is a free spirited character before her transformation and she is the way she is because she is different from other girls in the village. However, "Hindi film upholds the traditional patriarchal views of society which, fearful of female sexuality, demands the woman a subjugation of her desires" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998:77) and these dictate that Anokhi is tamed and made into a woman who acts and defines herself by how society sees her and how society and her lover wish to see her.



Fig.40
Source: *Aaja Nachle* (2007)
Anokhi transforms from playful tomboy
to refined woman.

4.4.6. Discussion

Because song and dance routines and dress are visual modes of media representation, I am combining the discussion. Under the veil of Hinduism and tradition, patriarchy has taken hold of representation of women in these films. The women are not only portrayed as stereotypes in terms of characterisation, but visually as well in terms of song and dance sequences and more insinuatingly, through dress codes. This ties into the discussion from Chapter 2, where theorists have iterated that dominant cinema is catered for male viewing pleasure and that women are object to the male gaze, and even though I do not claim that this is *always* the case, this is the case in most films.

In accordance with Mulvey's notion of the male gaze, "female characters on screen tend to be filmed in a way that emphasises their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' and point of view shots within the frame are predominantly from a male perspective" (Macdonald, 1995:27). Women here are turned into a fetish, to be ogled at by the male viewer and to a female viewer, identified with (Men want the woman on screen and women want to be her or like her). The focus of the song and dance sequences and dress codes in Bollywood not only stereotype women, but place them under a banner of patriarchy by taking away their three-dimensionalism and placing only aspects of them and their bodies on screen so as to make them picturesque and on a pedestal. The fear of castration that Mulvey writes of is what this comes out of. If the woman is made powerless, she does not have that castrating ability. The makers not only give the men a fetish to obsess over, they provide "the dress and personal style of female stars as a source of pleasure for women" (Macdonald, 1995:29). This makes the aforementioned aspects of Bollywood a deep rooted source of oppression for women.

4.5. The women who break the mould

In this study, I have looked specifically at Yash Raj Films and have only looked to other films for examples when I could not find them in the films produced by Yash Raj Films. In this, I found but one strong female character amongst an inundation of weak and two-dimensional characters. This is the character of Dhiya in *Aaja Nachle*. Visually, she is represented in a similar fashion to other Bollywood heroines; she is slender, fair-skinned, and doe-eyed and her dress and song and dance sequences are typical of Bollywood style, as mentioned before.

However, Dhiya is not the average wallflower that Bollywood usually portrays. In the film, she elopes with her American lover, divorces him and comes back to India to save her beloved amphitheatre where she used to dance, which has

fallen into disrepair since she left. The film touches on the issue of how women falling in love and acting on their own will are received by old-school Indian mentality: her parents, on finding out about her lover, arrange her marriage to a local shop owner. Her parents refuse to acknowledge that she is her own person and can choose her life path. They constantly chide her about being a liability. "A girl child is seen as a burden by everyone in the family the moment she is born because the parents have to pay someone to marry her" (Pendakur, 2001:148-149). When she elopes, they leave the village out of embarrassment. When she came back approximately eight years later, she was met with cruel comments and treated with disdain. She does not fear going into the village to state her purpose and to revive the theatre, and does so with vigour, armed with funding from her New York dance troupe and dressed in figure hugging jeans and low cut shirts – a very risqué thing to do in a traditional Indian village.



Fig. 41

Source: *Aaja Nachle* (2007)

Dhiya is her own woman but still frowned upon.

She is strong and she holds her own, however, the film was met with bad reviews and poor audiences. "Audiences are publicly known to *reject* films that do not uphold the status quo" (Nayar, 2004:18). The reasons the film was rejected by Indian audiences are that Dhiya is shown as breaking the rules of what is seen as 'the great Indian dream'. She elopes with a non-Indian man, which is seen as

taboo, even in Indian diasporic cultures, and furthermore, she gets divorced, not because her husband was abusive but because he changed as a person. That is seen as an even larger taboo issue than domestic abuse. "A woman who returns to her parents due to a quarrel with her husband or due to his death is not quite welcome in her parents' home. They sympathise with her, but would prefer that she work out the problems with her husband and her in-laws with the entrenched belief that a woman's rightful place in society is with her husband" (Pendakur, 2001:148). Dhiya's strong character and the resistance from the community within the film as well as the audience is testament to the fact that even though strong women do exist in Bollywood cinema and in Yash Raj Films, they are rejected by society and seen as breaking the sacrosanct traditions that override Bollywood.

A film which also collapsed at the box office yet portrayed incredibly strong female characters, I found outside of Yash Raj Films. *Lajja* (2001)⁴⁹ is a film which is centred on four women who are concurrently experiencing hardships that women in every social class in India experience. The film chronicles the travels of Vaidhi (Manisha Koirala), a socialite who is running away from her abusive husband. On her journey, she meets a bride-to-be, Maithili (Mahima Chaudhary) who stands up to her antagonistic in-laws and eventually has her wedding cancelled, an actress, Janki (Madhuri Dixit) who refuses to re-enact the parable of Sita walking through the fire to prove her loyalty to Ram (see footnote 31) and gets stoned and beaten by the audience and a village midwife, Ramdulari (Rekha) who, after being discovered as teaching the village women how to read and write, gets gang raped and murdered.

⁴⁹ *Lajja* (2001) is a progressive Bollywood film which deals with the plight of four women across class lines in modern day India.



Fig.42

Source: *Lajja* (2001)

Janki prepares herself for the public humiliation she knows she is going to face.

This film, set in modern day India, shows the ways in which different women in India experience oppression in each social class.⁵⁰ The women are strong willed, ready to stand up for what they believe and the film as a whole speaks about *laj* as being placed on a woman's shoulders thus drawing the viewer's eye to the struggles that women in India face. However, the film relies on the aforementioned Bollywood tactics in order to appeal to a larger audience, hence the dress and song and dance routines are represented as they usually are – with the dress being suggestive and the dances being formulaic. "The heroine may have metamorphised (sic) over the years, but she still cannot break away from the shackles of certain norms set by Hindi cinema years ago" (Motwani, 1996). Also, the story pans out to have a typical Bollywood-style happy ending with all wrongdoers being punished and all the men reforming, which is not the case in real life.

I found that the women in the film, although portrayed as stalwart, still fit into the Bollywood mould of being the proverbial goddess-like Hindu archetype. "The heroines of female-centred films are often depicted as divinely inspired" (Booth,

⁵⁰ bell hooks discusses this topic about interconnectedness of struggles, her discussion delving into how to deal with feminism across class boundaries. This is outside of the scope of the dissertation and will therefore not be delved into. For further reference please see hooks, b. 2004. 'Feminism: A Transformational Politic. In: *Feminist Theory: A Reader*. Kolmar, W. & Bartkowski, F. (eds.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

1995:181). I found this in their names, which are all different names to refer to the goddess Sita and the fact that they look to God for guidance, where men have failed them. The name of the film, *Lajja*, refers to *laj* as was explained in Chapter 2. It is seen here as a 'shame' that women have to carry in the dark times we live in. They are seen as having to bear the brunt of the bad decisions of men and have to pick up the pieces, which is exactly what happens in the film. No attempt is made to change this notion.

"While acknowledging that movies sometimes portray strong competent women...many women presented as strong are simply often protecting their young or dealt with negatively" (Rothman *et al*, 1993:66). The majority of female centred films exist mainly outside the realm of Bollywood (i.e. what is termed as 'alternate Indian cinema'⁵¹ and there is no room in traditional Bollywood for the kind of women that fit outside the two-dimensional Bollywood norm.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the construction of women as archetypal characters, a description of song and dance routines and dress has been analysed. The chapter also provided a link to the relevant theory described in Chapters 2 and 3. By this analysis we can deduce that women are indeed represented under the premise of patriarchy.

Mulvey and Kuhn's concepts of the male gaze as well as the concepts of tradition, Hinduism and mythology, which are all dictated by patriarchy, prescribing the roles of women in cinema help to highlight the positioning of women in Bollywood cinema. They are represented as flat, prototype characters and this is seen in their characterisation as daughter/wife/daughter-in-law,

⁵¹Indian cinema does not only consist of Bollywood and there are cinematic forms which counteract the conventions of Bollywood.

mother, vamp, courtesan and widow as well as in the song and dance routines and dress codes.

I am in no way suggesting that the opposite be made true for film to be truly liberating for women because "women should not be depicted as only sexual and biological creatures but neither should these aspects of their existence be ignored or misrepresented" (Owens-Weekes, 1993:37). However, when women are predominantly represented in this light, there is indeed a problem and the way in which to overcome this is by representing women in all her facets and not only a few of them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Film is, by and large, regarded as a form of entertainment. It operates on commercial success and therefore incurs the complex process of production, financiers, investors, makers and consumers, which requires it to be economically viable in catering to a mass audience. Films which fail at the box office are seen as not having catered to that mass audience and it either happens that the people involved in making the film end up not making films again, or, the more common decision made is that the style of film and its contents are altered or not shown again so that the audiences get what they want to see. "The real truth is that most people find it very difficult to journey away from familiar and fixed boundaries" (hooks, 1996:2). Audiences draw pleasure and amusement from what they see on screen, and even though this is determined from individual tastes, the general populous would like to see what they know and are comfortable with on screen. In this sense, successful Bollywood films are seen as catering to a mass audience in their representation of women and the female form is used as a selling point.

Aside from the audience and investors dictating what goes into a film, it is the ideology of the filmmakers and those in power at the time, which decides the content and representations within a film. In Yash Raj Films, it is the overriding systems of Hinduism, Hindu mythology, notions of family and tradition which, unfortunately fall under the banner of patriarchy, that prevail. Those superseding ideologies have the power over representation, and this leads to, as mentioned in Chapters 2 and 4, the film industry creating depictions of women afforded to the male gaze and this is done through specific characteristics of Bollywood, being the way in which women are categorised, through songs and dances and through various forms of dress which compartmentalise women, turn them into a fetish and allow them no room to be 'real women' – three dimensional, with flaws and individual identities.

When I began this study, I was under the premise that Bollywood would have become more progressive towards its representation of women, seeing as though globalisation and western influence has had a large impact on the content and locations of many of the films which have been released recently. However, on the examination of the films, I found that as much as the progress has been made in terms of technology improving, the content of films shifting towards representing the wealthy, successful Indian or NRI, the westernisation of speech, dress and songs and the overall acceptance that India has changed and is changing towards being a more commercial and less traditional sphere, women are still trapped in the old forms of portrayal as being docile and feminine. In fact, westernisation and modernisation of India and Indian ideologies have colluded with women's commodification by turning women into a spectacle with allowances to show more skin and cater to a wider (male or female) audience, and not only Indians; the male wanting her and the female wanting to be her.

In relation to the films I have analysed, the questions set out at the beginning can be answered. Through the discussion I have ascertained how Bollywood visually represents women, by and large. Through aspects of culture such as Hinduism, mythology, notions of family and tradition, Bollywood has taken much liberty in representing women in terms of these values and these values, ruled by the dominant premise of patriarchy, subject women to a representation that is submissive to these values and the men who control them. This is evident through characterisation, in which the various archetypes of women, being daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, vamp, courtesan and widow, are two dimensional, have no substance and exist in relation to the men in the film. In terms of song and dance sequences, women are denoted as part of the spectacle; they are represented characteristically by whatever dance they are performing (such as the virtuous daughter performing a traditional Indian dance and a vamp performing a western dance), and they are put on display for the men in the film and in the audience to ogle at, as well as for the women in the audience to identify. In respect to dress codes, women are represented

characteristically by their dress (such as the mother in a sari and the widow wearing white only) and dress performs the functions to either expose the body or denote character. Femininity, as outlined by patriarchy, is fully adhered to in the films.

However, we have seen that there are some women in Bollywood cinema who do break this mould in terms of characterisation and this is evident in *Aaja Nachle* and *Lajja*. The strong women portrayed in Bollywood are the types of women who exist in the world – they are not flat as portrayed in the other films studied. However, correlating with the claim that cinema thrives on commercial success and that formula and giving the audiences something familiar to deal with on screen, these films were flops at the box office and were chided for their subject matter. Visually, however, these strong women do still fit into the mould of the aforementioned Bollywood woman. Dhiya in *Aaja Nachle* is still represented as a dancer and her sexuality is on display through this. The women in *Lajja* are nonetheless shown as being beautiful, fair skinned and existing only in relation to the men in their lives. So the question of whether women in Bollywood are constructed for the male gaze can be answered as yes.

Also, the question of the extent to which women have overcome negative representation in Bollywood can be answered and that is very little. From the argument as presented in this study, we can see that even though there are attempts at emancipating women through representations of strong women in powerful roles. This is, however, very limited and obscured by the overriding themes of religion and tradition, which entrap these women under the shroud of patriarchy, as well as the fact that their visual representation in terms of dress and dance are no different to the conventions already mentioned.

As much as this study has foreground the way in which women are represented in Bollywood through an analysis of Yash Raj Films, Bollywood is a hefty industry, which these films, although prominent in the success of Bollywood at

large, are a mere sample. This dissertation highlights how concepts of femininity are conveyed through this visual and powerful medium and how these films draw these representations and justifies them by using Hinduism and how the filmmakers use these concepts to perpetuate negative and incorrect stereotypes of women.

In order for this barrier to be broken down, the dominant form needs to be, first deconstructed and then recreated in a different form in order to create film which will emancipate women. "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (de Lauretis, 1985:158) and this calls for an entirely new type of cinema which speaks women's realities. This has been suggested by many theorists before me such as Teresa de Lauretis (1985) and bell hooks (1996). It has already begun in Indian cinema with directors such as Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta,⁵² whose films have dismantled traditional Bollywood techniques by; excluding song and dance routines, not using exclusive dress designers, using unconventional actresses and breaking the stereotype of women's roles.

According to hooks,

If we long to transform the culture so that the conventional mass media are not the only force teaching people what to like and how to see, then we have to embrace the avant-garde/experimental. Here is where we'll find radical possibility. We can deconstruct the images in mainstream white supremacist capitalist patriarchal system for days and it will not lead to cultural revolution (1996:107).

We need to pay more attention to these films and let the public experience these forms of entertainment more if we are to fully liberate both women in Bollywood as well as audiences from their blinkered perceptions of what cinema and its representations should be. This dissertation makes evident the need for further research into Bollywood cinema, and perhaps a more detailed and in-depth analysis of all of the aspects of Bollywood which undermine women and perhaps

⁵² Both directors, Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta, have made films which have countered the manner in which Bollywood works and these films do not contain song and dance routines or any of the *masala* formula which makes Bollywood what it is.

when all of these are brought to attention, the screen might reflect women in a more real light.

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2. ***Bandini*** (1963) (Imprisoned)

Director and Producer: Bimal Roy

Production Company: Bimal Roy Productions

3. ***Dil To Pagal Hai*** (1997) (The Heart is Crazy)

Producer: Yash Chopra

Director: Yash Chopra

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

4. ***My Best Friend's Wedding*** (1997)

Director and Producer: P.J. Hogan

Production Company: Predawn Productions

5. ***Mohabbatein*** (2000) (Love Stories)

Producer: Yash Chopra

Director: Aditya Chopra

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

6. ***Lajja*** (2001) (Shame)

Director and Producer: Rajkumar Santoshi

Production Company: Eros International

7. **Hollywood/Bollywood** (2002)

Director, Producer & Script: Deepa Mehta

Production Company: Different Tree/Same Wood

8. **Devdas** (2002)

Producer: Bharat Shah

Director: Sanjay Leela-Bhansali

Production Company: Eros International

Script: Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay (novel), Sanjay Leela-Bhansali (screenplay)

9. **Mujhse Dosti Karoge!** (2002) (Will You Be My Friend?)

Producers: Aditya and Yash Chopra

Director: Aditya Chopra

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

10. **Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai** (2002) (It's My Friend's Wedding)

Producers: Yash Chopra

Director: Sanjay Gadhvi

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

11. **Hum Tum** (2004) (You and I)

Producers: Aditya and Yash Chopra

Director: Kunal Kohli

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

12. **Kisna: The Warrior Poet** (2005)

Director: Subhash Ghai

Production Company: Mukta Arts

13. **Water** (2006)

Director, Producer & Script: Deepa Mehta

Production Company: Different Tree/Same Wood

14. **Baabul** (2006) (Father)

Director: Ravi Chopra

Production Company: B.R. Films

15. **Laga Chunari Mein Daag** (2007) (My Veil is Stained)

Producers: Yash Chopra

Director: Pradeep Sarkar

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

16. **Dhoom II** (2007)

Producer: Aditya Chopra

Director: Sanjay Gadhvi

Production Company: Yash Raj Films

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