THE DANCING BODY: A STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY IN BOLLYWOOD ITEM NUMBERS

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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This is to certify that the dissertation titled **The Dancing Body: A Study of the Representation of Sexuality in Bollywood Item Numbers**, submitted by **Janet Lalawmpuii C.**, of the Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, under my supervision for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is the candidate's original work and has not been previously submitted in part or full, for any other degree of this or any other university.

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Declaration By The Candidate

This dissertation titled **The Dancing Body: A Study of the Representation of Sexuality in Bollywood Item Numbers** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any university or institution.

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Introduction

This dissertation represents my attempt to provide these basic aims: to situate the cultural representations of the category woman in Popular Hindi Cinema in the face of tradition and modernity, how this results in the denouement of the problem with the split of the image of woman along binary lines of mother and whore, and to look at the resultant models of limited gender categories in the domain of representation.

This work starts of from Efrat Tseelon's assumption: 'if categories of gender are the cultural correlates of sex, then gender display is the conventionalized portrayals of these correlates"' (1). This work proposes to look at 'item numbers', as they are popularly called in popular Hindi cinema, in light of this assumption. 'Item numbers', by description are sexually suggestive song-and-dance sequences with equally provocative lyrics, choreographed around the figure of a woman. Popular Hindi cinema or Bollywood as it is more commonly called has long been guilty of the proliferation of images centered on the erotic spectacle of woman for a long time.

How this came about, at least in the field of visual representation, can be traced back to the causes and effects of the twin notions of tradition and modernity on Popular Hindi cinema. However, for the purpose of this dissertation I propose to narrow my focus and look into those films wherein a lesser-known actress is roped in to play the 'item girl' for the duration of the song with no significant function in the larger narrative.

Bollywood is an interesting contradiction in terms: while it consciously mimics some western norms it also mimes traditional Indian culture as it is perceived. It consciously seeks a metropolis that is not America while giving in to American consumerism. In its avowal of nationalism and cultural tradition, it presents a significant challenge to American domination of international film and culture.

Bollywood films not only ape selected Hollywood tendencies in terms of production, writing and marketing, they also reproduce patterns of cultural domination, primarily marketing Hindi-language films to a diverse community whose languages include many regional ones it becomes difficult to reconcile this image of a monolithic entertainment industry with the notion of an indigenous culture that successfully demonstrates resistance in the face of hegemonic oppression. Therefore it is too simple to say that Bollywood represents an assertion of cultural independence in the face of an imperialist challenge.

Bollywood, like Hollywood, is guilty of replicating the hegemonic norms of the host culture. Rather than representing cultural independence in the face of an imperialist challenge Bollywood demonstrates that hegemony can operate at more than one level

Gokulsing writes about Sooraj Barjatya's Hum Aapke Hain Koun (1994), a story of marriage and family, and says that it "reinforces India's cultural heritage" through its depiction of various rituals, including engagement, marriage and the mehndi, the traditional tracing of decorative patterns on the bride's hands using henna (44). Sumita Chakravarty echoes this observation, commenting that "Hindi cinema has served to reinforce mythical stereotypes in modern clothing" (57).

At a time when boundaries separating local and global have become blurred Bollywood finds itself seeking an identity which will mark its distinctiveness. The lure of modernity, perceived to be embodied by the West, is a viable option but it must contend with a stubborn desire to hold on to 'tradition'. This results in an Indian public culture that constitutes its 'traditional' values under the aegis of modernity. Whatever outward styles it chooses to adopt is only a means to reinforce and reinscribe pre-capitalist feudal patriarchal enclaves (24).

As a result, Bollywood is seen grappling with those models of gender that would best showcase and endorse patriarchal views. In its portrayal of principal male and female characters there is a level of self- consciousness that does not permit it to represent them in ways that might share a direct correspondence with real phenomena. A heroine's sexuality is at best hinted or displayed in the realm of a character's dreams. This is not to say that there is no blatant sexual titillation. However, when sexuality is represented it can not be reconciled within one represented body of woman. A woman's sexuality has to be moored outside of the home, because it poses a threat to the unit of family as defined by the patriarchal norms.

The central idea that emerges at this point is that of representation: one of the main concerns of this dissertation is to look at and study representations in the popular cultural sphere meaning is generated by the media through its endorsements of models of a masculine and feminine ideal. Representation, in its widest sense, would mean that some kind of a process of modulation and interpretation is re-presented. It follows that some kind of a manipulation or transformation is unavoidable.

It is not representation per se that is at issue here but the models that are chosen to be represented that raises a cause for concern, especially if one group is privileged over the other. This brings in the notion of norm in which every other model is either subordinated to the one endorsed by the dominant ideology, or at worst left unacknowledged and repressed. Consequently, this breaks the direct correspondence between the phenomena of events, people and things in the world as it exists and their appearances in cultural text.

The main motive behind my choice of a popular cultural text like an 'item number', resides in a desire to expose the 'constructedness' and clearly delineate the artifice

behind such a kind of representation. The issue of gender attains significance in this case because it is ineluctably linked to notions of identity and desire, which are also the main components of representation. Says, Foucault: 'Tell me your desire and I will tell you who you are' (cited in Macey, 365).

To succeed in exposing the artifice, on which depend popular representations, would be half the battle won. This is not to suggest that there is a quintessential 'self', it is rather an attempt to broaden the field of possibilities by embracing multiplicities. Central to the issue of representation in Bollywood are the notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. The contention that Bollywood derives its characteristics through a simultaneous containment of western styles and disavowal of western values is interesting in this regard.

Theories of subjectivity based in and drawn from psychoanalytic discourse have provided a rich field for the exploration and investigation of the construction of identity and subjectivity. Laura Mulvey in her seminar article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" says 'in their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (837).

Item numbers are normally sexually blatant in choreography with sexually suggestive lyrics and they have their precedent in the sensuous cabarets of Helen. Drawing on Mulvey's theorization on the 'gaze' one cannot ignore the fact that in most visual representations concerning women there are two levels of gaze that the body of a woman suffers: one is that of audience within the frame and the other of the spectators outside the frame. In the case of the erotic spectacle central around the woman these two levels unify to project a gaze that is controlling and limits the potential for the erotic object to attain a subject position at any point.

Some arguments put forward suggest that not all gaze is homogenous nor of the kind that confirms to heterosexist norms: however, a look at the narrative of desire played out on the screen reveals the limited nature of such representations. One does not argue with the contention that desire or the gaze is homogenous. At the same time one cannot be oblivious to the limited models that are on display.

The models of femininity 'item numbers' foreground vis-à-vis the main narrative of the film belong to the other side of the binary split of mother and whore. Popular Hindi cinema has been displaying a consistent mode of female caricature much in keeping with the monolithic construct of womanhood supported by selective in corporation of certain deterministic ideals. This binary image of woman reinforces repressive ideological concerns. The normative gaze of the male audience or off screen spectators always curbs her subjectivity and sexuality into a mere objects, and recreates her as a combination of attributes to be controlled.

Annette Kuhn, in her analysis of the image of woman as an object of the dominant cultural discourse, writes:

> Representation sets in play certain relations of power through which, among other things, discourses around sexual differences and subjects in and for those discourses are produced. In this sense, representation may be regarded as a strategy of normalization. Representation participates in the various relations of power with which are surrounded and in which we are always in one way or another implicated. Representation can be understood, then, as a form of regulation (cited in Bonner, 199).

Elizabeth Cowie makes a semiological analysis of the image of woman and asserts:

"The image of woman refers not to the referent woman, existing in the real world outside of representation, but to a meaning produced by and for men. Patriarchy controls the image of woman, assigning it a function and value determined by and for men and in the service of the construction of definitions of the male and especially of masculine desire. Patriarchy and the interests of men becomes a unified field which is able to determine meanings outside of the process of signification" (19).

As we trace the beginnings of the erotic song and dance sequences from Helen's cabaret to present the item numbers, we witness the evolution of women's image which seems to have taken a reverse gear in that she has been successfully typecast and contained in linear models of seductress or goddess-like woman. Psychoanalytic approach reveals that the image of women is not wholly congruent with the reality of women's life and conduct outside of the screen. She merely functions as a sign within the parameter of myth to connote or signify an ideology. This myth transmits and transforms the dominant ideology to render it invisible and evaporates when the myth is visible and hence natural.

This brings to focus the subordinated nature of the woman when it comes to the representation of her body. The images of women, as proliferated by item numbers are choreographed and designed according to the norms dictated by patriarchal ideology. The represented cultural designation of a personal body is thus exaggerated and embodied in a flat unilinear model of the category woman. What is seen as an inherently feminine trait is revealed as posture in the exaggerated sexual imagery of item numbers.

The persistence of this image does not imply a deep and abiding identification with the image. It rather points to a dependence on acknowledgement form other the image of

woman that turns into a spectacle is internalized catalyzing a heightened sense of awareness of its derivative nature. Cultural texts exaggerate the nature of the text and builds at something natural. Hence when we look at item numbers we see an image of woman who is there to provoke and seduce but never to provide a correlate of experienced reality. This paradigm of cultural experience and perspective could, as an example, extend to the cultural designation of the categories 'masculine' and 'male'. By the same token it could encompass more cultural categories.

It fails to grasp the potential of cultural texts as a means of extending 'self'. In fine art practice, her role in patriarchal artistic discourse as a model, where she is the object of the male artist's gaze subjugates her. A reversal of her role to become the artist/subject might challenge the conventional frames of artistic production.

There is a high degree of inflexibility in accommodating broader interpretations gender and public participation for the category 'woman'. In item numbers understanding of roles is based within traditional formulations of heterosexual norms. The fixity of heterosexual norms with a predominance of an imbalance in power distribution maintains barriers which prevent an alternative of varied forms of expression. Here, the range of identities operate to inform the construction of contemporary notions of identity in ways that represent 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles as by patriarchy.

Keeping this in mind I have designed my chapters accordingly:
The first chapter "Porous Borders: The influence of Hollywood on Bollywood" deals, at length, with the representations of female sexuality starting from the days of Helen to contemporary 'item numbers'. It deals with the way it came about: item numbers or sensuous song and dance imagery is a symptom of Bollywood's failure to combine the twin elements of foreign styles and traditional values. In this chapter, I primarily focus

on the enthusiasm of the Indian market when the Lumiere Bros. first set foot on Indian soil.

Along with technological transfers there was a borrowing of styles perceived as peculiar to the west. However, this backfired because of a desire on the part of mainstream cinema to harp back on pre-capitalist patriarchal enclaves. The borrowing of robes belonging to Hollywood found mainstream Indian cinema grappling with the denouement of such a cultural interaction.

"Porous Borders" will also try to show how notions of modernity seemed to find their way into the body of woman. Premised on the tenets of pre-capitalist patriarchy this led to a split of woman into mother or goddess and whore.

In the second chapter, "Is the Item Girl a Woman?" I have tried to reconcile the category of woman as represented in item numbers and other such blatantly sexual precedents to the category, if there be any at all, that lives and experiences. In the course of the chapter I have borrowed the idea of self-reflexivity as put forward by Prem Chowdhry. This chapter compares and contrasts the sexual imagery found in item numbers with that of the women's songs as recorded by Chowdhry. The difference between the two is marked by a difference between representation and reflection. Whereas the former facilitates a model of female that is an extension of masochistic and heterosexist male fantasy, the other is a category in which 'self' is felt and experienced in the existing world.

The third chapter is interesting because it talks about the inclusion of well-known actors in item numbers. However, far from suggesting a progressive shift, this points towards a persistence of cultural stereotypes sustained by the dominant ideology. In due course of the essay one will be made aware of the impossibility of realizing multiple subject-

positions because the limited icons and images of masculinities on display hinders and obstructs the possibility of a subversive model.

I have drawn my materials from film texts with special emphasis on Dum, Kaal, and Main Khiladi Tu Anari. For the first chapter I have drawn heavily from postcolonial theories to engender the understanding of the position of Indian public culture in the face of globalization. For the second and third chapters I draw my sources from psychoanalytic theories starting from Laura Mulvey. The third chapter "The Choreography of Compulsory Heterosexuality" looks at a text which cannot be strictly aligned with the category of 'item numbers'. However it is a significant text because it facilitates a clearer understanding of homosocial play in popular Hindi cinema, which would lead to a very important assumption undertaken in this dissertation; that is the anxiety and self-consciousness evident in popular cultural texts when it comes to representation of sexuality.

Central to the ideas put forward in all three chapters is power or the lack of it. In 'item numbers' or in any form of representation serving the interest of masochistic 'male' fantasy there is an overwhelming imbalance of power. The figure of woman is deployed as erotic spectacle in order to serve the sexist dominant ideology resulting in a loss of position as author of one's own body. In this context it is interesting to note the messages of the main narratives in the films of the selected item numbers. Most of them are directed and produced by male authors and the storylines engender the presence of a hegemonic form of masculinity.

Chapter – 1

Porous Borders: The Influence of Hollywood on Popular Hindi Cinema

Hollywood, although a big factor in Bollywood's evolution, is not the sole overwhelming influence. Its influence is seen more as the result of selective adoption by filmmakers in their desire to fuse the best of both cultures in a way that would appeal to the greatest number: mainstream Hindi cinema, as show is a creation that is born out of adapting the resources and inventiveness of Hollywood to suit indigenous tastes, and sensibilities.

According to Rosie Thomas, "...the Bombay film-story does not generally have an unexpected conclusion, it only has a predictable climax and what is important in the Hindi film is how things will happen rather than what will happen next" (130). Regardless of such kind of criticisms Bollywood prevails over Hollywood when it comes to the local market. This suggests that the Bombay film industry has been able to capture the imagination of the widest possible Indian audience in a way which the latter has failed to do so.

Despite its borrowing the popular Hindi film is careful to reiterate its difference in terms of values: the symbols that are borrowed are only on the surface level and it does not augur the borrowing of the host values as well. Sheila Nayar argues that the fear of those values, such as individualism and sexual liberation, is countered in Indian films by their emphasis on family ties,[1] and the consistently "*successful eradication of all tension between oneself and one's immediate family, and between one's immediate family and one's future spouse*" (86)[2]. This is an entirely self-conscious attempt at negotiation on the part of those whose dislocation or exposure to external influences has affected their ability, according to Kraidy

[1] In Sooraj Barjatya's Hum Apke Hain Kaun (1995) and Yash Chopra's Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (1995), both cult movies of the mid-90s, the notion of family and filial relationships is foregrounded.

[2] Italics in original

"to exclusively belong to one or the other of what they saw as two irreconcilable worldviews" (464).

Hindi film music is sometimes criticized for its incorporation of Western rhythms, though Western trends do not obliterate this music's unique sounds, derived at least in part from folk traditions Bollywood, according to Dhareshwar and Niranjana, recognizes the importance of the local but also acknowledges that the "MTV culture, as well as more generally the global televisual culture, is here and we have to negotiate it" (193).

Chowdhry suggests that songs and sound are among the more compelling elements of Hindi film, with the introduction of sound in 1931 touted as the reason for the rise of Indian cinema's popularity and the failure of Western cinema to secure the Indian market (13). Music is a key element of Indian cinema, as is dance and mainstream Indian movies are not specifically strait-jacketed into musicals or non-musicals, as opposed to a Hollywood-style of categorization.

Pendakur says that any Bollywood movie tends to incorporate musical sequences, a characteristic that has been enormously influential in determining an individual film's popularity and the profits it can generate (119-44). Filmmakers use all kinds of gimmicks to package these item songs with the latest hook-up being promotional music videos. These music videos of the item numbers are shot and aired on TV channels for publicity and by the time of a movie's release the audience is fairly familiar with them.

There is no attempt to reconcile narrative and spectacle and as Gokulsing and Dissanayake suggest, these song and dance sequences might be used as a tool to communicate emotions and situations emerging from everyday life (21). These sequences at times serve as subtle expressions of sexuality without provoking the disapproval of the state and public. The questions that have to be raised at this point are:

why is there need to suggest instead of blatant display? When there is blatant display of sexuality, why is it not played out between the main characters within the narrative?

If the answer lies in the fact of disavowal of foreign values by the recipient culture then how does this trickle down to affect its own cultural representations? The changing face of sensuous song and dance sequences might speak of more liberal times but there is something more threatening than this. This threat can be located in the ambivalence that Indian public culture reveals in its representation of women.

There are many songs, especially in this global age of Hollywood music channels and imports, that could be categorized under this term, however for clarity and for purposes of clear-cut demarcation one would define "item numbers" as highly sexualized songs with racy imagery and suggestive lyrics that feature a relatively well-known actress or model, erotically choreographed usually in a bar or nightclub. She is in the film only for the length of that song and has no dialogue that contributes to the main narrative, before or after. It is a common occurrence for these item numbers to occur in the opening and closing credits of Bollywood films.

The scenes in which 'item numbers' are played out is an amalgamation of the local and global, rural and urban[3]. Most of them include at least one such 'public' exhibition, either in a theatre, night club, bar, disco, or even the living room of a family home that comes equipped with its own appreciative diegetic audience[4]. The protagonist of such numbers are portrayed as sexually daring and liberated. She comes on-screen only for the duration of the song: she has no background or motive behind her appearance, safe for the motive of titillation.

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[3] In *Babuji zara dheere chalo* we see shifting scenes of rural and a discotheque-like urban space.

[4] Among the more popular item numbers such as Shool's (E. Niwas, 1999) *Main Ayi Hoon UP Bihar Lootne* and Company's (Ram Gopal Verma, 2002) *Khallas,* the 'item girls' Shilpa Shetty and Isha Koppikar are choreographed in a rural like setting and a nightclub respectively, with an audience watching their performance within the screen.

Item numbers, a recent trend, have become increasingly rampant accompanied by a spurt in the demand for item girls. Many top stars are doing item numbers, and the phenomenon is becoming less stigmatized.[5] 'Item numbers' have even been credited with reviving the careers of many an actress: Shilpa Shetty's[6] waning career is said to have taken a different turn ever since she appeared in the number *Main Ayi Hoon U.P. Bihar Lootne.* Another actress whose career has been affected for the better is Isha Koppikar[7] through her item number in Ram Gopal Verma's Company (2002). In fact there are some actresses who appear on screen only for item numbers. For instance, Malaika Arora[8] and Yana Gupta[9] have so far only been seen in song-and-dance sequences and that seems to be the extent of their contribution to their association with mainstream Hindi cinema.

The motive behind the popularity and success of item numbers and the erotic spectacle peculiar[10] to popular Hindi cinema can be placed into perspective if one looks back to the late 1980s, when the song *Ek Do Teen* was added to the movie, Tezaab[11] as an afterthought. The tremendous popularity of the song and the accompanying music video

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[5] There were a few fixed actresses in the earlier Hindi cinema who were typecast in these kind of erotic dance performances: they were never cast in the role of the main heroine. For instance Helen, Bindu and Aruna Irani were usually given the role of vamps who would readily seduce the hero. Such kind of portrayals from the main heroine would disrupt the flow of the main narrative that was usually didactic in nature.

[6] Shilpa Shetty has appeared Sameer Malkan's Main Khiladi Tu Anari (1994). Her other item songs include *Aila Re Ladki Mast Mast* from Rama Rao Tatineni's Jung (1996).

[7] Isha Koppikar who rose to stardom after her number *Khallas* in Company (E. Niwas, 2002)became a rage and managed to immediately grab another song *Ishq Samundar* from Sanjay Gupta's Kaante (2002)

[8] Malaika Arora is married to Arbaaz Khan, a Bollywood actor, who is the brother of Salman Khan, another popular Hindi film actor. Among her more popular appearances in 'item numbers' are the songs *chaiyya chaiyya* from Mani Ratnam's Dil Se (1998) and *Kaal Dhamaal* form Karan Johar's Kaal (2005).

[9] Yana Gupta is a Czechoslovakian model who has appeared in several advertisement campaigns like Lakme, and is also a successful ramp model. Her item number appearances include the very popular *Babuji Zara Dheere Chalo* from the movie Dum (2003), and Oh! *What A Babe* - Rakht (2004)

[10] Bollywood represents such spectacles by deploying strategies to legitimize its portrayal: the scenes may not always be intrinsic or complementary to the flow of the narrative unlike Hollywood where such scenes are introduced as a significant part of the main plot.

[11] N. Chandra, 1988.

transformed Madhuri Dixit[12] and made her a superstar. The popularity of the event and its antecedents foreground the existing stereotypes that allow for the erotic display of a woman's body in popular Hindi cinema.

This particular aspect of Hindi cinema goes a litle further back in the history of indian popular culture. The actual pioneers of this trend – not the term – may be Helen[13], who did such numbers from as far back as the 1960s. In a sense, item numbers or what they stand for, that is unbalanced sexual representations of gender, have always been a part of mainstream popular Indian culture.

Kakar, in Intimate Relations says that popular cinema is an important site because it is that domain of 'collective fantasy, a group daydream' (26). This is not to be taken in the sense of a mythic collective unconscious but rather as a site for the basis of a shared fantasy of people living on the Indian subcontinent. It is vital that we grasp Indian public culture not as a homogenized whole but a differentiated field with diverse audiences and agendas. While there are identifiable aspects of elite and subaltern culture, there is a middle ground of public culture that occupies a space which encompasses much of the 'middle' class and sections of small town and rural India.

Here, all participate and become fluent in a shared grammar of cultural agency: a texture and style of expression and reflection occupy the central ground of public culture whose marginality is hard to discern. This particular cultural space occupies a new social space, one partially created by specific forms of media. Arjun Appadurai

[12] Madhuri Dixit has been acting since 1986 (Kranthi Kumar's Swati). She has appeared in popular movies like Hum Apke Hai Kaun (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), Devdas (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2002) and Dil Toh Pagal Hai (Yash Chopra, 1997) among others.

[13] Helen has appeared in over 500 movies in a career that spans 40 years and she has danced in nearly every single one of those movies, sometimes more than once. In 1999 Helen received the Filmfare Lifetime achievement award.

suggests that "the community of sentiment that emerges out of Public culture is the consequence of the predominance of electronic mass media" (8).

A myriad field of local and global tastes and pleasures intersect with one another facilitating and creating the possibility of convergence: this is reflected in the kind of cinema that is available in Indian popular culture. Appadurai and Breckenridge contend note that 'film, television, and video technologies are at the heart of this new cosmopolitanism (and) contain models of celebrity and consumption that are pivotal to the new public culture (Appadurai and Breckenridge, cited in Dwyer and Pinney). However, there is no compromise at the level of values even as the politics of modernity seep through from the global into the local.

A look at 'item numbers' as part of an ongoing process in the presentation of woman as an erotic spectacle places into perspective the notions of modernity and tradition that Indian public culture endorses. As Sut Jhally puts it, gender is the social resource most heavily exploited by commercial communication strategies. The reason being: "gender is one of our deepest and most important traits as human beings...what better place to draw upon than an area of social behaviour that can be communicated almost instantly and which reaches into the very core of our definition of human beings?" (135)

Madhava M. Prasad, in Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction, does away with the explanation of mainstream western cinema as a result of a particular combination of elements. His contention is that this form has repercussions in other representational sites and is accountable for the practices and reflections in other areas of the world. However, western and Indian cinemas are inscribed within the same epistemological field where this particular combination is the dominant one among all possible combinations and that it is precisely this that accounts for the primacy it has been accorded in film theory.

He further contends that transfers of technology across cultures involve the possibility of the established structures of the host culture determining the way in which it functions in the recipient culture. Film technology developed in the capitalist centre, arrived in India during colonial rule and captivated audiences here as it had done elsewhere. It did not arrive in a vacuum. There was a cultural, political, and social field from within which some people, encountering a new technology of representation, devised ways of putting it to uses that accorded with the field.

The technology did not bring along a set of readymade cultural possibilities which would be automatically realized through the mere act of employing it. At the same time, the technology is not neutral, simply sliding into the assigned to it by the cultural political field. It has its own "unsettling, re-organizing effects on the field."(2).

Further, the functioning of the capitalist industry of popular Hindi cinema is determined by a variety of factors like the political structure and the hegemonic project of the modern state. There is no simple and unmediated reproduction of 'tradition' or 'myth' by a cultural institution that relies on modern technology and the dispersed desires of an anonymous audience comprised of 'interrelated subjects'[14], some of them created by the industry itself.

In looking at these issues one cannot but realize the emerging articulation of a national cultural tradition that is arrived at through the conflation of twin cultural processes of the local and global. Sandria B. Frietag records in her essay "Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption, and Participation in the Public Sphere" the coming of the Lumiere Bros. to Bombay on 7 July, 1896 to present 'living photographic pictures in life-sized reproductions'[15] and how this signified the rapid pace of technological dispersion possible in the context of capitalism. Within just two-

[14] Prasad echoes Althusser's concepts of hegemony and interrelated subjects (Prasad, 10).
[15] She mentions how a similar sensation of excitement and enthusiasm was echoed in other urban sttlings throughout the world like Russia, China, Australia, South Africa with the introduction of the screen.

and-a-half years, viewers could see local events such as 'Poona races '98' and 'Train Arriving at Bombay Station' and by 1902 the 'rudiments of the first film-empire' had been established in Calcutta by Jamjetji Framji Madan. This interaction with the Lumiere brothers very quickly enabled the building of a repertoire of material of worldwide dimensions (cited in Dwyer and Pinney).

Despite this interaction and sharing the metropolitan aspiration was not towards America. The metropolitan effect that the subsequent Indian popular culture invoked, however, was one that operated independently of America. It was of a particular version of capitalism: Indian public culture can be thought of as what Sumita Chakravarty terms 'impersonation' creating what Homi Bhabha (cited in Dwyer and Pinney) calls a 'vernacular cosmopolitanism'.

This cosmopolitanism mobilizes an accessible and fluid repertoire of signs that include dress and gesture which reverberates with other representational practices echoing what Frederic Jameson noted: "nothing is heard for the first time; it is always half-heard in advance" (Cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 13) the engagement with the West is in this sense not dialogic. As Frietag notes in her essay, this is an appropriate example of Homi Bhabha's 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' which he describes as "interruptive and questioning cosmopolitanism where there is a translation of symbols, a translation of sites...which confuses what is the general and what is the specific, what is the part and what is the whole" (Cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 13).

It is a site of simultaneous persistence and transformation, what Homi Bhabha calls "the circulatory and protean field of the popular in which artefacts are continually re-tooled, re-sited" (14) It is a field which is at once familiar and unknown because it is characterized by a state of interruptive tension. This impersonation is not truly resistant but a part of what Achille Mbembe calls 'zombification'. There is a logic of 'familiarity and domesticity' which explains, as he suggests, this process of 'stylistic connivance'.

A whole repertoire of signs through which the protean post-colonial subject marks its fragmentation reveals "the myriad ways in which ordinary people bridle, tick, and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly" (22).

Video culture is popular in Hollywood and has caught up with rapid speed in Bollywood. In fact by the look and feel of these numbers one cannot help but point out the imitation of the form. The reason they have fitted in so well in mainstream Indian cinema could be attributed to the fact that these two cultural forms of representation are nothing but two rivers that flow into the same sea. This implies that Indian cinema follows paths already set earlier. But inherent in this implication is the problem of a cultural politics that is centred on the way local forms reinvent themselves to establish a dialogue with and assert difference from universal modes of narration, representation and subjectivity. At issue then is how traditions of identity, aesthetic forms and cultural address are deployed for the purpose of creative adaptation in a post-colonial world.

In light of impersonation one can examine the cultural context in which 'item numbers' characterized by the spectacle of the woman appears. The presence of this spectacle highlights the entrenched conservatism that generates dilemma or anxiety when Indian public culture attempts to articulate identity through the agency of the body of woman. The apparent similarity in the music videos of the West and item numbers, the constant fetishizing of a woman's body, the dual split of woman into erotic object and muse, the creation of 'other' masculine hero[16], the conflation of rural and urban settings, as are seen in item numbers, are all symptoms of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism.'

Sumita Chakravarty writes:

[16] Other is used not in the sense of 'resistant' or alternate but follows the logic of Mbembe's thesis that the shared semiotics and gestures of a system "inscribe the dominant and dominated within the same epistemological field" (14). The models of masculinity embodied by Bollywood and Hollywood heroes are dissimilar: the means by which Bollywood and Hollywood heroes are presented may be different on a superficial level, but they both reinforce a dominant patriarchal ideology.

> ...impersonation subsumes a process of externatization, the play of/on surfaces, the disavowal of fixed notions of identity. But it also encompasses the contrary movement of accretion, the piling up of identities, the transgression of social codes and boundaries (4).

The deployment of the figure of woman to create erotic spectacle is acceptable as long as it does not interfere with the project of articulation of national identity through the 'traditional' woman. However, she poses a threat once her image disturbs the equilibrium of hegemonic ideology that is conservative in terms of values and modern in terms of outward stylization.

The economic pressure that drives the Hindi film to propose erotic pleasure through the presentation of woman as spectacle to both its male and female spectators[17] must take into competing demands of all sections of its public: it eulogizes an ideal Indian womanhood, stressing virtue and chastity thus constructing a moral framework within the narrative, and on the other hand it offers a transgressive erotic display of a woman's body through the socially acceptable mode of voyeurism, namely dance. This dual function is a strategy to reassure the state and other moral authorities as well as spectators while still allowing for transgressive visual pleasure.

Mainstream Indian cinema, in its desire to straddle the twin processes of tradition and modernity, arrives at a culture that sits uneasy in its borrowed robes. This can be more elaborately put forward if we analyze how cinema represents women through the binary process of muse and erotic spectacle. The history of the presentation of Hindi film heroines form muse to erotic spectacle is directly linked to development of strategies by the film makers to simultaneously uphold state directives and placate controlling bodies without sacrificing the erotic pleasures for its audiences.

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[17] Paul Willeman has repeatedly pointed out that the male figure is as much an object of male 'desire' as the female figure, thus pointing to a auto-erotic, repressed homosexual "narcissistic identification with the ideal ego in the diegesis" (Dwyer and Pinney, 307).

Asha Kasbekar in her essay "Hidden Pleasures" in Pleasure and the Nation (248-86) harks back to the time under the British colonial government when stringent guidelines were laid down by the Indian Board of Censors regarding what could or could not be shown in films thereby monitoring the 'corrupting' influences in entertainment. These directives, as observed by Manjunath Pendukar were primarily concerned with discouraging the national movement through the power of cinema (236).

Kasbekar goes on to talk about how post independence, rather than loosening the noose additional directives were incorporated, the most famous being the ban on kissing. The additions by post-independence censor board are interesting because it reveals to a large extent the conceptualization of notions of public and private and women's relation to them in the Indian subcontinent.

Kasbekar quotes one such directive regulating the act of kissing on screen:

> Kissing or embracing by adults, exhibiting passion repugnant to good taste, shall not be shown. Though common in Western countries, kissing and embracing by adults in public is alien to our country. Dancing is acknowledged as an art. It should therefore be preserved beautifully, in keeping with the finer tradition of our country (Cited in Panna, 246)

Madhava Prasad explains that "the prohibition of kissing is a symptomatic cultural protocol whose origins lie in the need to prevent the dissolution of pre-capitalist patriarchal enclaves" (79). There is a blurred definition of what constitutes tradition and modernity. While kissing is looked upon as a direct influence of the west and hence unacceptable, dancing, in however a sexually suggestive manner, as is the case in most erotic song-and- dance numbers, does not seem to share the same stigma. Therefore the problem does not seem to lie in the (mis)representation of women itself, but whether her

representation echoes a direct or indirect influence of west, as the dominant ideology sees it. He further adds,

> When the censor, excising the Indian screen kiss, contended that such a 'public' display of a private activity was not compatible with Indian values, the Censorship Committee erroneously equated cinematic representation with representation of the public sphere. In this account there is no recognition of the possibility that while the representation circulates in the public sphere, it need not be of the public sphere (75).

Though kissing is still regarded as taboo, though he trend is not without a following in today's films, a look at the popularity item numbers and the persisting presence of an enthusiastic market for erotic spectacles centred around the body of woman highlight the consequences of this erroneous definitions of public and private. Consequently film makers in conjunction with the public have played around this error motivating the production and proliferation of such images.

Rosie Thomas states:

> ...Indian cinema, for a number of reasons, has been concerned with constructing a notion of Indian cultural and national identity. This has involved drawing on concepts such as 'tradition'. But a chaste and pristine India has also been constructed by opposing it to a decadent and exotic 'other', the licentious and immoral 'West', with the films' villains, invariably sporting a clutter of signifiers of 'Westernization': whiskey bottles, bikini-clad escorts or foreign limousines (11).

How is it that popular Hindi cinema that derives its heroines from the mythical figure of Sita[18] and exposes its anxiety in all its portrayal of a heroine's sexuality represent such a figure without any self-consciousness?

Asha Kasbekar traces the various stages in the history of Popular Hindi cinema wherein filmmakers have sought socially acceptable motivations for such erotic exhibitions. Kasbekar records that till the 1970s it was achieved through a simple bi-polarization between good and evil[19] in female characters. Once the vamp's erotic performances were over she would be conveniently disposed of by a stray bullet, to quote Ravi Vasudevan, 'as fitting punishment for her threatening sexuality' (Cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 299). In the case of Helen where she usually played the vamp, such a portrayal of her execution would place into perspective her role in the larger context of Indian public culture.

To make the spectacle tolerable the Hindi film takes great pains to devise ways to accommodate the moral concerns of its audiences and coax their consent. Thomas believes that the most important strategy has been to create an 'idealized moral universe' (15) that upholds the 'official' definition of femininity within the main plot , and then to provide 'unofficial' erotic pleasures to its targeted audience through the song and dance sequences, areas of heightened transgressive pleasure. In such spectacular displays, the woman is usually the central component who solicits and intensifies the voyeuristic gaze through her erotic displays, challenging the official version of femininity espoused with great rhetoric in the main narrative.

[18] In Hindu Mythology she is the wife of Ram, the ideal ruler, and stands for chastity and purity.

[19] In Raj Khosla's Woh Kaun Thi (1964), this simple bi-polarization was achieved by casting Sadhna in the twin roles of good and evil. The latter character meets her end in the end as befits Bollywood's style of denouement when faced with the question of femininity.

The impulse or motive behind the fetishization of woman, who is central to the spectacle, can be traced back to the staged dance performance.[20] Although theatre was a privileged contributor to the cinematic institution, there are, as Christian Metz has pointed out, significant differences in the manner the two kinds of entertainment are consumed by their respective publics (2-4). In the theatre spectator and performer are bound by a mutual awareness of each other, but such reciprocity is ruptured in cinema because the film actor/actress never looks directly at the camera disavowing any relationship with his/her audience. Without this mutual acknowledgement the spectator's voyeurism becomes an intense and 'transgressive' activity.

Historically speaking, dance performances with the leading female star offering herself to the erotic male gaze, has been a crucial, commercially driven component of Popular Hindi cinema. They differ from 'item numbers' in that they are presented as part of the main narrative, however inconsequential their role, whereas in presentation of 'item numbers' there is no attempt or pretence to accommodate it in the unravelling of plot in the main narrative.

Kasbekar further elaborates the motive and ways of eroticizing the female body. With Helen's retirement popular Hindi cinema faced the demise of the Anglo-Indian vamp. In the 1980s to execute the erotic dance performances filmmakers relied on the figure of the working woman pursuing a career in the performing arts, either as singer in bars and discotheques[21] or as a film star[22] within the narrative. Another contrivance in the early

[20] Even before the advent of the talkies, the filming of women's dance performances was a well-established practice. Hiralal Sen's film work between 1901 and 1904 included dances from stage plays e.g. A Dancing Scene from the Opera, The Flower of Persia (1898) and Dances from Alibaba, both taken from the repertoire of the Classic Theatre of Calcutta (Mukherjee 1985: 52; Rajadhyaksha and William 1995: 195). R.S. Choudhary's Madhuri (1928) was entirely silent except for a special dance performed by the celebrated Sulochana which was the only sequence in the film in sound, a strategy that proved extremely successful in the later transition to sound (Bharath 1986: 42).

[21] Zeenat Aman in Feroz Khan's Qurbani in 1980.

[22] Parveen Babi in Ramesh Sippy's Shaan in 1980.

1990s would be the portrayal of the heroine as a campus co-ed performing an erotic dance in the Annual Founder's Day Dance Competition[23].

The most common of the strategies, according to Kasbekar, is the 'noble sacrifice'[24]. Typically, the villain takes hostage the heroine's beloved and she must agree to the villain's demands for an unabashedly erotic spectacle that only she can perform for him and the members of his gang. The noble sacrifice can even extend to the safeguarding of national security.

By manipulating the story so that it can provide as many occasions as possible for the fetishization of the woman male spectators are offered the pleasures of erotic voyeurism. Then, by introducing the 'performance' as a ploy whereby the woman makes a 'spectacle' of herself, often for the sake of a greater social good, it allows erotic contemplation of the female body but simultaneously disavows any prurient intention by introducing the mediating, diegetic voyeur. Through such narrative contortions, erotic voyeur is legitimized, and the desiring spectators in the cinema are granted permission to freely enjoy transgressive erotic pleasures.

Earlier a well-known actress of popular mainstream Hindi cinema would seldom, if ever, sign a movie for the sole purpose of an 'item number'; nowadays heroines are more amenable to the idea of appearing in a movie for only a song with no dialogues before or after. This is not to say that the representation marks a positive progressive shift.

Far from suggesting an optimistic picture these images point towards a persistence of old stereotypes and woman misrepresentation. Issues they draw attention to include youth, and beauty, the commodification and objectification of women body. All this

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[23] Pooja Bhatt in Sachin's Prem Diwane (1990).

[24] In Ramesh Sippy's Sholay (1975), the villain Gabbar Singh (played by Amjad Khan) and his henchmen take Veeru (Dharmendra) prisoner. They then abduct his beloved, Basanti (Heman Malini) and force her to dance in the midday heat, on broken glass, threatening to kill Veeru, if she refuses.

makes one sceptical of the capability of contemporary images to undermine the dominant ideology of the 'gaze'.

The social and economic systems operating in the production of culture at large will, of course, have a visible impact on the representation of women. The pervasive and dominant cultural industries like television, film, theatre, radio, advertising and newspapers, persist in representing and disseminating messages and this is made even more pervasive by the development of the worldwide web that supports the culture of the dominant ideologies. In the field of the visual culture, patriarchal culture penetrates and maintains the ideological mechanisms that operate in meaning making processes.

Lemke writes, "this dominant presence, self-reflexive, defining and renewing itself through the production of meaning, controls the means of production and results in a cultural heritage that excludes and manipulates the interests of 'other' groups, including women" (94). Though there are means to redeem women to their rightful position change, however, is slow.

Furthermore, in the context of these sexually explicit song-and-dance routines, Prasad contends that the public spectacle of the woman is tolerated by the authorities because it does not undermine the control of 'representation of the private'. Also, dancing or women dancing is not something to is alien to Indian culture.

Manjushri Chaki-Sircar talks about the position of dance in ancient India: dance was indigenous to religious ceremonies and dances of worship or temple dance preserve the style and tradition of ancient culture even today. The content of dance is determined by 'Brahmanic' patriarchal cultural tradition and in the name of worship, in Hindu India, dance became a site for the female body to become the object of lust and desire of priests and kings. Within this framed tradition, women were frozen in stereotypes — as 'abhisarika, darpanasundari' and other enticing bodily images (10-4).

The dance that perennially traps women within the image of a 'nayika' (heroine) portrays her body, almost without exception, for erotic purposes. Thus 'Dassiattam' (later rechristened 'Bharatnatyam' by Rukmini Devi Arundale) developed through the 'Devadasi' system that was oppressive to and exploitative of women. Likewise in 'darbari' dance like 'Kathak', in the name of spiritual and transcendental themes, dance was tailored to the pleasures of kings and nobility. Dominated by institutionalised religion, the classical tradition of dance catered to the sensual indulgence of a male audience. (10-14).

This tolerance exposes the entrenched conservatism of a culture that is bred on patriarchal definitions of sexuality. Sudhir Kakar unearths a culture that safely assumes an ambivalent attitude when it comes to women and their representation.

Sudhir Kakar in The Inner World confirms the nationalist project through which the new leaders encouraged the portrayal of the woman as 'muse' rather than erotic object, and the ideal Indian woman sought its inspiration in the mythological prototype, Sita:

> For both men and women in Hindu society, the ideal woman is personified by Sita, the quintessence of wifely devotion, the heroine of the epic, Ramayana. Her unique standing in the minds of most Hindu, regardless of region, caste, social class, age, sex, education or modernization, testifies to the power and pervasiveness of the traditional ideal of womanhood (Cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 291).

Such a trend and its comfortable existence within a public sphere of culture reveals an ambivalent attitude towards women in Indian society. How does one reconcile the juxtaposition of Hindi film heroines in two roles, namely muse and erotic spectacle? In

his analysis of Mitro Marjani[25] Sudhir Kakar in Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality, places this dichotomy or splitting of the women into two images into perspective. According to him, Hindu marriages hold within a cultural unease: the fear of the wife as a woman i.e. a sexual being. It is the persistent age-old splitting of the wife into a mother and whore which underlies the husband-wife relationship.

This partly explains the often contradictory Hindu views of the woman. Freud had also spoken at length about this dichotomy. To Freud, in such an occurrence, sexuality is separated from tenderness and the object of desire from the object of adoration: a man idealizes one kind of a woman, who he sees as higher than him but he is impotent with her. However he is capable of more intimate relations with a woman who he regards as his social or intellectual inferior, most frequently a prostitute.

Kakar contends that this split can be traced back to the anxiety surrounding the horror of incestuous relations and consequently de-idealizing the mother on whose image the man-boy relies for nurture and support. This splitting of mother image into goddess and whore is devised as a way of resolving the man's anxiety and sexual life.

Kakar further draws our attention to the predominance of such a kind of attitude towards women in the proverbs[26] of all the major Indian languages. This reflects a cultural unity of the subcontinent in fundamental human relationships; between spouses, siblings and generations. The kotha or traditional style Indian brothel, is Hindi cinema's favourite abode for the denied and discarded sexual impulses, a home for vile bodies. The kotha is sometimes replaced by a shady nightclub, a direct import from the west, that provides the alcohol as well as the erotic music and dance associated with these degraded impulses. When a hero is portrayed in such places it is cloaked with guilt and self-recrimination, on his part.

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[25] Sobti, Krishna. Mitro Marjani. New Delhi: Raj Kamal Prakashan, 1967.

[26] "Only when fire will cool, the moon burn or the ocean fill with tasty water will a woman be pure" (cited in Kakar, 1990: 19)

In Ideology of the Hindi Film (22), Prasad talks about the ways in which cinematic process is bound by certain overarching political and ideological formations in post-colonial India. Bollywood films may occasionally address cultural issues, but they will nearly always resolve them in a way that reinforces the societal status quo. This happens by the twin processes of containment and disavowal: in the context of gender, the woman figure may be portrayed as liberal and 'modern' situated within the usual consumerist trappings of foreign locales and wearing designer costumes, it is nothing more than a means to reassert hegemonic ideology. Where a woman is shown as sexually provocative she is confined to either the realm of on-screen fantasy or moored away form the self-contained narrative structure of the film, as in the case of item girls.

The 'feudal family romance' like Hum Apke Hai Kaun[27] is an example of the process adopted by a modernizing state, to adapt its transformative agenda to the realities of pre-capitalist power. Prasad looks upon it as a political compromise in terms of narrative form at the level of the state. The elements of such kind of romances like consumerism and individual fulfilment are eventually reined in to foreground the underlying theme about reconciling individuality with wider duty. In this regard, the feudal family functions as a way both of disavowing change and, more subtly, of allowing for it without disturbing social hierarchies.

In the introduction to Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics, and Consumption of Public Culture in India (2001), Dwyer and Pinney write about the place of shared desire that is the vivid materiality of popular visual culture in a place as dramatically divided as India. They find the existence of such places of convergent fixation from diverse stances paradoxical and as such aids in our understanding of Indian society and how economic, political and religious seem to increasingly characterize it.

[27] Released in 1994, this Sooraj Barjatya-directed film went on to capture the attention of a large section of the public. It was hugely popular.

This can partly be explained by the circulation of images and texts which have had a long standing historical place in India. A focus on representational flows will highlight how they have been in active engagement with public/popular culture.

The gaze which is a vital aspect of the erotic spectacle is a factor that is the common denominator facilitating the production and proliferation of the unbalanced representation of gender in popular Hindi cinema. As we shall see further on, there has been a safe method, derived from folk narratives and honed to perfection (in the sense that it is so deeply entrenched in the psyche of the audience that it seems natural to the form), that when one gazes into a spectacle one is in a fantasy realm that is at once local and global.

Sandria Frietag in "Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption, and Participation in the Public Sphere" (Dwyer and Pinney, 35-75), tries to unravel the complex past of consumption as an act of identity formation. According to her at the turn of the century in British India people were compelled by the twin actions of consumption and identity formation which propelled them to make certain choices that allied them with fellow members of a delineated but ambiguous shared group. It was a dialogic process that drew on indigenous forms of popular participation in public life as well as metropolitan forms of production.

In Anderson's model, 'the two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century' were 'the novel and the newspaper' (Cited in Dwyer and Pinney,24-5). Drawing from this Eurocentric model, central to the act of imagining a community is the pictorial image, where spectatorship meets creation in, to borrow Ramaswamy's word, 'a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality.' Frietag notes, in light of the above, 'there are indicators from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (as early as modern India

emerges) of fundamental experiences that enable Indians to shift the exercise and purpose of their gaze.' (Dwyer and Pinney, 39)

To this purpose it becomes important to trace the role of the visual as an essential building block in shaping nationalism she further goes on to identify three realms in which 'visual images are the shapers and bearers of thought' (Dwyer and Pinney, 39-49), namely 'courtly culture[28]; religious practices[29]; and live performance traditions[30]. Vision thus operated at the centre of a number of public activities, all of which became available for transformation in the service of nationalism and the operation of a specially shaped civil society under imperial rule.

As the mobile gaze expanded its repertoire of signs, it also began to envelop a range of new materials and technologies brought to the subcontinent under the impulse of the global market of imperialism. Therefore, with such cultural processes at work nineteenth century India brought together previous exercises of the gaze with a dramatically increased scale of consumption made possible by India's place in a global market.

The domestication of divinity was part of the ongoing discourse. The figures of Durga or Parvati[31], as she appeared in the guise of a real-life woman, was also cast into a

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[28] The opportunity to gaze upon the king is recognized as an essential element in, Vijaynagara royal palace. Mughal adoption of the concept is related to earlier Hindu practices and becomes concretized in the architecture in each Mughal palace of the presence of a ceremonial viewing balcony in the Public Audience Hall. What this suggests is that vision and the exercise of the gaze set up expectations between the font of power and the audience. The ruler could trigger the gaze but he needed the presence of his subjects for this (cited in Dwyer and Pinney).

[29] Darshan or 'seeing the divine in an image, in a person, or in a set of ideas' emphasizes 'the interdependence of the visual and the intellectual' (Eck 1985) and Bhakti or devotion entailed the notion of participation attributing importance to the acts of individuals in relation to larger constitutive entities.

[30] Public performances like the *ramlila* and *jhanki*, at the turn of the century, were an expanding form of urban visual communication. The most crucial aspect of it was the central role assigned to movement and to audience participation. Processions moved the action from one locale to another. The ways in which civic and religious stories were told through enactment (e.g. *Ramlila* and *Muharram* in the north) incorporated an increasing role for images and visual vocabularies.

[31] Goddesses in Hindu mythology

contemporary social mold of daughter, wife or mother (Cited in Dwyer and Pinney). The juxtaposition or blurring of the categories of the divine and the ordinary was a strong aspect of this ongoing convention. This resulted in the use of woman as signifier for things or as a trope for the nation. Much attention has been devoted to the process by which female figures stand in for domestic values that then become abstracted to stand in for the nation.

Guha-thakurta has put it well:

> In the new urban art forms of modern India, the woman's form had undergone a striking metamorphosis, posing a new configuration of the 'modern' and the 'traditional'. While its form was 'modernized', the concepts and ideals it signified always harked back to 'tradition' – to Hindu mythology, Sanskrit literature, regional customs or Indian values and ethics. (cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 57)

The characters from myths come to stand in for values: for instance, Ram as the ideal ruler, Sita as the ideal wife and Hanuman as the perfect devotee. Frietag notes the active functioning of the mobile gaze before and after the coming of the Lumiere Brothers on 7 July 1896. What is striking within this global capitalism frame is the extent to which cultural specialization emerged almost immediately in order to satisfy desires in this particular cultural region. It is consumption that marks Indian participation in this global economy as active rather than passive.

Writes Sudhir Kakar in Intimate Relations:

> ...I regard the Indian cinema audience not only as the reader but also as the real author of the text of Hindi Films,...in my view, their (producers,

> directors, scriptwriters, music directors, and so on)[32] functions are purely instrumental and akin to that of a publisher who chooses, edits and publishes a particular text from a number of submitted manuscripts... they must intuitively appeal to those concerns of the audience which are shared ; if they do not the film's appeal is bound to be disastrously limited. As with pornography, the filmmakers have to create a work which is singular enough to fascinate and excite and general enough to excite many (28).

Ravi Vasudevan writes, "The cinematic process of iconic reconstruction may in fact deploy and subordinate modern methods of subject construction modelled on Hollywood narration. By convention, the continuity system, and especially its point of view editing, is associated with the drives and perception of individuated characters. However, it is quite common in popular Hindi cinema to observe the yoking of such views to the bearer of darsanic[33] authority" (89). Vasudevan further says that Darsana has a wide currency seeing as it is used in discourses of social and political authority as well. In the rendering of the category of darsana as an authoritarian form, social status derives from the degree of access which social groups and individuals have to a central icon of authority, whether of kingship, divine authority, or the extended patriarchal family and its representatives.

In the case of mainstream cinema the iconic authority is the male protagonist around whom all other characters and plot are arranged. Therefore, it is in the representation of one's link to this point of reference that other characters attain significance. This pattern

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[32] My own added parenthesis

[33] Darsana, the power exercised by the authoritative image in Hindu religious culture. In this practice, the devotee is permitted to behold the image of the deity, and is privileged and benefited by this permission, in contrast to a concept of looking that assigns power to the beholder by reducing the image to an object of the look.

of arrangement of plot and characters leads one to weigh the value of each and every role. The emergence of such an enshrining view is thus dependent on the dynamic of reconstruction, and it is often mobilized to the end of a patriarchal transformation.

The stereotyped plots and plans ensure that the repetition of the message makes it gratifying to adult in the same way that a fairy-tale ending is satisfying to children. Kakar goes on to stress that it is the success of such formulaic works that impel the makers to repeat and vary the 'daydreams' (28). These daydreams do not contradict reality because though seemingly dreamlike and not-real, the visual landscape of these films is clearly linked to reality. While the landscape evokes reminiscence of ordinary experience and situation they are transformed to create a 'subtly fantastic milieu' (Kakar, 29).

As 'identification' takes place the audience is 'like the dreamer who is not only the author, producer, and director of his dream but often plays all the important leads himself, the creator-audience of the film too, is not limited to existing within the skin of the hero or the heroine but spreads out to cover other characters.' The audience may well be deriving pleasure in the sexual villainy of a character or seeking delight in the ordeal of some other character. The third eye destroys the very identities of the film's characters' (33).

This chapter has attempted to explain the function of audience reception and how this is inextricably linked to the process of film making leading to the kind of films made. In order to maximize its market share, the film industry acknowledges the composite nature of its nationwide public. However, in so doing it falls into the trap of catering to the needs and desires of only a certain section of the public, who, form the majority. This is seen in its representation of fixed images of women starting from the cabarets of Helen to today's item numbers. Additionally, the complex system of film financing, whereby distributors, exhibitors, recording companies and other investors exert

considerable influence on the kind of pleasures that are to be provided within a film, places further constraints on the popular Hindi cinema. The frequent exhibitions of suggestively choreographed item numbers contained and regulated within the frame of the main narrative are symptoms of a need to prioritize spectacle over narrative.

Chapter - 2
Is the Item Girl a Woman?

The concerns of this chapter are associated with the widely debated concern in media studies; that is the relationship between media and processes of identity formation. How do media act as instrument of representation? To what extent does it reflect and to what extent it shapes gender differences and stereotypes? Together with focusing on media influence and processes of socialization, as gender forming technologies, this chapter also involves a reflection on the impossibility of reconciling representations of sexuality in item numbers with any kind of a cultural correlate in lived experience. It is important to note that when one refers to female culture, it is about a discursive space and not a symptom of the 'essence' of gender but rather a mode of representation that constructs gender by drawing on stereotypes, figures and images already available in the culture of reference.

Asha Kasbekar relies on Metz's observation when she talks about the narrative structure of popular Hindi cinema. As Metz observed, cinema is founded on scopophilia and therefore it constantly derives narrative strategies to solicit the 'look' and mobilize the scopic drive. Central to the pleasures of heterosexual scopophilia is the role of the woman, and, as in Hollywood films, in Hindi cinema too she functions primarily to address the erotic gaze and constitutes an indispensable ingredient in look-soliciting.

The concept of ideology is central to any cultural critique. The dominant group exercises its hegemony which consists of the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent

confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci, cited in Prasad, 10).

The chief purveyor of gender modelling today is the media. During the pre-electronic dawn of family, theatre, and temple (community ritual), there was very clear and constant reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Through centuries of history and cultural evolution, other institutions have assumed the role of moral inculcation and the teaching of gender. In contemporary times, information pathways have modelled cultural notions of morality and sex-role behaviour. Most modern cultures reinforce the binary template of image and relations that feminist scholar Adrienne Rich has labelled "compulsory heterosexuality" (5).

The functioning of the capitalist industry of popular Hindi cinema is determined by a variety of factors like the political structure and the hegemonic project of the modern state. There is no simple and unmediated reproduction of 'tradition' or 'myth' by a cultural institution that relies on modern technology and the dispersed desires of an anonymous audience comprised of 'interpellated subjects' (Prasad, 10), some of them created by the industry itself.

The threat of a 'direct, interpreted, communication' [1](22) that comes from a political source like the committed film maker has to be taken into account too. The director's freedom to choose is in conflict with the spectator's and such a choice amounts to 'a clear standpoint on reality as such'. What is the danger that this represents? According to Prasad "it is the danger of a realized individuality, as opposed to which a virtual one formally reiterates the availability of choice, and in order to be able to do so, must

[1] Prasad, here, quotes from Bazin, 1967: 36.

forever desist from actually making a choice. Individuality must always be provided for but never realized" (22).

The director must therefore merge his own identity with that of the state for the 'full unfolding of the reality of nation/civil society,' at the cost of his/her own individual freedom. At the other side of the spectrum with burred lines of demarcation lies the choice of the subject: the citizen is also duty-bound to restrict his/her freedom to a virtual plane where everyone more or less makes the same choices. The rules of restriction for the maker extends to the spectator in that the 'laws of attention', as Prasad calls them, demand that while reality, by definition, is diverse the perception of this diversity must not lead to a diversification of perception (22).

Mitchell teases out the different relationship women have to society through gender relations, which, although linked to class conflict, is not the same as the experience of men:

> The controlled exchange of women that defines human culture is reproduced in the patriarchal ideology of every form of society. It goes alongside and is interlinked with class conflict, but it is not the same thing. It is not only in the ideology of their roles as mothers and procreators but above all in the very psychology of femininity that women bear witness to the patriarchal definition of human society. (413)

Her emphasis on how the psychological dimension of femininity is constructed through patriarchy in such a way those women "bear witness to the patriarchal definition of human society" (413) demonstrates the importance of psychological structures and how they are maintained through social processes. It is through this experience as a "witness" that the psychology of femininity bolsters the maintenance of patriarchy.

The sexual content of item numbers is always enhanced with suggestive lyrics, racy moves, and revealing dance costumes. Most item numbers are filmed in a bar or nightclub to create an ambiance consistent with the sexuality the screenplay demands for the song. Sometimes, the item number is so far removed from the theme of the film, that producers (to circumvent the problem) show the item number in the opening and closing credits of films.

It is in light of this that one must look at gender representations in mainstream Indian cinema in the context of technological transfers and deeply entrenched attitudes towards gender and sexuality and their representations in mainstream popular culture. John Berger in Ways of Seeing, writes, 'Men act, women appear. Men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at.' Berger argues that in European art from the Renaissance onwards women were depicted as being 'aware of being seen by a male spectator' (45-49).

In mainstream Indian cinema, women have been relegated to the passive position as 'bearer, not the maker of meaning' as an appendage to the man, the actual wielder of power (Mulvey, 834). Women's specially constituted role as spectacle, as the subject of the 'look' is especially evident in 'item numbers.' In item numbers, the styling or presentation in terms of make-up and costumes, and the cinematic elements of lighting and shots[2], movements of the body, all add up in turning the woman into a spectacle.

The gaze is invited to certain parts of the body selectively considered sexual –the eyes, the lips, the breasts, the navel, the buttocks, and the legs. Make-up techniques include enhancement of these anatomical features. The costumes are often revealingly cut and more often than not are worn wet, under a waterfall, rain or a spray of water that would make one's costumes cling to the body emphasizing the parts of a female figure that are

[2] The way the body is arranged with respect to the camera and hence the eye of the audience.

considered sexual. To emphasize these 'assets' women are frequently shot from low or high angles. The actions of the women in these item numbers, as in any other erotic song-and-dance performance, often mimic sexual movements with numerous shots of heaving breasts, pelvic thrusts and gyrating hips.

As Mulvey puts it in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema": "...in their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact, so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (837). The image of the woman functions at two levels, as already explained in the earlier chapter, as erotic object for the characters as well as for the audience of the narrative. The two looks are unified so that both the gazes of the audience and the characters are combined to produce a feeling of control and possession in both.

The movie Dum released in 2003 had the very popular song *Babuji zara dheere chalo* choreographed primarily around the popular Czechoslovakian model Yana Gupta. As per the previous definition of item numbers she has no role to play in the movie and appears only for the length of the song. The song takes place in the villain's camp and is picturised around a titillating performance aimed for the diegetic audience who appear in the form of the main villain and his cronies. The choreography and subsequent movements within the performance along with the lyrics of the song become important in this regard.

As the beat of the song is heard the camera focuses on a group of men who gaze lasciviously into the camera and out at the audience. They are obviously looking at something that is approaching them but the audience is not shown what it is so far. The camera seems to peek out from between the horns of a buffalo out at the men. A few seconds into the music and we realize it is Yana Gupta who is riding the bull: it is her

approach and her scantily clothed figure that is the object of the men's lascivious gaze. The lyrics of the song start as she alights and starts dancing to the beat. The lyrics area corollary to the titillating performance:

Babuji, zara dheere chalo

Bijli khadi, yahan bijli Khadi

naino mein chingariyan

gora badan sholon si ladi

giri giri giri giri bijli giri

arey, is pe giri, us pe giri, lo gir padi[3]

The next few lines of the lyric follow the same theme:

Nazron mein pyas, dil mein talash, hothon mein bohot narmi

Chehre mein daag, seene mein aag, sanson mein bohot garmi[4].

The setting has a rural theme to it with the buffalo and the crowd of ruffian-like men dancing and drinking cheap liquor. The setting does not change until the second half of the song where she disappears behind an ornate curtain and comes out with a different change of costume that leaves her shoulders, arms, midriff, and most of her legs bare. The setting of the scene also transforms into a nightclub-like place accompanied by a change in the sound of the song: it changes to a more techno sounding beat with accompanying electronic sounds to keep pace with the choreography that has changed from a sort of carnivalesque rural performance to a more sophisticated one like that of a nightclub or a strip bar reminiscent of Madonna's music videos.

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[3] Loosely translated this means: 'be careful as u walk, sir, lightening stands in the way my eyes burn with sparks, and my fair body is as hot as series of sparks (female voice). The fifth and sixth lines are rendered in a male voice and they mean: the lightning has struck men it has fallen on this one, that one, everyone.

[4] The literal meaning of these line would be: my eyes are thirsty, my heart is searching, my lips are very soft there is a mark on my face, my bosom burns with desire and my breath scalds.

She is now seen dancing on the stage with back-up female dancers for the pleasure of the male audience who are watching with obvious desire in their eyes. The camera focuses on a close-up of the main villain – played by Yashpal Sharma[5] – more than once to show the look of desire in his eyes. While earlier in the rural scene he threw 100 rupees notes on her, now he is shown to be pouring alcohol all over her. This gives him an excuse to go close, touching and running his hands over her bare calves as he removes her boots.

Keeping in mind the stringent moral authority in the form of the state or the public that the makers of Hindi cinema has to keep in mind this gazing and unconsummated desire can be read as a substitute for the culmination of something more intimate between the item girl and her diegetic audience. Though the item girl is not coy about her sexuality and poses a sexual challenge, through the lyrics she mouths and the movements she displays through her dance, inscribed within this challenge is the patriarchal fantasy of sexual challenge whose ultimate aim is in being overcome and possessed.

This image of Yana Gupta mouthing the words of a titillating song and dancing to its beat surrounded by salivating men in such kind of song-and-dance routines is in accordance with the image of the 'lustful woman'(175) with a dangerous sexuality which is an important aspect of male visualization of women in rural north India. In Prem Chowdhry's essay, "Lustful Women, Elusive Lovers: Identifying Males as Objects of Female Desire" he explores the 'lustful image' in rural north India with special insight drawn from the Haryana region. He bases his analysis on women's songs produced collectively by women for women. A comparison between the sexuality portrayed on-screen and a look at these kind of songs, however small their contribution

[5] A Bollywood actor whose list of films include, apart from Dum, Apaharan (2005), Ab Tak Chappan (2004), and Kisna (2005).

in understanding sexuality itself, will show whether this image is consistent with women's self-understanding and self-evaluation, desires and fantasies.

The songs that Chowdhry talks about are drawn largely from Haryana in the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, from the "landowning dominant class/caste women, a number of them Jat by caste..." (cited in Ramaswamy, 177). He further adds that similar songs are known to be popularly sung by high caste women of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh as well. It is likely that these songs are common to upper caste women in the northern belt of India. This investigation is important because they highlight the feminine construction of masculinity, conjugality, pleasure and deprivation. This is not to say that women do not share or submit to the dominant ideology, but they also bring to the fore an alternative viewpoint through idealization and fantasy which, according to Chowdhry, more often than not provides a 'cathartic space' (177).

In rural north India folk dramas[6] have always been an exclusive male domain. In these dramas the ideal image of a wife or mother is also projected as that of a lustful woman and the destructive violence her desire unleashes is resolved by her often gruesome deaths. These negative connotations act as instruments of control over women as well as warnings to the male populace regarding the dangers of such women. While the repertoire of songs is bawdy, comical and obscene at one level, they are deeply conservative and idealistic at the other: they engender male titillation while sending out messages of warning.

In comparison to these nautankis women's songs accept their lustful nature as natural and initiate sexual encounters seeking fulfilment. This vast repertoire of women's songs

[6] They are called swangs or sangs and nautanki.

is found in the rural north and they are sung mostly on occasions like Holi[7] or Teej,[8] weddings, births or deaths and so on. On the occasion of marriage in rural Haryana (as also other parts of north India) it is a custom fro the men-folk to set off for the bride's house. At such times women are left alone to enact the sequenceof khoria[9]. In such performances women go through a mock circuit of courtship, marriage, consummation of marriage and childbirth.[10] In short, Khoria plays out the anxieties that exist in and among women in the northern rural belt around consummation of marriage and fertility (179).

Chowdhry gives an example of such songs sung on the festival of Holi and Teej:

mere gore badan pai rang bares
he ri baagaan me jaaun to maali lalche
mere gore badan pai rang bares
he ri laalaan pai jaaun to dhobi lalche
mere gore badan pai rang bares
he ri sej pai jaaun to balmaa lalche
mere gore badan pai rang bares

(My fair body is aglow, my friend
When I go to the garden, the gardener covets me
My fair body is aglow, my friend
When I go the pond, the washerman covets me

---

[7] Holi or Phagwah (Bhojpuri) is a popular, Hindu spring festival, observed in India, also called the Festival of Colours. In West Bengal, it is known as Dolyatra (Doljatra) or Boshonto Utshob.

[8] Teej is a fasting festival for Hindu women of some parts of India and Nepal. It takes place in August or early September. It is celebrated for marital bliss, well being of spouse and children and purification of own body and soul. The festival is a three-day long celebration that combines sumptuous feasts as well as rigid fasting.

[9] According to Chowdhry, a word significantly derived from kholana which means to open or to expose.

[10] Chowdhry writes that a mature married woman usually enacts the role of the bride to initiate the younger woman masquerading as a shy bridegroom into sexual pleasure accompanied with explicit songs. Such enactments centre around a bride's interest in her husband' sexual virility.

My fair body is aglow my friend
When I go to bed, my husband covets me
My fair body is aglow, my friend) (191).

At the level of fantasy and desire, women's songs may be taken to portray changed power equations between gender, class or caste. They hint at the idea of women claiming the use of their bodies according to their desires. They offer an alternate image visualization and aspiration to the dominant upper caste/class patriarchal worldview. Sexuality, openly celebrated is not necessarily connected with procreation, although it forms a major part of it. This sexuality is not clothed in fears and dangers as in the male controlled folk dramas or the earlier vamp in a cabaret as seen in earlier popular Hindi cinema. Women do not see themselves as sexual transgressors in these songs and males are brought in as sexual partners in a total reversal of roles wherein women are either seen as chaste and therefore to be revered or lustful and therefore to be feared and warned against.

If we compare the lyrics of *Babuji, zaara dheere chalo* to that of the above mentioned women's song we find in them certain similarities and differences that will aid in our understanding of the representation of women's sexuality in popular visual culture. Though both the songs are sexually explicit and titillating there is a vast area of differences in the twin processes of creation and execution: women's songs are authored collectively by women and sung and performed collectively by and for women. Occupying an almost autonomous space outside the male presence, though most of them are not to be heard or viewed by men, it sometimes leaks out into the periphery of male presence. This interaction goes unacknowledged facilitating a full and frank expression of women's desires and pleasures. The issue raised here, apart from representation is reflection too. Here, the woman as author and subject attains significance.

Read against women's songs the representation in item numbers, is exposed as an appropriation of women's domain of fantasy: *Babuji zara dheere chalo* is a realm of male fantasy and the targeted audience is the male heterosexual who subscribes to the dominant patriarchal mode. The central themes discussed above: the marginalization of women; the lack of recognition of women's work and "female" values; finally the appropriation of "female" categories by the "male" are also features of the literature on the role of women in exchange.

Irigiray (1985), developing the idea of Claude Levi-Srauss's assumption of women's role in exchange between warring groups, has said that ultimately all systems of production and exchange (of women, signs and commodities) in patriarchal societies are built around the satisfaction of male desire. She suggests that while society purports to be heterosexual, in practice it is characterized by hom(m)osexuality which is prohibited in practice and played out through the bodies of women. To Irigiray heterosexuality is an alibi for the "smooth workings of man's relations with himself, of relations among men" (172).

She goes on to say how this results in a split:

...women are effectively totally lost "outside of themselves", and they never know what they themselves want because they submit, through the fear of being left on the shelf, to the existing order. What makes them "passive" traps them in the roles described by "femininity", in which their desire loses itself - which does not mean that they have none (71).

In the context of a contemporary patriarchal and global culture in which social and economic dominance by any one group can always be seen in tension with, or as existing at the expense of, another, it is therefore important to interrogate the implications this power relationship has on media production of images representing women and her sexuality.

The item girl's presence does not detract in any way the focus of the main narrative where the hero and heroine are comfortably ensconced in a make-believe world of

neatly arranged 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles. The titillating display of sexuality cannot be reconciled with the dominant image of a chaste woman who has to serve as an appropriate partner to the hegemonic masculinity enacted by the hero.

Therefore, the transgressive sexual identity that cannot be accommodated in the main heroine is transposed to the figure of the item girl who, in any case, is not connected to the unfolding of the main narrative. A blatant display of her sexuality contrasts with the sexuality repressed in the image of the main heroine, provoking the assumption in the reader that the different aspects of lived identity are embodied in two bodies of the category woman. A blatant display as opposed to a repressed image does not subvert the status quo because the two images of the item girl and the main heroine are equally flat and one-dimensional. The power to subvert does not reside in the image as both are the projections of the dominant ideology and are therefore subject to its control. The image of the item girl cannot challenge patriarchal models of sexuality because she is the other side of the binary of mother/goddess and whore: the only kind of challenge she conveys is the desire to be possessed in accordance with the logic of the binary model of male/female, dominance/submission in patriarchal ideology.

The outward stylization of draws on Hollywood conventions, in terms of dress, mannerisms, or other such outward manifestations of what is considered feminine but the narrative continuity shows that such conventions are drawn upon to be contained within what is considered 'traditional' and subsequently and disavowed thus the presence of two figures: one that foregrounds 'chastity' and the other, blatant sexuality, the similarity being both are premised on heterosexuality.

In films where item numbers occur, to borrow Supriya Agarwal's thoughts, 'males are frequently masters of themselves while the female protagonist is cast in a fixed canon' (cited in Jain, 89). Some may argue that all songs in Bollywood movies have little relevance to their respective movie plots. Regardless, they still have a loose connection to the storyline if only to the extent that they are musical renditions of the stories' moods (and its protagonists) at those points in the films. Consider the storyline of Dum which

is centred around Uday (Viveik Oberoi) and his war with a corrupt police inspector. Interspersed along the storyline are the other characters whose roles and their contributions the storyline are shaped in accordance to the general direction of the central iconic figure's narrative destiny.

As Ashish Rajadhyaksha in "Viewership and Democracy in the Cinema" has argued that in such instances, the concept of a third look codified by the requirements of an integral continuity narration emerges as a transaction between narrator and spectator, and does not acquire a decisive autonomy. This brings to focus the way the cinema deploys these discourses of visual and auditory authority, and how it hierarchizes them in its narration. What emerges is the third look or the look which authorizes a view, locates a figure in narrative space which reveals the compact narration between the narrating instance and the spectator's attention.

To turn back to the concept of 'darsan/darshan', as mentioned in chapter 1, it is important to locate the relationship the item girl shares with the darsanic authority. In Dum, or Shool, both the female leads played by Diya Mirza and Raveena Tandon respectively are cast in the mould of characters who are actually appendages to the main male protagonists Viveik Oberoi and Manoj Bajpai. Their characters are fashioned and styled according to the needs of the characters of the main male leads; while the character of one serves as the love interest to one, the other is the dutiful wife of an uncorrupted police officer. In either of the movies the item girl is never shot in the same frame as the main male protagonist.

The presence of such item numbers, in a not very far-fetched way, brings to the fore the repressed sexuality or sexual display and intimacy that is hinted at in the relationships enjoyed by the main leads. The item girl and her diegetic audience, in a way, become the bearer of that repressed sexuality. It is little wonder then that she is not given any role to catalyze the momentum of the plot. Women who appear in lead roles in mainstream Hindi cinema, by convention, are almost always fitted under the respectable guise of daughter, wife or mother.

A look at popular movies like Umrao Jaan[11] and Mughal-e-azam[12] reveal that if a woman is dislocated from the family she is fitted into the role of the courtesan or a prostitute. All aspects of womanhood portrayed through one or a few 'respectable' characters is not a representation that would sit easy with the dominant patriarchal ideology hence it is significant that such a type of song-and-dance numbers come with a central performer who does not have to be fitted into the 'comfortable' world of that particular narrative.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one is brought back to the question of the representation of woman as an erotic body: What form of relation is there between female body and the audience? This question becomes significant when one looks at the concept of the gaze as forwarded by Laura Mulvey.

While the gaze of the audience towards the narrative is consistent, stable and reassuring the reverse hardly ever exists and if it does, as in the case of the item girl as mentioned earlier, it is to posit a sexual challenge. However, this is not to say that the gaze of the audience is homogenous, men and women have different responses to the stories of desire being played out on the screen.

Notwithstanding the possibility of a diversity of responses there is a definite trend towards the controlled diversity of perception operating on the virtual plane of popular Hindi cinema. Such a kind of narrative that regulates the diversification of perceptions is made for a heterosexist audience by a heterosexist maker to show the way men look at women reflecting the power dynamics in society.

In mainstream Hindi cinema the staged performance or 'item numbers' allow the performing woman to bring a powerful and sexually-aggressive identity into

[11] Umrao Jaan, released in 1981, is based on the Urdu novel Umrao Jan Ada (1905), written by Mirza Hadi Ruswa. The film starred Bollywood actress Rekha.

[12] Mughal-e-Azam is an Indian epic film, reminiscent of the older style of Indian cinema. It was produced and directed by K. Asif and released in 1960. It took nine years to finish and was the most lavish production for its time. The film broke box office records in India when released and held the record for the highest grossing film ever till 1975.

existence. Temporarily, the woman assumes command of her body and defiantly acts out her own desires. Mary Ann Doane, explaining pleasure in the 'woman's film' contends that by presenting the woman as spectacle, women are offered 'masochistic fantasy instead of sexuality' (79). In them women are de-sexualized, and function not as spectacle to be looked at but as protagonists in masochistic scenarios.

Laura Mulvey draws on Freud and Lacan to elaborate how the unconscious of patriarchy has structured film form. According to her, film is made for the pleasure of the male spectator alone, who seeks to control and 'indirectly' possess the female figure through narcissistic identification with the main male protagonist, who controls the gaze and the events on the screen, thus giving the male spectator a reassuring sense of omnipotence.

It also functions at the level of voyeurism where the spectators gaze into the frame without the characters gazing back at them. As Mulvey says, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly" (1989, 14).

What Mulvey is proposing is only a partial understanding of the female gaze and pleasure. She proposes a 'masculinization' of the female gaze whereby the woman, assuming a masculine position, male points of view, and male identifications, enjoys the freedom and control typically available to men. The role of female spectator is a particularly complex one. In her fetishized portrayal, a woman is transformed into a 'commodity'.

But she is at the same time, Doane suggests, a paying spectator and hence a consumer who must witness this commodification in the cinema halls and in her own living room as she watches television, across the nation.

To explain the female audience as consumers of this image the spectatorial position as forwarded by Laura Mulvey is inadequate. To explain the position of 'other' consumers one turns to Mitchell's interpretation of Freud's concept sexuality and sexual orientation. Mitchell writes that according to Freud we are essentially bisexual. He has emphasized in his essays that he did not conceive of sexuality as a ready-made aspect of human nature. He says that 'normal' or dominant hegemonic sexuality established itself, if only precariously, only as it passed through a long and cultural path. Therefore, sexuality is composed of a number of component elements and is not a monastic unity (17-18)

Therefore a possible pleasure can be from the ability of the virtual plane to satisfy the need to overcome sexual difference, the wish to fulfil our desire to be both sexes temporarily through the mobility of multiple, fluid identifications. Pleasure may even proceed from the viewing of the female figure as plenitude, or in identifying with the female figure, that is opposite sex identification, which Mulvey ignores. Notwithstanding this, when one sex is predominantly constituted as a spectacle and another as the looker, it becomes evident that there is politics inscribed within this ideology and therefore a cause for concern.

The gender 'woman' is persuaded to straddle dual functions of 'commodity' and 'consumer', through a process that echoes Doane's concept of masochistic fantasy. The Hindi film industry must persuade women (and men) to participate in her own exploitation as a commodity and solicit the female gaze by the kaleidoscopic changes of extravagant sets, sumptuous costumes, fashionable jewellery, imaginative hairstyles, and daring make-up, so that 'the filmic frame is a kind of display window and spectatorship consequently a form of window-shopping (121).

De Lauretis has pointed out: "the self-attribution of gender is an accumulation of habit, inclinations, repressions and ghosts that do not attach themselves to an original body ...but produce at the same time both a body for the subject and a subject for that body" (10). The gender representations articulated in mainstream popular culture work as a pool of meanings and identity models from which the viewers can negotiate their own subjectivity. It follows that it helps to define what each of us understands and experiences as 'female gender', even outside of our role as television viewer ; if we accept this point of view the issue is not if and how television reflects, conceals, or distorts an existing female reality, but rather which female identity models it proposes.

Thus, if the way of showing determines the way of looking at what is shown, the inscription of sexual difference in such kind of music videos can also be in the gaze offered to the spectator, that is in the construction of the vision. Camera movements, play of lights, and the framing of the female images can not only render female figures in different ways, but also contribute to strengthen values, roles and competencies.

It follows that most visual representations through hegemonic male subjectivity tends to coincide with 'the eye' whereas that of female or any other subjectivity is reduced to what the eye can see. This is crucial in understanding the depiction of the female figure as a body, as an object of man's pleasure, and as a spectacle to be admired.

This (mis)representation or selective representation pervades other visual texts like advertising: the politics of the gaze is also present in most other visual representations that involve women. Erving Goffman's Gender Advertisements is concerned with the depictions of male and female figures in magazine advertisements. Probably the most relevant of his observations in this context is that 'men tend to be located higher than

women', symbolically reflecting the routine subordination of women to men in society (1979, 43).

Another concept which may be useful in investigating 'the gaze' is 'face-ism'. The term 'face-ism' was coined to describe a tendency for photographs and drawings to emphasize the faces of men and the bodies of women. An analysis of magazine and newspaper photos found that 65% of a man's picture was devoted to his face, compared to 45% of a woman's (Archer, Iritani, Kimes and Barrios 1983).

Writing in 1972, Berger insisted that women were still 'depicted in a different way to men - because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him' (64). In 1996 Jib Fowles still felt able to insist that 'in advertising males gaze, and females are gazed at' (204). And Paul Messaris notes that female models in ads addressed to women 'treat the lens as a substitute for the eye of an imaginary male onlooker,' adding that 'it could be argued that when women look at these ads, they are actually seeing themselves as a man might see them' (41).

Berger adds that at least from the seventeenth century, paintings of female nudes reflected the woman's submission to 'the owner of both woman and painting' (52). He noted that 'almost all post-Renaissance European sexual imagery is frontal - either literally or metaphorically - because the sexual protagonist is the spectator-owner looking at it' (56). He advanced the idea that the realistic, 'highly tactile' depiction of things in oil paintings and later in colour photography (in particular where they were portrayed as 'within touching distance'), represented a desire to possess the things (or the lifestyle) depicted. This also applied to women depicted in this way (92).

Such images "appear to imply a male point of view, even though the intended viewer is often a woman. So the women who look at these ads are being invited to identify both

with the person being viewed and with an implicit, opposite-sex viewer" (44). Within this dominant representational tradition the spectator is assumed not simply to be male but also to be heterosexual, and beyond puberty.

Communicative strategy appears perfectly in tune with 'male gaze' standards (a term coined by Mulvey). For example, the protagonists of 'item numbers' always seem to be represented as pretty adolescents or young and attractive women. In this sense, we can say that women act as nice objects moving on the surface of the image and looking for male voyeuristic attention or for female masochistic gratification (through male gaze identification).

There is a tendency as far as camera movements are concerned to linger on women's cleavages or legs. The prototype of inventor always having been male, the assumption follows that the wielder of the camera is one who identifies with the male gaze. The notion of technology as used in this study can be better understood by a brief look at the assumptions surrounding it: technology as associated with machines, with physical and tangible artefacts.

According to Wajcman, we can see technology as an artefact designed to achieve some human purpose. An artefact does nothing without surrounding human activity and technology refers to this human practice empowered by the possibilities of machines. As Wajcman points out, women's contribution have been left out from the history of science and technology. Over the last two decades Feminist studies have begun to focus on the gender character of technology arguing that Western technological development itself embodies patriarchal values and men's monopoly of technology is an important source of their power[13] .

[13] See Rothschild, J.. Machina ex dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology, Pergamon Press, 1983; and Cockburn, C. Machinery of Dominance, Women, Men and Technical Know-How, Pluto Press, 1985.

These contributions illustrate how gender difference and inequalities with respect to technology start from the beginning of the socialization process. Far from being natural or self-evident, the link between masculinity and technology has been historically and culturally determined and has been developing within a context of a traditional division of roles. This leads to the construction of men as strong, manually able and technologically endowed, and women as physically and technically incompetent. Power is the most important message that male technology conveys. Technical competence can be considered as another source of man's control over women, technology being a product of and reinforcement for their other power in society.

As already noted in relation to Laura Mulvey's theories, the issue of the gaze is closely related to that of identification. The viewer may subjectively identify with the camera's point of view, with that of a person which it depicts or with both. While it is often observed that men tend to identify with men and women with women in film and television narratives, John Ellis argues that this is a gross oversimplification. We may, for instance, experience shifting 'identifications' with different characters, and these may not necessarily be characters of the same sex (or sexual orientation) as ourselves. Indeed, we may 'identify' with feelings or experiences rather than characters as such. And such identifications may sometimes even be contradictory.

What Jonathan Schroeder notes for films is true of item numbers, which forms a part of the film it occurs in: he asserts, 'Film has been called an instrument of the male gaze, producing representations of women, the good life, and sexual fantasy from a male point of view' (208). The concept derives from a Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' which is based on psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan.

Such psychoanalytically-inspired studies of 'spectatorship' focus on how 'subject positions' are constructed by media texts rather than investigating the viewing practices of individuals in specific social contexts. Mulvey notes that Freud had referred to scopophilia - the pleasure involved in looking at other people's bodies (particularly, erotic) as objects. She declares that in patriarchal society 'pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female' (27). This is reflected in the dominant forms of cinema.

These conventional narrative films in the 'classical' Hollywood tradition not only typically focus on a male protagonist in the narrative but also assume a male spectator. 'As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.' (28). One should note that such representations highlight very limited, if not only one, models of masculinity. If this is indeed true, which it is in most mainstream public culture, then what of other multiple subject positions?

Mainstream films present men as active, controlling subjects and treat women as passive objects of desire for men in both the story and in the audience, and do not allow women to desire sexual subjects in their own right. Such films objectify women in relation to 'the controlling male gaze' (1989, 33), presenting woman as image or spectacle and man as 'bearer of the look' (27). Men do the looking; women are there to be looked at.

Mulvey puts forward the idea that cinematic codes of popular films 'are obsessively subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego' (33)[14] and distinguishes between two modes of looking for the film spectator: 'voyeuristic' and 'fetishistic', which she presents in Freudian terms as responses to male 'castration anxiety'. Voyeuristic looking involves a controlling gaze and Mulvey argues that this has associations with sadism: 'pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt - asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness' (29).

In the context of item numbers fetishistic looking, in contrast, involves 'the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. This builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The erotic instinct is focused on the look alone'. Mulvey argues that the film spectator oscillates between these two forms of looking .

However, a key objection underlying many critical responses has been that Mulvey's argument seems to be essentialist treating both spectatorship and maleness as homogeneous essences:
E Ann Kaplan (1983) asks 'Is the gaze male?' Both Kaplan and Kaja Silverman (1980) argue that the gaze could be adopted by both male and female subjects: the male is not always the controlling subject nor is the female always the passive object.

Teresa de Lauretis (1984) like Kaplan and Silverman also argue that the female spectator does not simply adopt a masculine reading position but is always involved in a

[14] Apart from one or two exceptions there are few cultural icons available for women. Pateman suggests that the belief in the essential subversiveness of women is "of extremely ancient origin" but goes on to argue that the notion of the "disorder of women" is particularly acute in the modern state (Pateman, 1992: 109). Where women do take up arms to fight, the lesson seems to be that they will end on the margins of society. Evans (1995) cites the case of the "bandit queen" Phoolan Devi, forced on to the margins of a "civil society" which enslaved and mistreated her.

'double-identification' with both the passive and active subject positions. Jackie Stacey asks: 'Do women necessarily take up a feminine and men a masculine spectator position?' (245) because there can, Stacy notes, be erotic exchanges of look within certain texts. Indeed, are there only unitary 'masculine' or 'feminine' reading positions? What of gay spectators?

What Steve Neale says of Hollywood is also true of Bollywood: he identifies the gaze tradition as not only male but also heterosexual. There is the possibility of voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze directed by some male characters at other male characters within the text. To give a detailed account of queer viewing or to suppose that the male is not always the looker in control of the gaze would be quite subversive a stance to take in the context of item numbers in mainstream Indian cinema. However, as will be further elaborated in the next chapter of my dissertation, this type of viewing is controlled and reigned in by foregrounding and endorsing a dominant 'masculine' model. This model is different from the Hollywood model but these icons and images that stand for power are always destined to reinforce patriarchal heteronormativity, whatever the means may be in establishing it.[15]

In short, item numbers could be seen as the cause and effect of the predominance of limited one-dimentional icons on-screen. Multiple subject-positions are ignored in the process. These numbers are actually an empty celebration of one of the many aspects of "female"[16]desire and pleasure and they do no more than reinforce existing stereotypes. It is actually a flitting from one side of the binary position to the next. It is, as Firat claims, no more than a witnessing of men and women experiencing heteronormative "masculine" and "feminine" moments at different points. The point is the 'masculine'

[15] Michel Foucault, who linked knowledge with power, related the 'inspecting gaze' to power rather than to gender in his discussion of surveillance (Foucault 1977). Apart from one or two exceptions there are few cultural icons available for women with power.

[16] Female, here, is used to mean that model, which is appropriated and endorsed by dominant ideology.

and 'feminine' models that the virtual plane endorses, as evidenced in Bollywood item numbers, reveals an extremely limited field of available identities in representations.

Chapter – 3

The Choreography of Compulsory Heterosexuality[1]

Sexual need, according to Sudhir Kakar in Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality, is not contingent on the need for coitus nor is the presence or absence of genitals and the expression of a biological drive the only factors constituting sexuality. Normal sexual intercourse may not necessarily satisfy mental desire. In short, 'sexuality in psychoanalysis, is a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies, arising from various sources, seeking satisfaction in diverse ways, and involving a range of excitations and activities that aim to achieve pleasure that goes beyond the satisfaction of any basic somatic need.'(21) This chapter looks at the way popular cultural forms force a realization of a masculine ideal through the accumulation of habits and styles that are perceived appropriate to masculine and feminine identities.

When we talk about cameo appearances and item numbers we should note that this aspect of Indian cinema is no longer exclusive only to female bodies. Shah Rukh Khan made an item appearance, so to say, in Karan Johar's Kaal (2005) along with professional item girl, Malaika Arora. A look at the two chosen texts: the eponymous song from *Main Khiladi Tu Anadi*, and *Kaal Dhamaal* acutely displays the self-consciouness of a male body in dance and item numbers. In Main Khiladi Tu Anari (1994), which is choreographed around two 'male' figures the display of desire for each other is self-consciousness and gives way to the realization of a masculine ideal. The motive behind the choice of these two texts will become obvious as we go further.

In light of this it is important and interesting to see how male dancing and male dancers in a system of stars and celebrity construct their cultural identities. A look at the growing presence of 'item boys' in a domain reserved for the erotic image of the woman attains significance, in such a context. Item numbers featuring well-known

[1] I am borrowing from Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality."

actors present opportunities to re-read not only the space of dance but the bodies and cultural meanings attached to these bodies found in this space. As an active space in which 'objectivity and subjectivity – between seeing and being seen, experiencing and being experienced, moving and being moved' are constantly negotiated, says Albright (3)[2], dance can function as a space in which one's cultural identity is rethought by society and by 'self' at the same time. In this context, gender is not only performed in and through the space of dance (as Judith Butler claims); it seems to be choreographed, as Susan Leigh Foster claims in Choreographies of Gender.

Contrary to the promise of such a novelty, the presence of well-known mainstream actors in item numbers does not point towards any progressive shift in the representative visual culture, rather it emphasises the limited models of masculinity that mainstream media culture seeks to portray. The representation of such male bodies as markedly 'male' brings to sharp focus the entrenched conservatism in representations of masculinity.

Conclusions of dance theorists Susan Leigh Foster or Graham McFee (65) are similar: "what we understand as dance is dance." This definition might make more sense if we consider how we popularly think of dance and how dance contributes to the construction of cultural identity, or, as Albright puts it, "how one's body renders meaning and is rendered meaningful in society" (xxiii). Therefore, to undermine fluidityof form and to guard the status quo it is important to portray established celebrities as upholding the dominant ideals. However, we find that dance provides us with several options for re-reading common ideas about the space of dance itself, and how a male dances in this space, and how male dance films construct cultural identities in relation to dance.

[2] See also Alten, 1997.

The presence of such well-known mainstream actors in item numbers does not point towards a progressive shift in visual culture, rather it emphasises the limited models of masculinity that mainstream media seeks to portray. Abhishek Bachchan[3] and Shah Rukh Khan may make appearances matching item girls step for step but their bodies are already heavily inscribed with cultural stereotypes: such male bodies brings to sharp focus the entrenched conservatism in representations of masculinity. The model that is represented is sustained by the persisting submission/domination, hunter/prey roles, which is peculiar to a definition of gender organized along binary oppositions of male and female.

Brian Lucas's "Meat-in-Motion" explores and challenges the dominant form of masculinity in texts and institutions of dance. While dance appears to be a site open to subversive masculinities, Lucas argues, any subversion is superficial, operating on the level of theme rather than "at all levels of the creative and performative processes". "Thematics alone do not, and cannot, govern the nature of choreographic texts".

According to Lucas, there is a high degree of anxiety about male sexuality in this seemingly feminine art form. The male dancing body, being heavily inscribed by the codes of patriarchy, obscures its own transgressive potential thereby failing to recognize the pattern of gender coding in dance. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity is reproduced by a limited range of masculinities on show. Furthermore, he demonstrates the symbiotic co-dependence of sexuality and gender: '(homo)sexuality is the oft-unspoken foundation to the dominant culture's sanitised discourse of gender.'

Lucas's contention is that the creation of gender representations that operate outside accepted mainstream notions of what constitutes 'masculinity' and 'femininity' (as well as the various labels of sexual identity), require that shifts be made, not only in the thematic and structural content of performance, but also in the processes and structures

[3] Abhishek Bachchan was featured in Mahesh Manjrekar's Rakht (2004) in the song *One Love.*

that are employed in their creation and presentation. Any true redefinition of gender and sexuality through performative representation will require a thorough reassessment of the structures and processes through, and by which, performance works are created.

This includes subverting the status quo: representations of alternative gender and sexual identities must be undertaken in ways which tie thematics and processes together, in the development of a holistically realised method of creating and presenting performance works, the very essence of which challenges accepted patriarchal modes of practice. A cameo appearance in an item number cannot obliterate the cultural baggage that the male bodies of Abhishek Bachchan or Shah Rukh Khan carry because they are actors who have established themselves through mainstream popular heteronormative films.

In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers." What Goffman is saying is that certain behaviour has an audience and moreover has an effect on that audience, the essential quality of performance being based on a relationship between audience and performer. For Goffman, his overall emphasis is rather more towards the audience: how social performance is recognized and how it functions within the domain it occurs, that is society.

Such an analysis that bestows equal importance to the audience is echoed in Sudhir Kakar's formulation of popular mainstream Hindi cinema as a 'collective fantasy', not in the sense of a mythic collective unconscious of a group mind, but a '...mise-en-scene of desire, its dramatization in a visual form' Kakar 27). He sees it as a meeting point of shared fantasies of people along the Indian sub-continent linked by a similarity of culture and psychology. He does away with the usual connotations of fantasy as whimsical, trivial or eccentric. Rather, his focus is on the definition of fantasy as that

space of imagination that is strongly influenced by desire and which can provide an alternative world to negotiate with reality.

When a popular actor like Abhishek Bachchan or a superstar like Shah Rukh Khan comes on-screen the audience is more or less already assured of what to expect. They are that group of consumers who have already bestowed upon these figures the status of stardom. The images of them, circulating in the public sphere, are those that conform to and re-affirm their status in a cultural set-up where heterosexual desire and identification is the biggest currency.

However, a queer reading is possible on many levels because Hindi cinema, even mainstream, has always had a history of allowing its heroes to weep or recite poetry and has never strictly followed the Hollywood archetype of a hero. It has always been the norm for the heroes to break out into a dance along with the heroines. Emotional repression and physical force are the barometers by which he measures his masculinity; whereas the Bollywood Hero breaks all the rules of American masculinity and manages to make the trespass look heroic.

The Bollywood Hero is ineluctably linked to the wider familial and societal set-up surrounding him. He is portrayed as one who is in willing bondage to conventions, an example of which can be seen in his relationship to his mother, whether he is playing a Romeo-like lover or a 'tough-as-nails' commando. On the other hand, the Hollywood hero, as seen in Lethal Weapon[4] and Die Hard[5], is one who has a dysfunctional family history and bottles of alcohol stashed beneath his bed. In turn,

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[4] This movie released in 1987 and directed by Richard Donner was so popular that there were four following sequels to it, all of them starring the original actor in the first installment, Mel Gibson.

[5] This also has four parts to it: Die Hard (1988), Die Hard 2 (1990), Die Hard with a Vengeance (1995), Live Free or Die Hard (2007).

Bollywood offers gun-carrying teetotallers who, like Shah Rukh Khan in Karan Arjun[6], fire away in their mother's name.

Instead of impugning the depth of his love for the heroine, the Hero's filial devotion only reinforces our belief in his capacity for romance. He is emotionally open and deeply passionate. When he is in love, he admits it, often in breathtaking verse: *Bejaan dil ko tere ishq ne zinda kiya,*[7] Salman Khan sings in Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam[8]. And when the Hero cries openly, as Shah Rukh Khan does at his beloved's wedding during the climax of Kuch Kuch Hota Hai,[9] he evokes sympathy in the audience.

This sentimentality works because the Bollywood Hero's demeanour leaves no room for the corresponding allegations of effeminacy. Rather, he brazenly flaunts his maleness. Emotions that are displayed are coupled with male sexuality (Suggestive dance moves, Shah Rukh Khan's tight leather pants and see-through shirts), different from the one endorsed in Hollywood movies.

Indeed, if one were to compare the heroes of Bollywood and Hollywood, we might conclude that Indian society is apparently more accepting of male sexuality than its American counterpart. In Hollywood, men's bodies are rarely sexualized in a way that caters to the female gaze. However, the purpose of this is not to seduce and titillate in the nature of item girls: the Bollywood Hero chooses his wardrobe and his choreographic moves with an eye to assert his power and fixity as the central point of authority in the frame. His comfort in seducing exudes reinforces his power and confidence in his 'masculinity'. He is also bound by postures of machismo, however different from that of the Hollywood hero, in that even if he were to appear in a song-and-dance routine it would be in the role of the hunter/predator. The type of sexual

[6] Rakesh Roshan, 1995.
[7] "Your love gave life to this lifeless heart", translation mine
[8] Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 1999.
[9] Karan Johar, 1998.

challenge he exudes is vastly different from the type a supposedly promiscuous 'item girl' gives out. His is not present to be possessed but rather to possess.

Bollywood item numbers, occupies a space that is brimming with what Laura Mulvey has called 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. By making us look at it, dance also asks us to read it. In this respect, to echo Brian Lucas's argument, dance is no different from any other spectacle or even performance. We popularly think of dance in these ways because dance marks a space in which corporeality is offered to us as a rhythmic, mobile spectacle. Indeed, in her discussion of cinematic spectatorship, 'to-be-looked-at-ness' is embodied by women and not by men. Naturally, male figures would not fit into the codes of these erotic dances in ways we expect women dancers to.

The traditional notions or stereotypes which exists dictates that the essential personality and behavioural traits that the status quo requires to be enacted by male gendered bodies so as to establish their 'masculine' identity (and to allow them to be clearly delineated and defined) be understood to centre around power, strength, aggression, independence, self-containment, emotionlessness, inscrutability, a potential and ability to compete and win over most, particularly those outside the traditionally acceptable parameters of 'masculinity.'

Guidelines for the physical depiction of a coercively idealistic 'masculinity' interrelate with, reflect and affect these behavioural requirements. The heteronormative 'masculine' body, as seen in the song *Kaal Dhamaal*, engenders the possibility of a site for the enactment of a masculine persona thereby providing a vehicle through which a masculine identity can be realised.

The song *Kaal Dhamaal* occurs just before the closing credits of the film. The first frame takes us to a sort of stage where the side dancers are standing. The females are standing alongside pole-like structures and they are spread out across this stage-like

platform that is clearly meant for performance. Then a male dancer, from between two short poles, looks menacingly into the camera and mouths "its time". The scene changes to another part of the stage where a number of male and female dancers are clustered around the figure of Malaika Arora, who till now is hidden because the cluster of dancers around her are still standing. They suddenly all bend down together showing Malaika, whose back is faced towards the camera, gyrating to the beat of the music.

A few seconds before Shah Rukh Khan is introduces into the frame the male dancers are shown to give an energetic jump. The camera moves on to show Malaika's face and Shah Rukh's side profile: he is breathing close to her ear, apparently about to say something. Then the song comes on with Shah Rukh mouthing the lyrics:

Sherni yeh aankhein tumhari
Kya gazab hai pyari pyari
Makhmali ye roop tumhara
Ashiqui ban jaye hamari[10]

The next frame shows Malaika lying on the stage floor with Shah Rukh standing over her. The camera focuses from the top showing most of Malaika lying laterally while only the top of Shah Rukh's head can be seen clearly. She is shown looking into the camera and Shah Rukh is holding her from the side of her head and peeping from the top of her head into the camera. They, Shah Rukh, Malaika rise along with the camera. In this scene the top half of Malaika is visible while most of Shah Rukh's torso is hidden by the former's body. It is only the flexed muscles of his arms holding her that are visible.

The next shot, once again, focusses on his visible muscles. So far, and this applies to the rest of the sequence, the bodily movements of Shah Rukh centres around vigorous

[10] "Your tigress-like eyes /Are amazing and adorable /Your velvet-like beauty / Makes my love complete."

jumps and jerks, while at least twice in the number, Malaika is seen to be touched and lifted by the male dancers. At such times the camera shifts to the top view and Malaika looks up into the camera while suggestively revealing a part of her cleavage.

One of the shots, well into the song, portrays wet female dancers who are gyrating seductively and there is a sprinkler from somewhere that is spouting water on them. Malaika is soon seen dancing alone in wet skimpy clothes with water from the invisible sprinkler cascading suggestively down her body. Incidentally Khan is never shown wet and gyrating alone in the same way as the female figures. When he does enter this 'wet' frame it is to touch and dip Malaika backwards, as part of the choreographed steps.

About a third into the number the camera moves all over Malaika's body focussing on different parts of her anatomy. Shah is seen to be doing the same thing from behind her: the camera and Shah Rukh are face-to-face with Malaika in between them. In this scene Khan looks out at the camera into the gaze of the audience provocatively. This combined with the barely-clad figure of Arora who is lying between the eye of the camera and Khan, hints at the controlled power that lies between Khan, the central authority within the frame, and the power inscribed in the gaze of the spectators without. The reader of this text becomes aware of the pervasive presence of a normative sexuality; the kind that attributes power to the bearer of the look, which most often than not, always lies in the figure of the 'masculine' male.

There are exactly five costume changes in the song and all of Malaika costumes are variations of one small and revealing piece of clothing after another. A sizeable portion of her legs, arms chest and middle is shown throughout the duration of the song; whereas Shah Rukh is seen to change into vests and transparent shirts while all the time

retaining his trousers. Whenever he is seen changing into vests the choreography of the dance accommodates steps that include him flexing his newly acquired muscles.[11]

In this context I would like to put forward Efrat Tseelon's theory on female appearance and morality. In The Masque of Femininity, she traces the importance of female apparel in the discourse early and medieval Christianity: according to her, in Christian theology concepts of modesty and chastity in dress came about to counter the fears of women as symbols of seduction and sin. This idea of a fallen woman is drawn from the image of Eve, the first woman according to Christian theology. To counter these fears female sexuality, which was perceived as residing in her appearance, had to be controlled. Central to the idea of chastity is virginity and central to the idea of virginity is modesty in dress and mannerisms. Any image women not regulated according to this idea becomes the site of displaced fantasies in patriarchy.

Therefore, it follows that while Khan's exposed anatomy is understood to stand specific physical characteristics like power and aggression the image of the exposed anatomy of the item girl, in stark contrast, stands for seduction and provocation.

Kramer and Coneel reiterate that the social construction of masculinity has placed high priority on heterosexuality (62). This complex feature has been represented through simple manifest signifiers: the presence of exaggerated feminine figures around the central protagonist in 'item numbers' in a bizarre way highlight and doubly exaggerate the man's supposed virility. His muscles are matched with the curvier and more seductive body of the 'item girl's'.

Dance is commonly thought of as transgressive, dangerous or even liberating because it centres on the body, using it as the prime communicative and expressive site, and

[11] Shah Rukh Khan is not normally known for his hypermasculine roles. He has appeared successfully in the genre of romance and not action movies. His most famous rendition of a romantic hero has been in Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995).

because of this has the potential to be a highly effective form in which to explore the redefinition of notions of gender and sexual identity. The dance performance featuring item boys has little relevance to the reality of life. Agreed that it is full of seductive, perfected bodies, writhing and sweating in athletic displays of youthful strength and power which should keep an appreciative audience of the male and female form satisfied, but it obscures and hinders the redefinition of the male dancing body. It does not consciously seek to explore dominant notions of 'maleness' and 'masculinity' by using the male body as the site for a more vivid gendered sexual representations and expressions that may be regarded as possible 'multiple masculinities'.

The failure to make it truly subversive in mainstream Hindi cinema is reflected in the eponymous song from the movie Main Khiladi Tu Anari (1994). Thomas Waugh on Main Khiladi, an action film, says that it is really a male romance in more respectable guise. This film starring Akshay Kumar as a macho but upright cop and Saif Ali Khan as a decadent movie star recruited to his gangster-busting activity portrays male companionship at its most playful and physical level. The play between Akshay Kumar and Saif Ali Khan replicates gender difference on the homosocial axis. In the Akshay vs Saif opposition, writes Waugh, "we have the not unfamiliar oppositions of:

butch vs dandy

Fighter vs dancer

Naked vs clothed

Mature vs ephebe

Techno-warrior vs klutz

Teetotaller prude vs promiscuous drunk

Self-controlling law-enforcer vs impulsive actor

Heterosexual vs homosocial

Family man vs bachelor (with valet!)

Offscreen cockteasing vs offscreen homosexual panic.

The homosocial play is most effectively etched in the dance duet of the title song. *Main Khiladi tu Anari* is situated in the second half of the movie right after the two heroes reconcile after a spat. The reconciliation between the two is tearful accompanied by a hug from Khan. He caresses Kumar's hair, cheeks, ears, and stares straight into his eyes. The song literally bursts onto the screen, at this time, preventing what might have led to a more intimate proximity seen in heterosexual romances. The song not only consolidates and celebrates the two's friendship through its lyrics but also serves to deflect any 'inappropriate' inference to their relationship. Most of the times, within the choreography their interaction is competitive and pugilistic. At other times, within the choreography of male friendship a discourse of heterosexual courtship, distracting and revealing at the same time, unfolds.

The female side dancers, all this while, serve only as the backdrop to this homosocial play. At one point, Kumar lifts Khan at the hips and carries him down toward the camera; later Khan, seen lying on the floor, thrusts his groin upwardly toward the centre of the frame, while Kumar, standing above him is doing similar pelvic thrusts toward the camera, so that the low angle perspective of the frame brings their thrusts together. Toward the end of the number, both walk with away together while grasping each others' shoulders. During this time they continually maintain eye-contact. Kumar puts his tie on Khan, slaps his behind and this goes on creating a larger symmetrical bodily movements that play up the physical intimacy of their bond.

Given the male domination of both the cinematic apparatuses and the public sphere of south Asian society as a whole, male sexual expression, straight or queer is the common currency of the realm, whereas female sexual expression is a highly challenged site. Thomas Waugh writes:

> In fact Indian cinema has traditionally been more than hospitable to same-sex desire –regardless of the fact that it has never been so named-

> whether within institutions of publicity, stardom, fan culture, and reception, or within narrative worlds in which the borders around and within homosociality have always been naively and uninhibitedly ambiguous. In these popular cinemas ingredients from rape narratives, and the newly merged vamp/virgin heroine to pelvic dancing and 'lewd' lyrics have been out of control for some time now. (280)

Waugh agrees with Cohen when he identifies the principal task as the delineation of hegemonic forms of homosociality. This is because, as Cohen puts it,

> Bollywood, in its incoherently heteroglossic and enigmatic spontaneity, its compulsive flirtations with the forbidden and addiction to the familiar, its foundation on same-sex audience formations...has always been the ideal locus for crystallizing the cultures of homosociality, both textually and contextually. The discourses of male bonding, mentoship, friendship, violence, rivalry over and sharing of women – in short of homosocial desire- cement this cinema across every generic category form multi-starrer action flick to social/family melodrama, and constitute a rich, volatile, and pluralistic site for recent settlings and resettlings. (285)

Notwithstanding this history of popular Indian cinema, the growing ambiguity and complexity, playfulness and boldness, of this traditional homosocial formula par excellence has become increasingly self-conscious, even parodic, in such films as Main Khiladi. The fact that this formula is incorporated in heterosexual neo-romances – where the function of female roles is to offset panic and restore heterosexual equilibrium – bears testimony to the self-consciousness that seeps through such representations.

Margaret Jolly and Lenore Manderson call it "the deep histories of sexual contact and erotic entanglement between Europeans and 'others' ...cross-cultural exchanges in sexualities – exchanges in meanings and fantasies as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies... 'sites of desire' formed by confluences of cultures, be they the tidal waves of European colonialism or the smaller eddies of sexual contacts and erotic imaginings created between cultures...this border crossing, this fluid terrain in the exchange of desires..." within the fluid terrain of popular culture in India (Cited in Waugh, 285). In a media set-up that feeds off global and local culture, where Michael Jackson is demonstrably one of the most important choreographic influences of the last generation, it is difficult to ascertain where imported metropolitan identity ends and authentic indigenous identity begins.

This is not to mean that play is an alibi for same-sex desire in any simple way, though it could be at some other level. This axis of erotic play is allowable in Bollywood's parallax world because this play is situated within a predominantly heterosexual framework where most men situated on this axis focus their desiring look on the bodies of women. For most, the boundary excludes penetrative sex. However, this does not rule out play as a prevalent axis of same-sex desire in a homosocial culture. The gradation between sociality and eroticism is finely coded and does not transgress the regulated sphere of convention, even on parallax.

Apparent images of queer identity found in certain texts such as *Main Khiladi Tu Anari* cannot be located in the subversive domain, the reasons being that such kind of portrayal takes place along a spectrum that accommodates queer as easily as it does heteronormativity. The term 'queer' lacks definite character. Though it has been described as Doty as 'contra-, non-, or anti-straight' (xv) and as 'an in-your-face-rejection of the proper response to heteronormativity, a version of acting up' by Hennessy (967) what these male presence in item numbers demonstrate is the

paradoxical resettling of heteronormative masculinity through dance performances; whereas it would make more sense if queer was defined in much the same way that Barthes thinks of the plural, as "that which confuses meaning, the norm, normativity" which is different to standing against the norm or normativity.

This kind of performance appropriates the representation and exploration of the images of the male body and as a result and redefines undermines any attempt to reinscribe the male body. It does not offer any new reading of cultural representations; rather it suffers from a limited access to available models of masculine and feminine roles.

This leads to the failure of the dance form to adequately capitalise on the unique qualities and problematics inherent to such kind of performance text. Lucas complains that by only approaching 'maleness' and 'masculinity' as themes, choreographers, performers and viewers are regarding the male body as a blank canvas on which can be written the texts of subversion disregarding the fact of its prior inscription.

The male dancing body (as an integration of the 'male body' and the 'dancing body') occupies a volatile position. It could challenge heteropatriarchal tenets, simply because of its presence in a form which Western patriarchal discourses posit as essentially 'feminine', though to the Indian tradition dance cannot be aligned strictly with the female domain. However the history of the erotic song-and-dance sequences in popular Hindi cinema posits this form as a platform for the exclusive fetishization of woman's body thus confining it to the domain of heterosexist gender representations. Bollywood's production and distribution systems in filmmaking and music video culture not only has followed the footsteps of the glamorous and capitalist Hollywood but has also internalised the representation process and the choices in representability.

Because the form is seen as 'feminine', it is open to suspicion and regarded as having the potential to be both subversive and contradictory to the dominant

principles of a patriarchal society. The bodies that operate within the form are therefore necessarily subject to close scrutiny and rigid control

The control over the dancing body is applied to both masculine and feminine images, with male representations shaped and governed just as fastidiously as are female. Obviously though, the location of dance as a 'feminine' form has particular implications for the construction and presentation of 'masculine' identities that are contextualised within it. The male dancing body – feminised, sexualised, passionate – is obviously a dangerous weapon that must be closely scrutinised and not be allowed to escape from the boundaries of conventional masculinity. Hegemonic patriarchal culture attempts to rigidly govern ways in which male identity is established through the texts of its actions.

The traditional notions or stereotypes, which exist dictate that the essential personality and behavioural traits that the status quo requires to be enacted by male gendered bodies so as to establish their 'masculine' identity (and to allow them to be clearly delineated and defined) be understood to centre around power, strength, aggression, independence, self-containment, emotionlessness, inscrutability, a potential and ability to compete and win, and a dominance of others, most particularly of those outside the traditionally acceptable parameters of 'masculinity.' Guidelines for the physical depiction of a coercively idealistic 'masculinity' interrelate with, reflect and affect these behavioural requirements. The heteronormative 'masculine' body, defined by its strength, muscularity, and its potential for explosive and effective action, provides a site for the enactment of a masculine persona, providing both a vehicle through which a masculine identity can be realised and a clear and tangible physical sign of a presumed inner nature.

The 'masculine' body is regarded as a mechanism for the undertaking of particular actions, and is understood to possess the specific physical characteristics which enable

these behaviours. The muscles are for power, aggression, competition and strength—not for their own sake. Furthermore, the idealistic male body (unlike that of its female counterparts) is commonly represented as being intricately in tune with the operations of the brain, presumed to possess an innate and integral ability to tie together physical actions with the psychological and intellectual mechanisms of thought, reason, intelligence and rationality.

Because the song-and-dance sequences of popular Hindi cinema exist in a society in which patriarchy is one of the most influential discourses, its continuing existence is premised within the expectation that it will conform to the dominant physiological and behavioural guidelines that constitute this system. The male dancing body is unavoidably assessed and regarded in accordance with these dominant beliefs. It is important to remember that the male body is developed only inasmuch as it is required to fulfil the 'masculine' actions of the male identity.

A trend that is thrust to the audience through media culture is the assertion of a masculine identity that manifests itself through an ideal 'masculine' body. One only needs to look at advertisements on television and follow the lifestyles of popular personalities in the entertainment industry to realize the massive investments made on the body. There is a whole new trend among actors to put themselves through the rigours of exhaustive physical exercises in order to achieve what convention decrees is the norm in beauty.

The structural nature of the male dancing body does not guarantee it a certain placement in the masculine' category because a male dancing body, with signs of strength, sinews, physical power and potential for action inscribed on it, is not developed for aggression and competition unlike the spectacle of an athlete's body whose musculature is dedicated to the realization of competition and subsequent externally awarded excellence, but rather to fulfil aesthetic requirements of a 'feminine' form.

Hence, it follows that if Shah Rukh Khan, a superstar in India, makes an appearance in an item number, it is only to assert his masculine role as predator to Malaika Arora's prey, the item girl's body being the actual site for erotic spectacle. The presence of the item girl vis-à-vis the male dancing body is to re-affirm the heterosexual norm of male and female within the larger narrative of masculine power, aggression and assertiveness. It is a spectacle created for a heterosexist culture that values aspects of challenge and victory and not the 'trivialities' of aesthetic worth. A male dancing body that is not regulated according to the norms of the dominant ideology would be essentially worthless. In the meantime, the female body is overtly eroticised: it is a servile sexual display and its appeal is primarily directed at an audience that subscribes to the dominant heteronormative ideology.

A feminisation of male dancing body, beyond the limits set to mark his similarity to and difference from Hollywood heroes, would certainly alarm the systems of heteronormativity. The relation of a male body, inhabiting an otherwise feminine domain, to patriarchy is a problematic one and cannot be fully resolved, involving as it does, a constant fluctuation between formal requirements which posit it in a 'feminised' role (according to patriarchal modes of function) and an autonomous and self-contained male identity which is the expected standard from its gender, as defined by the dominant ideology. Therefore to make it conform to this dominant ideology it is controlled and regulated such that even if it is 'feminised', it is still recognisably gendered as 'male', because patriarchy demands that every effort be made to refute and minimise the 'damaging' effects of its instability.

These demands affect both the individual body, and the form in which it exists, demonstrating a definite attempt to govern the shaping of sex-gender relations in any popular Indian cultural dance text. This exposes a desire to excuse and realign the gendered texts of the male dancing body in accordance with accepted patriarchal

concerns of representation. Both body and form operate under pressures which act to eradicate (or at least reduce) the separations between the identity of the male dancing body and conventionally accepted concepts of masculinity and heteronormativity.

Body and form are both pressured to align with heteronormativity (as a dominant and coercive ideal) by strongly asserting patriarchal correctness and dominant 'masculine' ideals, and constantly refuting 'feminine' instability and suspiciousness. The external exertion of influence to address these concerns manifests itself in a variety of forms, all of which are essentially tied in with the notions of masculine control, domination, and privilege. The common theme is 'power'. And within this system reward through acceptance is the most valid currency: the form and its practising bodies are accorded status depending on their ability to successfully fulfil the requirements of heteronormative functioning.

The success of item numbers involving popular Bollywood actors would depend entirely on the success with which these figures are represented according existing dominant ideology. There is a prescribed need for a formulaic pattern that would always represent the male body as a predator, assertive; sure of itself and having potential for action whereas the female body is present to serve as a foil that offsets this display of masculine ideals through an erotic display of her anatomy. The success and appreciation of such item numbers depend on the relationship of the form to the dominant ideals: constructions and representations of 'maleness' and 'masculine' identity through the dancing body is monitored in the same way that images and behaviour of gender is governed within the larger context of society.

In the context of *Kaal Dhamaal* it is Shah Rukh Khan who is the 'darsanic authority': he is 'male' figure who sings, and directs the flow of the number. Within this represented structure that is constituted of an 'ultra male' dancing figure flanked by extra side dancers, we see the defined interrelationship of a self-contained, self-reliant,

and autonomous 'masculine' director/leader who organises, dominates, and controls the 'feminine' workers/followers who, in turn stress his authority through compliance.

As regards notions of gender and sexual identity, such a representation operates in a state of denial and hypocrisy: while the idea of a male body operating in a 'feminine' domain is subversive, in practice it is only an extended platform of 'play' for patriarchy to realize the requirements of normativity. This sense of hypocrisy is nowhere more apparent than in the way the dance form regards and represents the male dancing body. It deliberately does not capitalise on its subversive traits. On the contrary it often goes to extreme lengths to try to bring that body into line with heteronormative ideals.

The most obvious example of this process of attempted normative complicity is the limited range of movement options given to the male dancer. As mentioned earlier, in the song *kaal dhamaal* Khan is never seen appearing wet in the same way that Arora is. We also do not, throughout the song and dance, see him being lifted and erotically touched and caressed in the same way that the other is. Too often, his movement draws only on the clichés of strength and muscular power, and denies his male body full access to any movement or performance or quality which may be considered 'feminine.'

In conclusion, all of these aspects illustrate the inability of the form to acknowledge the potential of the male dancing body as a site for the redefinition of notions of 'masculinity' and 'maleness'. The form cannot successfully use the body to explore themes of multiple masculinities if it is also working to actively reinforce the very same stereotypes that it seeks to dispel. If the form is genuinely seeking to facilitate the creation and presentation of texts which contribute to the redefinition of the existing narrow identity parameters, then it must embrace this difference and actively promote it. To utilise its subversive power one must accept the requirement of shifts in the processes and structures that are employed in its creation and representation It is indeed

the dangerous weapon that the patriarchy fears it to be, and one that can be used to challenge accepted modes of practice.

Conclusion

There is an unquestioning readiness to accept things the way they are and this attitude seems to be growing with each passing day as evidenced by the unchecked proliferation of image depicting the unequal balance of power in public culture. 'Item numbers' are also cultural manifestations of this unequal balance of power in society.

The position of the category 'woman' becomes that of a subordinated nature, forever relegated to that domain wherein she is controlled and subjugated by the 'gaze'. Therefore it is important that a woman take control of her body so that the text of her image is not subject to another's definition of it. However, as put forward in the second chapter, this statement is predicated upon the construction of woman as having an 'essence'. This is not to suggest that women or men have a quintessential nature but rather to facilitate the possibility of multiple sites of desire and identity.

The aim of this work is not to privilege one group over the next. As has been put forward in chapters 1 and 2, this work aims to reveal, through the text of 'item numbers', the artifice behind such a representation. A common assumption underlying almost all work on sex and gender is that all subjects must be either male or female and subject-positions masculine or feminine. In this context we need to consider whether the taxonomy afforded is able to embrace all aspects of subjectivity: does the failure to conform to either roles or positions situate one outside the reach of this taxonomic regulation?

These cultural representations are premised on the assumption that there are certain sex-typed differences which are recognizable without the aid of empiricism. The persistence of the image supports the assumption that if repeated often enough and made familiar gender will eventually shed its mythic status and be regarded as natural. Gender as it is commonly perceived can also be called gender role or roles and they are judged through

the individual's level of conformity to the societal norms of masculinity and femininity. The twin concepts of gender and gender role are tied together and cemented by certain signifiers like clothing, personal appearance, mannerism, occupational choice and other choices.

Therefore, women in order to constitute themselves as truly social beings need to be able too represent themselves as themselves. They have to overcome the deficit of women unsymbolized by woman, in short they have to become woman. This implies that there is a certain power structure involved which represses certain aspects of a subject's identity.

The production process is central to the signification of power in the process of representation. In Bollywood women hardly contribute to the making of film except as performers in them whereas the directors and producers are almost always males. This highlights the issue of authorship. This is not to suggest that all males identify with the 'gaze' and that they constitute a homogeneous unit. Central to this issue is the problem of identification and subject-positions.

The unilinear and one-dimensional constructions of the item girls become a cause for concern as they are displayed and paraded time after time with each new release (these numbers are shot and aired before the film they appear in are released) across television screens spanning all regions of India and farther to the South-Asia diasporic community. In their traditional role theirs images are portrayed as exhibitionist and this hinders and obliterates the possibility of diverse perspectives.

There is something deeper about the persistence of such kind of images. As we have tried to probe and analyze in the earlier part of this work, what is it about such masochistic fantasies that they get foregrounded in almost all popular visual texts? Chapter 1 reasonably deals with this question: a subject position that realizes its

individuality is always treated with suspicion because such features of modernity threaten the cohesive pre-capitalist patriarchal ideals and values. The signs of modernity are worn only to be discarded for traditional values as they are perceived.

The 'safe' roles of masculinity and femininity, as defined and controlled by the dominant ideology, are a method of reinforcing patriarchal ideals. Indian public culture or Bollywood, in conjunction with the state and the public, upholds these ideals revealing the nexus of power relations between all three. In this nexus of power and power relations the subjectivity of the category woman is trapped and appropriated by the dominant ideology and as a result images which have no cultural correlates in lived reality are re-presented again and again at the expense of individuality.

The visual images made by men of women in the past: the good mother, the chaste maiden, the whore, and so on, has the cultural prestige of antiquity. However, they are woman as imagined by men, signifying men's desire to control women's sexuality in the family, enjoy it outside and displace the qualities they fear in themselves onto the body of the woman, where these qualities can be controlled.

Women in visual images made by men connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness' in Mulvey's word. They are encouraged to play the role of being desired. This traditional role of women as the bearer and not maker of the 'look' subjugates her further her further because the notion of the gaze has important links with men's control of objects through ownership of capital, and it has implications, too, for the mastery of nature and connotations of an asymmetry in sexual relations, in which women are encouraged to make themselves passively receptive while men are supposed to actively seek out their pleasures.

Although all representations entailing the indication of the human figure through tangible and visual shapes entail a form of objectification some levels of objectification

may be considered safe. Objectifications that ensure the representation of the object as one with will, autonomous desires and powers, a specific personality, rights and human dignity, would be considered acceptable. The question to be raised in the context of representation would be: does objectification render the subjecthood of the person objectified; their ability to be author and maker of text too? Again such a kind of safe representation would have to take place in circumstances in which the object might reply back and ascertain its subject status. Unfortunately, in the texts available to us the subject in the narrative is the patriarchal, bourgeois male, that unified, centred point from which the world is organized and given meaning.

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