

**GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR
HINDI CINEMA: FEMININITY AND FEMALE SEXUALITY IN FILMS BY
POOJA BHATT AND KARAN JOHAR**

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DECLARATION

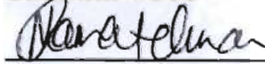
I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated in the text, is my own original work. This research has also not been submitted to any other institution for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on a textual analysis of the representation of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema. Popular Hindi cinema has been a major point of reference for Indian culture in the last century, and will undoubtedly persist in the 21st century. To an extent, Hindi cinema has shaped and reflected the burgeoning transformation of a 'traditional India' to a 'modern India'. (I use the term modern to reflect the impact the west has had on Indian society, and how this impact in turn is reflected on screen). Issues surrounding gender and sexuality tend to be avoided, if not subverted in Hindi cinema. More specifically, issues surrounding femininity and female sexuality in Hindi cinema is either not recognised or 'mis-recognised' on screen. Feminist studies, in relation to film, have taken up these issues, to a large extent in the west (cf. Hollows, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Macdonald, 1995). Chatterji (1998) maintains that the interest of feminists in film began as a general concern for the under-representation and mis-representation of women in cinema. This study explores issues surrounding the 'presences' and 'absences' (as identified by Chatterji) in the representations of female sexuality and femininity in popular Hindi cinema. The project offers a comparative study of the films produced by two popular Hindi cinema filmmakers. Pooja Bhatt's *Jism* (The Body) (January, 2003) is analysed in comparison to Karan Johar's *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* (Sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness) (November, 2000). The study compares, contrasts and analyses the ways in which each of these films (and thus, how each filmmaker) positions female sexuality and femininity in popular Hindi cinema.

Keywords: popular Hindi cinema, femininity, female sexuality, gender, representation

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And last but not least, my gratitude and thanks to my family for their unstinting belief in my research. Your support and encouragement during this process has been nothing short of extraordinary. To my parents, words cannot fully express my appreciation for your patience, understanding and love.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all those who continue to challenge traditional and conventional representations of women in the mainstream media.

In the words of Robert Frost (1923):

***“The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.”***

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INTRODUCTION

Cinema, as both an entertainment industry and genre, could be described as one of the most effective visual mediums today. Cinema is also a social and cultural phenomenon “bearing the marks of ongoing struggles over the control of public life, personal freedoms and artistic achievement” (Chatterji, 1998: 1). Included in these “ongoing struggles”, is a concern for the representation of women in cinema. Feminist approaches to film, brought into effect by both viewers and filmmakers, view these domains as a site of conflict and debate, where power is exercised, disseminated, or moulded into new and more progressive forms. Being the fluid medium it is, cinema has drawn on many fields in the process of becoming a discipline, a branch of knowledge, or an area of concentrated study. The importance lies not in questioning the discipline of cinema, but rather how we interpret it and what we learn from it.

Feminist studies and cinema are a global phenomenon today. The representation of women on screen, both in the television and film genres, has become a matter of concern, contention and discussion among critical scholars (cf. Brunston, 1997; Tasker, 1998; Silverman, 1988; Hollows, 2000). Cinema addresses a great diversity of questions surrounding film as an instrument of representation, and this includes examining issues of gender over the last 20 years, which has impacted greatly on critical studies. Feminists’ interests in film began as a general concern over the misinterpretation and under-representation of women in cinema and the images of women on screen have long been a site for gendered debates.

In recent years, the imaging and representation of women in the Indian film industry has become an area of academic concern, which has resulted in critical debate and pioneering scholarly research (cf. Bagchi, 1996; Chatterji, 1998; Jain & Rai, 2002; Pendakur, 2003; Prabhu, 2001). The focus has

primarily been on the representation of women in popular Hindi¹ cinema, which is more commonly referred to as Bollywood (named after the film capital of India, Bombay, or Mumbai as the city was renamed in 1996).² In considering the 'traditional' and 'expected' roles of women in Indian society (that is the role of mother, daughter, wife and sister), these authors have concentrated on the impact of such representations on a burgeoning middle-class India. The common thread of research in this field of study has tended to analyse the shifting state of the Indian film industry, perceived to be undergoing a negotiation between a 'traditional' India and a 'modern' India. The modern is understood to be an India that is an active producer and consumer of a new public culture, greatly influenced by images and representations from the West.

The popularity of Hindi cinema far surpasses that of its counterparts in the Indian film industry.³ This is because Hindi cinema is more strongly and widely promoted, at both a national and international level. Further, the Hindi cinema industry constantly endeavours to encompass and capture film viewers and markets specifically outside India, thereby increasing a worldwide fan base.

Popular Hindi cinema can be likened to an immense continent with its own language and culture, and situated within this vastness there are many layers that are open for investigation and interrogation. For example, previous work on popular Hindi cinema has focused on nationalism and nation-building (Basu, 2005); "the volatile relationship between Indian audiences (with varied identities, as active consumers and receivers of the cinematic enterprise) and [popular Hindi] films" (Chowdhry, 2000: 9); politics (Nandy, 1998); as well as questioning the realism and the "primordial root genre of Hindi cinema"

¹ A north Indian language that has earned official status in India.

² Mumbai is the Marathi (the indigenous language of the people of Mumbai) title of the local deity, the mouthless "Maha Amba Aiee" (Mumba for short), who is believed to have started her life as an obscure aboriginal earth goddess. The reversion to Mumbai, the traditional Marathi name, has met with much resentment from certain quarters in India who have rejected the name in fear of the 'Marathification' of the city, which excludes other Indian languages.

³ The Indian film industry consists of films made in various Indian languages, including Hindi. Films produced in other languages in India include, among others, Marathi, Telugu, Bengali, Tamil and Malayalam.

(Prasad, 1998: 6). This dissertation delimits this broad field of study and focuses on one area of analysis, namely women in popular Hindi cinema. This project intends to map out an approach that interprets popular Hindi cinema, including its gendered and sexual representations. Thus, this dissertation also charts a framework for analysing the representations of female sexuality and femininity in popular Hindi cinema.

To further define this analysis, the study foregrounds two recent films by Indian directors Pooja Bhatt and Karan Johar. Bhatt's *Jism* (The Body) (2003) will be analysed in comparison to Johar's *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* (Sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness) (2001). Although both directors situate their films within the context of popular Hindi cinema, Bhatt is known for producing films that do not completely inhabit the mould of popular Hindi cinema. Her films usually carry strong social messages. Johar's films on the other hand, are viewed for their pure entertainment value, which celebrate Hindi cinema as a visual feast of glamour, song and dance. The aim of this study is to compare, contrast and analyse the ways in which each of these films (and, therefore, how each director) positions, frames and represents femininity and female sexuality within popular Hindi cinema.

The concept of femininity (in relation to this study) investigates the feminine characteristics and traits as represented in the two films under investigation. Traditionally, characteristics and traits that are considered feminine include "large breasts, a narrow waist, fertility, being emotional, affectionate, sympathetic, sensitive, soft-spoken, warm, childlike, pretty, willowy, submissive, compassionate, gender roles and relationships"⁴. The notion of femininity as identified above is appropriate to popular Hindi cinema (discussed in more depth in **Chapter one**). Aspects of female sexuality include issues pertaining to "body image, self-esteem, personality, sexual

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femininity#Feminine_attributes

orientation, values and attitudes”⁵. For the purposes of this study, these issues are examined in relation to the representation of female sexuality as demonstrated by the female characters in the two films under analysis.

In considering the two films under analysis, I attempt to trace similarities across the broader canvas of popular Hindi cinema’s treatment of femininity and female sexuality. In other words, although the study focuses primarily on the two films under analysis, it is informed by a greater body of work comprising existing research conducted on popular Hindi cinema. Despite the breadth of the approach, there are inevitable omissions in a dissertation of this scope. The concentration on just *two* films, produced over the last three years (2000 - 2003), leaves room for criticism about those films that cannot be discussed.

The study’s critical methodology is based on a textual analysis, but within a gendered framework. Jones (in Fairclough 2003: 23) formulates textual analysis as:

[a] 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.

As such, the textual analysis in this study focuses on the various representations of femininity and female sexuality emerging from the films under discussion, concentrating on the signification of such gendered representations. Macdonald (1995: 4) explains that:

because gender, as a category, has been important in the differential impact of capitalism on men and women, and especially in our differing positions as male or female consumers, this context has significant implications for the ways in which the medium chooses to address us.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_female_sexuality

The assumption here is that it is not only *how* the media addresses us, but the relation between the producer and the consumer *and* between producer and text which provides a site for debate, discussion and research. The relationship between the gender of the producer and the gender representations is a complex one, and is beyond the scope of analysis of this dissertation. Thus, this study does not investigate the significance of the director's gender in the representation of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema.

Furthermore, any discussion concerning the meaning of media texts requires consideration of the audience, in this case, the film viewer. Although this study offers no empirical evidence about how the viewer responds to the representations of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema, the study argues that the "consistency in methods of constructing women does not imply consistency in response" (Macdonald, 1995: 5). In other words, now that women have become accustomed to images portraying them as housewives, mothers, daughters and friends, they now have access to a wider range of representations and, in terms of this study, my aim is to investigate this wider range of representations within the context of popular Hindi cinema and, specifically, femininity and female sexuality.

The study does not assume that women are a homogenous group, but rather acknowledges that women are separated by (among other factors) class, race, age, education and culture. Writing about popular Hindi cinema, as a middle-class, South African female, of Indian origin, my interpretations might not always be truly indicative of the social and cultural norms entrenched in Indian society (likewise, I do not in any way assume that there is *one* homogenous Indian society). What I offer in this study is an interpretation, framed by some theories of representation and feminist film concerns in relation to femininity and female sexuality.

In the past, Indian popular cinema was dismissed out of hand by film scholars, film critics and intellectuals as being generally unworthy of serious academic attention. It was often criticised as being meretricious, mindless, escapist drivel, and irrelevant to the understanding of Indian culture and society. The discursive significance of Indian popular cinema went unnoticed in many academic sectors until the perseverance and research conducted by authors such as Parikh and Pulin (1989), Prasad (1998) and Vasudevan (2000) brought about a change in the scholarly tide. The efforts of such scholars have brought into sharp relief the importance of studying Indian popular cinema, and the significance of viewing such cinema as an 'authentic' field of academic research.

The representation of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema is divided into four chapters in this study. **Chapter one** focuses on establishing a theoretical framework for analysing the representation of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema. By locating these concepts within a theoretical framework, the dissertation foregrounds feminist film theory, the concepts of representation and stereotyping, mythology and gender and sexuality. The chapter proceeds with a history of popular Hindi cinema.

Specifically in relation to popular Hindi cinema, **Chapter one** elaborates on what Chatterji (1998) describes as the *presences* and *absences* in popular Hindi cinema. The chapter also briefly explains the concepts of representation (Hall, 2000) and stereotyping (Dyer, 1993) in an attempt to explain why femininity and female sexuality are represented in specific ways in popular Hindi cinema.

Located within the broad rubric of 'feminism and representation' various concepts are explained and interrogated in this chapter. Using Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978) as a starting point, **Chapter one** explains two key terms, "sexuality" and "femininity". This section explores the questions: What

constitutes the feminine? What is meant by sexuality? I do not offer a detailed history of sexuality and femininity. Rather, my aim here is to link these concepts directly to popular Hindi cinema. In doing so, though, I first introduce these concepts and then show how they relate to popular Hindi cinema.

Chapter one examines Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) concept of performativity. Butler questions the belief that certain gendered behaviours are natural; exemplifying the ways in which one's learned performance of gendered behaviour (what we commonly associate with femininity and masculinity) is an act of sorts, a performance that is imposed upon us by normative heterosexuality. Integral to understanding the concept of performativity, is the realisation that the act one performs, is – in a sense – an act that has been going on before one arrived 'on the scene'. In other words, gender (what constitutes as feminine and masculine), is a rehearsed act, with carefully staged and enacted performances. The representation of femininity and female sexuality in Hindi cinema is examined through the lens of performativity, focusing on the construction (the rehearsed gender, imposed by normative heterosexuality) of archetypal female representations on film.

Chapter two provides synopses of the films under analysis, concentrating on intense descriptions of the main female characters in each film. Apart from discussing each character individually, I also examine the relationship between the female characters in the film. The subtleties and nuances of the relationship among the women assist in developing and contextualising the study. I also examine Chatterji's concept of *absences* and *presences* in relation to the two films under investigation. In other words, Chatterji's concepts will be applied to the two films under analysis when analysing the construction of the female characters.

Chapter three offers an investigation into the analysis of the films by identifying the representations of femininity and female sexuality in *Jism* and *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham*. Informing this chapter is an application of the

representational strategies identified and outlined by Hall (2000) and Dyer (1993).

Chapter four briefly investigates the mythological status of women in popular Hindi cinema. The mythological roles for women are derived from ancient religious sources and texts. Hindi cinema has found it fruitful to use the different archetypes of mythical Goddesses to model many of their female characters on (Chatterji, 1998). These mythical representations are open to many interpretations, but when framed in film such representations can be dangerous as they tend to place women in a difficult position.

Rachel Dwyer (2000: 18) reinforces this view, arguing:

These women's roles are prescriptive as well as descriptive, including *Sita-Savitri* (selfless, sacrificing), *Shakuntala* (virtuous, loyal), *Durga* (avenging), and *Draupadi* (the woman wronged, whose husband fails to protect her).

Thus, these mythological figures provide insight into the social standing of Indian women in a society⁶ that renders it extremely difficult for them to forget and distance themselves from (at times) unhealthy mythological associations. Hence, the discussion problematises the misgivings about using mythological figures in representing women on film.

Gendered Representations in Contemporary Popular Hindi Cinema: Femininity and Female Sexuality in Films by Pooja Bhatt and Karan Johar is premised on the understanding that the representation of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema hinges on the battle waged between India's mythological (as well as traditional) representations and emerging representations of 'contemporary' Indian women. While a director such as Bhatt may start with the intention of bringing 'contemporary' representations of femininity and female sexuality to the screens of Indian cinema, whether she

⁶ In this instance, society is not used to refer to a particular group of people situated in a specific locale. Rather, society is used to refer to those familiar with the Indian mythological characters and those who uphold and perpetuate such mythological associations.

is successful or not in her attempt, is interrogated in this study. The study also explores how the more commercially driven director (Johar) represents femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema. This dissertation is born out of my fondness for popular Hindi cinema, which coincides with my interest (and concern) for the representation of women in the media.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

As indicated earlier, in this chapter my focus is on motivating a theoretical framework of analysis for reading two popular Hindi films produced by Pooja Bhatt and Karan Johar in recent years (2000 - 2003). Pooja Bhatt, a well-established Bollywood actress herself, hails from a family of filmmakers. In the Indian film industry, the Bhatt family is well-known for producing, writing and directing films that convey a strong social message and have a strong social impact. Born into a film producing family, Karan Johar is a young director whose career was launched in 1998 with his highly successful directorial debut, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something is happening). His films revolve around issues surrounding parental duty, family love, marriage and 'romantic tragedy'.

By interrogating the two films under analysis, the theoretical framework links feminist film studies to popular Hindi cinema, and proceeds to an explanation of gender and sexuality, representation, stereotyping and the concept of performativity. Although there has been a great wealth of critical research on feminist film studies (Hollows, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; Macdonald, 1995), very little of this research speaks directly to the Hindi film genre. Much of the academic work and commentary that has addressed popular Hindi films has focused on the notion of nostalgia. Punathambekar (2003: 65) explains that:

Drawing on portrayals of Indian families in a diasporic setting in movies such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (The Brave Heart Will Take the Bride) and *Pardes* (Foreigner), the academic work suggested that consumption of films represent an attempt to maintain an imaginary connection to a homeland left behind.

This chapter recognises that much of the scholarly research on representation, gender and sexuality stems from the West and that feminist

approaches to film in fact developed in the West. Groundbreaking studies (Haskell, 1974; Mellen, 1974; Rosen, 1973; Silverman, 1988) were devoted to examining the place of women in dominant western cinema. Haskell, for example, studied the screen image attached to (female) stars in Hollywood in chronological sequence, like a linear history. Haskell focuses on films as a cultural form, which is saturated with sexist ideology. Haskell's analysis extends to stereotyping of women into binary roles – for example, good/evil, virgin/whore. Thus, the great majority of feminist film writings do not speak directly to the Hindi film context. However, ideas and concepts raised and interrogated in their writings are nevertheless invaluable because they provide insight and strategies for understanding the films under analysis in this study.

As indicated earlier, an understanding of gender and sexuality forms the foundation of this study. Given that gender and sexuality cannot be understood without the one informing and relating [to] the other, my aim in this study is to demonstrate how these issues are foregrounded and represented in film.

This chapter also examines the various representational strategies identified by Hall (2000) and offers a definition of the concept of stereotype, and the nature of gender stereotyping. Of particular importance is the stereotyping of women in popular Hindi cinema and this chapter proposes several 'classifications' of women in popular Hindi cinema, to date.

1.2 Popular Hindi Cinema

In this section, I provide an abbreviated history of popular Hindi cinema, and go on to examine the narrative structure of the popular Hindi film. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 23) assert:

A distinction needs to be drawn between the 'popular' and the 'artistic' traditions of filmmaking in India. Popular films are films seen and appreciated by a vast mass of Indian movie-goers. They are largely melodramatic, often

musicals, conveying simple clear moral messages; they represent a distinctly Indian approach to cinema as a form of mass entertainment. The artistic films, which constitute only about ten percent of the total output, are realistic, often inspired by neo-realism, and seek to capture a segment of Indian reality.

Artistic films differ sharply from popular films. They are more realistic (often ethnographic pieces) that seek to capture vital aspects of Indian society and reality. When the artistic medium of Indian films warrants discussion, Satyajit Ray is generally regarded as India's foremost proponent of the 'art movie'. Ray was largely responsible for establishing this particular film style, and gained international and national recognition for his work. His first film, *Pather Panchali* (1955) is considered one of the greatest films of all time, depicting the childhood world of Apu, a little boy whose life and fortunes are recounted in two subsequent films that make up the Apu trilogy (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998: 30). In artistic films, the camera is operated in a different manner to popular Hindi films, keeping to the presentation of a realistic narrative. The camera angles are largely at eye-level, the lighting is unobtrusive and generally follows the pattern of western techniques.

Popular Hindi films, however, are hesitant to follow this pattern of western filmmaking. Thus, argue Guneratne and Dissanayake (2003: 209):

Makers of popular films in India also sought to adopt pathways that differed significantly from some of the conventions and preferred modalities of presentation valorised by Hollywood filmmakers.

This study focuses on, among other things, the styles of presentation, techniques and the narrative structure associated with the popular Hindi film medium. It would seem that directors of popular Hindi films aim to create their own brand of film and narrative discourse. Moreover, popular Hindi films are well known for their predictability. The Hindi film industry seldom produces films with unconventional themes, unusual character portrayals, and 'non-formulaic' storylines are eclipsed in favour of the 'masala formula' (cf. section 1.2.2). In the following sub-sections, I offer a brief history of the popular Hindi

films, and conclude with a discussion of the narrative structure of popular Hindi films.

1.2.1 History of the Popular Hindi Film

The Indian popular cinema has many names; 'Bollywood'⁷ film, 'Bombay cinema', 'commercial film', 'masala film' and so on, all of which refer to films made for a mass audience, in Hindi, which is the national language of India. Subramanyam (2000: 37) claims, "There is no 'Indian cinema'. Different discursive arenas have used this term in a variety of ways, each differently from the other[...] 'Indian cinema' here, therefore, refers to what is also known as 'Bombay cinema' or 'Bollywood'[...]". In my study, the term Hindi cinema is used interchangeably with popular Hindi Cinema and Indian popular film.

Ghosh (2003: 2) explains that, "the roots of Indian cinema are almost as old as those of the medium itself. Within eight months of taking Paris by storm, the touring agents of Lumiere brothers' Cinematographer landed on the shores of India". The first film show in India was held on July 7, 1896, six months after the Lumière brothers introduced the art of cinematography in Paris in 1895. Maurice Sestier, an emissary to the Lumière brothers, screened several short films in Bombay to an audience consisting primarily of British and European residents in India (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998: 11). Cinema made its presence hugely felt in India, with initial screenings well received by audiences. Soon, additional screenings were arranged to accommodate a growing audience. The burgeoning cinema audience was treated to a regular flow of films, imported from France, Britain, Italy,

⁷ Prasad (2002: 6) explains that the term Bollywood has:

[...]crept into the vocabulary of the Anglophone national culture slowly and steadily, almost without anybody noticing it. Like certain processes of which we become aware only when they are almost over, we are right now witness to the naturalisation of 'Bollywood' as the designation for what was previously known as Hindi cinema, Bombay cinema, Indian popular cinema.

Jha (2005: 3) states that some people resent the term Bollywood, but he argues that "the whole notion of what's pejorative has changed. We've to see the Indian film industry as a brand. To say Bollywood is demeaning is to question a brand name like Coke or Macdonalds".

Germany and the USA. The popularity and success of these films prompted British residents and Indians to import film equipment to make their own films. Within a few years, a network for the distribution and screening of films within India was established by several enterprising Indian businessmen (Kaskebar in Nelmes, 1996: 374).

Raja Harishchandra, made by D.G. Phalke in 1912, was the first feature-length silent Indian film. The film was based on Indian mythology, which made the film accessible to a nation familiar with myths and legends, setting a precedent for many films to follow. Early Indian popular cinema springs from a long tradition of Indian theatre and art, which was inspired by Indian mythology (Pendakur, 2003: 11). Phalke's film debut (*Raja Harishchandra*) was a huge success and as a result he established India's first studio in his home. Early Indian cinema consisted of only male actors, who lived and worked in Phalke's family home. At that time acting – as a profession – was considered no better than prostitution (Kaskebar in Nelmes, 1996: 375). Even prostitutes, unfamiliar with this new form of entertainment were unwilling to act in films. The introduction of women in Indian films occurred only a decade later, and the first actresses, from the Anglo-Indian society, were frowned upon by 'respectable' society.

Phalke's death in 1944 did not mean an end to Indian cinema. He had established a good foundation for what was to follow. As explained by (Kaskebar in Nelmes, 1996: 375 – 376):

Phalke had started a national [film] culture and a lucrative industry. Others entered the field, and soon historical and social themes began to be introduced to the screen. Audiences seemed to prefer locally-made films to the European and American imports...The arrival of sound was to prove a serious problem for the film industry. India, with its linguistic diversity, would need to make films in different regional languages which would mean the fragmentation of a vast national market into smaller regional, and consequently commercially less lucrative, ones.

The first Indian film with sound, *Alam Ara* (1931), brought revolutionary changes to the existing Bombay film industry (Grover, 2004). The advent of

sound⁸ brought about the establishment of studios in various cities, including Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. These studios catered to a specific regional language and audience. The studio system was hugely successful in India, having laid the foundations for a powerful nationwide industry, trained actors, directors and film technicians (Kaskebar in Nelmes, 1996: 377). Due to the outbreak of the Second World War, the studio system drew to an end. Rapid industrialisation brought in new money into India, and new industries flourished. Along with these new industries, 'black markets' also thrived. Such 'black money' also found its way into films, bringing about new independent producers, who did not wish to be encumbered with the high costs of a studio and staff. Thus, they lured actors, musicians and film technicians away from studios with the promise of large sums of money. Within a decade, the studios, with high overhead costs, ran into major financial difficulties and were forced to close down permanently (Kaskebar in Nelmes, 1996: 378).

Furthermore, intense political activity in India during the '30s and the struggle for freedom from colonial rule, led by Mahatma Gandhi, saw a strict British censorship of Indian films. Films with a strong political theme, reflecting a strengthening of Indian nationalism, were closely monitored. In retaliation to this censorship, some Indian filmmakers deliberately created an Indian character that mimicked the British mannerisms. This character, dressed in western attire, and was ridiculed as either a villain or 'clown'. In contrast, the character of the Indian nationalist, attired in traditional wear, usually emerged victorious over him (Kaskebar in Nelmes, 1996: 378).

Shoesmith (in Subramanyam, 2003: 33) sums up various stages of the early beginnings in Indian cinema arguing:

⁸ With the arrival of sound, filmmakers strongly believed that songs were indispensable to their films. 'Film songs' or background score, become extremely popular and proved to be integral to the success of a film. The demand for 'film songs' led to the establishment of various businesses. Music directors, singers, lyricists, musicians and composers now had a new channel through which to display their talent (Raheja and Kothari, 2004: 33).

[The] film industry in India has gone through three distinct stages in its growth. He writes that the first, from 1913-1924, can be termed the 'cottage industry' period. This period is marked by a lack of capital for investment in infrastructure, problems in film technique, absence of identifiable stars, and an unstable mode of production. The second period is the studio era that extends from the mid-1920s to the mid-1940s. The third stage, 'the star as commodity' phase, is characterised by among other things, complete reliance upon the star at the box office and abundant finance.

After independence in 1947, the 1950s became known as the Golden Age of Indian popular cinema. Cinema was firmly established as an art form, entertainment and a lucrative industry (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998: 16). The '60s also saw an emerging new middle class in India. Thus, the 1960s paved the way for a new category of actors and actresses, who came from middle-class homes. The 1960s also saw the advent of the first colour film (Raheja and Kothari, 2004: 74). At the end of the decade, though, colour films became a permanent fixture. Most important though, was that the '60s:

[...]also witnessed the release of some women-oriented films. Yet, as is often the case with Indian cinema, many such films had an inherent paradox. They did exalt woman by putting her at the centre of the scheme of things, but these films also largely dealt with the glorification of demure suffering (Raheja and Kothari, 2004: 82).

These 'martyred' female performances are significant in analysing the development of the representation/s of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema. The project picks up on these issues later.

The distinctiveness of popular Hindi cinema can, nevertheless, also be understood by an examination of the film's narrative structure.

1.2.2 The narrative structure ('masala formula') of popular Hindi films

The Hindi film industry, perhaps more than other film industries in India, is dedicated to the goal of being commercially successful. Dasgupta (1996: 175) explains, "although the industry has been criticised for the unrealistic movies it persistently pours out, its popularity has been increasing consistently all over

India". In addition to this, Dasgupta asserts that the majority of the films released in India are very sensitive to the needs of the public in both content and texture. The themes of popular Hindi films vary from the mythological to the romantic, patriotic to historical and even from social relevance to fantasy. However, claims Dasgupta (1996: 175-176), "the bulk of Hindi films produced each year are mixtures of family-drama, romance and action-violence, with a generous sprinkling of song and dance". These are the films that are popularly termed 'masala' or formula films. Thus, despite Indian cinema being greatly influenced by Hollywood,⁹ its narrative structures with endless digressions, convoluted plots and deviations remain uniquely Indian, and loyal to the 'masala' formula. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 29) emphasise that:

Indian popular films are sometimes referred to contemptuously as 'masalas' (spices). Just as different spices are used in cooking, so the filmmaker, it is contended, uses the standard elements associated with the given formula for success, namely: song, dance, melodrama, stunts, fights and exaggerated humour. While there is much substance to this charge, and some of the worst films are nothing but such a formula, the more talented and successful filmmakers have deployed these elements with remarkable ingenuity to create a distinctively Indian form of cinema.

From this definition, the 'recipe' for masala films entails:

- song and dance sequences
- various genres and themes associated with mythology, romance, action, history, society, and family melodramas
- strong characterisations (for example, the hero, mother, wife, daughter)
- no explicit sex scenes.

The uniqueness of this recipe to popular Hindi films lies in the way these 'factors' have been handled by Indian filmmakers, "investing them with a characteristically Indian cultural imprint" (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998:

⁹ Gokulsing and Dissanayake explain (1998: 20), "Asian audiences were enthralled by the magic of Hollywood cinema. This is certainly the case in India where filmmakers very quickly succeeded in adapting the ethos, resources and inventiveness of Hollywood to suit indigenous tastes, sensibilities and outlooks". For example, although Hollywood musicals held a great fascination for many Indian filmmakers, they adopted a different strategy when using music. Instead of the music being brief flights of fancy for the actors and actresses, in Indian cinema, the music was adopted as natural expressions of emotions and situations, related to everyday life.

24). The recipe though has not remained unchanged, as Hasan (2002: 5) clarifies:

The traditional masala feature has the traditional song situation as well as the comedic principle perfectly incorporated and in addition has the 'dialogue'. Another feature is the extended fight sequence repeated at multiple points in the narrative, almost marking the space of the film as effectively as the songs at regular intervals.

Today, Hindi films tend to, more often than not, veer from elaborate and extended fight sequences. However, each popular Hindi film still usually consists of five to six songs. The soundtrack to the film is released well in advance before the release of the film, usually with the expectation of promoting the film among film audiences. Typically, films that release a good soundtrack tend to be successful at the box-office. The songs are written specifically for the film, with the lyrics woven into the fabric of the script. To those unfamiliar with the Hindi film experience, these songs might appear to be disruptive and intrusive in terms of the flow of the narrative. However, such is the extent of the conditioning of Hindi cinema viewers, that these songs have become expected, a norm, what I would term a generic feature. Kaskebar, in Nelmes (1996: 369), maintains:

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.

For this reason, the song and dance sequences are instrumental in understanding the texture of popular Hindi cinema as they are connected to the overall development of the film. Song, music and dance are significant in conveying the meaning of the story and in generating the desired emotions. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 29) state, "They [songs] generate emotion; they underline the moral messages; they convey eroticism and sexuality whose overt expressions is disallowed on screen".

The various genres associated with Hindi films serve to elicit a particular emotional response from the film viewer. For the most part, more than one

genre is used in one specific popular Hindi film. Depending on the scene, and how the director wants the scene to be emoted, a specific genre will be adopted. For example, a scene in a film that explores the tensions and upheavals within a family will lean towards the 'family melodrama'. Closely related to the various genres associated with popular Hindi films, is the re-emergence of various themes. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 24) identify these themes as "romantic love, male friendship, motherhood, renunciation, fate, respect for tradition and social injustice". These themes tend to be based on the reality of India as a developing country emerging from years of colonialism. The themes are often styled to deal with the problem of how to modernise while still preserving traditional values, in relation to the narrative structure. In other words, popular Hindi cinema negotiates between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' India and the themes reflect this. For example, the theme of 'romantic love' is treated delicately in Hindi films today. Romantic love encompasses both a 'love marriage' and 'arranged marriage'.¹⁰ The 'love marriage' is indicative of a more 'modern' India, whilst the 'arranged marriage' has its roots in 'traditional' India. Most filmmakers style their narrative so as to appease both 'modern' and 'traditional' sensibilities, by generally portraying a 'love marriage' that needs to be arranged. Linked to the various themes and genres in the popular Hindi film, is the concept of characterisation, another important aspect of the narrative.

Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 29) claim:

In Indian popular cinema, there are a number of readily identifiable characters who already have specific valuations attached to them. The hero, heroine, villain, comic are commonly found in Indian cinema as well as in most other popular cinema. However, in Indian [and popular Hindi cinema] films there are a few characters who are distinctly Indian in outlook both in conception and in the role they play in propelling the story. The figure of the mother is the most important....modern Indian filmmakers have constructed an image of the mother that is highly visible in Indian cinema.

¹⁰ In India, 'love marriage' refers to the marriage between a man and woman who meet and fall in love without the interference of their family. In other words, the relationship between the couple is not engineered by family and friends. An 'arranged marriage' is an age-old custom in India, still widely practiced and considers various factors such as caste, economic background, social status and education of the man and woman *before* entering into a marriage agreement. The emphasis is on the joining of families and compatibility between the couple rather than love.

The characterisation of the heroine and the mother is integral to this study. However, the hero, villain and comic, in relation to the 'mother' and heroine' renders a greater understanding of the representation of femininity and female sexuality in Hindi cinema. An in-depth analysis of such characterisations is explored in **Chapter three**.

The absence of explicit sex scenes in Hindi films stems from early censorship, which Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 78) describe as:

Kissing is a sensitive issue. [...] the prohibition of kissing scenes was based on an unwritten rule; the written rules 'prohibited excessively passionate love scenes', 'indelicate sexual situations' and 'scenes suggestive of immorality', all of which were derived from the British code of Censorship [...]. Public kissing is associated with western life, so is alien to Indian culture. But the paradox is that the restrictions have never been applied in the censorship of foreign films.

As discussed earlier, song, dance and music were deployed to emote sex and passion. The deliberate repeated use of certain imagery, like a bud in bloom, became associated with a budding romance, connoting young love. Indian audiences, now accustomed to such disguised acts of sexual excitement, instantly attached sex, passion and sexual love to such images. In terms of this study, I comparatively examine the use of such images in the films of Johar and Bhatt. Going further, I attempt to identify any 'new' or emerging images in these two films used to signify sexuality (cf. also **Chapter three**).

In the following sections, I turn to selected aspects of feminist film theory in relation to popular Hindi cinema by proceeding with what Chatterji (1998) identifies as the *absences* and *presences* in popular Hindi cinema. A discussion of feminist theory in relation to popular Hindi cinema further reinforces and contextualises the study and offers an interpretation of the impact of feminism on popular Hindi films.

1.3 Feminist film theory

In this section, I briefly outline the impression of feminism on film theory.¹¹ A detailed analysis and description of feminist film theory is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, what I offer is a summary of the significant developments of 'feminism and film' and link this relevance to the Hindi film context.

Feminist concerns in relation to film developed within the context of the various women's liberation movements that emerged in the United States in the late '60s and '70s. Film study is enhanced by feminist perspectives, as the word 'feminist' implies a particular concern with differences of gender in general, but focuses specifically on women (Kaplan, 2000). As a social movement, feminism has had an enormous impact on film theory and criticism. Smelik (1999: 25) states,

cinema is taken by feminists to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity, as well as about men and masculinity. [...] Early feminist criticism¹² was directed at stereotypes of women, mostly in Hollywood films.

Thus, looking at women in film foregrounds various questions relating to the relationship between the image of women on screen and the image of women in reality; stereotypes of women on screen and whose image of 'woman' is projected on screen and how this relates to notions of fantasy, desire and pleasure.¹³

¹¹ In discussing feminist film theory, I do not go into the details of the origins of feminism. For a detailed reading and understanding of this, cf. Tong, Rosemarie P (1998). *Feminist Thought: A more comprehensive introduction*, second edition. Oxford: Westview Press.

¹² See also Haskell (1974) and Rosen (1973).

¹³ In her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey (1975) uses psychoanalysis to understand the fascination of women on screen, in Hollywood cinema. Mulvey uses Freud to explain this fascination, through the notion of scopophilia (the desire to see). She explains that the desire to look is stimulated by integrating structures of voyeurism and narcissism into the story. Voyeuristic visual pleasure is produced by looking at another, whilst narcissistic visual pleasure is identified from self-identification with the image on screen. Whilst this dissertation acknowledges Mulvey's seminal essay, it does not apply psychoanalysis film theory to the Hindi film context. Embarking on such an exploration would shift the focus of the study and would be beyond the scope of this dissertation

Over the years, psychoanalysis has been the dominant paradigm in feminist film theory. However, in recent years, there has been a move away from the binary understanding of sexual difference to multiple perspectives and identities (Smelik, 1999). The opening of this mode of reading has resulted in an increasing concern with questions of ethnicity, femininity, masculinity and hybrid sexualities. For example, in relation to Indian cinema (not just popular Hindi cinema) and feminism, Moodley (2004: 30) argues:

Western second-wave feminisms is a term used [...] to describe all the various forms of feminism (e.g. radical, socialist, marxist) that have been developed in the west. [...] Some forms of these western feminisms have historically tended to speak, on behalf of all women, from a middle-class white perspective. In doing so, 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.

Although Moodley is writing on diasporic filmmakers such as Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta and the representation of women in their films,¹⁴ her criticism of second-wave feminism can be extended to the context of popular Hindi films. Moodley examines postcolonial feminisms, referring in particular to Mohanty's (1988) and Spivak's (1988) insights. Although this dissertation does not foreground postcolonial feminisms, the study acknowledges the relevance and impact postcolonialism has made (and continues to make) on film theory.

According to Ackbar Abbas, "postcoloniality begins when subjects cease to feel that they need to apologise for their lives just because they differ from more centrally placed others" (in Behar and Gordon, 1995: 367). In relation to feminism, Mohanty (in Williams and Chrisman: 1994) highlights that western feminist discourse has an inherent limitation in that it fails to take into consideration race, class, identity, history and thus she puts forward the notion of a postcolonial feminist theory. Thus, Mohanty in her seminal essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1988)

¹⁴ Moodley (2004) offers an in-depth reading of the Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2002) and Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1995) and *Earth* (1999).

criticises western feminist analysis in assuming women to be a homogenous group, with similar interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location. In other words, western forms of feminism tend to universalise the 'female experience'. Mohanty argues that the assumption of a global experience as a woman is based on a white, middle-class perspective and thus, cannot be applied to women in general.¹⁵ Mohanty emphasises the need for feminist theory to be culturally specific, working within a specific culture and context. In relation to film, Mohanty's argument makes a significant impact, as films work within a specific culture: the meanings inherent in these films are culture and context specific.

Turning to the representation of Indian women in the western media, Parmar (in Jones, 2003: 287) argues that the images of Indian women are very much rooted in, and locked into the political and social systems of domination, and cannot be divorced from the processes of struggles that Indian women are involved in. Parmar (in Jones, 2003: 287) elaborates on this, claiming that images of Indian women:

Intersect with and against a background of variety of 'taken-for-granted' images of Indian people formed well before the 1950s and 1960s, when Indian migration to Britain was in any way significant; they have their historical roots equally in the encounters of the British Raj during the heyday of the British empire as well as pre-and post-war Britain. Images of Indians which were created within imperialist social relations were those of Indians as 'coolies', 'servants', 'ayahs' and 'incompetent natives'.

Parmar (2003) is unflinching in her disapproval of such continued representations, arguing that depending on the political motivation and climate, specific images of Indian women are mobilised for particular arguments. She firmly believes that common sense ideas about the imaging and representations of Indian women are based within, and determined by, a racist patriarchal ideology.

¹⁵ bell hooks, (1990) in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* interrogates the assumption of the universalisation of the woman experience, with particular reference to black africanism.

Turning to popular Hindi film, it is clear that Hindi cinema predominantly speaks to a female audience that stems from India: these women of colour from different economic, cultural and educational backgrounds are a departure from that which western feminisms traditionally speak to. Also, the representation of women in Hindi films exists within a specific locale, India. Western feminisms in relation to film then cannot be applied to Hindi films. The need is for a revisitation of feminist film with regard to popular Hindi films. In lieu of this, the following section takes up feminism film theory in relation to Hindi films, and I prioritise ideas by Chatterji (1998), Jain and Rai (2002) and Prabhu (2001). Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) also merits mention in this study. Although her work does not underlie this project, her work is integral to understanding the 'Indian context' at large. The 'Indian context' I refer to here is not assumed to be a homogenous one. It could be argued that by using the term 'Indian context' I am already clustering groups of people together and thus assuming a homogenous group. This, however, is not my intention. Rather, I explain 'the Indian context' as a common framework *from* which and *within* which there exist various groups, classes and categories of people. How each group arranges and positions itself within this common framework would obviously vary. In terms of this study, the common framework I speak of is popular Hindi cinema. Spivak questions whether Indian women who have 'absorbed' Hindu mythology and ideology have a voice and are able to have a say in their existence. Specifically, in relation to popular Hindi cinema, I relate Spivak's question to Hindi cinema's deep connection to mythology (cf. **Chapter four**).

1.3.1 Feminist film theory and Hindi cinema

Feminist film theory is a collective, polysemic term, which has various critical perspectives and methodologies. In other words, there exists a plurality of feminist criticisms that brings about the reading of a text from different points

of view.¹⁶ The focus of this section is on feminist criticism in a third-world context (India), speaking directly to popular Hindi films. Nelmes (1996) explains this through the example of black feminist theory, which has found it problematic to apply what could be termed white bourgeois film theory to an ethnic group that is so noticeably under-represented in film. bell hooks (1990: 123) argues, "many feminist film critics continue to structure their discourse as though it speaks about 'women' when in fact it only speaks about white women". Likewise, Chatterji (1998) questions the notion of feminist film theory, derived in the west, being applied to the context of popular Hindi cinema. Chatterji points out that there are many ways of practicing feminism in film and that adopting the mode of 'appropriation' is an injustice to the reading of Hindi films. Chatterji (1998: 2) argues that feminism in film should be seen as a "[...] set of possible strategies, adaptable, creative and occasionally at odds". Chatterji takes her argument further, claiming that feminists rarely agree on the proper approach to 'reforming' cinema to serve feminist ends. Chatterji (1998: 3) identifies the many ways there are to reading films, maintaining that in some ways:

[...]it involves reading 'against the grain', or, rewriting some of this evidence by means of creative interpretation, or, isolating a single aspect of a strong, female character and ignoring/highlighting the tragedy/strength of her final demise/triumph. Or, it may involve supporting the work of feminist directors, writers and actors, male or female. In all cases, 'feminist' means a wide range of possible strategies".

In other words, Chatterji provides a new concept when distinguishing between feminism as a perspective and feminism as a methodology. Chatterji (1998: 3-4) elaborates:

Feminism may be regarded on the one hand, as a way of seeing the world a frame of reference, or a standpoint from which to examine whatever it is one wishes to examine. Alternatively, it may be seen as constituting a set of conceptual tools, a method or a *series* of methods, even an analytical model by means of which one can examine the object, in this case, film.

¹⁶In considering various aspects, Maggie Humm (1994) has categorised feminist criticisms into the following classifications: second wave, myth criticism, marxist/socialist-feminist criticism, French feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, poststructuralism/ deconstruction/ postmodernism, black feminism: the African diaspora, lesbian feminist criticism and third world feminist criticism, third wave and fifth gear.

In terms of this study feminism film theory in relation to popular Hindi films offers more of a perspective than a methodology. With reference to Chatterji (1998: 4), this means that feminism is more like a pair of spectacles through which we read films and what we see through our spectacles tells us *what* we choose to analyse and *how* we choose to analyse it. She stresses the concern shared by most kinds of feminist theory in relation to the representation of women on screen. The concern, she explains, “tends to be focused on the silences of film texts in relation to women,” (1998: 4). In reading films, this includes becoming sensitive to what often goes unnoticed and sensitivity to what reverts to the natural in dominant or popular Hindi cinema.

Reinforcing this idea, Prabhu (2001: 5) highlights the most prominent insensitivity and un-noticing prevalent in Hindi cinema, and writes:

[...]the most serious accusation [insensitivity] directed against the Hindi film is that they project women in secondary and stereotyped roles. People, especially women, have raised many issues regarding the projection of women in films.

Also commenting on what goes ‘unnoticed’ in Hindi cinema is Mathur (in Jain and Rai, 2000: 66):

As the stories progress towards expected and anticipated endings, Hindi cinema proves again and again that its women characters will always need something more than the brains which God Almighty has given them. Their loves, their dreams, their unexpected destinies shall always oscillate vacuously between the pluralisms of culture and traditions.

The observations made by Mathur (2000) and Prabhu (2001) are conceptualised by Chatterji in terms of the *presences* and *absences* in Hindi cinema. By *presences*, she refers to that which becomes naturalised in popular Hindi cinema and *absences*, refers to that which goes unnoticed. Chatterji (1998: 4) clarifies *presences* as:

- explicit ways in which women are portrayed in film, such as, in extreme polarities of good/bad, black/white, mother/whore, etc and

- kinds of images they are invested with – such as the *sati savitri*¹⁷ image of the wife, the glamour puss for the westernised girl, sacrificing widowed mother clothed in white, etc.

Absences for Chatterji (1998: 4) is explained as:

[...]imply the ways in which women characters *do not appear at all* or in certain ways, are not represented in films. For example, very rarely in Indian popular cinema, will one have been audience to a female character reading the daily newspaper, even if she is portrayed as a journalist or a politician.

In this dissertation the analysis seeks to make visible the *absences* in the two films under investigation and bring into discussion the *presences*. In other words, the study examines the ways in which the presence of women is represented on screen, and the ways in which women are not represented (absences). For example, popular Hindi cinema would often represent a young 'college-going' Indian woman on screen without further developing her character (Chatterji, 1998). By this I mean that the young Indian woman in question would only be *situated* at the college, but very little (if any) information is given on her choice of study and her career aspirations. Her presence at the college plays a secondary role to that of the male character, whose character is developed into a more 'believable' representation. This being said, the male character is shown attending classes, studying for his exams and working towards career fulfilment.

Consequently, the signifying function of women situated within the system of cinematic representation and stereotyping has been a site for discussion and debate by many feminists. The representation and resultant stereotyping of women, has also been a site of gendered discourse, drawn from the specific, socio-cultural experiences of women and shared by women. In the next section, I explore these concepts.

¹⁷ *Sati Savitri* (a pure woman) stems from mythological associations. This will be explained at greater depth in **Chapter four**.

1.4 Representation and stereotyping

Representations and stereotypes are common to all media texts (e.g. film, magazines, and television) and academic scholars have been concerned with their critique and analysis (cf. Perkins, 1979; hooks, 1992; Hall, 2000). In relation to the study of media texts (and in this instance, film), the concept of representation can be understood in two ways, "how the media re-present event, and how the media represent (portray) people and groups" (Branston and Stafford, 1999: 125). The emphasis of this study is on the representation of specific people and groups (that is, women in popular Hindi film), and foregrounds the representation of femininity and female sexuality in the films under investigation.

Representation refers to the construction in any medium (especially the mass media) of aspects of 'reality' such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations do not only limit themselves to the printed media, but also include film, known as the moving picture (Chandler, 1994). Studies in this area have outlined three ways of viewing representation as formulated by Hall (2000), namely: the *reflective* view (when we represent something, we are taking its true meaning and trying to create a replica of it in the mind of our audience, like a reflection); the *intentional* view (the most important aspect of representing is the person doing the representing, and that the words and/or images they use mean what they intend them to mean; and the *constructionist* view (representation can never really just be the truth, or a version of the truth that someone wants you to hear and, thus, this view takes into account the person doing the viewing as an active participant, with the ability to form an opinion and act on the opinion).

This study uses the constructionist view as it takes into account that representation is a mixture of the object/s being represented, the opinions of the people doing the representation, the reaction of the individual to the

representation,¹⁸ and the context in which the representation is taking place. In relation to this study, the producers/directors of the films under investigation have no doubt represented femininity and female sexuality in accordance with specific notions and ideas.¹⁹ By analysing the films under investigation, I explore how each director positions femininity and female sexuality within the context of popular Hindi films. In the comparative analysis, the study focuses on how each director's representations relate to and perhaps, deviate from the other.

In addition to the constructionist view, de Lauretis (1984: 37) explains:

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 [...].

Building on this concept of representation as a signifying practice, Hall (2000) articulates a variety of approaches to representation, namely: semiotics, psychoanalytic, anthropological, feminist and sociological. Hall explores representation across a range of social contexts, such as the representations of African-Americans over time, through advertisements, cinema and history (slavery), thereby bringing to light a discussion on why black people are portrayed in certain ways. A parallel could be drawn here with Hall's initial focus now extended to incorporate an analysis as to why femininity and female sexuality are portrayed in certain ways in popular Hindi cinema. Such an investigation lends itself to a discussion of the various representational strategies, as identified by Hall.

¹⁸ An analysis of audience reception is beyond the scope of this study, however, I acknowledge the importance of reception studies in the constructionist approach to representation.

¹⁹ In **Chapter four**, I rigorously examine such specific representations in relation to mythology. I trace the representations emerging from the films under analysis and show how they have emerged from early mythological texts.

The first strategy under discussion in this study is naturalisation, which Hall (2000: 245) defines in relation to racial representation:

Typical of this racialised regime of representation was the practice of reducing black people to Nature, naturalising '*difference*'. The logic behind naturalisation is simple. If the differences between black and white people are cultural, then they are open to modification and change. But if they are 'natural' – as the slave-holders believed – then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed. 'Naturalisation' is therefore a representational strategy designed to *fix* 'difference', and thus *secure it forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological 'closure'.

When taking this definition into consideration, it becomes apparent how this could 'allow' for the representations of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema today. Attributing the dominant portrayals of femininity and female sexuality to the natural, and not contesting these representations, means not criticising such representations, but rather depicting these representations as the norm, the right order of things.

Any discussion on representation steps on the terrain of stereotyping, which is the second strategy marked by Hall. This is because O'Sullivan *et al* (in Fourie, 2001: 471) define stereotypes as:

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.

The above definition raises pertinent questions in relation to the study of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema, including: Why are femininity and female sexuality portrayed in Hindi cinema in specific way/s? How is it that such portrayals generally go unquestioned? In turn, to answer these questions, the link between stereotypes and media texts needs to be highlighted. Holt (1998: 31) elaborates on this, with a specific mention of the visual medium:

[...]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.²⁰

Dyer (1993:1) links representation and stereotyping by asserting that, "how we are seen determines in part how we are treated, how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation". It is evident then that representation does not work in isolation, but the assumption is that how members of society see themselves, how they are viewed, and even treated by others is determined to a great extent by their media representation (Bernstein in Newbold *et al*, 2002: 260).

The media plays a contributing role in perpetuating a narrow range of stereotyped images of women, and the manner in which women are represented in the media may – at times – encourage particular expectations of women which can be extremely limiting. Some of these limitations include: that women are always based in the home, they are inferior to men or that they like men who are violent (Nelmes, 1996: 248).

Relating this to the representation of (specifically) femininity and female sexuality, Kuhn (1985:6) argues, "What does looking have to do with sexuality? With masculinity and femininity? With power? With knowledge?" Kuhn (1985:11) raises many questions around notions and ideas of representation, sexuality, power and knowledge. She puts forward an invaluable line of thinking:

To possess [as a spectator, viewing the image on the screen becomes an act of possession] a woman's sexuality is to possess a woman, to possess the image of a woman's sexuality is, however mass-produced the image, also in some way to possess, to maintain a degree of control over, women in general.

²⁰ Holt offers a sophisticated conceptualisation of stereotyping, tracing the history of the concept to more contemporary appropriations. Holt not only refers to the wide embracement of stereotyping as an investigative tool of analysis, but also maps out the criticisms of stereotyping as a prospective methodological tool. For a detailed understanding refer to Holt (1998).

By exploring sexual difference in the media, Kuhn (1985:48) finds that:

Sexual difference is dealt with in a variety of ways across different media, genres and forms, and is produced through diverse codes and conventions. All representations are coded: they do not merely reflect a world outside the bounds of the text.

Likewise, gender differences are also dealt with in a variety of ways across different media, genres and forms. In applying this to popular Hindi cinema, there is a marked difference to be noted in the representation of femininity and masculinity. This resonates with Dyer's argument that differences in society manifest themselves in the differences on screen.

Connecting feminism directly to representation, Kuhn (1985: 3) explains:

From the point of view of politics, then, the women's movement has always been interested in images, meanings, representations – and especially in challenging representations which, while questionable or offensive from a feminist standpoint, are from other points of view, if they are noticed at all, perfectly acceptable.

The above view depicts the importance of the feminist movement in questioning the representations of women across a wide range of discourses. Feminist writers (see for example, Brunston, 1997; Hollows, 2000 and Tasker, 1998) continue to examine the portrayal of women in the media and are particularly concerned with stereotypical representations. These stereotypical representations do not account for a change in the structure of society, for a change in the dynamics of the role of women in society, and in the workplace, or even in the home. Rather, these representations are being perpetuated as 'natural' or 'normal'. Feminist writers (cf. Humm, 1994; MacDonald, 1998) began to deconstruct the construction of femininity and female sexuality in various media discourses.

In relation to the deconstruction of the construction of femininity, Brunston (1997: 33) asserts:

Although early feminist critique had generally involved some notion of counting – how many women appeared on screen to read the news? What sort of roles did women generally have? Which women? – it has been mainly within the discipline of mass communications that questions about gender have been added to the array of quantifying projects... there have been a series of studies which have focused...on the investigation of the type of roles available for women and the type of women to fill them.

At this point I allude to Hollows (2000: 21) and the chapter on “The Images of Women Debate”. Hollows engages in a discussion on how the media plays a role in socialising women by portraying restricting notions of femininity. She refers to the work of Gaye Tuchman²¹ in establishing how media images have not kept up with changes in society, especially the ‘transformation’ of gender roles brought about by the women’s movement. Hollows (2000: 21) expounds that the media is more sexist than society and misrepresents reality.

Kuhn (1985: 50) goes on to claim that by:

Analysing films in this way [looking at the various cultural and textual codes imbedded in films], unpacking the various layers of meaning at work in them demands, in this instance, attention to the particular ways in which sexual difference is constructed.

Kuhn brings to light a very important distinction here: the way in which sexual difference is constructed. The ‘sexual’ in this instance applies to the gender binary oppositions of the masculine and the feminine. In the next section, I engage in a discussion of gender and sexuality and relate this to Butler’s concept of performativity.

1.5 Gender, sexuality and performativity

Gender, sexuality and the concept of performativity each merit a detailed exploration in their own right. However, for the purposes of this study, these terms will be briefly explained in their uniqueness and then linked to the context of popular Hindi cinema.

²¹ Gaye Tuchman (1978) has written on the formulation of *The symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Gender is a cultural and social construction, rather than a biological given. There are various approaches and interpretations of gender as a construction.²² Rubin (1975) in her theory of the sex-gender system lends importance to the consideration of gender as being shaped within ideological frameworks by socialisation through family, education, church, media and other agencies. According to Rubin, the basic sex-gender system ascribes femininity to 'biological' women and 'masculinity' to 'biological' men. Thus, gender becomes a seemingly 'natural' or inevitable part of our identity. This perspective views gender along the lines of the nature/nurture debate, which is referred to as 'biologism', where – for example – it is often believed that women are naturally more fit to look after children. During the late '70s, the impact of Foucault's reflections on sexuality brought about the idea that gender was unrelated to sex. For example, a person could be born with female genitals, but still be of a masculine gender (Foucault, 1978). The question of gender roles (the ways in which people express their gender identities) in relation to one's biological role became a site for contention and debate, which continues to rage on. Traditionally, gender roles were divided into strictly the feminine and the masculine. Gender role norms, however, differ significantly from one country or culture to another, and in many cases, within a country itself. At present, there is a wider and diversified encompassment of gender roles.²³

The underlying criticism of linking gender roles to feminism is that gender roles oppress women. The basic assumption is that the female gender role is constructed in opposition to the male role, which ultimately serves to perpetuate patriarchy. Furthermore, the female gender role is also seen to be dichotomised into either the traditional, 'domesticated', stay-at-home-mother or the 'career woman'. Viewing this within the context of popular Hindi films,

²² For example, psychoanalysis is one approach, concerning the theorising of construction of gender. Another approach is Chodorowian, which emphasises the gender-specific symbiosis between mother and children (cf. van Zoonen, 1994: 31-32).

²³ For example, with regard to the masculine gender role, terms such as "metrosexual" and "sensitive new age guy" indicates that masculine gender roles have now become more malleable.

this study – as stated earlier – prioritises the dichotomy of the traditional female gender role in relation to the representation of femininity and female sexuality on screen (in the two films under analysis).

From the discussion above, it is evident that gender is concerned with the masculine and the feminine, rather than male and female. For the purposes of this study, what can be construed as 'feminine' will be explained.

When considering the fact that femininity comprises those "attributes that are conventionally associated with the condition of being female within a specific culture" it becomes apparent that 'myth' plays an integral role in what can be construed as femininity within a specific culture (Macdonald, 1995: 224). In this instance, myth is used in the sense as defined by French cultural critic Barthes (1972). According to Barthes, myth refers to ways of conceptualising a subject that is widely accepted within a specific culture and historical period, despite having little bearing on reality. The way in which this is done, Barthes claims (in Bignell 1997: 24) is by "making the current system of beliefs about society, the 'dominant ideology' seem natural, common sense and necessary". With specific reference to femininity, Macdonald (1995: 2) foregrounds that:

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'.

By establishing a definition of femininity, it is apparent that various disciplines have left their imprint on the concept of femininity. For example, in mainstream sociology, femininity is examined from the position of the unequal relationship between men and women in society. To the sociologist, gender roles are a key concept that facilitates the understanding of the myths of femininity in a given society, which espouse that femininity is acquired and reproduced through socialisation and the development of the self-concept

(Macdonald, 1995). In other words, femininity has become a learned behaviour through exposure to society, media and other cultural forms that encourages the adoption of gender-specific roles. In the course of this dissertation, the production (a 'constructed' femininity) and reproduction (sustaining and maintaining a specific view of femininity) of femininity in popular Hindi cinema will be analysed.

Sexuality is related to the social construction of femininity. The foremost theorist on sexuality is Foucault, who in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), attempts to disprove the view that western society has seen a repression of sexuality since the 17th century and that sexuality has been a taboo subject. Rather, argues Foucault, western culture has long since been fixated on sexuality. Foucault divides sexuality into two geographic 'areas'. First, he views sexuality in relation to countries such as China, India, Japan and the Roman Empire, where sexuality was viewed as erotic art. In view of this, sexuality does not connote something dark and sinister. Rather, it is viewed as a form of pleasure and art. However, in such societies, sexuality is not openly discussed. Foucault explains this, claiming that by speaking about sexuality, there might be a loss of the mystery and pleasure surrounding it. Second, Foucault analyses sexuality from a western perspective, and explains that during the 17th and 20th centuries, the sexual act and discussions surrounding sexuality were considered 'repressed'. However, Foucault rejects this hypothesis. Instead, he speaks of a "discursive explosion". Foucault asserts that by having the state try to repress sexuality, they actually started a series of discourses focusing on sexuality. Foucault proceeds to claim that in western society, sexuality has become a science, with emphasis placed on confession and truth. In other words, the need to speak about one's sexuality is prioritised. Thus, in order for one's sexuality to be confirmed in society, it has to first be first revealed. Underpinning this 'confession' is the role of power relations.

To Foucault (1978), power is ubiquitous, and not an exclusively negative force. Foucault (1978: 155) maintains:

The notion of sex brought about a fundamental reversal; it made it possible to invert the representation of the relationships of power to sexuality, causing the latter to appear, not in its essential and positive relation to power, but as being rooted in a specific and irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate.

Foucault's claim here is that the relationship between power and sexuality is not always correctly interpreted. When sexuality is viewed as 'unnatural',²⁴ explains Foucault, power is seen as a repressive, controlling and constraining force. Rather, he argues sexuality should be understood as constructed through the exercise of power relations. Through the exercise of power relations, power is seen as a technique or action, which individuals can engage in.²⁵

"The mythology of female sexuality," argues Macdonald, (1995: 164) "appears to have changed radically in the course of this century. We have moved a considerable distance from the view that only 'bad' girls enjoy their sexuality. Yet, the questions of who defines and controls female sexuality remain." Macdonald asserts that the construction of female sexuality needs to be more carefully explored. This is of particular significance in this study as the ways in which female sexuality are represented and controlled in popular Hindi cinema comes under investigation. In *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (Kinsey *et al.*, 1952), female sexuality was presented in a different and, at that time, controversial light. Kinsey's study challenged the mythologies of female sexuality that propose that women endured rather than enjoyed their sexuality, and that without men, women could experience no sexual pleasure.

Drawing on Foucault's understanding of sexuality, Butler (1990) explores the idea of 'norms' within gender and sexuality. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler

²⁴ 'Unnatural' sexuality refers to sexual behaviour that departs from heterosexuality.

²⁵ A detailed analysis of the relationship between sexuality and power is beyond the scope of this study. For a more in-depth understanding, refer to Foucault (1978).

makes a clear connection between gender roles and sexuality. According to Butler (1990: 43), gender identity is “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being”. The regulatory power of the norms that govern our performances of gender is both disguised and strengthened by the assumption that gendered identities are natural and essential. Thus, for Butler, it is imperative that dominant gender norms are challenged by exposing the contingent acts that produce the appearance of an underlying ‘natural’ gender identity. Additionally, Butler stresses (1990: 30) “one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces that restriction of gender”. Hence, Butler brings an important view to the fore that, when assuming a gender identity, one actually differentiates from the opposite gender/s. This can be related to popular Hindi cinema as the films under analysis investigate the way/s in which the feminine is differentiated from the masculine and, thus, restricted and constrained.

In her attempt to deconstruct gendered and sexual norms, Butler explores the concept of performativity. “In the first instance”, asserts Butler (1993: 2), “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names”. With specific reference to gender, Butler (1990: xv) argues “the view that gender is performative, is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylisation of the body”. Butler proceeds to argue that the many types of relationships between gender and sexuality are also varied and not nearly as simplistic as heterosexual performativity would suggest. Additionally, Butler explains that people are “forced to negotiate” their gender and often display fear at the thought of losing their gender, or no longer being considered as displaying a ‘natural’ sexuality in the view of dominant society.

Essentially, Butler argues that everyone takes part in gender and sexual performance. She uses the image of a person dressed in drag to note that

what is performed in drag is the 'sign' of gender; a sign that is not the same as the body that it figures, but that cannot be ready without it. Butler (1993: 13) proceeds to state that we have no control over what form of the performance we will take. "There are for the most part compulsory performances, ones which none of us choose, but which each of us is forced to negotiate". Butler (1993: 22) notes that performativity is about power and being able to choose which role we want to play, "performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power".

Butler (in Jones, 2003: 396) posits:

In what sense, then, is gender an act? As anthropologist Victor Turner suggests in his studies of ritual social drama, social action requires a performance, which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimisation.

Relating social performance to gender, Butler (in Nelmes, 2000) maintains that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations of becoming stylised into gendered modes, this 'action' becomes public as well. Butler proceeds to explain that by stating that gender reality is performative, what this really means is that the 'real' exists only to the extent that it is performed. Butler (in Nelmes, 2000: 398-399) draws a distinction between expression and performativity, arguing:

the distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction.

In other words, Butler (in Nelmes, 2000: 399) argues that gender reality is created through sustained social performances, and that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performance aspect of gender is concealed.

In relation to the popular Hindi cinema context, Butler's concept of performativity will be used to analyse the way/s in which the female characters in the films under interrogation 'choose the role' they play on screen. The 'role' I refer to, is the characterisation on screen and the way in which the femininity and female sexuality have been enacted (performed) on screen. In other words, the concept of performativity will be applied to the two films under analysis to investigate the degree to which traditional and 'expected' function of women in Indian are then 'enacted' on screen. This is significant to the project as it sheds light onto why certain representations of women (discussed in **Chapter two**) continue to prevail in popular Hindi cinema.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have linked the popular Hindi film context to a range of interdisciplinary fields of study. First, the chapter located the study within the broader framework of cinema, proceeding to an explanation of the popular Hindi film medium. Considerable emphasis has been placed on understanding elements of popular Hindi cinema, which include discussions on the 'masala formula', genres in the films and characterisations. Second, the focus shifted to an understanding of Chatterji's (1998) appropriation of western feminist film theory. Third, the concepts of representation and stereotypes were discussed in relation to popular Hindi cinema. Fourth, the concepts of gender, sexuality and performativity were related to the corpus of the study.

By positing a framework for the analysis of the two popular Hindi films under investigation, the chapter motivates that although western feminist film theory has had significant impact on the study of media images, representation and stereotyping, western feminist film theory cannot fully account for the context of popular Hindi cinema. As bell hooks (1990) argues, western feminist film theory does not in fact look at the case of 'women' but rather, white women.

Chatterji (1998) voices the same concern as hooks, but turns specifically to popular Hindi cinema as her subject matter.

The next two chapters employ the theoretical framework to analyse the two films under discussion.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I use the theoretical framework explained in the previous chapter to motivate and analyse the construction of the female characters in Karan Johar's *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* (K3G) (2001) and Pooja Bhatt's *Jism* (2003). Apart from examining each character separately, this chapter offers an analysis of the interaction between the female characters in the two films under scrutiny.

Bhatt's *Jism* has a limited cast and revolves around three central characters, one of which is the female protagonist, Sonia. Conversely, Johar's *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham* is a 'multi-starrer' with a large cast and several key female characters. The difference in the number of characters in the films relates to the variations in the narratives. Bhatt claims that her characters are not like the conventional characters portrayed in popular Hindi cinema. Her strong female lead in the film is testament to this. In Bhatt's films, there is usually a dearth of female characters. Rather, she focuses on *one* strong female lead as the central point for constructing her plot. For example, in her film *Paap*²³ (Sin) (2003), Bhatt's female lead is the *only* dominant female character in the film, and the female lead, Kaya, is integral to the development of the narrative.

The presence of women in Indian cinema has not come about without struggle and resistance. Early Indian cinema (1912 – 1920s) did not allow for the presence of female actors because it was considered an indecent profession for 'decent' women. Instead, early Indian cinema featured males in women's roles (Kabir, 2001). In fact, India's first feature-length, silent film, *Raja Harishchandra* (Phalke, 1912), featured a young male cook cast as the queen. Almost a century later, this male cross-dressing is still used in popular

²³ *Paap* was also released in 2003, but in the latter part of the year. *Jism* was released in January 2003.

Hindi cinema, but more so as a comic device. Sometimes, the 'hero' in the film will dress as a female to gain entry into the home of the 'heroine' he is trying to seduce. For example, in the 2000 blockbuster film *Duplicate* (Bhatt, 1998) actor Shahrukh Khan is seen dressed as a woman in an elaborate action scene.

As women were gradually accepted into theatre productions, film directors began casting women in their films. However, a certain social stigma (actresses were thought to be promiscuous, indulging in alcohol and a lifestyle of debauchery) was still attached to these female cinematic pioneers.²⁴ However, as these early actresses began to be accepted and appreciated in India's film industry, other actresses soon followed.

Innovative roles for women in Indian films, especially mainstream cinema, are few and far between. Some creative directors working within the mainstream format, however, have offered substantial characters. According to Ghosh, (2005: 9)

Several women-significant films were made in the early days of Indian cinema like *Achhyut Kanya*, which touched on the theme of untouchables. Bimal Roy made a few films inspired by the novels of Sarat Chatterjee like *Biraj Bou*, *Devdas* and *Parineeta*. *Biraj Bou* was a film based on a selfless Indian woman, who endured hardship and pain for the sake of her husband.

Ghosh (2005) proceeds to explain how Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1995) brought hitherto taboo subjects, such as lesbianism, to the Indian screen for the first time. Ghosh (2005: 12) maintains that:

Women characters in Mahesh Bhatt's *Arth*, *Swayam*, *Kaash* and *Tamanna* were interesting. Smita Patil and Shabana Azmi gave great performances in *Arth* while in *Kaash*, the wife tries to cope with a failed actor- husband who turns a derelict and a little son diagnosed with a terminal disease.

²⁴ Some of the pioneering actresses in Hindi cinema included: a Jewish woman, Ruby Meyers, who gave herself the Hindu screen name, Sulochana; Gohar (known as 'Glorious Gohar' because of her style and elegance); and Muslim actress Zubeida (Kabir, 2001).

Ghosh concludes by stating that several filmmakers have earnestly tried to portray women in a dignified, realistic and intriguing way and have succeeded remarkably. Of this genre, Ghosh (2005: 12) maintains that filmmakers such as “Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Mahesh Bhatt, Amol Palekar, Tapan Sinha and Girish Kasaravalli and a few others seems to have given us the best of such women-significant films”.

Predominantly, though, female characters in popular Hindi cinema have been expected to, as Kabir (2001: 53) points out, “look like a fairy, dance like a dream and never grow older than twenty-three”. Indian society is strongly patriarchal and for this reason it is not surprising to see popular art forms responding to this. In other words, most Hindi films are written for the hero. Male stars tend to dominate not only the industry, but also the narrative. The entire narrative structure of Hindi films positions the male at the core of the film. The heroine in these films is quickly reduced to a pretty appendage.

Indian heroines tend to oscillate between two outlandish extremes – from the single, sexy siren, to the obedient sari-clad spouse. Kannan and Mishra (2000: 3) argue that the heroine in Hindi cinema “can be anything but a ‘woman’ if she is not forgiving, caring, a sex object, strictly monogamous, and an all-loving mother”. However, the characterisation of females in Hindi cinema has been changing in recent years. Today, there are different kinds of characters appearing on screen who render new meaning to the representation of women on Hindi celluloid. For example, Bhatt’s films *Jism* and *Paap* show the promise of reinventing female characters. As stated earlier, her films always have strong female protagonists. Subject matter is also changing and does not deal exclusively with the theme of romantic love. Bhatt’s *Jism* is a testament to this.

Gokulsing and Dissanyake (1998: 75) establish:

[...]in traditional Indian society, there were definite and consensual norms of behaviour – that regulated the conduct of women – all of them handed down from the past. For example, the concept of woman as *Sita* is prevalent in Indian society as well as Indian films.

Gokulsing and Dissanyake (1998: 75) proceed to describe how over the years, Indian popular cinema has perpetuated this idea of a wife's selfless devotion. They also identify four typical roles attributed to women in popular Hindi cinema, namely:

(a) *The ideal wife*

This character is represented by sexual purity and fidelity. She must consistently adhere to traditional Indian roles by honouring the family and depending on the husband. Richards (in Gokulsing and Dissanyake 1998: 77) further claims that Hindi films uphold the "traditional patriarchal views of society which, fearful of female sexuality, demands of the women a subjugation of her desires".

(b) *The vamp*

Gokulsing and Dissanyake (1998) describe the vamp as the opposite to the wife. They proceed to explain that she is usually a decadent, modern woman, generally with a name such as Rosie or Mary. She flouts tradition and seeks to imitate western women. She smokes, drinks and is portrayed as being a morally tainted person, who is associated with everything that is unwholesome about the West. She is almost always punished for what is regarded as her unacceptable behaviour. Gokulsing and Dissanyake (1998: 77) make a significant observation here:

There is an interesting contradiction here. Indian cinema is a product of cultural modernity and it has accelerated the process of modernity in India as few other media have. Yet the woman who chooses to identify herself with modernity is almost always portrayed as decadent and punished for it.

(c) *The ideal mother*

In Indian cinema, the reference to the ideal mother almost always has a dominant religious connotation. The role of mother in Indian cinema is often linked to that of great moral and physical strength, and to the Goddess Shakti.²⁵

(d) *The courtesan*

The courtesan is a popular character in Indian cinema. She is a character who helps take care of the physical and emotional needs of the male protagonist. She is often known to comfort the male protagonist, usually falling in love with him. Seldom, though, is this love reciprocated. Chandramukhi, a renowned character in the film *Devdas*,²⁶ is the quintessential courtesan. Dwyer (2000: 127) makes a significant contribution to this discussion asserting:

The courtesan has also been a popular figure in film, where her attractions give rise to a variety of pleasures in the audience. She is portrayed as a victim of men's lust and as an object of the viewer's pity, but also delights in being the object of the male gaze as she dances for his entertainment. Her sexuality is not associated with reproduction, nor is she expected to offer any nurture – she is the essence of female eroticism.

In the proceeding sections, I first provide synopses of the two films under analysis and then explore the construction of female characters in the two films. The discussion will also take into consideration the four 'typical roles' identified above.

²⁵ Shakti is the divine force, manifesting to destroy demonic forces and restore balance. Shakti is the Mother Goddess, the source of all, the universal principal of energy, power or creativity (Accessed from: http://www.sanatansociety.org/hindu_gods_and_goddesses/shakti.htm).

²⁶ The film *Devdas* is based on the well-known Bengali novel by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and has been depicted visually (on film) many times. *Devdas*, tells the story of a young man (Devdas) from a wealthy family, who is prohibited from marrying the girl he desires (Parvati) because of class and status differences. The 2002 remake of *Devdas* by director Sanjay Leela Bhansali has been much appreciated by Indian as well as 'foreign' audiences. It was nominated for an award at the Cannes 2002 festival and has been the recipient of the Best Film Award at award functions such as Filmfare and International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFA – touted as the Indian Oscars).

2.2 *Jism* (2003)

Jism is set in India's beautiful Pondicherry. The film tells the story of Kabir Lal (John Abraham), a drunken lawyer who in an alcoholic daze, one day sees a beautiful woman emerge from the sea and walk by him, only to vanish seconds later. Kabir Lal later bumps into his 'vision' in a restaurant, who introduces herself as Sonia Khanna (Bipasha Basu), a married woman. A further meeting reveals that she is the bored and lonely wife of an older man, Rohit, (Gulshan Grover) who visits her only on weekends. She leads Kabir on and the two soon embark on a passionate relationship. As the film progresses, we learn of the wife's plot to murder her husband, and how she goes about ensnaring Kabir in her web of deceit and betrayal. Fuelled by lust and driven by his passion for Sonia, Kabir finds no solace in his quest for a relationship with this sultry woman, and finds his world crumbling around him.

The following sub-sections explore the construction of the female characters in *Jism* and briefly look at the genre and narrative structure of the film. There are two main female characters in *Jism*, namely Sonia and Priyanka.

2.2.1 Sonia

Sonia's first scene in the film is reminiscent of the famous Bo Derek beach scenes in the Hollywood film, *10* (Blake Edwards, 1979). Sonia even has the same hairstyle as Bo Derek in this scene (her hair is in braids). The camera draws immediate attention to Sonia's sexuality as the water cascades over her body while she frolics in the warm waters of Pondicherry. The opening water sequence is almost dream-like in its treatment. The viewer is initially shown a clear horizon hued in orange tones against the backdrop of a rising sun. Sonia appears suddenly in the frame, and her disturbing beauty is the focal point in the tranquil setting. Sonia is dressed in a skimpy, tight-fitting white dress. She walks by Kabir, without acknowledging his presence, and it is of little wonder that he later thinks that he has imagined this vision. Kabir

risers from his dazed state to follow her, only to find she has vanished into thin air. He shrugs off the vision as a dream.

The next time he meets her is at a restaurant. The camera pans across the balcony where the glamorous Sonia is standing, and zooms in to a close-up of her, clad in a revealing black dress. Kabir immediately responds to her sexuality, by approaching her with a flattering poem. The first words²⁷ she speaks to him are:

Sonia:	I am married.
Kabir:	Are you happily married?
Sonia:	Yes. My husband[...]
Kabir:	Your husband? Where is your husband?
Sonia:	He is out of town. He only comes during the weekends.
Kabir:	I like husbands like this.

Kabir is unfazed by Sonia's marriage and continues to pursue her. Bearing in mind the plot of the film, Sonia's first words to him can be understood as a 'test' of sorts. She tests him, to see if he is a determined person, as she requires someone who will not easily be daunted by the sinister task of killing her husband. In the scenes that follow, Sonia and Kabir embark on a passionate affair. He is smitten by her innocence and fragility. Sonia assumes the role of the wounded wife, caught in a loveless marriage with a selfish and uncaring husband.

In one scene, Sonia and Kabir are seated in a restaurant and a group of men continually stare at Kabir. Kabir is bemused and Sonia explains that these men (and others) had attempted to sit at her table, but he [Kabir] is the only man she has permitted to do so. Kabir then says:

Kabir:	Well, you can't blame these guys. Maybe it's the way you dress. They are drawn to you.
Sonia:	My clothes? What's so special about these clothes?
Kabir:	There is something special. These clothes hold your body. And <i>that</i> is special.

²⁷ The original dialogue in the film is in Hindi. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be using the English subtitles during analysis.

Kabir's explicit appreciation of her as a sexual being is unusual in popular Hindi cinema, as is Sonia's tolerance of Kabir's suggestive language. According to Chatterji's notion of *presences* (cf. **Chapter one**: 25), the kind of image invested with Sonia is that of a sexual object, as a vamp. To Kabir, Sonia is first a sexual object. He is attracted to her body and he makes this very clear.

The first seduction scene between Sonia and Kabir takes place when she invites him to view her wind chimes. Kabir is again very transparent about his admiration of her body and the fact that he wants to spend the night with her. Sonia feigns reluctance. She orders him out of her home and Kabir does leave, but only goes as far as his vehicle. He returns, looking almost deranged in his need for her. He begins banging on the doors and windows to be let in. Sonia is shown to be breathing heavily, standing still, as if she is terrified of what he might do. What is *absent* from her terror though is any immediate action. She does not make a call to the police for help, she does not scream for help, but merely stares at Kabir while he breaks down the door to get to her.

Although Pooja Bhatt represents Sonia as an independent and strong-willed individual, her unresponsiveness speaks otherwise. The decision to allow Kabir into her home is taken away from Sonia. She is portrayed as the helpless woman awaiting her fate. Perhaps allowing Sonia, as a married woman, to make the decision to allow Kabir in her home, might not have gone down well with audiences. In this way, it is almost as if Sonia is emotionally forced to surrender to Kabir's seduction as he had already broken down the physical barriers.

Once Sonia and Kabir begin their affair, it is made very clear who the dominant force in the relationship is. It is *Sonia* who controls Kabir both physically and emotionally. Knowing that Kabir has fallen in love with her, Sonia begins to weave her web of deceit. She portrays her husband, Rohit, as

being selfish and unkind, and makes it blatantly clear to Kabir that she cannot bear for Rohit to touch her.

However, when Rohit enters the scene, Sonia is represented and presents herself as the 'ideal wife'. Rohit goes so far as to say:

Rohit: I am so lucky to have not only a beautiful wife, but also someone who looks after me so well.

Playing the dutiful wife, though, is all part of Sonia's greater scheme. She convinces Kabir that the only way for them to be together is if he murders Rohit, which Kabir does. Once Kabir has played his part, Sonia's true nature is revealed. She is now depicted as a woman who is extremely self-centred, conniving and evil: a woman who had seduced her husband only for his money. The climax depicts Sonia's real character, that of an ambitious woman who will stoop to any level to inherit the riches.

However, the sudden love she expresses for Kabir at the end of the film is strange. Prior to this, she confesses she has never loved anyone but herself, yet, suddenly, Bhatt gives her protagonist emotions. This is, however, not enough to sway Kabir from murdering her, before he too is killed.

Bhatt makes a valiant attempt to present Sonia in a different light, and Bhatt suggests she is offering an alternate positioning of the vamp, but in reality, her portrayal of the vamp (and sexuality) reverts to traditional representations. Sonia's morality is questioned by her husband's sister, and even Kabir has his doubts. Essentially, no attempt is made to flesh-out her character. All that is foregrounded is her greed for money and her mercenary attitude. It is as if she is and can *only* be described through and by her 'unacceptable behaviour'. Sonia is punished in the end for her evil deeds at the hands of her lover. As Gokulsing and Dissanyake (1998: 77) explain earlier, the "vamp is almost always punished for what is regarded as her unacceptable behaviour".

2.2.2 Priyanka

Priyanka (Anahita Uberoi) is Sonia's drunken sister-in-law. Her role in the film is very limited and she appears in only a few scenes. These scenes are, however, vital to the development of the plot and lead to the revelation of the truth (Sonia had murdered Priyanka's brother's (Rohit) wife and had only married Rohit for his money). There is no development of Priyanka's character, she appears and departs suddenly. Bhatt does not disclose to the viewer any information about Priyanka's life in terms of her marital status, or a career. Priyanka is only represented as Rohit's drunken sister. Priyanka meets Kabir in a bar one night where they both try to drown their grief in alcohol (Kabir because he has murdered Rohit and Priyanka because she has lost her brother). Priyanka reveals to Kabir that Sonia is not what she claims to be; she is in fact a merciless woman whose profession it is in life to seduce men to get them to do her bidding. She explains how Sonia, when practising as a nurse, killed Rohit's wife and then seduced and married Rohit.

2.2.3 Interaction between the female characters

Sonia and Priyanka only share one scene together. In this scene, Priyanka ferociously expresses her hatred for Sonia. Sonia is characterised as being impervious to Priyanka's ranting and maintains:

Sonia: You are a drunkard Priyanka. No one will believe what you say.

In this scene, Sonia completely dismisses Priyanka as a threat, and makes the assumption that Kabir would disregard Priyanka's accusations on account of her alcoholism. However, Priyanka is determined to disclose Sonia's avaricious character. Priyanka is unable to hide her contempt for Sonia during their conversation, and the angrier she becomes, the more amused Sonia becomes. Sonia's complete dismissal of Priyanka highlights the power she believes she has over Kabir. Sonia is confident that Kabir trusts her implicitly

and that, in his eyes, she is an innocent woman trapped in a loveless marriage.

In the following section, I examine the genre and narrative structure of *Jism*. In a project of this nature, it is important to bring into discussion the 'visual language' of cinema. The proceeding section briefly concentrates on the structure of the film in terms of *mise en scène*: that is the costume, setting, lighting and camera angles.

2.2.4 Genre and narrative structure

Jism fits into the genre of *film noir* (literally black film, or cinema), which was coined by French film critics who noticed the trend of how 'dark' and 'black' the look and themes of many American crime and detective films were (Monaco, 2000). Strictly speaking, *film noir* is not really a genre, but rather the mood, style, point-of-view, or tone of a film. Monaco (2000) explains that the characteristics of *film noir* are melancholy, alienation, bleakness, disillusionment, disenchantment, pessimism, ambiguity, moral corruption, evil, guilt, desperation, etc. Monaco (2000: 299) proceeds to argue that the "heroes (or protagonists) are not your average 'butter-wouldn't-melt-in-my-mouth' film heroes, but rather, they are distinctively cynical, morally tarnished, with slightly (or overtly) negative shades to their character".

In the film *Jism*, we see this: Kabir, (the hero of the film) embodies some of these characteristics. He is portrayed as someone who succumbs to 'sinful' pleasure, who is tempted by the seductress. Unlike the usual 'ideal' hero, who is easily able to distinguish between right and wrong, and who can do no wrong, Kabir exhibits a very realistic and believable persona. If we say that Kabir is the hero of the film, then that makes Sonia (in typical Hindi-film style) the heroine of the film. Like the *film noir* style of film, in which the female characters were often glamorous – the *femme fatale*: mysterious, duplicitous, double-crossing, gorgeous, unloving, predatory, tough-sweet, and

manipulative – Sonia is also portrayed in this manner. She has a distinctive gloss to her, an air of the extraordinary. When Kabir first catches a glimpse of her as she is frolicking in the water he is attracted to the sensuality she exudes. In keeping with the *film noir* genre, we see how Kabir follows the goading of a traitorous *femme fatale* which ultimately leads to him committing murder.

The narrative of *Jism* is maze-like and convoluted, and at times quite complex. In the film, this complexity of the plot is depicted through Kabir, who has to try and untangle himself from Sonia's deceitful web. The narrative is hinged on the *mise en scène* (that is, the background music, the flashbacks, camera techniques, lighting). For the purposes of this dissertation, I examine the following aspects of the *mise en scène*:

- (a) *Setting*: The look of the film matches the tone of the overall narrative, which is very gloomy and dark. Even in the outdoor shoots, colour is kept to a minimum. The sets are sparse (Kabir's apartment is dimly lit and murky), the lighting is very low-key and there are numerous 'night scenes' (which add to the suspense and thrill of the plot).
- (b) *Costumes*: Sonia is dressed as the ideal vamp in slim-fitting, often revealing dresses, which highlight her sexuality. She wears strong, bold colours, either black or red. The first time she speaks to Kabir she is framed outside, on a balcony, looking at the moon, wearing a sexy black dress. The black dress signifies the 'black' tone of the film and is in keeping with the *film noir* style. While she is mostly dressed in black, Kabir in contrast is shown in lighter colours that signify innocence, and perhaps even naivety. The opposition between black and white provides an interesting dichotomy in terms of developing their characters (in the sense that black usually signifies negative aspects of a person's character, and white symbolises innocence and purity).

- (c) *Lighting and camera angle*: As mentioned before in the discussion about the setting, the lighting is kept to a minimum. The dark overtones of the plot cast a dull and unsettling light over the picture. The camera angles are used to emphasise and, at times, exaggerate the sexuality of Sonia. The camera lingers on her body, bringing in close-ups of her face and capturing her sultry expressions effectively.

The next sub-section analyses the female characters in the film *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham*. This film has four key characters and offers more insight into the representation of women in Hindi cinema.

2.3 *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham (K3G) (2001)*

K3G is set in two countries. The first half of the film is set in India in the bustling town of Chandni Chowk, New Delhi. In the second half, the location is moved to London, England. The film revolves around the close-knit Raichand family, which has become divided for several factors. Yash (Amitabh Bachchan) and Nandini (Jaya Bachchan) have raised their children: Rohan, affectionately called 'Ladoo' (Hrithik Roshan), and Rahul (Shahrukh Khan). Rahul was adopted into the Raichand family at birth. The Raichand family has kept this a secret until circumstances intervene and Rahul falls in love with the 'wrong' girl, Anjali (Kajol), a vivacious girl from Chandni Chowk. Exasperated by the fact that he has fallen in love with a middle-class girl, the father is all the more upset when Rahul refuses to marry Naina (Rani Mukherji): a woman he feels is of a much better social standing than Anjali. Yash and Rahul part ways, unaware of the pain they have inflicted on members of their loving family. Anjali, Rahul and Anjali's sister, Pooja, depart for London after Rahul and Anjali wed. They live in London for several years until a grown-up Rohan goes to London to try and reunite his estranged family for the sake of Yash's dying mother (Achla Sachdev).

The following sub-sections explore the construction of the female characters in K3G and consider the genre and narrative structure of the film. There are four main female characters in the film: Nandini, Anjali, Daijaan and Pooja.

2.3.1 Nandini

Nandini Raichand is the wife of the wealthy Yash Raichand. As Chatterji (1998) explains in her discussion on *presences* (cf. **Chapter one**: 25), Nandini is represented as the ideal wife, who regards her husband as a god. Every morning she applies the sacred *tikka*²⁸ to her husband's forehead before he leaves the house. Nandini has to stand on an ottoman to accomplish this, as her husband is much taller than herself. She embodies the ideal wife because of her subservience to her husband, and because she dresses in the sari,²⁹ the traditional garb of a married Indian woman. There are many instances in the film where she is deeply unhappy with her husband's decisions, but she does not go against his wishes. It is only in the second half of the film that we see a strong-willed Nandini emerge. She is also represented as a devoted mother, who is especially close to her eldest son, Rahul, (who is adopted). The opening dialogue in the film perfectly emphasises her devotion as a mother:

Nandini: No one can fathom the amount of love that a mother has for her son, not even the mother, because there is no measure for a mother's love. It is an emotion, it can only be that – a mother's emotion. Rahul, my son – my life!

What is absent here is Nandini as a person with her own identity. Apart from being a mother and a wife, she is not shown in any other way. There is no insight into her life prior to her marriage and motherhood. All we are made aware of is that her father arranged her marriage to Yash.

²⁸ A *tikka* is a red marking that is applied to the forehead after a prayer. It symbolises faith and belief in God as a protective force.

²⁹ The sari is a six-metre length of fabric in various designs and patterns, which is wrapped around the body. It is worn by both single and married women.

In the first half of the film, there is a flashback to Rahul's childhood that shows the caring and loving relationship between mother and son. The role of the mother as the caregiver is a universal identity ascribed to women. As discussed in **Chapter one**, it is often believed that women are naturally more suited to look after children, and we see this clearly in *K3G*. None of the opening scenes show the father's role in rearing the child. Nandini is also shown as the one responsible for maintaining faith in the home. In most of the scenes in which she features, she is shown praying for the welfare of her family.

When Yash presents his choice of bride to Nandini, she voices her concerns. She attempts to explain to him that today's young people find their own life partners. Yash rudely cuts her off and tells her that nothing has changed and he will select a bride for his son. Throughout the film he expresses his wishes by saying:

Yash: I've said it, haven't I? That's it.

Rahul, though, has fallen in love with Anjali and reveals this to his mother. Nandini watches helplessly as Rahul presents his wife (he has married her in secret) to Yash and is sent away from home by his angry father. Nandini does not, however, question her husband's decision. Nandini's grief is almost tangible, and her tears are proof of her deep unhappiness with the decision.

For 10 long years, Nandini lives her life in a vacuum; separated from her beloved Rahul, she grows quieter by the day and her personality dims. Yash is not insensitive to this and tells her he would love to have his smiling Nandini back. In the second half of the film, the younger brother Rohan promises to bring happiness back into his mother's life (he plans to mend the rift in the family). It is at this point that hope blossoms in Nandini and along with that hope, a quiet inner strength.

Nandini's first act of defiance is when, one morning, she arrives to put the *tikka* on Yash's forehead, and does not stand on the ottoman. Yash looks at her with a puzzled expression on his face, and after a few seconds, bows down to her. His bowing signifies the awakening of Nandini as a strong character.

Her second and final act of defiance is at the end of the film. Rahul and his family come to India after 10 years for the funeral of his grandmother. Nandini wants Yash to welcome Rahul into the family. She says:

Nandini: Rahul and Anjali are leaving. They are leaving tomorrow from here. They haven't even come home. If you say to them...

(Yash cuts her off with a fierce look. Nandini gets angry and retorts :)

Nandini: Do you know that mother always used to say that a husband is God? No matter what he says, no matter what he thinks, he is always right. You brought Rahul home one day, right. We gave him lots of love, right. He became a part of our family, right, absolutely right. Then one day he left home and went away, wrong. You separated a mother from her child...wrong. Our family was shattered to pieces, wrong. Then how does a husband become a God? God doesn't do any wrong, does He? My husband is just a husband, just a husband, not God.

Yash: Nandini[...]

Nandini: I said it, didn't I? That's it.

Nandini's progression from 'the ideal wife' to the questioning wife is made very clear in this scene. She uses his famous words, "I said it, didn't I? That's it" in response to him questioning her decision. In doing so, she places him in the position she has occupied thus far: he is not given an opportunity to voice his opinion. In the remaining scenes, Nandini is still represented as a devoted wife, *but* she has removed herself from her secondary position in the family. She is no longer a submissive wife, but rather a strong-willed woman.

2.3.2 Daijaan

Daijaan is Rohan's governess. She is a dignified Muslim woman who represents the middle-class values of morality and discipline. She is more upset than Nandini when Rohan is sent to boarding school. She is on the periphery of the family: she has had a strong hand in the rearing of Rahul and Rohan, but is never truly accepted by the patriarch of the family, Yash Raichand, nor is she invited to voice her opinion in any family discussions.

She shares a good relationship with Nandini, who regards her as a confidante. Her immense love for the family is highlighted when she leaves India to settle with Rahul and Anjali in London, at the request of Nandini. She sacrifices her family and home so that Rahul and Anjali do not lack motherly love in London.

Daijaan is an old, dignified woman and her costumes reflect her age and social status. Sober coloured *salwar kameezes*³⁰ that match her age and her middle-class existence.

2.3.3 Anjali

Anjali's character is shown in two phases; first, as a young girl living in India and, second, as a married woman living in London.

Anjali is a loud and boisterous young woman. Her father is the owner of a confectionery shop in the bustling Chandini Chowk, a populated middle-class neighbourhood. Absent in the film, is any mention of Anjali's career. She apparently helps her father in the shop, but this is never really shown. In her scenes, Anjali is shown dancing with a travelling band, visiting her friends and chatting to other shop owners.

³⁰ A *salwar kameez* is a pants and tunic-style top worn by women. They come in various designs, from the revealing to the more sober pattern.

Anjali is first and foremost presented as the ideal daughter. She is devoted to her father and gets very upset when he tells her that one day she will have to leave him when she gets married. Anjali is adamant that she will never marry and never leave her father. To this, her father (*babuji*, which means father in Hindi) replies:

Babuji: Then perhaps I will have to leave you (*implying death*).

Anjali also adopts the role of mother to her younger sister as her mother had died several years ago. In Chandini Chowk, Anjali is loved by other shop owners and patrons. Daijaan lives in the same locality and Anjali shares a close relationship with Daijaan's daughter, Rukhsar. Her bubbling personality and fun-loving nature attract the attention of Rahul, who falls deeply in love with her.

Anjali is shown to be very sensible when responding to Rahul's attentions. She is not impressed with his wealth and charms. Anjali cannot fathom why a man of Rahul's social standing would fall in love with her. She has many comical moments in the film, and in one scene she says she believes the wealthy Rahul is pursuing her because he wants to buy her father's confectionery shop. Her innocence and naivety are clearly visible here. She is a transparent character in the film, whose love for India is emphasised during her first scene; where she waves the Indian flag shouting "We've won!" in response to a cricket match between India and England.

Anjali's clothing is in keeping with her modest personality. She dresses in fitted, but unrevealing *salwar kameezes*. Her make-up is kept to a minimum and what shines through is her personality as the 'girl-next-door'.

After her marriage, Anjali's dress changes completely. Although she lives in London, she wears the traditional attire of a married Hindu woman and dresses in a sari. Here, her role as a wife and a mother is emphasised. In the opening scene of the second half of the film, we see Anjali bustling in her London kitchen, making breakfast for her family while singing the Indian national anthem. The loud spirit of the young girl from Chandini Chowk still remains, and Anjali is as boisterous as ever. She yearns to return to India, but accepts that it is difficult for Rahul to live in India and not be a part of his family. She casts aside her own wishes in favour of her husband's wishes in a manner befitting a 'traditional Indian wife'.

Anjali is a loving and caring mother. She instils in her son 'Indian traditions' and teaches him all about India. She cannot bear to hear anything bad about India and gets upset when her husband teasingly says, "you can never rely on India!" As a wife, Anjali is devoted to her husband. Like her mother-in-law Nandini, Anjali too is shown as a wife who sees to her husband's every need. She sets out his clothes before he goes to work, she knots his tie, she carries his briefcase out to the car and she awaits his return from work.

Although Anjali accepts her husband's reason for living in London, it seems unfair that her husband does not understand her yearning to return home. Towards the end of the film, Anjali confronts her husband about this:

Anjali: Let's go home. It's too much now, this is not our country; these are not our people. We have set up a house here, but have you ever wondered what kind of home this is? It doesn't have a mother's warmth or a father's blessings. Let's go back Rahul. Mummy and daddy are there. They are our elders. They are a little angry with us, but we will ask for forgiveness. Rahul, I know they are incomplete without us as we are without them. We will ask them for forgiveness. Rahul, let's go back.

Rahul: Anjali, you can't understand. To turn a stranger into your own and then to turn him back into a stranger, you can never understand the pain. I agree they are our elders, but even then, they don't have the right to break a heart.

Rahul is referring to his adopted status in the family and his 'banishment' from the Raichand home because he married without the approval of his father. Nandini and Anjali have to contend with Yash's ego and Rahul's stubbornness, which remain the sole reasons for the family's continued separation. It is interesting to note how Rahul dismisses Anjali's sentiments. His father hurt him because he did not understand him and yet he hurts Anjali now because he fails to understand her. By telling her she "can't understand", Rahul creates a distance in their relationship and for a moment, turns her into a stranger.

2.3.4 Pooja

Pooja is Anjali's younger sister. Her character is shown at two stages of her life: as a nine-year-old girl living in India, and as a nineteen-year-old college-going woman in London. Pooja, now called 'Poo' in London, is a glamorous and flamboyant young woman. Her first scene as a young woman is very memorable. The camera captures her as she dances on her bed, dressed skimpily in her revealing sleepwear. She dances to the tune, "It's raining men" and gyrates her body to the music, while she changes into a seductive little outfit. The camera zooms in on her face for a close-up as she applies make-up and pouts her lips. When she is completely dressed, she turns to look at herself in the mirror and says (to herself):

Pooja: You have no right to be so beautiful. How dare you!

She breezes in to breakfast, and immediately begins searching for the 'fat-free' ingredients! Johar positions Pooja as a modern-day, cosmopolitan woman, who is concerned about her looks, body and acquiring the perfect partner. Pooja's character is very similar to that of Alicia Silverstone in the Hollywood film *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995). Pooja's character is well defined as a playful, sassy, bubbly young woman.

The manner in which she treats her admirers is also amusing. She has a great fan following at her college, but treats the young men with disdain. For example, her most ardent admirer, Rocky, asks:

Rocky: Poo, movie tonight?
Poo: Sure, tell me how it was!

Pooja is searching for that special 'someone', who happens to arrive in the form of Rohan (Rahul's younger brother). Pooja and Rohan re-establish their childhood friendship, and this soon blossoms into love. Before she meets Rohan, it would be safe to claim that Pooja is the most sexual character in the film. With him on the scene, Pooja's clothes undergo a complete transformation. Gone are the skimpy skirts and revealing tops: Pooja now dresses more conservatively and has even started to wear Indian attire. Apart from her attire, her personality has undergone a change as well. She is no longer shown flirting with the young men at college. In one scene, her sister Anjali expresses shock at her change in appearance:

Anjali: Now what's happened to you? Poo has become
Parvati?³¹
Pooja: Stop it. It's the Indian touch. It's in!

It is interesting to note that although Pooja studies at the college, what is absent from the film is that she is never actually shown attending a class, carrying a notebook, or studying. Her role in the film seems to be to assist Rohan in uniting the family. In view of this, she is represented as a good and caring friend. Once she falls in love with Rohan, however, her character changes: she becomes more 'homely', caring for the needs of her family,

³¹ Parvati is the second consort of Shiva, the Hindu God of destruction and rejuvenation. Parvati is the only female deity, who like Vishnu has the ability to change her form. She appears in incarnations as Durga and Lakshmi. As Parvati she is soft and gentle. As Durga she becomes a powerful warrior, and as Kali a bloodthirsty Goddess who can even demand sacrificial killings. She is the source of all power in this Universe and because of Her, Lord Shiva gets all His powers. She is occasionally depicted as half of Lord Shiva.

helping in the kitchen and even attending religious functions. It would be unfair to say that Rohan has wrought these changes in Pooja, but he does not offer any objection to her clothes and personality either. In fact, he finds it rather amusing. It is Pooja's love for Rohan that changes her style of dress and personality.

2.3.5 Interaction among the female characters

All four women (Nandini, Daijaan, Anjali and Pooja) project aspects of the roles of Indian women. Nandini and Daijaan are devoted mothers and wives, who display characteristics from the more traditional India, where the ideal wife is subservient and motherhood is all-defining. As a mother, Nandini is respected and her opinions are actively sought. However, as a wife she is not consulted in important decision-making and is relegated to a secondary position in the family. Anjali and Nandini share a good relationship: they both understand the responsibilities of being a good wife. Anjali's wifehood, though, is a negotiation between the traditional 'ideal wife' and a more contemporary interpretation. In other words, Anjali is not a subservient wife who refrains from voicing her opinions.

Pooja represents the 'modern' Indian woman. She has sassy attitude, is ambitious and dresses as she pleases. Although she comes from a fairly traditional home, Pooja is not confined by this 'traditionality'. Anjali, Daijaan and Rahul give her the opportunity to define and create her own space. There is no talk about an arranged marriage for Pooja, nor is there any pressure from the home front. Pooja is left to decide her future for herself.

Thus, the four female characters project aspects of the roles of the Indian woman.

2.3.6 Genre and narrative structure

K3G fits into the genre of melodrama. Schatz (1959: 154) defines the melodrama as that which is:

[...]applied to popular romances that depicted a virtuous individual (usually a woman) or couple (usually lovers) victimized by repressive and inequitable social circumstances, particularly those involving marriage, occupation, and the nuclear family.

The basic characteristics of the melodrama as identified by Brooks (1976: 154) include:

- (a) Legibility: everyone can read it
- (b) Expressiveness: given to exaggeration; everything brought into the open
- (c) Simplification of roles: good and evil clearly delineated
- (d) Strong identification: emotions alive with high suffering.

Apart from the above characteristics, the hero is also identified as being central to melodrama. Brooks (1976: 156) explains that in classical Greek dramaturgy, the term applied to a man of superhuman strength, courage, or ability who was favoured by the gods. In antiquity, the hero was regarded as an immortal intermediary between the gods and ordinary people – a demigod who was the offspring of a god or goddess and a human being.

The importance of the hero is well-established in popular Hindi cinema and *K3G* is no different. All three 'heroes' in the film, Yash, Rahul and Rohan, are given differential treatment and are represented as men with commendable strength in the business world. In the case of Yash, he is represented as a powerful man in his private life as well; Daijaan is fearful of approaching him.

The narrative of Hindi cinema tends to give in to exaggeration and sometimes glaring loopholes in the narrative. *K3G* has a well-constructed narrative, but there is the tendency towards slight exaggeration. For example, Nandini's ability to sense the presence of Rahul as soon as he steps into a building leans towards the exaggeration of 'maternal instincts'.

Like *Jism* (and popular Hindi films in general, see for example: *Veer Zaara*, 2004; *Murder*, 2004), the narrative is hinged on the *mise en scène*. As discussed earlier in the chapter, I look at the following aspects in this study:

- (a) **Setting:** During the first half, the film is very bright in colour and tone. The bright colours are indicative of the lighter mood of the narrative. In the second half, though, there are slightly darker overtones. While not gloomy like *Jism*, there is a notable difference in the use of light. Nandini and Yash's house is very dimly lit and is a far cry from the initial brightly lit interior. The marked difference in the lighting is linked to the emotions of Nandini (and her family). In earlier scenes, prior to the family's separation, the Raichand house was brightly lit, depicting their inner happiness and glow. After the separation, the dark interior of the house matches Nandini's dark mood, in that she is now in 'mourning' for her son.
- (b) **Costumes:** The costumes are lavish and impressive. Nandini is attired in Indian designer clothing, expensively tailored, which mark her as the wife of the wealthy Yash Raichand. Daijaan (and initially Anjali) wore modest clothing, in keeping with their middle-class background. Pooja's costumes are also in keeping with her character. First, she is dressed in skimpy, revealing western clothes, and as her character changes, she dresses in more conservative *salwar kameezes*.
- (c) **Lighting and Camera angle:** Unlike *Jism*, which has a darker plot, *K3G* (which has a lighter plot) uses lighting to the maximum effect. As explained above under "Setting", the lighting is very bright, which showcases the impressive sets.²⁶ The camera beautifully captures the hustle and bustle of Chandini Chowk in all its magnificent chaos. In London, the camera spans over the landmarks and zooms in to the

²⁶ Apart from the few scenes in the Raichand household (after Rahul and Anjali leave for London) which is dimly lit, the rest of the scenes are brightly lit.

Raichand household. Close-ups are used during the many emotive scenes, capturing all the pain-filled expressions. The close-ups also linger on Pooja's body, emphasising the sensuality in her revealing outfits.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the construction of the female characters in *Jism* and *K3G* has been outlined. The chapter also provided synopses of the films and focused briefly on the genre and narrative structure of each film. By analysing the construction of the female characters in *Jism*, the character of Kabir has also been explained. This is because the characters of Kabir and Sonia are intensely connected.

Pooja Bhatt wishes to present her female characters in a different light than is the norm for popular Hindi cinema. Karan Johar, on the other hand, makes no such claim. His female characters are embodiments of the typical 'masala' film. This analysis has shown that despite Pooja Bhatt's intentions, she reverts to the traditional representation of women. She makes a valiant attempt at positioning her female protagonist, but this is lost at the end when Sonia is punished for her evil deeds.

Chatterji's (1998) concept of *absences* and *presences* helps to highlight the positioning of women in Hindi cinema. For example, as discovered in the analysis, it is found that despite Pooja attending college, she is never shown attending a class or studying. In Johar's film, the women are mainly confined to the home. Apart from Pooja, the rest of the female characters exist only in the homes. However, this is not the case in *Jism*. Sonia and Priyanka are hardly ever shown at home, and never in a 'homely' light.

In the next chapter, I examine – using more in-depth analysis – the representation of femininity and female sexuality in the two films.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate the representation of femininity and female sexuality in Johar's *K3G* and Bhatt's *Jism*. Related to femininity and female sexuality is Butler's concept of performativity. In other words, I examine the way/s in which the female characters in the films above 'choose' the role they play on screen (see **Chapter one**). Specifically, I analyse the way in which femininity and female sexuality have been enacted (performed) on screen.

The chapter first distinguishes between femininity and female sexuality, before proceeding to investigate the representation of femininity and female sexuality in the two films under interrogation. Bearing in mind that there has been very little work done in this area of research, I draw on additional popular Hindi films in support of my argument.

3.2 Distinction between femininity and female sexuality

Femininity encapsulates those attributes that are conventionally associated with the condition of being female. Further, femininity is culture-specific. In view of this, the ways in which femininity are naturalised on screen is explored. As explained earlier (see **Introduction** and **Chapter one**), traditional feminine characteristics include: large breasts, a narrow waist, submissiveness, compassion, beauty and being soft-spoken, and it is not incorrect to state that popular Hindi cinema represents femininity through a 'traditional haze'. I say this because the traditional representation of femininity in popular Hindi cinema tends to cloud alternate representations of femininity. In other words, if a female character is attractive, then she is automatically soft-spoken.

The feminine attributes discussed above seem to allow little room for alternate representations. Take, for example, Karan Johar's box-office success *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Something is happening, 1998), in which the female lead is initially represented as a loud, boisterous 'tom-boy'. She disregards dresses, skirts and traditional Indian attire in favour of jeans and tracksuits. Her femininity (or rather, her lack of femininity) is decided exclusively on her choice of clothing, her love of basketball and her boisterousness, and because of this, she is classified as 'one of the boys'. It is only when she sheds her jeans in favour of the sari that she is considered a 'woman' and, thus, her femininity is acknowledged. Johar goes so far as to change not only her clothes, but also the pitch of her voice and her career (she abandons her commerce degree to become a teacher of traditional Indian dance) in order for her femininity to be acknowledged. In fact, it is only after she begins to fit the mould of traditional femininity that she is recognised by her family and friends as a female.

There can, however, be no simple and direct response to the interpretation of femininity in popular Hindi cinema. One worn-out response could be that popular Hindi cinema does nothing but reproduce patriarchal ideology in relation to femininity, but this in itself is a stereotype. The danger of such an analysis is that it gives no space for female agency and turns female spectatorship into a helpless, victimised viewing position. Sridhar (2003: 2) asserts:

Until recent times and the emergence of television and its proliferating soap operas, women constituted the principal audiences for matinee shows. No cinema can afford to ignore them. Since the advent of cinema, therefore, many films have been made in many genres to address this female audience. These films, which may resolve their conflicts eventually within a patriarchal framework, do at the same time crack the patriarchy open in many ways to accommodate fantasies of empowerment for their female audience.

In support of the above, Sridhar (2003) draws on the genre of Amman films,²⁷ which mainly addresses lower middle-class and working-class women in the city, as well as women of subaltern castes and classes in the villages. They are replete with scenes of domestic violence in which the victimised woman finally asserts her femininity with the timely aid of the goddess she worships. The evil husband is ultimately subdued or symbolically castrated and the in-laws who are instrumental in reproducing such violence are silenced, or taught a very harsh lesson. Sridhar (2003: 3) also draws on the avenging woman genre wherein “female stars become embodiments of masculinity, bringing even the mightiest of powers to their knees”. The problem with most of these films, however, is that the female protagonist initially occupies the position of the victim in the narrative. In other words, victimhood is posited as an essential and eternal feminine quality, which then requires a miracle of some sort to redeem the situation. Popular Hindi cinema also tends to posit victimhood as an essential and eternal feminine quality (see Bagchi, 1996). For example, Vamasi’s (2002) film *Shakti* (The Power) essentialises victimhood as a feminine quality in that the female protagonist becomes a ‘victim’ of her gangster father-in-law and her family. Her victimhood status is challenged when the ‘miracle’ bestowed upon her is shown to be her own inner strength and determination to survive. This inner strength and determination manifests itself physically too, in that the female protagonist turns to the ‘traditional’ masculine attribute of physically fighting off her enemies in order to survive. In relation to the films under analysis, I examine the ways in which femininity is represented in terms of the ‘feminine attributes’ discussed earlier, and I also investigate the notion of victimhood as a feminine attribute.

²⁷ Originating in the '70s, the Amman films of the '90s combine digital effects, horror movie culture, science fiction, and calendar art in a crudely assembled visual medley. Low budget and shot at a rapid pace in villages, with a script based mostly on local folklore, these films are released in B grade theatres in cities, small towns and villages. They get good viewership from women and rural folk. These films perpetuate icons, rites and rituals, which link to a prevailing local Amman cult.

As explained at the outset of this chapter, a distinction between femininity and female sexuality is made. In the proceeding paragraphs, female sexuality (in relation to popular Hindi films) is explained.

One of the most contentious issues in media ethics concerns the representation of sex and sexuality on screen (Kieran, 1997:87). Kieran (1997) claims that the use of sexuality and sexual material in mainstream media helps to sell the product. Kieran (1997:88) further argues that, “the reasons why many people object to sexual representations in the media differ. Often, it is just that someone feels embarrassed or offended”. Hindi cinema is situated in a patriarchal Indian society that tends to view the representation of sex and sexuality in its media as a destructive force. India’s censor board works religiously to prohibit explicitly sexual material from entering mainstream media. Popular Hindi films also face the censor board and those films that are not aesthetically shot (in terms of sexuality), are not released into the market.

Pendakur (2003: 145) claims:

Differences in male and female sexuality and what is accepted and not accepted in any society is tied up with macro-and-micro structures. In a male-centred, contemporary Hindu society, it is not too surprising to see popular art forms responding to such structurations or even resonating with them.

In other words, Pendakur clarifies that most popular films are written for the hero. Male stars dominate not only the narrative, but also the industry. Thus, in Hindu society, dominant male ideology prescribes certain roles for men and women.³² This extends itself to popular art forms, such as cinema.

In popular Hindi cinema, heterosexuality is the norm and anything other than that is either considered as unacceptable material for films, or is parodied

³² These roles are drawn from the *Manusmriti*, the pivotal text of Hindu orthodoxy. This is discussed further in **Chapter four**.

(Pendakur, 2003). Heterosexual marriage is held up as the quintessential relationship.³³ Pendakur (2003:15) proceeds to claim:

Commercial Hindi cinema plays with the notion of the female's controlled-uncontrolled sexuality. Heroines are picked primarily because they have what the producers and distributors call 'oomph'.

Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998:78) question how sexuality is conveyed in Indian cinema. They go on to elaborate that Indian cinema excels in disguising acts of sexual excitement by operating on the basis that the female nude form is less exciting than the veiled one. Richards (1995), in Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 78 - 79), has identified the strategies used to display the female form and female sexual desire.

(a) Tribal dress

Because most Indian films involve music and dance, Richards explains that tribal costumes are used to expose sections of the body, in particular the pelvic region. Perhaps this was true in earlier popular Hindi cinema, but the idea of tribal dress is not so prevalent in cinema today. However, it could be argued that the tribal dress notion has been revisited and now encapsulates other forms of revealing attire (such as short skirts and dresses, tight, form-fitting clothes, etc).

(b) Dream sequences/wet sari

Here, Richards (1995) claims that dreams offer the ability to express desires and to explore forbidden pleasure. In these dreams flimsy saris are soaked by a downpour, allowing for the exposure of the female body.

³³ Popular films, however, enjoy an iconic status among gay and lesbian subcultures in India even though explicit references to homosexuality have been largely absent from mainstream commercial films (Vanita, 2002: 207).

(c) Behind the bush

This is the last distinction made by Richards and illustrates how the music and dance in Hindi cinema often gives characters the opportunity to run behind the bushes quickly. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 79) elaborate on this explaining that, "this [erotic display of the female body in popular cinema] is permissible because the song and dance sequences are conventionally coded as contracted voyeurism".

These strategies identified by Richards (1995) make a significant contribution towards understanding the ways in which female sexuality are portrayed in popular Hindi cinema. However, it is limiting to assume that it is *only* these strategies that are used to display the female form and female sexuality. It is also limiting to not distinguish between the *types* of women who exhibit this sexuality on screen. Traditionally (in earlier popular Hindi cinema), it was the vamps and the courtesans who blatantly displayed their sexuality through their tribal dress, clinging outfits and wet dance scenes. However, the lead female/s in popular Hindi films (the ideal mother, the ideal wife) would appear to be asexual, neither acknowledging, nor displaying their sexuality on screen. Thus, it would not be incorrect to establish that female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema is demarcated into two standard stereotypes: the vamp/courtesan (beautiful, but dangerous, whiskey-drinking, cigar-smoking: the proverbial 'loose woman') and the ideal wife/mother (shy, innocent and pure). This is not to say that Hindi cinema today does not credit the female lead with other instances and other roles with which to display her sexuality on screen. The two roles mentioned above, though, are the ones that dominate.

In the next section, I examine the representation of femininity and female sexuality in *Jism*.

3.3 *Jism*

As explained in **Chapter two**, there are two main female characters in *Jism*, namely Sonia and Priyanka.

Sonia's character in *Jism* is a conflicting representation of femininity and female sexuality. This relates to the director's (Bhatt) battle to bring to popular Indian cinema 'contemporary' representations of femininity and female sexuality, while simultaneously attempting to distance Sonia from India's mythological (traditional) representations of femininity and female sexuality. Sonia's representation of femininity and female sexuality in *Jism* captures what Rajan (1993: 130) describes as:

In the contemporary discourse of women in India a significant mode of interpellation and projection can be perceived in the construction of a 'new' 'Indian' woman. She is 'new' in the sense both of having evolved and arrived in response to the times, as well as of being intrinsically 'modern' and 'liberated'.

As a married woman, Sonia is expected to assume the role of a devoted wife, and her affair with Kabir immediately distances her from this role. Even her attire as a married woman goes against the norm: she does not dress as a married woman is expected to. She never wears a sari or *salwar kameez* in the film. Rather, she drapes herself in fitted, revealing clothes. In addition to this, Sonia does not apply the traditional red *tikka* on her forehead, which marks her married status, nor does she apply the vermilion to her forehead.

As discussed in **Chapter one** that femininity is a learned behaviour and is performed on screen. However, Sonia's representation of femininity does not initially follow the usual pattern (as per popular Hindi films). She is not represented as a dutiful and faithful wife, nor is she granted the status of motherhood in the film. On the contrary, Sonia's femininity is highlighted by her physical appearance. She is very attractive, with a tall and slim figure. Her

voice is low-pitched and husky, rarely rising higher than an octave. Priyanka, however, is represented as the opposite of Sonia. Where Sonia's femininity is highlighted by her clothing (she is always immaculately turned out) and mannerisms (she walks with a sway of her hips), Priyanka's femininity is drastically downplayed. Priyanka wears ill-fitting clothes, mainly pantsuits and is never shown in a dress or traditional Indian wear (sari or *salwar kameez*). Priyanka's voice is loud and has a baritone quality, which is also in direct contrast to Sonia's voice.

This dichotomy serves to highlight the difference in their characters, but in an unconventional way. In this instance, the one who appears outwardly negative (Priyanka as the raving drunkard) emerges in a positive light at the end of the film. Sonia, on the other hand, who has an outwardly positive image (dutiful and caring wife), emerges in a very negative light at the end of the film.

Sonia's victimhood status is essential to the development of the narrative and to the representation of her femininity. I say this because it is due to the representation of her as a 'victim' that she is able to ensnare and manipulate Kabir. Sonia is initially portrayed as a victim in the sense that she is trapped in a loveless marriage, which she cannot escape for fear of her husband murdering her. Sonia uses her victim status as the fearful wife to great advantage in trapping Kabir. Although Bhatt uses the notion of victimhood as an essential feminine attribute, she does attempt a departure from more traditional representations in that Sonia's victim status is only a masquerade. Sonia pretends to be a victim. In a marked departure from popular Hindi films, it is the male characters that emerge as the victims in *Jism*. Both Kabir and Rohit fall victim to Sonia's deception.

In relation to female sexuality, Sonia's sexuality is represented through her confident body image (in the way she dresses) and her self-assured personality (she is comfortable playing the role of a *femme fatale* and masquerading as the victim). It is interesting to note that although Sonia

wears tightly fitted dresses with bold cuts, the colour she mainly wears is white (**Figure 1**, below). White signifies purity and innocence, which is in direct contrast to Sonia's actions. As explained above, the tribal dress (sari) has today been exchanged for fitted, skimpy dresses. Accordingly, in analysing the use of costumes in film, it becomes evident that the character of the female manifests itself in her wardrobe. By this, I mean that tight-fitting, skimpy clothing is synonymous with a 'loose woman' and traditional Indian clothing (such as the sari) is synonymous with a pure and innocent woman.



Figure 1: Sonia is mostly seen dressed in white, fitted dresses when she is with Kabir. Source: www.indiafm.com/jism

When Sonia is with Kabir, she mostly dresses in white. In the few scenes she appears with her husband Rohit, Sonia is dressed in bold colours. For example, when Rohit and Sonia go out to dinner, she is dressed in a deep-red fitted gown. This could mean that she almost atones for her adultery by wearing white when she is with Kabir, with the aim of presenting the image of a chaste person.

In *Jism* there are no 'behind the bush' scenes. Sonia and Kabir are almost 'exhibitionist-like' in their display of sex and sexuality. They openly kiss and caress each other. In one scene, Kabir is driving along the road with Sonia in the passenger seat. Suddenly Sonia gets up from her seat and slides over onto Kabir's lap while he is driving. Considering that he is driving an open-top vehicle, their blatant display of sexuality is not censored for any passers-by. Sonia kisses Kabir openly on his lips and caresses his body while he is driving. The most sexually explicit scene in the film is between Sonia and Kabir. Kabir blindfolds Sonia and strokes an ice-cube down her partially exposed body.

Sonia's body movements and gestures ooze sexuality. The practiced way in which she walks (swaying her hips in a flirtatious manner) invites the attention of those around her. People are drawn to her graceful movements.

The dream sequence occurs at the outset of the film, just after Kabir sees the glamorous Sonia emerge from the sea. Thinking she is a vision, Kabir's mind conjures up erotic scenes between him and Sonia. The wet sari scene in *Jism* is replaced with the wet costume, which clearly outlines Sonia's body. The camera focuses intently on her every movement, following her caressingly as she frolics in the sea.

Priyanka appears in only a few scenes, and her femininity is obscured by her alcoholism. Traditionally, Hindu society frowns upon women who drink (they are not considered feminine beings). In this sense, Priyanka too stretches the definition of femininity. She does not fit into the mould of traditional femininity – she is not represented as an ideal wife, a good daughter, or a devoted mother.

Sonia is unashamedly a sexual being and is not afraid of representing this image. At the climax of the film, however, Sonia's femininity reverts to a traditional representation. By professing her sudden love for Kabir, she

disempowers herself by placing him in a position of power in their relationship. Thus far, she has been the one controlling the relationship and defining her femininity and sexuality. It can be argued that although Bhatt attempts to represent femininity and female sexuality in a different manner, she reverts to a more traditional mode at the climax of the film. It is difficult to determine why Bhatt reverts to cinematic convention in her representation of femininity and female sexuality, but perhaps she does so to satisfy the audiences of India who have become accustomed to seeing the elimination of the *femme fatale* (in *Jism* Kabir shoots Sonia).

When relating femininity and female sexuality to Butler's concept of performativity, it is evident that Sonia, at first, *chooses* to play the role of the victim in that traditional representations make it easy for her, as a woman, to fit the mould of a victim. In her performance as a victim (which serves to intensify her femininity), Sonia falls into the category of archetypical female representations in popular Hindi cinema. By this, I mean the conventions of popular Hindi cinema make it possible for Sonia to perform her role as the victim (and more importantly, to initially get the male characters to believe in her victim status) without much development to her character. In other words, the genre of popular Hindi cinema is accustomed to a representation of victimhood as a feminine attribute and, as a result, Sonia needs to do very little to establish her victim status. Sonia's carefully enacted femininity is clearly well-rehearsed and planned.

3.4 K3G

Nandini's femininity is formed and informed by her characterisation as the ideal wife and devoted mother. The same can be said for Daijaan. Their naturalised roles as mother and wife encapsulate the idea of an Indian femininity, which foregrounds wifehood and motherhood. Nandini and Daijaan perform the expected gender role of a mother and a wife. In relation to Butler's concept of performativity, their performance is based on a learned

pattern of behaviour, in all likelihood passed on from mother to daughter. In the case of Nandini, there is a slight departure from the traditional femininity when she begins to defy her husband Yash. Her quiet defiance helps reposition her femininity as she becomes more bold and courageous.

Nandini also exhibits a victim status in *K3G* in that her victimhood is defined by her marriage to Yash. In other words, Nandini's victim status exists because her marriage to Yash is based on the notion that a wife's duty is to obey and follow her husband's wishes. They share a happy married life, insofar that Nandini obeys and agrees with the decisions her husband makes. Their happy marriage is disrupted when Nandini begins to show her displeasure at Yash's treatment of her son, Rahul. The tension in the marriage and Nandini's eventual confrontation with Yash is testament to this.

Nandini and Yash share a close relationship and there are several intimate moments showing them hugging and smiling at each other with loving expressions (**Figure 2**, below). Sexuality, in this case, is represented within the realm of marriage and is automatically given a stamp of approval. Their intimate looks and embraces are by no means explicitly sexual, but more an expression of their mutual love and respect. Nandini's character as a strong mother figure does not call for, nor allow, openly sexual scenes.



Figure 2: Nandini and Yash share an intimate moment

Source: www.planetbollywood.com/Film/KabhiKhushiKabhieGham

Anjali's femininity is expressed in two ways. In the first instance, her femininity is portrayed through her role as the devoted daughter. Caring and nurturing for her family is something that is naturally expected of her. Anjali shows no ambition with regard to working or studying. She is represented as being content, ensconced in and devoted to family life. Anjali competently fulfils the role of the caring daughter. But, Rahul's entry into Anjali's life threatens the initial representation of her femininity, as her femininity is now (secondly) represented by their blossoming love. In her role as wife, Anjali's femininity is now defined and constrained by Rahul and their marriage. He 'gives' her the status of wifedom and, subsequently, motherhood. He limits her femininity by *only* seeing her as a wife and mother to his son. Rahul assumes the position of the 'head of the household' and makes it very clear that as the 'man' of the household, his decisions are final. What emerges in this instance is clearly a patterned behaviour. Yash presides over his household as the ultimate voice of authority, and Rahul adopts a similar attitude.

Anjali's clothes are that of a typical wife – she wears saris and is never shown in western attire in the film. Like Nandini, Anjali also makes her married status (and her femininity) visible by applying the *tikka* and vermilion. As explained earlier, Sonia (in *Jism*) does not attempt to adorn herself with these symbols of marriage.

Pendakur (2003) identifies the rain sequence as a strategy for representing female sexuality on screen. Pendakur (2003: 161) claims, "Rain gives the filmmakers the opportunity to explore female sexuality in a way that is allowed by the censors. Such scenes, however, are a cliché, a common ingredient of the masala film". *K3G* is a typical 'masala' movie and uses the rain sequence to best advantage. Rahul and Anjali, during a song sequence, express their love for each other by dancing and playing in the rain. Pendakur (2003: 161) maintains that in 'masala' films, "rain just pours out to get the stars wet so that we can take a peek at their bodies". In *K3G*, this is exactly the case. The skies suddenly open on a perfectly sunny day and the ensuing downpour serves

only to emphasise Anjali and Rahul's bodies. Anjali's body is more clearly outlined as she is dressed in a white, almost transparent *salwar kameez*. Rahul, on the other hand, wears a three-piece suit

As a married woman, Anjali comes across as being more confident of her sexuality. In one scene, as she helps Rahul get ready for work, she cosies up to him and attempts to kiss him on the lips. Surprisingly, it is Rahul who stops her, reminding her that their young son is around, to which Anjali replies, "I should be telling you that!" This clearly indicates that it is uncommon for the woman to be the initiator of sexual intimacy, and that it is usually the man who approaches the woman. However, Anjali's attempt to kiss her husband is not frowned upon, as she is a married woman.

Last, Pooja's character is a union of traditional femininity with a 'newfound' sexuality. By this, I mean that Pooja is outgoing and openly expresses her pleasure in dressing sexily and capturing the attention of young men. Unlike Sonia, who is viewed in a negative light for doing so, Pooja is admired for her sassy attitude. Pooja is the only female in *K3G* who dresses in such a revealing manner. Her fondness for mini-skirts and tank tops is clearly evident in the film. Her preoccupation with make-up, clothes and keeping fit positions her in a frivolous light. In this sense, her femininity is marked in the traditional manner because she is a young woman, and it is expected of her to be interested in matters such as make-up and designer clothes. Pooja represents a newfound sexuality, which is evident in her frank pursuit of Rohan. This is unusual in popular Hindi cinema, as it usually the domain of the male character to be pursuing the female character.

Pooja is the only female in *K3G* who actively pursues her man and is not afraid to be touched by him, despite her single status (see **Figure 3**, next page). This is in stark contrast to Anjali, who was mortified whenever Rahul touched her before their marriage. Pooja, in contrast, is the youngest female in the film and she represents a new type of sexuality.



Figure 3: Rohan and Pooja during an intimate moment

Source: www.planetbollywood.com/Film/KabhiKhushiKabhieGham

Pooja is a 'modern' girl who is not afraid to pursue the person she loves. Her femininity is actually foregrounded by her essentially 'dumb-blonde' persona. She is initially portrayed as a dim-witted young girl whose only mission in life is to look good, attend gym classes and eat fat-free food. Perhaps Johar could have lent more substance to Pooja's character by mentioning what she studies at college.

Despite the fact that Pooja flaunts her body, she resists the charms of the young men at college and patiently awaits the arrival of 'the one'. She is not shown dating young men, despite her flirtatious persona in the film. Dating is something that hardly ever occurs in popular Hindi cinema, and it brings into sharp relief issues surrounding morality and the behaviour deemed 'proper' for a young woman.

It is interesting to note that Pooja's character undergoes a change after she meets Rohan. First, it can be argued that Pooja changes her style of dress as she is now 'performing' the anticipated role of the dutiful wife. She envisages marriage to Rohan, and her performance as a traditionally clad, young woman confirms her commitment to Rohan. This performance is a learned behaviour.

She has watched her sister exchange her *salwar khammeez* for the sari after marriage and, so, Pooja exchanges her mini for traditional Indian wear.

In relating femininity and female sexuality to Butler's concept of performativity, it is evident that the gender roles represented by Nandini, Daijaan and Anjali, in particular, are the 'expected' roles. These women perform what is expected of their gender, for example, the archetypal female representation of the 'Indian wife' is that of obedience, devotion and sacrifice, and both Nandini and Anjali represent this essentialised notion of wifehood. In this way, the act that Nandini and Anjali perform on screen is a well-rehearsed one, which has been carefully constructed by Johar to fit the mould of traditional representations of femininity and female sexuality.

In the next section, I briefly look at the representational strategies as identified by Stuart Hall, and outlined in **Chapter one** of this dissertation.

3.5 Representational strategies

Stuart Hall (2000: 245) argues:

Naturalisation is a representational strategy designed to *fix* 'difference', and thus *secure it forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological 'closure'.

When taking this definition into consideration, it becomes apparent how representations of femininity and female sexuality are naturalised in popular Hindi cinema today. In other words, by rendering the dominant portrayals of femininity and female sexuality as 'natural', we are not contesting these representations and, thus, not criticising them either.

Hall also identifies another representational strategy, that of stereotypes. I refer to Dyer (1973) who examines the role of stereotypes in relation to sexuality/gender/biology and nature. He states (1974: 24):

Ideas about human sexuality have been insistently organised in terms of what is given by nature... the biological mandate... A major aspect of this biological view of sexuality has been the attempt to determine and differentiate male and female sexualities, so that not only are sex and gender conflated (biological sex being deemed to produce psychological gender dispositions), but so are sex and sexuality, there being a sexuality appropriate to the two biologically distinct sexes.

Again, we see the concept of naturalisation emerging, and – more importantly – the biological mandate, which restricts the questioning of representations because that which is biological, is assumed to be natural and is in turn thought to be uncontested and unchallenged. Hall (2000: 253) echoes Dyer on this point, “stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes ‘difference’”. The difference that is being fixed, naturalised and essentialised here is that of the representations of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema. By fixing and establishing boundaries, stereotyping effectively “excludes everything which does not belong” (Hall 2000: 253). Stereotypes of women in popular Hindi cinema work in such a way that these stereotypes are hardly ever contested or challenged. They are regarded as ‘the natural’ and ‘the normal’. Naturalisation and stereotyping work together in establishing an understanding of why and how society and, specifically, women themselves, do not challenge or contest such representations.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has identified and analysed the way/s in which female sexuality and femininity are portrayed in popular Hindi cinema. Johar’s representation of femininity and female sexuality predominantly typifies the traditional view. While there are departures in terms of dress and the emergence of a bolder, more cosmopolitan young Indian woman, Johar’s representations remain largely unchanged.

Bhatt, however, attempts to redefine female sexuality and femininity through the character of Sonia. *Jism* is not a typical ‘masala’ film. Bhatt has in fact attempted to offer a new approach to representing femininity and female

sexuality in *Jism*, by avoiding the conventions of a typical 'masala' film in its treatment of femininity and female sexuality. Bhatt does this successfully right up until the climax of the film. In typical masala films (as is *K3G*), the vamps are punished in the end, usually by death, which destroys any power that may have been attributed to female sexuality in the narrative realm. This is what Bhatt reverts to in the climax of the film.

In the next chapter, I briefly investigate the mythological status of women in popular Hindi cinema.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Introduction

As is the case with the evolution of most artistic disciplines in India, Hindu mythology provided the impetus for Indian cinema. For example, Phalke drew on the visual record of mythology for his images, including: illustrated texts of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*; temple sculpture; engravings on walls and common structures; the emerging poster art of the time and, of course, theatrical productions from the period (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, 1994). Moreover, the characters, incidents and plot outlines were very much part of Indian mythology. As such, their representation through the new medium of cinema did not pose much of a problem to communication and public acceptance (Nair, 2004: 2). It would not be incorrect to assert that Indian mythology shares a deep connection with popular Hindi films. Early Indian cinema, such as the work by Phalke ('20s), drew heavily from Indian mythology when establishing storylines and developing characters on screen. This study investigates the existing link between Indian mythology and Indian cinema in relation to the development of female characters and, subsequently, femininity and female sexuality.

As stated earlier, mythological associations in popular Hindi cinema have early origins. Early directors' preferences for mythological subjects and associations can largely be attributed to the audience's instant recognition and familiarity with myths and legends. Mythological films accounted for all but one of the 25 feature films made by Indian producers prior to 1920 (Rangoonwalla, 1983: 35). In the next decade, however, cinematic content changed rapidly. With the pressure of a growing film industry, filmmakers were forced into a variety of nascent genres. In the dominant Hindi language cinema, though, the mythological "had virtually disappeared by the 1950s," (Kabir, 2001: 114). Nevertheless, the continued use of mythological

associations in contemporary films ensures that the subject matter is kept alive. Regrettably, there has not been much academic work done on the mythological genre itself.

Lutgendorf (2002), however, has written extensively on the genre and in his 2002 paper, revisits the presence of mythological associations in the film *Jai Santoshi Maa*³⁴ (Vijay Sharma, 1975).

The Indian myths are so great that they are capable of countless interpretations. In India, mythology often borders on history; hence the renewed material today can find and take inspiration from the mythological tales. Chatterji (1998: 29) asserts:

Filmmakers over the years, have allowed their imaginations a free rein, underscored with constraints of commercial viability of the final product, as they have used, misused and abused the stereotypical images of women in Hindu mythology modernised and contemporised for mass consumption.

Popular Hindi cinema often tries to establish the autonomy of the Indian woman through its narrative, but the representations often diverge. For example, the model of the goddess in Indian myth – in her various manifestations – remains subtly present in many popular Hindi films today. Filmmakers have, of course, recognised the need to evolve these manifestations into a more contemporary idiom.

4.2 Mythical goddesses

Chatterji (1998: 29-30) identifies the mythical goddess as having the following characteristics:

- (a) she is an exalted image of female chastity
- (b) she suffers humiliation so that a new order is brought about through chaos
- (c) her 'sons' must fight for her and thus, those who fight for her must have 'son'-like qualities

³⁴ *Jai Santoshi Maa* (Hail to the Mother of Satisfaction), a low-budget film featuring an unknown cast and cheap sets, was a runaway hit at the box office. The film, dedicated to a little-known Hindu goddess (Santoshi Maa), had a cult following and elevated the goddess to an iconic level.

(d) the fight for justice is also a fight for her honour.

Indian filmmakers constantly weave dreamlike stories around different archetypes of mythological goddesses, and try to present them cinematographically in a way that is sometimes distorted. The goddesses predominantly projected onto Hindi cinema are:

(a) The mother goddess

A mother goddess is a goddess who is portrayed as the Earth Mother and serves as a general fertility deity; the bountiful embodiment of the earth. In the Hindu context, the worship of the 'Mother' entity can certainly be traced back to early Vedic culture, and perhaps even before. Various Hindu female entities, for example Kali, are seen as forming many faces of the same female divinity.³⁵

(b) Draupadi

Draupadi was a heroic princess of the Hindu epic of *Mahabharata*. She was a firm woman with an unbending will. Draupadi has remained an enigmatic woman of substance. She was a devotee of Shri Krishna, and was faithful to her five husbands as well. She had an unshakable faith in Shri Krishna and regarded him as a protector, well-wisher and intimate friend. When the fiend Dushasana tried to undress her in the Kauravas court and nobody present raised a voice against it, Draupadi cried and called out to Lord Krishna to save her grace.³⁶

(c) Radha

Radha is the supreme goddess. She is almost always seen with Lord Krishna. The Radha-Krishna pair is always recognised as the symbol of love.

³⁵ Adapted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Goddess

³⁶ Adapted from: <http://www.dollsofindia.com/draupadi.htm>

(d) Sita

The story of Sita is told in the Ramayana, (and is) one of the most popular stories in the Hindu tradition. Sita and Ram are the model wife and husband in the Hindu tradition. Sita symbolises an ideal daughter, wife, mother and queen. Whereas Ram symbolises standards of perfection that can be conceived in all the facets of a man's life, Mother Sita represents all that is great and noble in womanhood. She is revered as an incarnation of goddess Lakshmi, the divine consort of Lord Vishnu.

(e) Lakshmi

Goddess Lakshmi is the consort or wife of Lord Vishnu and is the goddess of prosperity, purity, chastity and generosity.

4.3 The link between mythical goddesses and Hindi cinema

Chatterji (1998: 36) foregrounds:

The male icon can transform itself [...] according to socio-political changes in the country from time to time. But the female in cinema is not spared. She must remain trapped within the image of a Sita, a pure idol even when she is portraying a modern lawyer or frolicking as a glamour girl.

The *Sita* element is evident in *K3G*. In the same manner in which Sita and Ram were banished from their kingdom for 14 years, Anjali and Rahul too were 'banished' from their home. Like Sita, Anjali (and Nandini) is a devoted and loyal wife. When Yash accuses Nandini of deceiving him,³⁷ he is like Ram, who wrongly doubts the innocent Sita. Pendakur (2003: 149) explains:

Mahatma Gandhi used the myth of Sita in the context of the national movement to symbolise its moral force. [...] It also contributed to the reconstruction of the role of women in the national movement, in a modern context. Popular cinema appropriated this nation list motif and used it as a cinematic formula in different ways at different times – the motif itself undergoing a formal metamorphosis while being realised in different images.

³⁷ Yash accuses Nandini of being a part of Rohan's plan to reunite the family. He believes that she sent Rohan to London to meet with Rahul and Anjali.

In Raj Kumar Santoshi's *Lajja* (2001), direct reference is made to Sita by the character Janki, who is a theatre actress. Janki is pregnant with her actor boyfriend's child. Her boss lusts after her, and Janki is made to pay the penalty for his sexual attraction by being questioned about her fidelity by her boyfriend. She challenges his attitude, and in a performance of the Ramayana, where she plays Sita, she challenges the validity of the *agni-pariskha* (trial by fire: reflective of the test endured by Sita to prove her innocence and purity).

Chatterji elaborates (1998: 42) on this:

Sita is an eternal favourite because of her sheer power to endure the meanest form of humiliation at the hands of her own husband. She is representative of all that is desirable in a woman. It suits the Indian mass audience fine since it coincides and reinforces its timeless conditioning into the dominant patriarchal ideology which deifies the woman who sacrifices everything for the sake of, or, at the command of her husband.

The playfulness of Krishna and Radha is embodied in Pooja and Rohan's relationship. Radha and Krishna share a deep friendship and were childhood friends. Likewise, Pooja and Rohan are childhood friends who are easily able to re-ignite their friendship years later. Pooja and Rohan's love for each other is a symbol of the Radha-Krishna love story.

Nandini embodies the mother goddess. She is the symbol of divinity for Rahul and Anjali, who pray before her framed picture every morning. Rahul and Anjali grant Nandini and Yash godlike status in their homes. In one song sequence, Rahul even goes so far as to sing:

Rahul: *In kadmon mein saansein waar de
Rab se zyaada tujhe pyaar de
Rab mainu maaf kare
Rabba khairiya, haai mainu maaf kare*

Rahul says that he wishes he would die at his parents' feet and asks for forgiveness from God, because – to him – his parents come before God.

In *Jism*, Sonia's character can be seen as that of Draupadi, in the form of Kali. Kali is considered as a 'forceful' form, associated with warfare. Kali is also well-known as the consort of Hindu deity, Shiva. In this light, a comparison can be drawn between Kali and Sonia: like Goddess Kali, Sonia too exhibits a ferocious personality.

As explained in the **Introduction**, mythical representations are open to many interpretations and when projected onto film, these representations can be dangerous as they tend to place women in a difficult position by creating unhealthy misconceptions (Dwyer, 2000).

Apart from drawing on mythological characters, Hindi cinema also draws from mythological texts in the representations and stereotypes of Indian women on screen. For example, Pendakur maintains (2003: 147):

According to a well-used Sanskrit verse, a woman plays several important roles in a man's life. The verse lays out the ideological terrain in which a woman's position in a Hindu family is defined. First and foremost, a woman should be like a slave when it comes to work. She should behave like a minister (or diplomat) in the affairs of the family. She is as forgiving as the mother earth itself. In feeding the family, she is like a mother. In courage, she is Lakshmi, the goddess who is married to Vishnu. Finally, in the matter of sex, this ideal woman should behave like Rambha, the celestial prostitute.

What is interesting to note here, is that except for the subjects of courage (which may or may not refer to the outside world) and sex, all the other (themes) set up a moral high ground that determines a woman's behaviour within the household. In *K3G*, Nandini and Anjali do not exist outside the realm of the household. To them, the public sphere does not exist at all.

Pendakur (2003: 148) proceeds to quote from the *Manusmriti*:

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.

Nandini's Character in *K3G* partially embodies the abovementioned distasteful description. As a child, Nandini was under the control of her father, who arranged her marriage to Yash. During her married life, she is under the control of her husband, who separates her from her beloved son. Nandini has not known a hard day's labour in her life. She moved from her wealthy family home, to her wealthy husband's home. It would be fair to assume she is dependent on her husband, both emotionally and financially.

In this sense, Sonia's character in *Jism* can be admired. She is certainly not dependent on any person for her happiness. Although her method of securing independence is wrong, her quest for independence is to be admired.

Nair (in Kabir 2001: 117) explains that it is not only mythological characters themselves that have influenced Hindi film heroes in subsequent years, but also the relationships they have with one another. For example, the conflict between families that cause a rift between them, "harks back to the fight between the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the *Mahabarat*"²⁸ (Nair in Kabir, 2001: 117). This is evidenced in *K3G*, when the Raichand family's life is marred due to a dispute. Although the family war is not one that manifests physically, a great deal of emotional scarring results from the dispute. The theme of the 'family rift' is not an isolated occurrence in popular Indian cinema, but emerges time and time again as a popular storyline, which has great mass appeal [see, for example, *Hum Saath Saath Hai*, 1999 (We Stand United) and *Bhagban*, 2003 (Gardener)].

In turning to the treatment of widows in India, Pendakur (2003: 149) asserts:

The ultimate manifestation of a woman being treated as chattel is how a widow is treated. She has to shun all contact with men and is supposed to get rid of all the characteristics that would make her sexually active (such as hair, make-up, and colourful clothes).

Deepa Mehta's newly released *Water* (December 2005) deals with the issue of widowhood. Set in 1938 Colonial India, against Mahatma Gandhi's rise to

²⁸ The *Mahabarat* is one of India's ancient epics telling of the great war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It also serves as a repository for many spiritual and moral teachings.

power, the story begins when eight-year-old Chuyia is widowed and sent to a home where Hindu widows must live in penitence. Chuyia's feisty presence affects the lives of the other residents, including a young widow, who falls for a Gandhian idealist.³⁸

4.4 Conclusion

The misuse and abuse of mythological women in and by popular Indian cinema could easily perpetuate negative stereotypes about women. The danger lies not only in the message being perpetuated, but also in the delivery of the message. Cinema is a powerful medium, with a strong visual appeal. Such images on the screen could very well cause more damage than the written text.

Myth in Hindi cinema has not been fully utilised to dispel some of the abstract and idealistic images of women. In fact, myth has performed just the opposite in Hindi cinema. It has been used to create the foundations of cinema's female characters. In doing so, Hindi cinema has served to reinforce mythical stereotypes in a contemporary setting.

³⁸ Available at: <http://www.apple.com/trailers/independent/water/>

CONCLUSION

Film is regarded, primarily, as a form of entertainment. It functions on a commercial level, thereby exposing it to the complicated processes of production, finances and investors, which stipulate that it cater to a mass audience. Audiences derive pleasure, enjoyment and entertainment from films. They see all kinds of films, as determined by their individual tastes. The films themselves cater to the concept of entertainment. In *Jism*, the sexuality of Sonia and the chemistry between Sonia and Kabir is used as the unique selling point. In *K3G*, the strong star cast, lavish sets, beautiful music and elaborate costumes further entice the audience.

Each filmmaker brings their own ideology and belief system to the set. There is no doubt that this contributes to the overall treatment of the film. Pooja Bhatt, as a female director, represents a somewhat different view of femininity and female sexuality. Bhatt seems more concerned with the existence of women in patriarchal society. She tries to understand the status of women, as it exists in a patriarchal society. Bhatt also projects her female character's survival instincts and manipulations for power and money.

Karan Johar, a male director, lends his own personal experiences and beliefs to the creation of his female characters, and, subsequently, femininity and female sexuality. He glorifies motherhood and wifehood through his elaborate costumes, intense dialogues and his overall respect for the feminine aesthetic.

When I had embarked on this study, I had assumed that the representations of femininity and female sexuality in popular Hindi cinema today would be drastically different from earlier representations. What this dissertation (in relation to the chosen texts) has demonstrated, however, is that although the

representation of femininity and female sexuality has been revisited, as a whole, earlier representations not only prevail, but still dominate.

In relation to the films I have analysed, I have noticed that – to an extent – female sexuality is controlled in popular Hindi cinema by reinforcing stereotypes and essentialising the role of women as being the ‘natural’ order of things. With regard to ‘control’, the research has uncovered that this stems from a fear and ignorance of the female form as a desirable and desiring sexual being.

The study has also highlighted, by drawing from the two films under analysis, (and other popular Hindi films, cf. **Chapter three**) the notion of victimhood as an essential and eternal feminine quality. The study has revealed that both filmmakers’ (Bhatt and Johar) represent the notion of victimhood as an essential feminine quality. What is interesting to note here, though, is that Bhatt digresses from a truly ‘orthodox’ representation of victimhood in that her female character (Sonia) is found to be masquerading her victimhood status. This is significant to the study as it shows that while Bhatt reverts to a more traditional representation of femininity and female sexuality at the climax of *Jism*, she does attempt to show an alternate view.

In view of that, it has also been noted that while Indian actresses are given different roles today than they would have been given earlier, the ways in which these roles are depicted on screen, ultimately conform to traditional representations. In other words, popular Hindi cinema reaffirms and reinforces social definitions of women. This emphasises the fact that women are constantly defined in relation to men, either being seen as different from, or complementary to them. Men, masculinity and male behaviour are always the reference points for women.

I have also exposed the notion of a dominant patriarchal ideology that is prevalent in popular Hindi cinema. This ideology works rather negatively in that it conforms to 'stereotypical' and discriminatory notions when representing women.

Women are also defined in familial terms as carers and nurturers. We see this clearly in Johar's *Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham*. Furthermore, a woman's identity and status is derived from her relation to the explicitly gendered categories of mothers, daughters and wives. Thus, a woman is defined not only in relation to a man, but also as being dependent on, and subordinate to him. Bhatt's *Jism*, however, has attempted to readdress this. Bhatt places great faith in her protagonist's delivery of a compelling performance. This is partially evidenced in *Jism* as Sonia is initially represented as an independent and strong-willed female.

Both directors have represented their women in either a male-dominated society, or against the backdrop of the patriarchal structure. Johar, in *K3G*, had to first portray the egotistical and chauvinist man (Yash), so that male viewers could identify with him. In this way, Johar highlights how popular Indian cinema continues to prioritise the male viewer over the female viewer. I say this because throughout this study, it has emerged that identification for the male viewer (in relation to the characters on screen) takes precedence over identification for the female viewer. Take for example, *K3G*. Johar gradually had to show the change in Yash as he evolves from being a dominating and controlling force, to a husband who eventually learns to appreciate and accept the opinions and wishes of his wife (Nandini).

When discussing femininity and female sexuality the project has briefly focused on Judith Butler's concept of performativity and the way in female characters enact expected roles (a rehearsed gender) on screen. The study has revealed that some of the female characters in the two films under analysis do represent a rehearsed and expected gender on screen. For

example, in *K3G*, Nandini and Anjali represent traditional and expected 'wifely duty'. The male characters as well are not removed from performing a rehearsed gender on screen. Rahul and Yash embody traits of the patriarchal husband, who is sole master of his home and family. In *Jism*, Bhatt has provided a departure from the notion of performing a rehearsed gender (in relation to Sonia), but she has reverted to a traditional and expected representation at the close of her film. Thus, it would not be incorrect to state that popular Hindi cinema (as displayed in the two films under analysis) today tends to perform an expected, rehearsed and 'traditional' gender on screen.

The project also foregrounds the impact Hindu mythology has had, and continues to have on popular Indian cinema. The dissertation highlights how cinema in India has evolved as a parallel culture in that although the 'concept' of cinema came from the West, Indian cinema derived strength from a whole range of Indian myths, legends, folk and theatrical forms. Specifically, the project draws attention to the danger of using the mythology to perpetuate negative stereotypes about women.

Finally, this dissertation demonstrates the need for further research into popular Hindi cinema, which would require a more detailed and diverse corpus. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, only two films were analysed, but it would be extremely useful to research a wider range of films.

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Producer: Ravi Chopra

Director: Satish Bhatnagar

Release date: 2003

Clueless

Producer: Paramount Pictures

Director: Amy Heckerling

Release date: 1995

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (The Brave Heart Will Take the Bride)

Producer: Yash Chopra

Director: Aditya Chopra

Release date: 1995

Duplicate

Producer: Yash Johar

Director: Mahesh Bhatt

Release date: 1998

Hum Saath Saath Hai (United We Stand)

Producer: Sooraj R. Barjatya

Director: Sooraj R. Barjatya

Release date: 1999

Jism (The Body)

Producers: Pooja Bhatt and Sujit Kumar

Director: Amit Saxena

Release date: January 17, 2003

Kabhi Kushi Kabhi Gham (Sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness)

Producer: Dharma Productions

Director: Karan Johar

Release date: November, 2001

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (Something is happening)

Producer: Dharma Productions

Director: Karan Johar

Release date: November 1998

Lajja (Shame)

Producer: Eros International

Director: Rajkumar Santoshi

Release date: February 2001

Murder

Producer: Mukesh Bhatt

Director: Anurag Basu

Release date: 2004

Paap (The Sin)

Producer: Mahesh Bhatt

Director: Pooja Bhatt

Release date: October 2003

Shakti (The Power)

Producer: Sridevi Kapoor

Director: Krishna Vamsi

Release date: September 20, 2002

Veer Zaara

Producer: Yash Raj Films

Director: Yash Chopra

Released: 2004

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