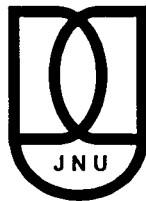


PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MAINSTREAM HINDI CINEMA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
In part-fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN MAINSTREAM HINDI CINEMA: A Sociological Study** submitted by **SHRAMANA MAJUMDER** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of the University, is an original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degrees of this University or any other to the best of our knowledge.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

This work focuses on Indian visual media. To be more specific, it looks at the treatment of women in mainstream Hindi cinema. Although films are made in many Indian languages, it is films made in Hindi that have for reasons historical and commercial, appropriated the label of Indian cinema. Hence the point of reference here is the popular visual medium.

The gendered identities, while ubiquitous and seemingly grounded in ontological primacy of sexual differences, are always crosscut by, and inscribed in other forms of inequality based on caste, class, religion, ethnicity, etc. These gender differences present certain versions of gendered identity as hegemonic because it is shown to be bolstered by a multiplicity of social institutions like family, religion, schooling system and the media among others. However, the focus here is on movies.

The movies are an important social institution that go far beyond providing mere entertainment. They are part of the development of modern mass society, and have helped the way we live, i.e. the way we think and perceive the world around us. Perhaps more than any other social institution, the movies grasp and hold the imagination of hundreds of millions of people. There are various factors which facilitate the movies to gain prominence in the social structure of any society. *First* and foremost, the movies are the culmination of the development of mass society, a process that brings together the dynamic forces of urbanization, industrialization and national forms of communication. When combined, these forces create a form of social interaction which encourages greater degree of homogeneity in society than had previously been the case. *Secondly*,

the movies are the ideal entertainment activity for an increasingly urbanized population. *Finally*, this entertainment form is the logical extension and a recombination of existing elements in folk-popular culture continuum. The motion picture synthesizes elements of folk culture and refines it into a product, which has a more universal appeal. Owing to the confluence of all these factors, the movies may be viewed as 'shaping' the ideas of their audiences, as much as 'reflecting' them. The question of cinema being reflecting or shaping the minds of the audiences is an extremely complex one. And the answer is subject to a wide variety of qualifications. Some argue for the visual media 'making an impact' on the viewers mind, while other argue for cinema being capable of 'reflecting' society.

In the present context, the images of women in media probably perform this double function of both 'shaping' and 'reflecting', which problematises the treatment of the subject – 'women' through this medium. In other words, the objectification of women in those genres where they are the prominent object of attention need to be read as something problematic in itself. In particular, the issue is not only of correctness or incorrectness of representation, but also of the socially constructing nature of the stereotypical imagery. One clue regarding what it means to be a woman in our society is provided by this popular medium. The behaviour, attitudes, options, permissible to women in our society are both presented and affected by mainstream Hindi cinema. Hence, there surfaces the need to analyse this medium.

Indian mainstream Hindi cinema has more often than not misrepresented women and depicted them in stereotypical forms of binary oppositions: 'the Devi' and the 'Devadasi'. There are also the 'Daayins'. In the Devi- that is the goddess category are

the revered mother, the demure sisters, the romanticized girl friends and the devotional wives. The Devadasis are the fallen woman – the sensuous vamp, the courtesan, and the common prostitute. Among these stereotypes the ‘real Indian women’ is lost and ignored. However, this is not the only distortion, equally important is the devaluation of women as sex objects, as commodities that is so strikingly a feature of mass media. The contemporary publicity industry (advertisements both visual and print), as well as the commercial Hindi cinema promote and to a significant extent depend upon the ‘objectification of women as objects of male desires and of potential items of male possession. As an indication of such treatment, women have become objects or things to be appropriated, possessed and exchanged in social relations of co-operation and competition among men. Women function as insignias of wealth, status, power and virility of men who possess them, and of desires of those who would want to possess them. This dissertation dwells on this very issue of objectification or commodification of women in contemporary mainstream Hindi cinema.

However, there seems to have been a change in the sense that in contemporary times we are witnessing a more realistic view of Indian women. Some films have actually represented the radical mode, and have even explored the questions of female sexuality. But even this rebellious sexuality or financial autonomy is controlled and made acceptable by a certain ‘femininity’ that is encoded as physical charm. Strikingly, such advertisements or movies target the most frequent sites of women’s oppression, sexual harassment, domestic work, dowry, marriage rituals, joint family, etc., and redefines them in glamorized or alternatively trivialized sites of reshaping female

identity. Needless to say, such imagery does have its own social repercussions. And in her desirability lies the justification of an apology for such an invasion of space.

Before moving on further, it may be mentioned here that, notwithstanding the high visibility of women in the visual media, the portrayal has remained distorted and problematic, which in a way propelled one to work on this theme of Indian popular cinema.

Any study based on a particular theory has a definite theoretical vantage point. For this work, fundamentally 'Feminist – Film Theory' forms the reference point. To be more specific, it attempts to analyse the treatment of women in Indian mainstream cinema, drawing mainly from psychoanalytic feminist–film theory, better known as the 'Screen Theory'. One also tries to examine the spectating position – whether male or female. An attempt has also been made to evaluate the changing equations of women's image in mainstream Hindi cinema, with reference to the post–modern feminist stance, and its applicability to Indian context. Besides, the study also dwells briefly on factors like consumerism, globalization, etc., that contribute to the changing images of women in Indian Hindi cinema. Though this study comes across as an appendage to already existing works on media in Indian scenario, it tries to be different by presenting and analyzing the female spectator's position. The paper also raises the legal issue, that of censorship, whilst relating it to social legitimacy or social acceptance. Most importantly, it addresses the issue of arrival of the post-modern heroine in mainstream Hindi cinema.

The *Research Methodology* employed for this study is essentially qualitative. The data has been primarily drawn from secondary sources (books, articles, etc.) and one's observation about mainstream Hindi Cinema. This study consists of broadly three

chapters. *Chapter one* focuses on the theoretical orientations in relation to women and cinema.

Chapter two deals with the issue of cultural construction of gender stereotype and the role of the media. Along with this, it also offers a chronological sketch of portrayal of women in Hindi cinema. With regard to change in the image of women, the factors that have contributed to such a shift in the treatment of women in Hindi cinema have also been discussed briefly. Finally, the chapter also provides an overview of various literatures that have dealt with the issue of the relation between 'Media and Gender'.

Chapter three attempts an analysis of the treatment of women in mainstream Hindi movies in terms of psychoanalytic-feminist theories. At the same time it examines the changing image of Indian women in Indian popular cinema in terms of post-feminist stance on the issue. It attempts to analyse whether one is able to identify the arrival of the post-modern heroine in mainstream Hindi cinema. The chapter also talks about female spectatorial position vis-a-vis the mainstream Hindi movies. We have also examined the legalities of obscene representation of women, bringing in the question of censorship. Finally, the future trend in the Hindi film industry is also focused upon, which is followed by the conclusion.

Limitations And Relevance of the Study

Every study has its own *limitations and relevance* and this is no exception to the rule. Why should we study Indian cinema? An obvious question. For millions of Indians overseas, India is experienced through its movies. One of the ways of studying Indian society is studying mainstream Hindi cinema. Cinema clearly opens up a most useful

window onto the Indian culture, and its study brings us intimacy and immediacy, unavailable from most other media of communication. Deeper insights into the complex processes of modernization, colonialism, nationalism and freedom for women can be acquired through Indian films. Indeed the representation of women in Indian films is a fascinating area of study and has been explored by a number of scholars.

While one analyses it from a feminist stance, it illuminates the dominant forms of patriarchal ideology: How women are subjugated as the nurturing mother, the chaste wife, the vamp or the educated modern woman. Cinema not only reflects culture, also shapes it to quite an extent. When we consider Indian films we see how they have promoted modernization, westernization, urbanization, new ways of life, a sense of pan-Indianism, the emancipation of women, the rights of minorities, etc. Thus, in a way, study of Indian cinema enables us to make sense of the relationship between popular cinema and Indian society. Films can also be seen as a vital instrument of social criticism, for instance, films like *Mirch Masala*, *Shool*, *Pinjar*, among others. Finally, it is important to study the sociological consequences of the portrayal of women in the media, as it helps to evaluate the media's role in relation to ushering in social change.

The present work identifies the changes in the portrayal of women in mainstream Hindi cinema and at the same time focuses upon the social implications of such alterations. Secondly, since the work raises the issue of female spectatorial position it may motivate the reader to dwell on the issue and raise relevant questions on the subject for further exploration. Moreover, as female spectatorial position seems to be a less researched area, one hopes that this work will contribute to the knowledge in this field by filling in the gaps that exist in the current literature.

The *limitations* of the study relate to the fact that the work is basically based on secondary sources and it may not have universal applicability. Moreover, since the study focuses only on mainstream Hindi cinema it is not comparative in nature and fails to provide an overarching view of the changing faces of women in Hindi cinema. Yet, one hopes that it will put forward certain propositions for further research.

CHAPTER-I

THEORITICAL ORIENTATIONS

Film, Feminism And Psychoanalysis: An Overview

The women's movement of the 1960s and early 1970s laid emphasis on the ideological form of sexual subordination, and developed counter strategies for ideological struggle. This struggle utilized psychoanalysis politically in the move towards a theorization of sexuality and oppression. This phase of 1960's – 1970s has been referred to as the 'Second-wave Feminism'. Debates about popular culture within feminist cultural studies often engage with concept and ideas generated by this 'Second-wave Feminism'. It is out of this movement that contemporary debates and theories have emerged, and Women's Studies entered academic life. By the mid-1970s, questions about how gendered identities were culturally produced and reproduced became the topic of much more in-depth feminist analyses and discussions. Around the same period, feminists and social scientists began to generate a body of research dealing with representation of men and women in visual media and its effect on the audience. This critique of 'image of women' led to the development of a key focus of feminist media, film and cultural studies. The early stages of feminist research into the media looked at "*images of women*" (how they are portrayed). However, with due course of time, many feminists turned their attention to "*images for women*" (movies made for the female audience). With this shift, a new series of feminist debates emerged which centered on 'women's' genres across a range of cultural forms. However, the present research deals with the former issue, situating it in Indian scenario.

In 1972, the first issue of a short-lived American journal called 'Women and Film' was published. Appearing just two years after the publication of *Kate Millet's* 'Sexual Politics', *Shulamith Firestone's* 'The Dialectics of Sex', *Germaine Greer's* 'the Female Eunuch', and *Robin Morgan's* anthology, 'Sisterhood is Powerful', the magazine declared itself to be a part of second wave feminism, and the editor of this magazine aimed to put an end to oppressive ideology and stereotyping, and the creation of a feminist critical aesthetics. The purpose of the magazine is best explicated in the following quote: "The women in this magazine, as part of the women's movement are aware of the political, psychological, social and economic oppression of women. The struggle begins at all fronts and we are taking up the struggle with women's image in film and women's roles in the film industry – the ways in which we are exploited, and the ways to transform the derogatory and immoral attitudes the ruling class and their male lackeys have towards women and other oppressed people".¹ It is in this climate that feminism's engagement with film began – as an urgent political act.

Early concerns within American feminism, centered on film representations of superficial images of women. It exposed, both false and oppressive images of women created by the films. For them, such films reflected both social structures and changes, and misrepresented them according to the fantasies and fears of their male creators. The resultant stereotype served to reinforce and / or created the prejudices of the male audience, damaged self-conception, as well as limited the social aspirations of women.

However, they lacked the theoretical framework that was capable of both explaining the persistence and power of these representations. One of the stalwarts of

1. Sue Thornham 'Films and Feminism' (in) Sarah Gamble (2001) *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post- Feminism*, Routledge, London / New York/ p-93.

American feminist movement *Claire Johnston* in her work 'Notes on Women Cinema'² wrote: "...From the outset the women's movement has assumed without question the importance of film in the women's struggle".³ This clearly signalled her political engagement.

It is worth mentioning here that the approaches of the American and British feminists differ. The British feminists drew from European film and Cultural Theory: Structuralism and Semiotic, from Marxist notions of ideology, and Psychoanalytic theory. This approach insists that film representation need not be viewed as in the American Sociological Approach, in terms of 'reflections' of reality, that is, whether true or false. For them, films are texts of complex structures of linguistic and visual codes organized to produce specific meanings of their organization of visual and verbal signs. It is these textual structures, which we must examine because it is here that meaning is produced. According to them, films are bearers of ideology, the 'way of seeing' the world, which appears to be natural but are in fact a product of specific power structures that constitute our society. Thus for them, the 'sign' women acquires its meaning within a sexist or patriarchal ideology. In other words, they point out that what should be examined is how the sign 'woman' operates within specific film texts –what meanings it is made to bear and what desires and fantasies it carries.

Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (published 2 years after 'Notes on Women's Cinema') is the most anthologized article in feminist film theory. In it, *Mulvey* adds to *Johnston's* account of women as 'sign'. More specifically she provides

² Claire Johnston: 'Notes on Women Cinema' (1973: Britain); (cited in) Sarah Gamble (2001) *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post-Feminism*, Routledge, London/ New York/ p- 95.

³ *Ibid.*

an analysis of how cinema as an apparatus creates a position for the film spectator, drawing on psychoanalytic theory to explain this positioning. In so doing, she also produces a further shift in analytic focus towards a concern with the structures of identification and visual pleasure to be found in cinema; in other words, towards spectator screen relationship. *Mulvey's* interest in psychoanalytic theory was one shared by a number of French film theorists in the early 1970s. Along with her *Christian Metz* and *Jean-Louis Baudry* had both compared the operation of the 'cinematic apparatus' upon the spectator to that of a dream. Yet another thinker *Mary Ann Doane's* work during the 1980s sought to extend *Mulvey's* use of psychoanalytic theory into an account of this shadowy figures, and in particular to an analysis of the viewing pleasures offered by a genre aimed specifically at women: the 'women's film', of the 1940s.

The later decades witnessed the emergence of new forms of analyses. Some while remaining within a psychoanalytic framework, sought to rethink its terms. Increasingly, *Freud's* work on dream and fantasy was reinterpreted. This became the theoretical underpinning not for cinema's power to 'fix' its spectators within the structures of sexual difference but for the reverse: for the shifting and multiple positions which cinema offers to its fantasizing spectators. In *Linda Williams* (1991) study of what she calls 'Body Genres' or 'Genres of Gender Fantasy', she argues that although these genres share a quality of excess in which it is the bodies of women which have functioned traditionally as the primary embodiments of pleasure, fear and pain, the viewing positions which they offer are not gender fixed or gender linked. Instead, they are marked by an oscillation of identificatory position, an oscillation between the poles of sadism and masochism, powerlessness and power.

Other responses moved away from cine-psychoanalysis towards an engagement with perspectives emerging from British cultural studies. *Stuart Hall* for instance, pointed out that if one wants to understand the process by which film or texts produce meaning, what we need is a model, which will account for the entire communicative process. *Hall's* models see this process as operating through three linked moments. *First*, is the moment of production, *second*, is the text, and the *third*, the moment of viewing. Each is envisaged as a site of struggle over meaning: the 'meanings' encoded by the texts' producers, the 'meaning' embodied within the text, and the 'meaning' decoded by the viewer. The feminists appropriated this model. *Christine Gledhill* argues on these lines, and says that the same struggle may be seen between competing meanings, frames of reference or ideological positions within an individual film.

Psychoanalysis And Cinema.

A particular school of thought evolved, which borrowed ideas from Structuralism, Semiotics, and Psychoanalysis, and utilized cinematic texts in terms of these ideas. This film criticism is often dubbed as 'Screen Theory'.⁴ The prominent theorists belonging to this school include, *Claire Johnston*, *Pam Cook* and *Laura Mulvey*. Their ideas are based on the notion that the very form of language and film works not only to reproduce patriarchal ideology but also to implicate its spectators as subjects of patriarchal ideology.

In this context, it becomes necessary to see the basic assumption of this theory, which drew mainly from Structuralism and Semiotics. Structuralism and Semiotics

⁴ Joanne Hollows, (2000), *Feminism Fertility And Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester, p-46.

provided a way of understanding how film texts constrain and reproduce our idea of what 'reality is'⁵ rather than reflecting a preexisting reality. This is based on the Structuralist idea that language is not a neutral system which refers to real objects in the real world, rather it is through language that world is given meaning. Language divides up the world into two classes of objects including 'men' and 'women', and ascribes meaning to them. In this way, language is ideological because it makes what is 'cultural' appear to be 'natural'; that is to say, the way things are.

For the Structuralists, meaning in language is generated through a system of differences and words or signs gain their meaning through their difference to other words. For this reason, 'men' / 'women', 'Feminine' / 'Masculine' acquire meaning through their difference from each other. Feminists appropriated this Structuralist notion and used this insight to argue that in patriarchy where 'man' is defined as the norm, 'woman' gains meaning as different to, and in opposition to that norm. The Screen Theorists drew on Structuralism to argue that the language of cinema worked in a similar way. While the realist films gave the illusion of being a window on the real world, they in fact worked to produce particular notions of what 'reality' was. They argued further that the truth revealed was ideological. Thus the feminist critiques moved on to maintain that dominant cinema works to reproduce patriarchal ideology in which man signifies 'norm' and woman the 'other' to that norm. Hence woman is an 'empty sign'.

Mulvey builds on the notion of woman as an 'empty-sign' that signifies only her 'otherness' to male norm which is associated with activity. Further, she argues that woman acts as a signifier for male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can

⁵Joanne Hollows,(2000),*Feminism Fertility And Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester,pp-44-46

live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of women still tied to her place as a bearer of meaning but not a maker of meaning. However, she is concerned with how the image of women in narrative cinema is also coded as an erotic object, they are objects of male visual pleasure. In order to explain this, she draws on psychoanalysis to argue that the visual and narrative structures of mainstream cinema both intersect with, and reproduce the processes through which people become aware of themselves as sexed and gendered subjects.

Further, she notes how cinema plays on what *Freud* had called 'Scopophilia'. He had identified Scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality that exists as drives quite independently of the erogenic zones. He associated it with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a curious gaze. He further exemplifies this phenomenon by pointing out the 'voyeuristic' instincts (activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of their private, and the forbidden, that is bodily function / genitals, etc.). However, this instinct is modified by other factors, in particular, the constitution of ego and it continues to exist as the erotic case for pleasure in looking at another person or object. The erotic pleasure in looking at another person or object, and in the cinema, she argues, is projected on to the woman who is coded as an erotic object for male gaze.

Mulvey moves on to point out a third type of relationship between the spectator, and the image on the screen – 'narcissism', which refers to male spectators identification with his own likeness. In this mode of looking, the male spectator misrecognizes himself in the idealized image of the male protagonist who controls both the narrative and the look within the film. This gives the male spectator a sense of power and omnipotence. However, while he can identify with the male protagonist as the object of male

spectator's look, it raises the problem of homoeroticism. As a result, woman must function as the primary erotic object within the film, their appearances coded for strong visual and erotic impact. The male spectator's gaze is deflected through identification in the female body.

Thus, for *Mulvey*, women as image in the mainstream cinema are produced as spectacles for male gaze. She can only function as the object of the narrative and signify passivity, while the man is the active subject of the narrative. Added to all this is the hermeneutically sealed world, which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, and producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another), and the brilliance of shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Furthermore conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer. Hence, *Mulvey's* theory implies that frameworks of all mainstream cinemas are organized around male desire. By appropriating psychoanalysis for feminist film criticism, *Mulvey* succeeds in explaining how the images and representations, which are the bearers of ideology, are also those through which, by process of identification, we construct our identities as human subjects. Thus, patriarchal cinema and culture for *Mulvey* has produced a world ordered by sexual imbalance in which pleasure in looking has been divided between active male and the passive female. Moreover, for her, patriarchal meanings cannot be

removed from cinema since the long structures and conventions, which underpins mainstream cinema, are patriarchal.

Claire Johnston and *Pam Cook* trained in Psychoanalysis and Structuralism (more in psychoanalysis) have different explanations for the treatment of women in dominant cinema. On the basis of their insights gathered from psychoanalysis, they argue that the male protagonist's castration fears, his search for self-knowledge all converge on women: it is in her that he is finally faced with the recognition of 'lack'. The idea that a woman signifies castration basically refers to the way in which her difference from man signifies an inferiority or 'lack' in relation to man. In this sense, the image of a woman is potentially threatening to men, since the woman signifies what it is to be powerless, and lack the power and presence that defines a man. In short, she signifies the threat that he might become like her. Thus, the threat of 'castration': the threat woman signifies to men that they might lose the positive attribute associated with masculinity and become more like the feminine other.

In order to avoid this threat, the dominant cinema uses mechanisms that alleviate this threat through particular ways of looking: 'fetishism and voyeurism'⁶. Fetishism turns women into an image that is safe, enjoyable, and unthreatening: by turning some parts of her body into a fetish thus turning it into some thing pleasurable in itself. By focussing on the fetish, the male spectators attention is drawn away from the ways in which woman symbolizes 'lack', and in the process, the spectator knows, yet denies the 'threat' of a woman. The alternative mechanism voyeurism overcomes the threat that the woman represent by seeking to investigate her, understand her mystery, and has rendered her

⁶ Joanne Hollows,(2000),*Feminism Fertility And Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester,p-48

knowable, controllable, and subject to male mastery. Thus, activating these modes of looking at the cinematic structures make women an image which is a source of male pleasure rather than a threat. Also, if dominant cinema works to make culturally produced notions of 'man' and 'woman', masculine and feminine appear 'natural', then the task for feminist film criticism would be to 'denaturalize' these images, and show them what they are: ideological constructions.

However, Johnston also argues that within dominant cinema it was possible to identify certain examples of more 'progressive' films that recorded contradictions in patriarchal ideology. These films may neutralize taken for granted assumptions about men and women. She also claims that these 'progressive' texts can teach feminists how to deneutralize patriarchal ideology, and form the basis for a 'feminist counter-cinema', which would sweep aside the existing forms of discourse in order to find a new form of language.

The former section focused mainly on the interaction between the cinematic text and the 'male spectator'. However, with women constituting half of the existing population, the woman's position as a spectator is equally important. Hence, the following section discusses briefly about the interaction between the cinematic text and the female spectator.

The Female Spectator

The theories began with analyzing the male gaze, however with the course of time, they raised the question: what is it in a film with which a women viewer identifies?

This type of question motivated many feminists to turn to women's films which after all had been produced for a female audience. This was an attempt to discover, whether it was possible to identify films which offered opportunities for female spectatorship, and which in the process might offer some form of resistance within what seemed to be an inherently patriarchal domain.

Mulvey in her article '*After Thoughts*' first published in 1981,⁷ raised the questions of whether there was the possibility of a female spectatorship position within dominant cinema' while the answer to this question remained a fairly emphatic 'no'. She raised the possibility that the female audience / viewer could derive pleasure from taking up the position constructed for the male spectator where she might take pleasure in a 'phantasy of action'. And that correct femininity demands should be repressed: she could take pleasure in an active masculinity which must be rejected in becoming 'feminist' but which is never quite fully repressed. In this work, *Mulvey* concentrates on narrative rather than visual pleasure and, therefore, ignores the implication of this: whether adopting a male spectating position would lead the female viewer to treat woman as image or an erotic object. In this article, *Mulvey* also raises the question of whether a female protagonist might offer something for women. For her, while on one hand, this might act as a safety valve for patriarchy that allows women's feelings of frustration to be defused, on the other hand, these films can be thought of as progressive texts which offer women a sense of contradiction and problems, which patriarchy produces for them.

⁷ Joanne Hollows (2000) *Feminism Femininity and Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester, p-51.

A much more thorough theory of female spectatorship was offered by *Mary Ann Doane* (1987) in her work, '*The Desire to Desire*'.⁸ Doane turns to woman's films of the 1940s, which were produced for a female audience, feature a female protagonist, deal with women's issues, and which might offer the possibility of female point of view. These films, she argues, anticipate a female spectator. However, the female spectator it anticipates is not an active desiring subject because within the terms of psychoanalytic theory and patriarchy, feminine desire can only be passive. For *Doane*, female spectatorship is characterized of a proximity or closeness between the female subject or spectator, and the female object on screen. She argues that as against male spectators, women viewers do not engage in fetishism: that is to say the image of women poses no threat to them. In other words, female spectatorship is characterized by 'Narcissism', an over identification with the idealized feminize images of the female star.

This narcissistic identification has other extremely negative consequences for *Doane*. She relates the ways in which the female spectatorship is positioned in the cinema to ways in which women are positioned as consumers by capitalism, a position in which the female subject is invited to consume in order to turn herself into a commodity and object for men. When the female spectator identifies with the female star (who is proposed as the ideal of feminine beauty) on the screen she witnesses her own commodification. Cinema, by acting as a shop-window for commodities, also helps to reproduce the female spectator as consumer. The cinematic image, by operating as both a mirror in which the female spectator misrecognizes herself and as a shop-window, takes on the aspect of a trap whereby her subjectivity becomes synonymous with her

⁸ Joanne Hollows (2000) *Feminism Fertility and Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester, p-51

objectification. If, however, the relationship of the female viewer to the cinema can only be passive-- her spectating position is already constructed by the film text – then the female consumer is also conceived of as being passive. Hence, Doane suggests that while the essential feminine physical subject is predicated on ‘otherness’, and ‘lack’, this is overlaid by a feminine subjectivity that is the product of historically specific discourses. This implies that women’s film is subject to the same psychic laws that govern all mainstream cinema where femininity is equated with otherness, and produces through it women’s discourse, a seeing and desiring female subject.

*Linda Williams*⁹ argues that mainstream cinema is capable of producing films characterized by a female gaze and a female subject. This offers the female viewer ‘pleasures of recognition’, addressing the contradictions that women encounter under patriarchy. She draws from *Chodorow*. For *Chodorow*, whereas men must break their identification with their mother in order to gain a mature sexual identity, girls do not. Instead, a girl takes on her identity as a woman in a positive process of becoming like, not different than her mother. For *Chodorow*, mothers and daughters maintain a sense of connectedness which constructs female identity as multiple and continuous, capable of fluidly shifting between the identity of the mother and daughter. For Williams, this offers a way of understanding female spectatorship which instead of being based on over-identification with the image, is based on multiple identifications. She further argues that the multiple, often conflicting points of view prevents such a monolithic view of the female subject because women’s development means that they are capable of shifting between different positions and the female viewer identifies with these conflicting view

⁹Joanne Hollows, (2000) *Feminism Fertility And Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp-55-56

points. Therefore, while there may be a patriarchal resolution to the film, the female spectator is in constant state of juggling all positions at once and identifies with the contradictions rather than the resolutions. This means that the female spectator faced with the recognition of the contradictions of patriarchy, produces a radical reading of a film.

The meanings the films generate for female audience in the period can only be understood in relation to wide discourses of consumerism, the female star and women's fiction. Movie going may be an escape for the female viewers from the harsh realities of a patriarchal domain. Thus, cinema offers a collective sense of escape, creating a shared intimacy between women which is reproduced in their talk about films and their stars.

*Jackie Stacey*¹⁰ argues that identification encompasses a far more complex range of processes, practices and meanings for audiences. She distinguishes between what is referred to as 'Cinematic' and Extra-Cinematics' identification practices. 'Cinematic' identifications are usually based on recognition of the differences between the star and the female viewer. Pleasure may be generated through being 'inspired' by one's favourite star- for example, by the glamour or confidence—or might involve what *Stacey* calls 'transcendence', the 'imagined transformation of self which produces the cinematic pleasure'. This refers to the pleasure of believing for the time that you are in the cinema, that you are the actors and actresses on screen. Extra-cinematic identificatory practice extends beyond the encounter between viewer and star in the cinema and into the viewers' everyday practices. In these practices, women tend to reproduce the difference between themselves and the star, for instance, by copying hairstyles, dressing like her, etc. Therefore, she maintains that desire may not only be a product of sexual difference,

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¹⁰ Joanne Hollows, (2000) *Feminism Fertility And Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester, p-61

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but also of difference in feminities. Secondly, she notes that the relationship between star and spectator is not just at the level of 'imagination' but can also become incorporated into spectator's cultural practices outside the cinema. Third, consumption is not simply a site of female subordination but instead may be a source of resistance and empowerment. By drawing on the modes of feminine identity enacted by female stars, women through their consumption practices may have resisted feminine ideals of the period which portrayed woman as primarily wives and mothers. Thus, popular film texts may be a site where, in specific historical contexts, the meanings of femininity are reworked and negotiated.

Hitherto, the discussion was limited to the feminist thinking. In the era which is more often than not identified as being post-modern, it becomes somewhat essential to talk of a post-modern feminist stance on treatment of women in a visual medium of popular culture. The next section attempts to provide an overview of post-feminists stance on the same.

Post-Modern Feminism and Film

Post-modernism has had a profound effect upon the study of politics and academic feminist theory. It is however difficult to pin it down. Post-modernism is embroiled in a discussion of architecture, psycho-linguistic theory or literary criticism; with an impenetrable jargon of shifting signifiers, decentred subjects and meanings endlessly deferred, ruled by paradoxically confident assertion that there is no absolute truth. The term is somewhat loosely equated with post-structuralism; it is also sometimes used to identify the condition of late 20th century post-industrial societies. For the Post-

Structuralists, meaning of an object, action or social information is not inherent in it but is called into being by words. Any meaning can be endlessly constructed / reconstructed through words, which themselves have meaning in relation to other words. This analysis undermines the dualistic nature of western thought which depends on such fixed binary opposites as truth/falsehood; public/ private or man/woman, and therefore assumes a stability of meaning. It thus makes objective knowledge impossible, both because this has no constant object, and because our perceptions are invariably constrained by the language available to us. This in turn implies that our understanding can never be final and never complete, and our knowledge is always limited and partial.

As far as relevance of post-modernism for feminists is concerned, feminists are divided. For some, post modernism's insistence on diversity and provisionality can seem in line with liberal defences of pluralism and free speech. Post -modernism also seems to support many of the radical feminist ideas. Its analysis of the ubiquity of power looks at first sight very like the claim that patriarchal power is exercised in personal life as well as through formal political institutions. The identification of culture and language as key source of power and resistance is also seen to reinforce the radical argument that what passes for dispassionate knowledge is only a partial and limited male perspective and the claim by some that female forms of knowing based on emotion and intuition can provide clearer understanding than reason and logic. Its rejection of 'grand theory' and 'universal goal' similarly reflects the feminist assertion that such theories and goals have been used to conceal particular male interests.

Many feminists, however, reject the idea that good feminist understanding gained through women's own experience should be put forth in an inaccessible fashion,

particularly when these are designed by misogynistic men. They also reject an approach which although it may politicize the study of literature, film and art and depoliticise the study of politics and can seem to suggest that textual analysis is a more important form of political activity, rather than a demand like better pay for women. Although recent theoretical developments within radical feminism recognize the specificity and variability of women's experiences they do also insist that these are interconnected, and that society is fundamentally structured around men's domination over women.

Post-modern feminists do not deny that, "real", flesh and blood women are going about their daily lives, nor that they may be systematically disadvantaged because of their sex. They are using post-modern ideas that the very process of sex identification and classification is socially produced rather than an inevitable and unchanging outcome of biology. They therefore reject the sex / gender distinction made by earlier feminists. They argue that it is society that creates the category 'women' by attaching overwhelming importance to particular anatomical arrangements. Some post-modern feminists have argued that gender is not a stable identity but an act that requires repeated performances of gender appropriate behaviour, and which can never be fully internalized.

Post-Modern Feminism And The Image Of Women

Thus, such ideas of post-modernism can be seen as liberating for they suggest that the meaning which society attaches to sex/gender can be challenged. They open up in principle the possibility of a much more open society, hence rendering women more powerful. It is most evident among the new generation who are reluctant to be identified as feminists since for them the 1970s feminism is inappropriate. Today's generation has bravely cut through the perimeter fence of feminist orthodoxy indulging themselves in the pleasure of the popular text- whether it be TV, pulp fiction, cinema or women's magazines. The controversy generated by the term 'post-modern feminist' are nowhere keenly registered than in the field of cultural productions, where issues of female imagery and the politics of appearance have become troubled and fraught with contradictions. As important sites of the negotiation of post-feminist identity these contradictions are most powerfully evident in the portrayal of women in urban movies, music videos and women magazines, among other. In these, the discourse of femininity is almost turned against itself and mobilized to often anti-feminist-ends so that the terms associated with feminism such as 'liberation' are hijacked for other purposes. This construction of the 'new femininity' supposedly allows a woman to be liberated from the sour uniformity of feminist dogma by taking pleasure in the gaze. These movies / cultural productions have moved beyond the idea that such bold images of women are merely 'playful', and that the 'new femininity' represents power. This power seems to reside in the female body and the female heterosexual response. And in most cases sex / sexual attraction is one of the major delineation of female freedom in such movies and music videos.

Thus on a positive note, such an emergence of the new woman may be seen as a back-handed tribute to success of feminism in politicizing popular awareness of the dominant ideological power invested in the female image as an object but on a critical side, such a stance refuses to engage with feminisms concern with the power of the look under patriarchy. Instead they invest in the fantasy of a cultural vacuum devoid of any male gaze thus ensuring that patriarchal givens remain unchallenged.

Post-Feminists And Female Spectatorship

Christine Gledhill in her article '*Pleasurable Negotiations*' (1988)¹¹, contends that female spectatorship elides conceptually distinct notions: the feminine spectator constructed by the text and the female audience, constructed by the socio-historical categories of gender, class, race, and so on. This distinction is an important one for understanding the nature of female spectator and the concept of diverse or differentiated audience response more generally. It also has implications for pleasures and resisting pleasures experienced by differently positioned 'readers'. The subject positioning constructed by different texts clearly relate to whether the text is produced for male or female spectating purposes. One area where the male body becomes the object of spectatorial pleasure is T.V., sport and sports-photography. However, *Ien Ang*, (1983)¹² shows how sports photography establishes the boundaries for visualising the male body within patriarchy. *Ang* maintains that 'these pictures are as compromise between activity and passivity; the male body tolerates the transformation in an object of

¹¹ Ann Brooks, (1997), *Feminism, Cultural Theory And Cultural Forms*, Routledge London/ New Delhi, p:180

¹² Ibid

visual desire only when it is in motion. *Van Zoonen* (1994: 104)¹³ contends that the way in which the male body presents itself to a female audience / spectator within a patriarchal framework shows that a reversal of masculine structures of looking which is based on identification and voyeurism does not produce an equivalent female voyeurism. She maintains that this conforms the inadequacy of the psychoanalytic model for the female spectator. Despite contradictions within patriarchal culture, the dominant visual economy is still organized along traditional gender lines.

With the help of psychoanalytic theories an attempt will be made to analyse spectator's position-male or female. In order to do so it becomes necessary to talk about 'film' as a medium of communication. While doing so a brief account of 'Theories of Mass Media' will also be talked about.

FILM: A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Communication automatically assumes that there are two parties involved in it, the one who communicates and the other one to whom it is communicated. In case of a feature film, the Director/ the maker of the film is the communicator and the observer/ the audience is the one to whom he communicates. Thus film, like all other act forms, and medium of communication, forges the relationship between the creator and the consumer, the artist and the observer. The very word 'communication' pre-empts the word language. There can be no communication without a language. Language has two sides—the functional and the artists. The former deals mainly with the expressions of a feeling and

¹³ Ann Brooks, (1997), *Feminism, Cultural Theory And Cultural Forms*, Routledge London/ New Delhi, p:180

the latter aspect put the finer touches to it. Thus the first one deals with the content and the second with the form. With course of time, film evolved a language of its own; the main medium of this language is the camera. Each camera shot is like a sentence, which when arranged systematically, produces the idea which the creator of the film wants to make. The camera acts as the eye of the director- we see what the director wants us to see. The camera can be objective / subjective. Though the audience sees, what the maker wants them to see, it is not to ignore the fact that there is a scope of reading the film from different perspectives.

Film being an audio-visual medium has its own symbols and syntaxes. It can talk through the camera shots. Film as a medium of expression is also a very manifested medium which leaves very little scope for imagination. Hence it can communicate more directly than any other art form. This is so mainly because of two reasons- firstly, since it is manifest, cinema takes you there, inside the specific space, time, even inside the inner recesses of the psyche, if necessary. With the camera moving into place, and with it the audience; thus facilitating them to identify directly with the situation and react more intensely to it than any other form of communicative art like drama, dance, song, etc. And secondly, it is able to reach out to a wider mass. As film is a recorded art, and also because it can be reproduced, film can reach the masses in a way no other forms of communication can.

Film integrates the audience to a great extent because of its naturalistic way of presentation. Acting, again with the aid of camera, can achieve the height of natural behaviours in a film. Along with the acting, the landscape, colour, etc. the entire medium

achieves a realistic proportion which leaves little scope of taxing the imagination or the intellect.

Along with the language of the film, its forms and mass appeal, the question of how and where its potential lies comes up. Here, the politics of the film determines how it relates to the world. According to James Monaco, there are two aspects of it- when the film relates to the society it may be termed as 'socio-politics'¹⁴, and when it relates to the individual, it may be called, 'psycho-politics' of the film. Because of its popularity, the film has tremendous socio- political value. It can change / effect the culture of a country; on the other hand, film reflects the cultural traditions of the country. That is why a film made in Hollywood, and a film made in Bollywood differs in treatment, even if the subject is same. For example, Hollywood movie 'Madame Bovary' differs from Ketan Mehta's adaptation of it namely, 'Maya Memsaab', or a how film affect behaviour such as eve teasing, which has become common place to the extent of emerging as a social problem. It may be seen as the outcome of watching too many mainstream movies where the Hero is often shown outraging the girl's patience and thereby winning her love at the end. Films therefore have a direct connection with society and also have the power to analyse and explain the structure to us.

Indian audience has very typical characteristics when it comes to viewing the film. They prefer watching movies that have a narrative structure. Every film has a story, a beginning, middle and an end. The end usually conforms to the requisite social norm such as the rebel hero gets a place in the society eventually or a job and lives happily ever after. Each film has a moral end. Usually the 'good' triumphs over the 'evil'. Another

¹⁴Curran James/ Smith Anthony/ Wintage: (1987), Impact And Influences : Essays On Media Power In 20th Century; Meuthen And Company. London/ New York

unique feature of the Indian audience is their perception of the film as a 'mixed entertainment Medium', where many mediums come together, tales, drama, dance, songs, colour, to name a few. However, precisely because of this entertainment value, the films have a mass appeal which at various moments in film history has been utilized to get across a message.

Whatever the type of film (documentaries, docu-feature, committed films, etc) it certainly communicates something about the relationship between the creator and the consumer. The dialectics of realism and film expressionism cannot be denied, that is to say the relation between film's power to depict reality and its power to change it is a fact. It attempts to mimic reality and it brings about catharsis (through identification) among the audience. Film thus has a dynamic relationship with the audience.

Impact of Mass Media: Theoretical Considerations

The role of mass media in contemporary society is obviously an important one. Mass communication plays a major role in shaping and articulating the cultural and political world in which we live. Here an element to be analyzed – certainly the media affect society, but does it also reflect its value and the status quo? And if so, under what conditions does the media promote change or endorse stability?

The answers to these and other related questions hinge on how we conceptualize mass media impact. If we limit our views of mass media effects to include only short-run change in the behaviour or attitudes of individual, as much of the early research in mass communications did, the problems are simplified by the fact that these types of effects are easily isolated and measured. But these studies by no means exhaust the topic if one asks

question about mass media's long-run effects on society & their impact on culture, politics, and the shaping of social instructs.

The Influence And Effects of Mass Media

Denis Mequail's¹⁵ paper puts forth the history of research on mass media effects and discusses the major issues that pertain to their conceptualization.

The mass media is highly diverse in content and informs of organisation, and includes a very wide range of activities which could have effects on society. At this point, various qualifications and specifications seem to be important.

- (1) A distinction may be drawn between effects and effectiveness. The former refers to any of the consequences of mass media operation, whether intended or not, the latter to the capacity to achieve given an objective, whether this be attracting large audiences or influencing public opinion and behaviour.
- (2) The reference in time is also an important point. Are we concerned with the past or with predictions about the future? If the former, we need to be precise; if the latter, then often it is a prediction. And if we're concerned with what is happening now and its results, then some uncertainty is inevitable.
- (3) We need to be clear about the level on which effects occur whether this happens at the level of individual group, the institution, whole society or the culture.
- (4) Moreover, in order to specify the level meaningfully one requires to name the kinds of phenomena on which influence may be exerted. We can investigate same phenomena at several levels – especially opinion and belief that can be a matter of

¹⁵ Janowitz Morris/ Hirsch M. Paul: (1981) Reader In Public Opinion And Mass Communication; The Free Press (Division Of Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.) London / New York.

individual opinion as well as the collective expression. Along with the question of effect, yet another aspect which becomes significant is the direction of effect. Are the media changing, facilitating, preventing, reinforcing, and reaffirming something? In some respects the media does inhibit as well as promote change.

The Effects of Mass Communication: A Historical Perspective

Research into mass communication has its 'natural history', and the study of media effect is of so much interest to the public, and the phenomenon of mass media so visible that it has been strongly influenced by currents which have little to do with scientific criteria of relevance. The popular newspaper or comic, the cinema, radio and T.V. have been successively objects of research interest as they have attracted public attention.

There has been some progress as can be characterized in media effects in terms of three main stages. In the *first* stage which lasts from the turn of the century to the late 1930s the media developed in Europe and North America, were attributed with considerable power to shape the opinion and beliefs, change habits of life, actively moulded behaviour and impose political system even against resistance. This stage of thinking coincided with a very early stage of social science when the methods and the concepts for investigating these phenomena were only developing.

The *second* phase extends from about 1940 to the early 1960s, and it is strongly shaped by growth of mass communication research in the United States and the application of empirical method to specific questions about the effects and effectiveness of mass communication. The influence of this phase of research is surprisingly great, given the

rather narrow range of the questions tackled and relatively small quantity of substantial studies. This stage also witnessed the tradition of social-psychological enquiry into the effects of film and other media on crime, aggression and racial and other attitudes.

The *third* phase which still persists, is one where new thinking and new evidence is accumulating on the influence of mass communication. Recently research approaches pay more attention to people in their social context and take account of the uses and motives of the audience member as mediating any effect, look at structures of belief and opinion and social behaviour rather than individual case and take more notice of the 'content' whose effects are being studied.

Processes And Models of Mass Media Impact

Some guidance is available from early psychological investigations of influence but the lessons have not been generally applied to mass communication research. For instance, Janis and Hovland (1959)¹⁶ discussed various factors associated with 'persuability' and suggested that "persuasive" effects might depend, amongst other things, on the prestige of the source, or on our attitude of the receiver to the source. Kelman (1961)¹⁷ comes closer to this in his analysis of social inference, suggesting that three main processes might be involved in opinion change.

1) One of these 'compliance' refers to the acceptance of influence in the expectation of some reward or to avoid punishment. (2) Another, 'identification', occurs when an individual wishes to be more like the source and hence imitate or adopts behaviour

¹⁶ Janowitz Morris/ Hirsch M. Paul: (1981) Reader In Public Opinion And Mass Communication; The Free Press (Division Of Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.) London / New York,pp-265-266

¹⁷ Ibid,p-266

accordingly, (3) 'Internalization', is intended to describe influence guided by the receivers over pre-existing needs and values. This latter process may be described as a 'functional' explanation of influence (or effects), since change is mainly explicable in times of the receiver's own motives needs, and wishes.

A further example of socio-psychological thinking deserves mention is the work of French and Raven (1953)¹⁸ which offers *five* main possibilities of a communicative relationship in which social power may be exercised and influence accepted. (1) Power based on 'reward' or (2) 'Coercion' both imply some interaction between the sender and the needs of the receiver (3) 'Referent' power similar to Kelman's notion of 'identification'. (4) 'Legitimate' power based on the assumption of a 'right' to expect compliance- present only where such a relationship is institutionally defined (5) There is 'expert' power based on the attribution of the superior knowledge of the sender.

Further De Fleur (1970),¹⁹ outlines *five* types of theory or models of the effects process which have been developed successively as knowledge has advanced.

(1) There is a model of simple conditioning, stimulus –response, a model which fits with the early views about the power of the media as direct and dependent on the source rather than the recipient (2) A refinement of this stance 'individual differences of theory' of mass communication which sought to accept the diversity of the audience, acknowledging that the media message contains 'particular stimulus attitudes that have differential interactions with personality of members of the audience. (3) The *third* phase of thinking is referred to as a 'social categories' theory, since it takes account of the fact

¹⁸ Janowitz Morris/ Hirsch M. Paul: (1981) Reader In Public Opinion And Mass Communication; The Free Press (Division Of Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.) London / New York,p-266

¹⁹ Opp.Cit,p-267

that the audience is stratified according to such variables of social position as life-cycle, occupation or class, region, sex and so on. Here *Fleur* notes that, members of a particular category will select more/ less the same content and will respond to it in roughly equal ways. Here the notion of selective exposure and response according to a broad social position too exist. (4) Another refinement of the theory builds in the findings of social group and personal influence studies of 1940s and 1950s, and is labeled as 'social relationships' theory. The basic thought is that inter-relationships between people as well as their individual attributes have to be taken into account. (5) Finally, *Fluer* describes the 'cultural norms' theory, "which postulates that the mass media, through selective presentations and the emphasis on certain themes, create impressions among their audience that common cultural norms concerning the emphasized topics are structured and defined in some specific ways. Since individual behaviour is usually guided by cultural norms on the actor's impressions of what the norms are with respect to a given topic or situation, the media would then serve indirectly to influence conduct".²⁰ The media works mostly directly on consciousness by providing the constructed images of the world and of social life and the definitions of social reality. In addition, *Fleur's* analysis is oriented very much to the persuasion process and understanding how the media might be used for persuasive objectives.

A general condition of effect with some reference to a source includes. (1) The set of relevant factors has to do with the audience (2) another with the message, and a (3) third with the source / the system of distribution. Among audience factors, an obvious primary condition is that a large audience should be reached. The appropriate members of

²⁰ Janowitz Morris/ Hirsch M. Paul: (1981) Reader In Public Opinion And Mass Communication; The Free Press (Division Of Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.) London / New York,p-267

the audience should be reached since size alone does not guarantee the inclusion of those for whom the campaign is relevant. The dispositions of the audience should at least not be antipathetic or resistant. A part of this condition relates to the needs of consistency with the norms of locality and sub-culture as well as the presence of broad societal consensus. Success is likely to be greater when within the audience, the flow of personal communication and structure of relevant inter-personal status is supportive of the mass media campaign and its aim. It is important that the audience understands or perceives the messages as intended by its originators and does not selectively distort it.

Factors related to the message or content are also important. (1) First, the message should be unambiguous and relevant to its audience. (2) The informative campaign seems more likely to be successful than the campaign to change attitudes or opinions (3) In general, subject matter that is more distant and more novel, least subject to prior definitions and outside immediate experience responds best to treatment by the campaign. (4) The campaign which allows some immediate response in action is most likely to be effective, (5) Repetition can be mentioned as a probable contributor to effect.

The process of learning through the media is often incidental, unplanned and unconscious for the receiver and almost always unintentional on the part of the sender. There are two main aspects to what occurs: on the one hand, there is the provision of a consistent picture of the social world which may lead the audience to adopt this version of reality, a reality of 'facts' and of norms values and expectations. On the other hand, there is a continuing and selective introduction between self and the media that plays a part in shaping the individual's own behaviour and self-concept. We can also expect the media to tell us about different kinds of social role and the accompanying expectations in

the sphere of work, family life, political behaviour and so on. We can also expect it to give an order of importance and structure to the world they portray, fictionally or as reality.

Mass media thus provides a major source of knowledge in a segregated society of what the consensus actually is and what the nature of deviation is. The media in some way helps to establish an order of priorities in a society about its problems and objectives. It does this, not by initiating or determining, but by publicizing according to an agreed scale of values what is determined elsewhere, (usually in the political system).

This section has primarily focused on the theoretical considerations related to gender and media in very general terms. Since the work is sociological in nature it becomes equally important for us to see the interaction between gender and culture. The following chapter specifically highlights the relation between gender culture and how it constructs gender as a social category that is rigid in nature. Further, it also deals with identifying the changes that have taken place over the years in the treatment of women as subjects in mainstream Hindi cinema, and the same time, dwelling briefly upon factors that have contributed to the shift in the image of women in this popular medium.

CHAPTER-II

CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND THE AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA.

This chapter attempts to offer an analysis of interaction between gender and the medium of film. At the same time, it presents a chronological overview of the changing modes of female forms on the Indian screen, thus providing the basis for identifying the changes in the recent genre of films. We also discuss in brief about the factors that have contributed to such changes on-screen, before we focus on its ramification off-screen.

Every society develops its own set of characteristics, of what is essential to differentiate between the two sexes-‘man’ and ‘woman’ or ‘Male’ and ‘Female’. The initial sex class placement stands at the beginning of a sustained sorting out process, whereby members of the two classes are subject to differential socialization. It is through this process of what is referred to as “Gender Socialization”, one learns about the norms, rules and regulations of the larger society. In other words, one is equipped with the knowledge of conducting oneself in the larger society, depending upon, whether one is a female or a male. Here, the term ‘Gender’ needs to be clarified. According to Erving Goffman, “viewed as the way of characterizing individual it may be called ‘gender’, viewed as the way of characterizing society it can be called ‘sexual subculture’.”¹ To clarify it further one may say, gender is socially constructed. That is to say, gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on the difference between the sexes. To stretch it a bit further, gender is also a primary way of signifying relations of power.

¹ Erving Goffman-(1977)‘*The Arrangement Between Sexes*’ Theory And Society, Elevation Scientific Publications Company, Amsterdam; Vol.4, No.3,p-303

Gender is constitutive of power in so much as relations that may not literally be defined in terms of gender utilize the language of sexual difference to signify and legitimize power differentials. These differentials are conceptualized as a set of binary opposites, which resonate with other set of oppositions. Thus, men are associated with 'up', 'right', 'high', 'culture', and 'strength'; whereas women are characterized by 'down', 'left', 'low', 'weakness', and 'nature', among others. In this context, we may talk of the 'nature' and 'culture' debate, which conveys the message of men and women belonging to different categories very strongly. Here, Sherry Ortner's² explanation of women being associated with nature and men with culture is significant. For her, culture attempts to control and transcend nature, to use it for its own purposes. Therefore, culture may be said to be superior to the natural world, and socialize nature in order to regulate and maintain relations between society, forces and conditions of environment. On the basis of the above argument it may be said that women on the virtue of their association with nature need to be controlled and contained. And it is through controlling nature (i.e. women) that culture seeks to transcend it. The implication being that it is through controlling women that men prove their cultural superiority.

Accordingly, gender as an identity is indeed constructed, and it is not psychology or biology but really culture that becomes destiny. These associations of sexes apart from being cultural constructs are powerfully reinforced by social activities, which both define and are redefined by them. Hence, as Mankekar puts it, the underpinnings of femininity are clearly seen in the nature of socially constructed and culturally coded existence of the

² Sherry Ortner (1974) '*Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?*' (In) M. Rosaldo / L. Lamphere ed *Women Culture and Society*, p- 67

female body.³ Consequently, then, when the body is perceived as the instrument or medium of culture, culture's grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of life. This is extended onto the audio-visual media- underlying all the media images is cultural authority. The media routinely promotes cultural authors who capture the audience's imagination by presenting their ways of thinking, acting and being in an attractive fashion. Audience members on their part identify with what they are shown, interpret these images in relation to their respective socio-cultural set up and juxtapose with cultural representations, in turn relating it to their everyday living situations.

Media and culture thus unavoidably engages in the politics of representation. A commonly asked question in this regard is, ' Does mass-media reflect social reality or create it? Without doubt, the answer is both. The audio-visual media shares a two-way relationship with social reality. On one hand, it plays on the stereotypes of any given society, i.e. reflects what exists. On the other hand, it also affects social reality. This is done by being selective in what it shows, and how it shows, in the process creating and interpreting its own reality. Technically of course the media can neither reflect nor construct socio-cultural reality. Instead of creating or reflecting, media seems to piece together symbolic fragments, and produce stories that resemble our surroundings in some way or the other. Commercial Hindi cinema, for instance, presents imagery that quickly catches the imagination or fantasy of the public and turns out at best to be short-term profit.

All human cultures are based upon use of signs and symbols since they allow us to communicate and make sense of our environment. In other words, any given society

³ Purnima Mankekar (1999), *Screening Culture Viewing Politics: TV, Womanhood, Nation in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, p-38.

uses category and imagery to record and store information. In sociological language these are termed as “Collective Representations”.⁴ Social life essentially is built on these representations which direct our thoughts and behaviour. Media plays an important role here. It becomes the source of representations of various social norms and institutions through its continuous flow of images and information. For some, media facilitates the social construction of cultural reality. The audio-visual media is a crucial symbolic vehicle for the construction of meaning in everyday lives. In fact, particular definitions of ‘femininity’ and masculinity’ that appear constantly on the popular medium, reinforces the already existing stereotypical images that are already gained through primary sources like family, religion, caste class, etc. The media thus plays a crucial role in this entire process of perpetuation of certain stereotyped myths and images of the position of women in our society.

Media And Women

An analysis of the relation between women and media reveals a dichotomous relation between the two. On the one hand, there is the traditional approach that treats woman in the ideal stereotypical manner who arouses both envy and admiration. On the other hand, there is the liberal approach that treats women in the light of their socio-economic roles. In constructing these images, the audio-visual media has its own preferred codes. For instance, in all representation of women, be it of the mother, daughter, wife etc, what is common is that all these are defined in relation to men. Social circulation of such images through the medium of films, unfortunately, helps to bring about commercial success and makes possible the spread of dominant ideology in a

⁴ Uma Singh (2001) *Woman and Mass Media*, Surabhi Publications, Jaipur, p-10

patriarchal society. It is worth mentioning here that what catches on with the media becomes widely recognized, accessible resources used by the audience to exercise cultural power. Extending the argument a bit further, we may say that, media portrayals lend certain practices legitimacy. For instance, mainstream Hindi cinema in more than one way reinforces the commodity-image of women that seeks to provoke desire. Such images are not only being disseminated by mainstream Hindi cinema but are being consumed and reproduced too. This would imply that there has been a certain amount of social acceptance of such kind of images of women. And social acceptance to an extent would also mean social legitimacy to such fetishization or objectification of women. One comes to such a conclusion since nothing else seems to explain the rampant use of women and her physical charm by the popular audio-visual media.

However, all this is not to deny the fact that in recent decades we do witness a change in the treatment of women as subjects in this popular medium. Unfortunately, frequency of such portrayals is comparatively less, and the treatment too is done within some set parameters defined by the male dominated medium.

Image of Women: The Formulaic

The medium of Hindi Cinema, from its introduction into the mainstream of entertainment, has often tended to look at the role of women in predetermined stereotypes. If in one context, women have been given an exalted status to be respected and revered, in the other context she is characterized as a sex symbol, enticing males and a sensuous temptress. A woman's invincibility has stood the test of time primarily as the mythological goddess--the image of 'Shakti', full of strength, power, resilience, and determination. The Hindi film actress no matter what character she portrays, when

represented by and as the goddess herself, is the epitome of all-pervading power and strength. The steadfastness of Sita, the power of Durga, the determination of Savitri, the knowledge of Saraswati, and the wiles of Kaikeyi are all reiterated repeatedly in Hindi cinema.

The significant stereotypical figures of Hindi cinema are that of the 'Mother' and the 'Sister'. The *mother* has, however, held her own over the years. She represents womanhood in the most invincible and durable form in Hindi cinema. The mother suffers, endures, strengthens, and is the ultimate pillar of justice. She loves her children unselfishly, at the same time, upholds righteousness and truth. Rohini Hattangadi, for instance, in *Agneepath* loves her son dearly but does not compromise on her values to accept his way of getting justice or punishing the wicked. The *sister* in Hindi films is yet again a formulaic construction. She is either portrayed as the younger rakhi-tying innocent girl, who is the responsibility of the brother to be married off at whatever cost, and even if subjected to unreasonable demands of dowry, or becoming a victim of rape. The elder sister is yet another model of the suffering and sacrificing mother figure. She sacrifices her love-life and happiness to bring up her siblings. At times, she is the sole earning member of her house and takes to dancing or prostitution to bring up her younger brother or sister; for instance Raveena Tandon in '*Ghulam-e- Mustafa*'. If the heroine is the epitome of silent suffering virtue, there is the "other" woman who has to be everything that the heroine is not. The vamp is there for sexual titillation, and basically represents the dark-haired version of the much-maligned "dumb blonde". Finally, the *leading lady*- the long-suffering heroine. Here also, there are by and large some very distinct prototypes. She is the beautiful, pure, and oh-so-perfect image of ideal

womanhood. She sings, dances, and generally looks great. She is the trend-setter in fashion as she provides the romantic interlude in the male-dominated three-hour storyline. Alternatively, she is there to suffer. She takes a lot in her stride- abuse, infidelity, starvation, and persecution- and is somehow rewarded for it all as she manages to live happily ever after in most cases.

Women In Hindi Cinema: A Chronological Sketch

The treatment of women in mainstream Hindi cinema has gone through various modifications over the years, from being the daring heroine in 1930s to the demure housewife to the more recent insistent chic, educated, alert, independent woman. The following section discusses in brief the transformations over the years.

The Daring 1930s: In the early 1930s cinema encouraged the emancipation of women. The first lady of the Indian screen, Devika Rani had no inhibitions doing a kissing scene. There was however a need for borrowed identity to portray the heroine's heroism. For example, Homi Wadia's *Hunterwali*⁵, dedicated herself to protecting the poor and punishing the evil-doer. This also she did hid behind the mask. These were indicators of social conditioning that would take time to shrug off. The films gradually became bolder and the heroines stronger. While *Amar Jyoti* profiled a woman who is denied custody of her infant, subsequently fights against the law; R.S. Chowdhury's *Hamari Betiyan* spoke about gender discrimination. The woman was slowly learning to express herself, her desires without guilt, best exemplified in Mehboob Khan's *Hum, Tum, Aur Woh* (1938), a love triangle that projected perhaps for the first time, the desires of a woman.

⁵ Gulzar/Govind Nihalini/Saibal Chatterjee(2003): Encyclopedia of Hindi Cinema, Popular Prakashan, pp-391-392

Post-Independence Conservatism: After Independence the social scenario changed and so did the portrayal of women on screen. The heroine became less emancipated but did not lose her spirit completely. The heroine symbolized the human conscience, an ethereal beauty. Interestingly, two images of fiery and submissive came in the same year, 1953. In Sohrab Modi's *Jahnsi ki Rani*, the protagonist was on the battlefield, fighting for freedom, and in Bimal Roy's *Parineeta*, she surrendered freedom to tradition. There were times when the heroine was unreasonable, and times when she was wise beyond her years. A product of turbulent times, the heroine continued to essay a range of complex roles, attempting to make a social difference through the golden 1950s. The streetwalker, Gulabo, in *Pyasa* is supportive of the hero when everyone else lets him down. *Kathputli* explored the perils faced by a professional woman, in this case a dancer torn between loyalty to her godfather and attachment to her beloved. *Madhumati* emphasized the fact that a woman does not need a man to fight her battles.

This rebellion was transgressing other areas as well. Reminiscent of Sita and Draupadi from the Indian mythology, the heroine of Hindi cinema has often been projected as a cross between the one who goes through trials to prove her chastity and the other who triggers off the *Mahabharata*. Ironically, those films that heralded women in sacrificing roles were applauded; probably because they held greater appeal for a more chauvinistic audience. Not surprisingly, *Mother India* was a hit with Nargis facing the acid test of endurance, sacrifice and justice, which she passes with flying colours.

In the 1960s, colour was tiptoeing into the Hindi cinema and so was the "Vamp"- a tangible contrast to the all-virtuous heroine. In the majority of films released during this period, the hero was busy wooing the heroine relentlessly. The era marked a strident

beginning towards harassment and eve-teasing, no matter how harmless. Shammi Kapoor was the most prominent star of this era who engaged in all forms of acrobatics in order to woo the heroine. The most popular songs include *Tumsa Nahin Dekha*, *Junglee...* etc. Succinctly, the focus shifted to the physical attributes of the leading lady and the songs of the 1960s bear testimony to that. Gradually, the heroine was transformed into an object of sexual desire. The heroines of the *1960s* and the *1970s* evolved as an intriguing persona. She was the haunting ghost of *Woh Kaun Thi*, the wanton call girl of *Chetna*, the widow of *Andaz*, who dared to love, and the courtesan who dared to dream of love in *Pakeeza*. However, after a while the demand of the audience of simple, un-complicated real life stories brought with it the era of such movies as *Guddi*, *Koshish*, *Kora Kagaz*; these explored the common concerns.

The cycle of the Indian heroine from being an armament to an ornament began in 1970s. Ironically, with the advent of this image coincided with the rise of Amitabh Bacchan, the angry young man. As Bacchan phenomenon began, the heroine found that she had no definite place in the story. She sang, and danced, only to provide relief from hero's relentless quest for revenge. That too only when the hero had the time for such dalliance. This era saw the emergence of the ultimate glamour dolls of Bollywood- Zeenat Aman, Parveen Babi, and, in later years Kimi Katkar. They were the sex symbols with hourglass figures and did all that the vamp used to do earlier, perhaps even more. Both costumes and roles had lost character. The impact of the action hero was so strong that the heroine began fading into oblivion. The heroine was a mannequin draped in rainbow colours. If Dimple Kapadia in *Bobby* was like a dream, Zeenat Aman in *Satyam*, *Shivam Sundaram* was the ultimate fantasy. When she was not the siren, the leading lady

was the submissive wife, basking in her husband's shadow. It was the middle-cinema that freed her from such subordinations. Gulzar's *Aandhi* dispelled the truth that husbands came before the self for a woman; it had the heroine choosing a career in politics over family. In *Arth*, after her husband walks out on her to live with his paramour, the jilted wife shows her dignity and self-respect by refusing the guilt-ridden husband's financial support, and lives on her own, without the crutch of a husband or lover.

In the 1980s, the heroine was going through an introspective phase in Hindi cinema. She had become courageous enough to expose her rapist in B.R. Chopra's *Insaaf Ka Tarazu*. The leading lady now was liberated to the extent that she was ready to avenge her tormentor, as Rekha did in *Khoon Bhari Mang*. The parallel cinema saw more of such characters, like the protagonist in *Mirch Masala*, *Pratighat*, furious enough to strike out her oppressors.

Inspired by the courage of the modern woman, the mainstream heroine of the 1990s began breaking out of the inhibitions imposed on her. She now entices the hero with her unabashed body language- (Madhuri Dixit, *Beta*- 'dhak dhak karne laga..') Moving with the times she has become assertive, at times even overstepping the set limits in her mutinous bargain for liberation. For instance, the leading lady in *Jism*, Bipasha Basu, no longer shies away from being open about her desires (both physical and material). She no longer waits for the hero to take the first move, she is bold enough to make her wants public.

Recent Alterations in the Image of Women: An Overview

In the last few decades, the Indian society has undergone change, and so have gender construction in Indian society. The form of patriarchal domination earlier

involved more rigid distinctions between home and the outside world; as well as within the house, with women assigned to deep interiors-kitchen, bedroom, etc. This also talks of the restrictions on sexual intimacy not only in terms of its space but also in terms of its enactment.

In modern times, intimacy through domestic sphere as a whole corresponds to somewhat more polymorphous relationships between the sexes, and a more individualized mode of interaction. The media in its portrayal of women in current decade is reflecting this change. The pan-Indian woman that the media seems to project nowadays is the urban middle-class educated woman. She is the urban educated “supermom”, she balances both her work and home. She is made to serve as the harmonious symbol of historical continuity, rather than a conflictual subject, or site of conflict. But the message which is objectionable is that till date she is the provider of services. She is the one gratifying needs of her family, husband on the one hand, and that of her work on the other. In this contemporary image of woman, the new Indian woman a significant mode of interpretation and interpellation can be perceived. She is new in the sense of being both having evolved and arrived in response to the times, as well as of being intrinsically modern and liberated. She is Indian in the sense of possessing a pan-Indian identity that escapes regional, communal or linguistics specificities.

This image of new women is of course derived primarily from the urban middle class career woman. This class of women commands an independent income, are educated, socially aware, attractive and hardworking. Hence, the media generates an image that is attractive and desirable for women. In the process media produces a normative model of citizenship that is significantly the gendered female. The

contemporary discourses on women may thus be seen as negotiating a strategy resolution of the contradictions that women experience in their lives as a result of the contrary pulls of the ideological categories of tradition and modernity. The tradition is represented as the timeless, and hence inclusive of the modern, while the modern is viewed as merely a transitional phase which disguises the permanent essence of timeless tradition. One of the primary sites of this construction is the mainstream Hindi cinema. However, all this financial independence along with vibrant sexual identity is made acceptable by a certain amount of 'femininity' within the female characters on screen. This femininity more often than not is encoded as physical charm. The success and power of such representation seems to be derived partly from the fantasy, and partly from the liberal idiom or society in which it is couched.

This liberal ideology is the product of such developments as globalisation and consumerism among others. Hence, it becomes important to see the role globalisation plays in shaping up a social set up. The following section focuses briefly on the impact of globalisation at the cultural level.

Globalisation, Consumerism And The Image Of Women

Globalisation, like modernization, is a modern concept. At the economic level, globalisation implies global transfer of capital. At the technological level, it is precipitated by the revolution in information technology- Internet, cyberspace, etc. Finally at the cultural level it refers to what is known as 'McDonaldisation of Culture' that is to say, the world is no longer a patchwork of nationalities but somewhat shares a global culture. Hence, it becomes imperative to see how mainstream Hindi Cinema has reacted to this development.

Globalization in India has rightly been associated with liberalization and the opening up of the economy to the forces of the international market. Masses are being drawn towards a new world of consumerism, where everything from objects to humans are being offered for a price in the market. With market value being the rule of the day, ultimately a person is being reduced to a commodity, which is tradable; including human mind, body behaviour, desire, relationship and even psyche. In this context, we may talk of Mike Featherstone, who identifies three perspectives on consumer culture, in his work “Theories of Consumer Culture: Consumer Culture and Post-Modernism”.⁶ *First* is the view that consumer culture is premised on the expansion of capitalist commodity production, which has given rise to a vast accumulation of material culture in the form of consumer goods and sites for purchase and consumption. This has resulted in the growing salience of leisure and consumption activities in the contemporary society. *Second* is the opinion that the satisfaction derived from goods relates to their socially structured access in a zero-sum game in which satisfaction and status depend upon displaying and sustaining differences within conditions of inflation. The focus here is upon the different ways in which people use goods in order to create social bonds or distinctions. *Third*, there’s the question of the emotional pleasures of consumption, which variously generate direct bodily excitement and aesthetic pleasure. He also points out the growing prominence of a culture of consumption, which has led to an increasing interest in conceptualizing questions of desire and pleasure- the emotional and aesthetic satisfactions derived from consumer experiences.

⁶ ‘Theories of Consumer Culture’ (in) Mike Featherstone (1991) Consumer Culture and Post-Modernism- Sage Publications , London/ New Delhi.

The above discussion makes it somewhat necessary to bring up the question of the *relation between women and consumerism*. Women's relation to consumption and consumer culture has been a central issue in feminist cultural theory. Luce Irigaray in 1977⁷, borrowing from Levi-Strauss and Marx argued that the key to understanding woman's relationship to consumer culture is her status not as a consumer but as a commodity. She further argues that, women are given all attributes of commodities in a patriarchal order. Women become fabrications, disinvested of the body and reclothed in a form that makes them suitable for exchange among men, fetish objects invested like religious fetishes, with the fantasized characteristics of masculine desire.

Thus, it comes across that women are implicated in consumer culture in number of contradictory ways: as commodified objects and signifiers in the narratives of exchange; as consumers of both commodities and (male) fantasy; as objects of desire but also as desiring subjects; and as producers both in the public sphere of work or employment and the private sphere, whereby they produce themselves both as fantasized objects of another's desire and as subjects in a narrative of an imminent kingdom of unfettered trade. Thornham in her work points out the notion of Flanuer and his female counterpart Flauneuse, as put forward by Benjamin Walter. (Benjamin Walter)⁸. Walter talks of the Flanuer as the ironic, detached observer of the modern city, strolling through the crowded public spaces, watching and browsing but not interacting. This figure is entirely masculine; his access to pleasures of the street symbolizes the public/private space. The Flanuer's gaze, described by Walter as "the gaze of modernity which is both

⁷ Sue Thornham (2000) *Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies: Stories of Unsettled Relations*,. Arnold Publishers/ London/P-127

⁸ Ibid:p- 376

covetous and exotic”(1970:67)⁹, thus, anticipates the “male gaze” identified by the feminist film theorists as characteristic of cinema- itself a source of visual pleasure developed in the new leisure spaces of the city. However, it is not that women were debarred from city streets but the ideology of separate spheres and of women’s proper place... operated to render invisible, even unrespectable women who were in the street. Thus, the female equivalent of the Flanuer becomes, the prostitute, but she is a streetwalker whose gaze, whatever irony detachment it might possess, marks her as commodity as well as consumer. For Elizabeth Wilson, this prostitute might be seen as the Flaunese of the 19th century city. Prostitution, she argues, “ became, in any case, a metaphor for the whole new regime of 19th century urbanisms... prostitution comes to symbolize commodification, mass production, and the rise of the masses, all of which are linked.”¹⁰ Thus the figure of the female shopper is like the prostitute, uneasily positioned between the roles of the consumer and commodity.

Along with such processes there has been a tangible sense of the “liberalization” and “globalization of sexuality” as has been pointed out by Mary. E. John,¹¹ which is most evident in the commercial Hindi cinema. Never before or so it seems, have our public sphere so inundated with sexual images ranging from posters to billboards to movies. What has taken place, it seems, is “Sexualisation of the Visual Field”¹² which definitely may be seen as something alarming. Under this increasing trend of consumerism the rule is to attract one’s clients and outdo his or her competitors in the

⁹ (1970:67) Cited in Sue Thornham(2000) *Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies: Stories of Unsettled Relations*,. Arnold Publishers/ London,pp-136-137

¹⁰ (1992:105) Cited in *Ibid*.

¹¹ Mary. E. John/ Janaki Nair (2000) *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economics of Modern India*, Kali For Women, New Delhi, p- 368

¹² Mary. E. John/ Janaki Nair (2000) *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economics of Modern India*, Kali For Women, New Delhi, p- 368

same trade. The outcome is use of a woman and her physical charms for the same. In the process, sexuality or sensuousness, however one puts it, gains importance, which needless to say, is associated with a woman's physical attributes. Hence, under such developments, image becomes more important than morality as far as the visual medium is concerned. This cultural economics of beauty requires alienated relationships to their bodies, that is to say, "fragmentation of body parts splitting of feminine subjectivity into an "other" who must relentlessly police or appraise the body self- to be disavowed"¹³ In this era of women empowerment, where they are exceeding in various fields, it seems ridiculous that more than ever before women are being subjected to more stringent standards of attractiveness. Herein lies the paper's concern- to question the sexualisation of the image in the visual field.

Before moving on to the next chapter that analyses the movie in terms of the feminist theories that have been discussed in the previous chapter, an overview of how various scholars have dealt with the issue of portrayal of women in mainstream Hindi cinema has been discussed in the following section.

Review Of Literature

The subject of cinema and its relation to women, has drawn considerable amount of attention to it, and as an evidence there exists quite a large number of works related to media and gender. These include, the works of not only the media theorists, but also sociologists, and psychoanalysts. The problematique has been dealt with by various scholars in diverse ways, in keeping with their respective theoretical orientations. Some

¹³ Mary. E. John/ Janaki Nair (2000) A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economics of Modern India, Kali For Women, New Delhi,p-376

of which have provided a holistic analysis of the issue at hand; while others have their own shortcomings. The following section reviews some of the basic works that have been consulted for the paper. While doing so an effort has been made to offer a critical appraisal of the referred works.

The question of how film plays both to and upon socially established systems of desire, fantasy, and fear received one of its most significant treatments in *Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."*¹⁴ Originally published in 1975, this essay has become one of the most important and influential in contemporary film studies and feminist theory. Mulvey's objective in the essay is clear: she wishes to place questions of sexual difference at the center of the debate surrounding the application of psychoanalysis to film studies. Mulvey is concerned with exploring, through psychoanalysis, the representation of woman as image in film and the concomitant "masculinization" of the spectator position. Her objective here is also quite polemical, as noted by Mulvey herself in the introduction: "Psychoanalytic theory is ... appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way in which the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film-form"¹⁵ Mulvey begins from the premise that mainstream Hollywood cinema both reflects and reveals the psychological obsessions of the society that produces it. In arguing this, she draws heavily upon both Freudian and Lacanian forms of psychoanalysis. According to Mulvey, mainstream Hollywood film "coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order". Mulvey implies that this coding is, in essence, the establishment of the "male gaze." Narrowly construed, the male

¹⁴ Laura Mulvey(2001) '*Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*' (in) Meenakshi GiGi Durham, Douglas M. Kellnar ed Media and Cultural Studies Key Works Blackwell Publishers UK/USA.

¹⁵ Laura Mulvey(2001) '*Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*' (in) Meenakshi GiGi Durham, Douglas M. Kellnar ed Media and Cultural Studies Key Works Blackwell Publishers UK/USA,p-14.

gaze refers to the act of looking upon women as objects, of adopting the role of spectator; but metaphorically, it refers to a way of thinking about and acting within society. "*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*," organizes around questions of spectatorial identification and its relationship to the male gaze. In exploring these questions, she targets and examines the codes and mechanisms through which classic Hollywood cinema has traditionally exhibited sexual difference as a function of its narrative and representational forms.

Mulvey also seeks to explore what effects these codes and mechanisms might have on spectators as sexed individuals and what their role might be within the general ideological structure of patriarchal culture. In a section of "Visual Pleasure" entitled "*Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look*," Mulvey succinctly states her organizing principle: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female"¹⁶ Drawing upon terms from Freud, Mulvey establishes a binary relationship between subject (spectator/protagonist) and object (narrative film/image) in which the subject is associated with the active/male position and the object with the passive/female position. Such an analysis of sexual difference is revealing and quite in keeping with Mulvey's feminist critique of patriarchal structures: since sexual differences in film function to produce pleasure, and this pleasure is produced for someone, whom Mulvey identifies as the male. Then this production sustains a situation in which relations of social imbalance are maintained, both in the filmic representation and in the "real" world outside the film. Mulvey argues that the subject and object positions cited above are the product of point-of-view mechanisms in

¹⁶ Laura Mulvey (2001) '*Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*' (in) Meenakshi GiGi Durham, Douglas M. Kellnar ed Media and Cultural Studies Key Works Blackwell Publishers UK/USA,p-19

Hollywood cinema. Point-of-view mechanisms--such as the shot/counter-shot and the lingering close-up--function to reconfirm and reproduce set positions, both within and without the film by avoiding avenues of displeasure and seeking avenues of pleasure. For Mulvey, there are a number of possibilities for pleasure in the cinema but she focuses primarily on only two, which divide for her quite neatly along gender lines. The first is what Freud called "scopophilia," or the pleasure of looking at another person as an object. The second pleasure Mulvey defines is that of "narcissism", which for her is essentially passive and developed through identification with the object/image on the screen. Thus, it is that scopophilia is inscribed as male (active) and narcissism as female (passive). The spectator's gaze is then male in two senses: from without, in its direction at women as objects of erotic desire, and from within, in its identification with the male protagonist.

For Mulvey, ultimately, the meaning of woman in the cinema is sexual difference, and her lack of a penis invariably connotes the threat of male castration. According to Mulvey, there are two avenues of escape for the spectatorial male unconscious: the demystification of the woman through devaluation or punishment, or the complete disavowal of castration through the substitution of a phallic fetish object. The only escape allowed for the female in Mulvey's schema is through an avant-garde form of film that breaks completely with the Hollywood traditions.

The major critique lodged against Mulvey since the publication of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is that she focuses only on the experience of a male spectator. While discussing at length the forms of male desire and identification, built on voyeuristic fantasies of the female body, Mulvey largely ignores speculating on the possibility of female desire, identification and spectatorship. According to the analysis

provided in "Visual Pleasure," the filmic gaze, in terms of both gender representation and gender address, belongs exclusively to the male, to the patriarchy; this leaves the female spectator with little agency: she must either identify with the male as subject or with the female as object or the image. If she does the former, the female spectator aligns herself with what Mulvey explicitly defines as voyeurism; if the latter, she aligns herself with narcissism and, implicitly, masochism. Mulvey's rigidly gendered approach to cinematic pleasure has also been criticized for being taken as axiomatic by feminists and film theorists. Mulvey attempts to redress the perceived errors of "Visual Pleasure" in the essay "*Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun**" (1981). In this essay, Mulvey acknowledges the binary nature of her work in "Visual Pleasure" and concedes that her exclusive focus on male spectatorship closed off avenues of inquiry pertaining to questions about the women in the audience. Nevertheless, Mulvey's intention here is not to refute her earlier proposition--she says more than once that she "stands by" what she has already said--but to refine it in light of her viewing of *Duel in the Sun*, a film that purports to have a "female hero." In reading this film, Mulvey asserts the emotions of those women accepting "masculinization" while watching action movies with a male hero are illuminated by the emotions of a heroine of a melodrama whose resistance to a "correct" feminine position is the critical issue at stake. While conceding that this dual context offers a "sense of the difficulty of sexual difference in cinema that is missing in the undifferentiated spectator of 'Visual Pleasure,' Mulvey maintains that the heroine of traditional cinema is unable to achieve a stable sexual identity and that her oscillation between masculine and feminine positions is echoed by the woman spectator's masculine point of view. In short, the female spectator

still has to adopt the male perspective, though this now derives from the "grammar" of the film narrative and traditions, which make trans-sex identification habitual and "second nature".

Though theories of the female gaze were offered shortly after the publication of Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure", Mary Ann Doane's influential essay on this topic appeared in 1982)--they remain rare and run into difficulties of conceptualization. Though Mulvey does address the concept of the female spectator in "*Afterthoughts*," her argument remains flawed by its acceptance of the female experience, of the singular shared response. Implicit in her essay is the idea that the experience of a white, middle-class, heterosexual, American woman represents the experience of all women. Obviously, there is much concern in recent film theory with defining and redefining the female spectator in terms of variables such as age, race, and class. Mulvey is, as we have seen, guilty of the "glossing over" and she has thus been criticized for it.

Mulvey's work however has acted as an eye-opener for this piece of work. It is only after studying her piece I could grasp the importance of psychoanalytical quotient of watching a movie. The work also predisposed me to raise certain questions with respect to the spectators' position. It seems to me that the issue of sexual orientation or preference--is of great significance to the concept of spectatorship in general and in need of further exploration. This exploration would begin with a redefinition of the role of the male spectator. Moreover, Mulvey's insistence upon the heterosexual male gaze denies the possible functioning of man as erotic object. This, like Mulvey's insistence that the female spectator is forced to accept some uniform "male" position, is unnecessarily limiting. It seems to me, then, that what is needed is a theory of spectatorship that will

simultaneously examine both the male and the female experience, not one in the absence of the other; a theory that will add to its assessment of viewing pleasure and unpleasure, in terms both male and female, the influence of variables such as age, race, class, and--perhaps most importantly, since it has been so greatly lacking--sexual orientation.

In "*New Developments in Film Theory*"¹⁷ Patrick Fuery attempts to find a path from 1980s French poststructuralist and postmodernist theory to cultural studies. At the outset, Fuery writes that his goal is 'to turn to . . . wider issues' resonating in cinema,¹⁸ and 'to consider how film and the wider issues of critical theory have come to change each other'¹⁹. And here is the problem, (or at least from a personal stance): despite his emphasis on the 'wider issues' at work in our understanding of 'the nature of the cinematic apparatus', his study remains, from beginning to end, tethered to a small number of poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists whose ideas are certainly no longer new. This raises another issue: does Fuery cover new territory? This is a complex question, given that most of work is, indeed, primary. However, much of his writing is derivative all the same, simply rehashing well-worn theories and applying them -- occasionally very perceptively, but more usually bewilderingly -- to specific cinematic texts and processes. An excellent example is his discussion of how we might use Lacan's 'virtual subject' to understand 'the relationships between the spectator and film'. What follows is a description and diagram in which the concave mirror, the spectator, the filmed real objects, and the processes of ideology (as part of the cinematic apparatus)' are brought together. Next, Fuery breezes into the statement that the motivating processes in Lacan's schema 'are primarily twofold: there is the seductive process of self-reflection . . . there

¹⁷ Patrick Fuery(2000) *New Developments in Film Theory*;- Palgrave Publications/ New York.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p-1

¹⁹ *Opp. Cit*-p-2

are also the forces of desire'. The idea, says Fuery, is that if 'desire is both inescapable and beyond satisfaction, this act of constructing the virtual subject, 'inside' a domain of complete and whole objects, presents a playing out of a mirage of satisfied desires'

²⁰Fuery claims that this model is an 'explication of desire itself', but I find it much less functional in that it fails to investigate the category of pleasure. This would have been a 'new development' -- one of the wider cultural issues he claims to be pursuing. It is not enough to say that we, as spectators, find the cinematic image compelling because it allows us to construct 'signification and interpretation through deferring the meanings and producing new ones'²¹. It is not so much that Fuery totally ignores the role of pleasure, but that he acknowledges its relevance and presence and yet passes over it without true analysis. In fact, one might go as far as to say that he recognizes that the category of pleasure has a central role in his study, given that his introduction concludes with a reference to Lacan's Reality and Pleasure Principles, stating that: 'The hallucination of satisfaction that cinema provides allows it to hold contradictions, splits and doubles without necessarily having to attempt to resolve them or even acknowledge the difference' ²². Fuery concentrates on Barthes's ideas of the '*studium*' and '*punctum*'. But what is it about a shared and fixed understanding of meaning (*studium*) that makes it attractive to an audience? What is it about the disruptive moments, or points, of looking (*punctum*) that make them entertaining, or pleasurable? Are they pleasurable? Fuery gives us only a surface explanation of how these structures operate with respect to the gaze, but these explanations leave out the conscious human agency, which would have provided the socio-cultural context Fuery promises us in his introduction. If there was

²⁰ Patrick Fuery(2000) New Developments in Film Theory-; Palgrave Publications/ New York,p-35

²¹ Opp.Cit,p-38

²² Patrick Fuery(2000) New Developments in Film Theory-; Palgrave Publications/ New York,p-5

ever a point in the book when a more socio-cultural analysis of pleasure could have been exercised (and there are several, what with sections on the spectacle, corporeality, and phantasy), it was certainly chapter five, *'The Ideology of Love: Film and Culture'*.

Writing that its intended focus 'will be on some possibilities for locating cinema within cultural contexts and processes' and the consideration of 'how certain critical movements argue for a type of intertextual exchange between culture and text'²³ Fuery yet again throws out the word 'culture' without explaining how he understands and interprets this vast term, nor how he intends to use it. Perhaps this kind of preparation and focus would have steered the chapter towards its intended goals; as it is, Fuery once again veers into Lacanian theory (this time on the subject of drive), which simply concludes that we are motivated by desire and that subjectivity is formulated by pleasure. That being said, the fifth chapter is also where Fuery reveals a flair for textual analysis in his discussion of how the filmic kiss operates in the social contexts of resistance and conformity as exemplified by certain noir and queer films. Unfortunately, this discussion simply concludes that things are complex and contradictory. And so we are simply and vaguely left with 'the ambiguity of the kiss' and its mysterious 'effects' on the spectator, which are 'part of the positionality of love and its discourses in the relationship between film and culture'²⁴

However reading his work was helpful since it offers an overall view of the Post-Structuralist, Post-Modernist thinkers. When it comes to summarizing, explaining, and attempting to apply the principal theoretical models of postmodernism and Post-Structuralism to film in some way. Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, Barthes, Kristeva, Lacan,

²³ Patrick Fuery(2000) *New Developments in Film Theory-*; Palgrave Publications/ New York,p-92

²⁴ Patrick Fuery(2000) *New Developments in Film Theory-*; Palgrave Publications/ New York,p-101

and Derrida are all well represented here, their greatest hits providing the basic organizing structure of Fuery's work. This piece of work enabled me to get a glimpse of Post-Modern thinkers and their stance with regard to issues related to media.

In her most recent volume of cultural criticism, "*Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*"²⁵, Bell Hooks analyzes "outlaw" culture--forms of cultural expression associated with contemporary society's margins--and the politics of cultural interpretation. Her essential theme is that while many academics assume that the culture of the margins is subversive, that it represents an authentic expression of the values and beliefs of marginalized groups, in fact these works often serve conservative ends, reinforcing stereotypes and ultimately reaffirming conventional norms. A class analysis lies behind this conclusion: that elites play a major role in shaping popular culture's images and consumption. Hooks suggests that many liberal academics are so desperate to bridge the chasm that separates them from more "authentic" realms of society, that they project their fantasies on the icons and products of commercial culture (for example, initially idealizing Madonna as "patron saint of a new feminism" and later as "high priestess of a cultural hedonism"). Although the book's twenty essays range across a wide range of topics--including criticisms of the "new" feminism of Katie Roiphe and Camille Paglia and a reinterpretation of Columbus--the heart of the book focuses on race and its representation in film, art, and music. Three major themes run through these discussions. One is critical misinterpretation of black works by critics who unconsciously adopt a Eurocentric frame of reference. Thus, for example, Hooks critiques the

²⁵ Bell Hooks (1994) *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, Routledge, London, New York.

interpretation of gangster rap simply as a music of murder, materialism, and misogyny. On the one hand, she argues that this reflects a pervasive cultural demonization of the young black male; on the other hand, it reflects a perception of a huge young white male audience for a music emphasizing violence and sexism. A second major theme is the persistence of racial stereotyping among avant-garde works. For example, in her analysis of the film *The Crying Game*, Hooks emphasizes the persistence of older seemingly discredited racial images, such as the tragedy of inter-racial sex or the black woman as sexual initiator. A third key theme "white colonization"--that is, the incorporation of the constructs of white popular culture in supposedly authentic expressions of the culture of the street. A critic of all forms of separatism, Hooks seeks to encourage inclusion and "border crossing"--combining various voices and cultural levels.

Her book does a masterful job of showing how race, class, and gender intersect in American key theme "white colonization"--that is, the incorporation of the constructs of white popular culture in supposedly authentic expressions of the culture of the street. This was yet another basic book referred to. The analysis put forth by Hooks with regard to American White population's supposed inclusion of the marginal section, led me to relate it to the supposed alteration in the treatment of women in Hindi cinema. Just as she points out in her work, at the outset it may seem that the leading lady has a substantive role but when one goes deep into it one realizes that it is not quite the case. Even these roles are defined by certain accepted norms of our society. The following chapter presents a brief discussion on this theme.

The ten theoretical and critical essays in *Post- Modernisms and its Discontents: Theories and Practices*, E. Ann Kaplan²⁶ focus on postmodernism as a cultural concept and practice. This volume contains valuable and challenging pieces to extend one's understanding both of postmodernism itself and of the discourse surrounding the concept.

Kaplan has organized the book in two parts, "*The Postmodern Debate*," with six essays devoted to postmodernist theory sometimes linked to works of art, and "*Postmodernism, Feminism and Popular Cultural Theory*," with four essays in criticism expressing the postmodernist spirit, admittedly "in some cases indirectly." Kaplan's nine-page introduction presents the key issues relating to postmodernism and refers to the major theoreticians whose works have shaped the concepts and vocabulary of cultural discussion for the past quarter century. The issues include utopian versus commercial postmodernism, modernism versus postmodernism, postmodern high culture versus popular culture and the problem of getting beyond dualistic "binarism" in social relations without losing the power of dialectic criticism in social analysis. The theoreticians include Kristeva, Foucault, Baudrillard, Bakhtin, Derrida, Habermas, and others.

The essay that was read for the present study was, E. Ann Kaplan's "*Feminism/Oedipus/Postmodernism: The Case of MTV*". In this piece she cites and reviews a number of theoretical issues in several dense pages, posing the question: How does postmodernism as a theory and as deployed in popular culture affect feminist theory and aesthetic practice? In MTV, she finds a format that thoroughly expresses co-opted commercial postmodernism but which has within it "individual texts that in their four-

²⁶ Ann Kaplan(1988), *Post- Modernisms and its Discontents: Theories and Practices*,Verso: London/New York.

minute airplay do offer subversive subject positions." However, when Kaplan describes these "alternative texts" as "theoretically important even if such positions are normally swept up in the plethora of more oppressive ones," "theory" comes close to representing constructs unrelated to experience as people live it. Yet, her concluding pages on "the different kinds of cultural work that feminists need to be doing" show her acute awareness of the need for new feminist forms in practice. Since most of the essays are written by academics, most of them are written in academic style. Dana Polan's "*Postmodernism and Cultural Analysis Today*" confesses that "one is constrained in advance to refer to certain figures, certain key texts," and that "at worst, postmodernist discourse frequently functions to allow entrenched academics a new way of doing the same old work...to insist again on the rich difficulty of difficult art." Of Particular interest is the final essay in Part I, Warren Montag's "*What is at Stake in the Debate on Postmodernism?*" studies the debate on postmodernism from a classical Marxist perspective and sees the discourse of postmodernism as a dangerous implicit attack on historical materialism. Its views of the end of narrative displace Marxist theories of change and struggle. Both Davis and Montag present their challenging ideas from a classical Marxist perspective and their creative use of theory illuminates political aspects of postmodernism whether one is Marxist in orientation or not.

The other section of the book, which was considered, include the four essays in Part II that discuss cultural theory and media practices without specific reference to postmodernism. Linda Williams, in "*A Jury of their Peers: Marlene Gorriss' A Question of Silence*," analyzes a Dutch feminist feature film in terms of its presentation of the world of women, so long hidden from men's personal and mediated experiences by their

own arrogance and dominance of cultural forms. In a long essay, "*Mikhail Bakhtin and Left Cultural Critique*," Robert Stam reviews and discusses Bakhtin's theories in terms of their utility to leftist critics. In some sections of the essay, he offers numerous examples of Bakhtin's terms in practice. William Galperin, in "*Sliding Off the Stereotype: Gender Difference in the Future of Television*," examines changes in the sexual stereotyping of televised sports and soaps. He finds that as women move into what was exclusively men's work and industrial men become more marginalized, and as more women watch sports on TV and more men comprise the audiences for soaps, the gender specificity of each genre is shifting. Finally, David James, in "*Poetry/Punk/Production: Some Recent Writings in LA*," examines the punk music and poetry of Los Angeles as "what may well be the only aesthetic negation possible in the contemporary west." In a time when any oppositional art is quickly adapted to a commercial style, he sees value in the transitory and marginal character of art "that is virtually unobtainable, that hardly even exists." Others may see it as merely marginal.

This is not an easy book to read, primarily because of the prose style the writers choose to employ, but the essays are all provocative. Several present quite valuable insights and, it is this book that facilitated my analysis of emergence of the post-modern heroine in mainstream Hindi cinema. It is with the help of this work that I could raise issues related to post-feminism and its applicability on Indian cinema.

The book *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*²⁷ was the basic one referred to in relation to theoretical considerations of feminist theories. In this book *Joanne Hollows* examines some of the key issues, debates achievements and problems in

²⁷ Joanne Hollows (2000) *Feminism Femininity and Popular Culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

feminist intervention in the discussion regarding popular culture. To begin with in the first chapter, she talks about “Second Wave Feminism” and the ideas and practices associated with it. Briefly, this section provides the reader with the history of some of the ideas, activities and struggle of second wave feminism. One of the main arguments and themes throughout the book, is, what it means to be a woman- subject to transformation, contestation and change. While part-I talks about the 1960s and 1970s feminism, and their concern with “ images for woman”. The second section of the book introduces some of the main themes in the feminist analysis of women’s genres by exploring the terms of the debate about the woman’s film in film studies, about romantic friction in literary and cultural activities and about soap opera in media and cultural studies.

However, I have considered only the first issue for the dissertation. In this section she mentions the works of Laura Mulvey, Pam Cook, Claire Johnston, among others, in relation to images of women. In the book Hollows has also discussed images for women: the issue of female spectators and woman’s films. This is one of the very few works that has considered this issue, which has otherwise been marginalized.

The book is a very good reader since it has dealt with issues holistically, leaving the reader satisfied with all the given arguments. Apart from this it serves as basic book for theory for this piece of work.

This book *Post-Feminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural forms*²⁸ sets out to achieve a number of objectives. Firstly, it seeks to contextualise the debate that redefines feminism in the context of the historical and critical development of feminism

²⁸ Ann Brooks(1997) *Post-Feminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. Rout ledge; London/ New Delhi/

as a body of political and theoretical practice. It seeks to establish the basis of distinction between second wave feminism and post-feminism around the issue of feminist theory and theorizing. In this book, post-feminism has been seen as feminism's intersection with elements of cultural theory, particularly post-modernism, post-structuralism and psychoanalytic theory, as well as with the theoretical debate and political debate around post-colonialism. Secondly, it investigates the nature and form of post-feminism and post-feminist debates. Finally, it also considers post-feminists' interaction with the cultural waves and the paradigm shift that resulted in the post-feminist theory henceforth. All these various debates are analysed by contextualising them around specific cultural and media forms and substantive fields. These debates are investigated within the areas of cultural politics, popular culture representations and cultural space. Apart from these issues it also raises other relevant issues such as that of fragmentation within feminism, thus raising the question of challenges that the feminist epistemological project is facing.

Thus, the book was helpful in identifying the relevant issues that surround feminism, in the process enabling me to comprehend the basic arguments of feminism and post-feminism. At the same time, making it clear to me that contextualisation is important for any issue in order to understand it in an all-encompassing manner. Taking cue from this book I have tried to juxtapose the concepts in relation to Indian cinema.

*Screening Culture Viewing Politics: TV Womanhood, Nation in Modern India*²⁹, this work presents a cutting edge ethnography of television viewing in India. *Purnima Mankekar* focuses on the responses of upwardly mobile, middle-class urban women to state-sponsored entertainment serial (including Ramayan, Mahabharat and

²⁹ Purnima Mankekar(1999),*Screening Culture Viewing Politics: TV Womanhood, Nation in Modern India*, Oxford University Press.

Hum Log). She demonstrates how television in India has profoundly shaped women's place in the family, community and nation and how it has played a crucial role in the realignment of class, caste, consumption, religion and politics. Mankekar examines entertainment narratives and advertisements designed to convey particular ideas about the nation. Organizing her study around recurring narrative themes in TV programmes-- Indian womanhood, family, community, constructions of historical memory, development, integration, and sometimes violence--she dissects both the messages and her New Delhi subjects' perceptions of and reactions to these messages. Her ethnographic analysis reveals the texture of women's daily lives, social relationships and everyday practices. Throughout her study she remains attentive to the turbulent historical and political context of the integrationalist messages in TV programmes, the cultural diversity of the viewership, and her own role as an ethnographer. In an enlightening epilogue the author describes how understandings of national sovereignty and gender were again reconstituted in response to satellite television and transnational programming in India since the 1990s.

This is a convincing study on the crucial role of the audio-visual medium (both film and television) in the production of postcolonial ideologies of nation, gender, and family. It has proved essential for the work owing to the fact that it answers a lot of queries to the intriguing role and impact of television and film in India. This book has made possible to see the issues related to media and gender in the Indian context.

The book *Films and Feminism*³⁰ consists of 24 papers covering a wide range of issues- directorial approaches, male intervention, empathy and sensitivity, religious

³⁰ Sudha Rai and Jasbir Jain ,(2002) *Films and Feminism*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi.

conservatism and tradition, the working of a novel into a film, stereotype constructs and images, the male gaze, among others. Of these 24 papers the relevant ones that were studied include *Vrinda Mathur's Women in Indian Cinema: Fictional Constructs*. In this essay, she explores the viewer's perspective related to the aggressive eye-teasing and courtship patterns and also analyses the sacrificing image on the mother in Hindi cinema. The other essay was, *Jasbir Jain's Body as Text: Women Transgressors and Hindi Cinema*. In this essay he problematizes the body through the images of victim, rebel and transgressors, bringing in not merely morality or physicality but also human will. The argument that is put forth is that, the body remains central to the self. All other activities like marriage, adultery, rape, all work on it and through it. *Ranju Mehta's essay Battling for Being: Manjerekar's Astitva*, in the same book is equally significant. Here, she argues that, self is central to construction of selfhood, and a subjecthood. *Mehta* works through a single film analysis to understand patriarchy and the feminine struggle against its imposition. This is a very neatly written piece where the author has put forth all her arguments in a very comprehensible fashion, in a way enabling me to grasp the inequalities in a otherwise hackneyed life of an average Indian middle-class woman. *Mehta's* use of the film *Astitva* which has been pitched as a feminist film is appreciable. Finally, the essay by *Bindu Nair, Female Bodies and Male Gaze: Laura Mulvey and Hindi Cinema*, needs mention here. *Nair* in her work mainly focuses on the exploitation of female form in the audio-visual medium. For her the purpose of such acts of exploitation on screen of the female form is cardinally to tease the male imagination, in a predominantly male medium. Though the title of the essay suggests an analysis in terms of *Mulvey's* psychoanalytic approach; one is disappointed while reading the piece, since

the essay barring one or two references, not much reference has been given to Mulvey's work. While reading, one feels a gap in relation between the theoretical orientation of her essay and her analysis. Hence, the essay does not provide any substantial study of films as the name suggests.

*Images of Modern women in Asia: Global media, Local Meanings.*³¹ This work is about women and media in certain Asian context. The various chapters in this book examine some of the relationships between gender and the fluctuations of power by concentrating on the reach of the global media and its reworking(s) in local context. In examining the links between gender and the media, the scholars in this book discuss questions involving the relationship between global media flows in relation to gender and modernity in the region. The article that has been referred to mainly was: *Marvellous Me: The Beauty Industry and the Construction of Modern Indian Woman*. In this work, she focuses on the middle class, urban consumer culture in which she examines the growth of the beauty industry in India: How Marketers and advertisers are largely targeting women for their make-up and fitness items; how many of these media discourses are influenced by global media flows, yet how such global discourses remain contained within discourses that are classified as traditionally Indian.

This is a very lucidly written essay where all her arguments come crystal clear to the reader. It proves helpful in providing an overall view of global media influences on Indian media. Moreover, she makes one understand the complexities of such representations on screen and their impact on the developing society like India, mainly on the urban, educated middle-class woman. The article is almost an eye opener to any

³¹: Shoma Munshi (2001) *Images of Modern women in Asia: Global media, Local Meanings*; Curzon Press/ Richmond/Surrey.

amateur on such issues. The essay also makes it clear how Indian media, be it print or the audio-visual maintains its distinctiveness as far as portrayal of female characters on screen is concerned.

Yet another basic book read for the work was, *A question of Silence : The Sexual economics of Modern India*³². There has been an assumption that there exists a conspiracy of silence regarding sexuality in India, be it within the social movements or among the intelligentsia. “ A Question of Silence?” interrogates this assumption in order to theorize this crucial field. Prefaced by a detailed introductory overview, the essay uses diverse perspectives to develop an understanding of the institutions, practices and forms of representation of sexual intimacies and their boundaries of legitimacy. From unraveling the Kama Sutra (the text) to investigating the KamaSutra (the condom), the voluminous essays are on how sexuality has been framed by the law, within the social movements, or has been patrolled by caste, ethnic or gender identities. Other essays analyse cinematic, televisual representation of sexuality. Taken as a whole, this book makes room for wide-ranging issues and approaches for dealing with the sexual economies of desire and violence among men and women in India.

On the whole, what comes across is that, distorted presentation of female form is an universal issue. Various theorists have dealt it with in diverse ways, thus enriching the subject matter of study of issues related to media and gender.

³² Mary. E. John, Janaki Nair,(2000)*A Question of Silence: The Sexual economics of Modern India,Kali For Women, New Delhi.*

In this chapter we have talked about various aspects related to gender and media. It has briefly discussed the role of culture in constructing gender stereotypes and we have presented get an overview of the changes that have taken place in the portrayal of women in mainstream Hindi cinema over the years. Finally, we have see how various scholars have dealt with the issue of gender and media, and its ramification off-screen. Till now we have been dealing with the problematique only in theoretical terms, hence, this calls for application of the various concepts that have been discussed in the previous chapters. The next chapter attempts to do the same with its focus on one film in particular.

CHAPTER-III

WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY HINDI CINEMA

This chapter focuses mainly on analyzing women within the cinematic text. After providing an overview of the image of women in Indian popular cinema, the chapter moves on to analyse one of the recent thriller, that has a young, independent woman as its central character, namely, 'Jism'. The chapter also includes the social implications of such alterations in portrayal of women on screen. At the same time, it raises the question of whether such bold portrayals imply infiltration of post-modern feminism on Indian screen, considering the fact that more often than not it is the female body that is commodified. Be it print or the audio-visual medium the female spectatorial position has also been dealt with along with addressing the question of censorship, as well as focusing on the future trend of the Hindi mainstream cinema.

The medium of Hindi cinema ever since its induction into the mainstream of entertainment has often tended to look at the role of women in pre-determined stereotypes, as true-to-form, and predictable personae. The roles that are of particular significance in Indian popular cinema over the years, as has already been mentioned are those of 'mother' and 'wife'. There is disparity between the representations of these two roles. Indian reference to the mother is loaded with religious significance. The mother in Hindi films is always revered as a vital force in society. She is 'Shakti' personified. On the other hand, the word used to describe wife in Hindi movies is 'Sati', which denotes extreme devotion towards her husband. The effect is that wife is a unidimensional creature with no personal ambition. Nevertheless, this ideal wife must be sexually pure

and epitome of sexual fidelity. The Hindi film thus upholds the traditional patriarchal views of society which is fearful of female sexuality and demands subjugation of a woman's desire.

However, the scenario has changed in the recent decade. The ebb in the cycle of films in the mainstream genre can be attributed to various factors. The most important being a peculiar shift in the popular presentation of the female body, propelled by the rush of beauty pageants and crowning of several Indian women as Miss World and Miss Universe; along with the twin processes of globalisation and consumerism (has already been discussed in the previous chapter). Owing to these processes what seems to happen is a repackaging of American junk in its Indian version that entices Indian women to be part of the Yankee cosmos of trivia. As Jyoti Sabharwal puts it, "There is willing suspension of disbelief, as you notice the American-looking Indian woman on screen barely managing to hold onto her micro-outfit. Suddenly we have become a nation that wants to be sexually noticed. These liberated souls have got trapped in the stereotype, which they desperately try to break through becoming a pawn in the marketplace of a consumer titillation and commercialized sexuality. Sounds pathetic but true."¹ Moreover, the new mantra of mindless consumerism carries in its fold a desperate urge to have, to possess, and to dominate. This culture in a way is adding to the culture of repression, and women are its primary victims. Most importantly, what one fails to realize is that underlying the intensely seductive and glamorous images created by modern technocracy is the attitude that reduces women to soulless objects. Surprisingly,

¹ 'Femme Fatale: Beauty, Success and Sexual revolution' (in) Shanta Serbjeet Singh/ Jyoti Sabharwal (1998) *The Fiftieth Milestone: A Feminine Critique*; Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi-16,p- 324 .

somehow everybody seems to be lapping up these images. This reduction of women into glamour dolls by the popular mainstream Hindi cinema is problematic.

The Constructed Female Body Within The Cinematized Text: An Overview

The body may be conceptualized in abstract, universal terms as a biologically constituted organism, which is differentiated as man and woman. However, the body, especially the 'female body', may be seen in terms of embodiments- a social and cultural process by which the physical body becomes a site of culturally ascribed and disputed meanings, experiences and feelings. The body is positioned within culture and social structure, wherein there are competing meanings, authority and control. This line of thought evolved with Simone de Beauvoir's insight that, "one is not born, one rather becomes a woman"². In a patriarchal set up this 'becoming a woman' has numerous connotations. In other words, socially, femaleness in a male dominated society would mean being attractive to men, which implies sexual attractiveness, and in turn denotes sexual availability on male terms. And the process through which one acquires the characteristics of being a woman is termed as "gender socialization". It is through this process that women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men. It is this process through which women internalize (make their own) a male image of their sexuality as their own feminine identity. Thus, gender becomes an acquired quality, a learned characteristic, and an assigned status. It is this social construction that gets projected through the mainstream Hindi cinema.

The cinematic medium on its part plays a pluralistic role in image construction of women. At one level, the woman's body is being constructed for marketing and

² Sandra Lee Bartky : '*Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power*' (in) Diana Tietjens Meyers, (1997) *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*; Routledge, London/New York, p-103.

entertainment; while on the other, she is presented in a traditional role model in which there is great emphasis on control and conformity. Though in recent decades, women in Hindi movies are being presented in a modernising idiom- outside home, working in office, playing games, as an adulterous woman, etc, yet her portrayal directly or indirectly is made dominantly through her body (looks) and its management. Hence, what is problematic is this constructedness of the notion of the body, of desire, of notions of femininity among others; as well as other ways through which the body-desires have been organized and prohibited. Thus, it seems that the social body and patriarchy rests on the control of the female body.

In almost all of these representations what seems to happen is the objectification of the female body which is clearly linked to sexuality. It is the woman's body as sex object that takes precedence over her embodied self. The cinema at such a level generates sexual meanings of women's body which are made prominent through sensuous scenes, combined with song and dance sequences. All these contribute towards creation of erotic meanings of a woman's body. Focus on certain body parts and body movements further heighten this construction of a woman. This view of body of a woman becomes the dominant expressive mode. The woman's body becomes what one has, rather than what one is. The objectification of the female forms on screen follows certain set patterns. The following section highlights the same.

Patterns of Objectifying Female Form

Indian popular films are largely musicals, and romance plays an important role. One of the most important aspects of such movies is the song and dance routine. Songs are the main source of pleasure in many ways that go beyond its lyrics. Any average

Hindi movie has six to eight songs. Songs fulfill several important functions including advancing the narrative by setting the scene for future action or enacting crucial turning points in the narrative. The song sequence is clearly marked as a separate event from the narrative even though it may be closely integrated to the narrative. The song in conjunction with the dance facilitates the presentation of the female body as spectacle allowing for erotic display. This spectacular impact of the dance-song sequence is heightened by the particular use of clothing. The leading lady is generally beautiful and more often than not the camera makes it a point of capturing her beauty in sensuous detail. The Indian Hindi cinema excels in the matter of disguised acts of sexual excitements by operating on the basis that the female form nude is less exciting than veiled. The films use various strategies to display female form and female sexuality leading to commodification of her. The various strategies used for the purpose as has been identified by Richards³ include:

1) *Tribal dress* (example: used in Satyam Shivam Sundaram, Ram Teri Ganga Maili).

Tribal costumes are most of the time used for the purpose of vast expanses of the body; particularly the mid-riff region. Sometimes the tribal dress gets modified into cabaret costumes or costumes for dance numbers. The common ones include short skirts, shorts, brief blouses, and veiless torsos among others.

2) *Dream Sequence*- The wet Saree sequence: This is the most common of the sequences employed in order to make a scene sensuous. From Ram Teri Ganga Maili to Chameli, the formula never fails. Wet sari dance in the Hindi movies is legitimized by a sudden torrential downpour that soaks the leading lady's flimsy sari, and allows for a very

³ Gokulsingh and Dissanayke (1995) Indian Popular Cinema, Orient Longman; Hyderabad pp: 78-79.

tantalizing and provocative exposure of vast expanses of the female form. Since it is a dream sequence it allows freedom to indulge in activities that otherwise are a taboo.

Contemporary Hindi Films: An Analysis

JISM : *Jism* explores the darker side of a woman, a subject alien to mainstream Hindi film, a genre that has rarely been attempted in the past as far as mainstream cinema is concerned. As a movie, *Jism* is contemporary and dares to be different with subtle use of erotica. This, needless to say that it objectifies female sexuality at its optimum.

The Story: Kabir Lal (John Abraham) is a restless, reckless and alcoholic lawyer whose steady race towards self-destruction even his close friends are unable to stop. A Chance encounter with Sonia Khanna (Bipasha Basu), young, attractive, and dangerously ambitious wife of a middle-aged industrialist Rohit Khanna (Gulshan Grover) takes place. Sonia exposes Kabir to needs, emotions and areas of himself that he never encountered before, including crime. The sexual chemistry between the couple intensifies with each encounter and blinds them to the point where they decide to get rid of Rohit together. The trouble in paradise begins when the murder plan is executed successfully and Sonia takes independent decisions. Soon Kabir finds himself as a helpless victim at the hands of his conscience, circumstances and Sonia. Legal entanglements, moral apprehensions and mad destructive passion towards Sonia lead him to his inevitable doom and ironically towards his redemption.

Sonia's character has been sketched out with much dexterity. The director should be appreciated for choosing such a bold theme as this plot defies the stereotype. A movie with a difference follows a dark and seductive theme. Sonia's image evokes a sense of

promise and possibility, a vision of freedom. She is a feminist in that she is daring enough to transgress sexist boundaries and stereotypes. Sonia is daring in the sense that she presents a complex, non-static ever changing subjectivity. She is intensely into pleasure yet disciplined. She stands out as the symbol of unrepressed female creativity and power- sexy, seductive, serious and strong. Sonia comes across as the embodiment of that radical risk-taking part of female self that is repressed daily to be a part of the institutionalized world of the mainstream. However, an in-depth analysis of the film reveals that, the purpose of the so-called bold film is not quite in contention with the run-of-the-mill films that lack a sensible storyline and blatantly portray degenerated image of women. Unfortunately, she still reflects man's desires. In fact, in a way the movie reinforces the "Laws of Manu" that praise women as essential in the household and denigrate them as fickle, unreliable, corrupt, and licentious; they cannot be granted independence from men.

To begin with, the very title of the film itself draws our attention to the female form- "Jism" literally means body, needless to say, the body implies cardinally the female body. The audience does not really have to apply their analytic or creative abilities to fathom that since the promotional posters of the movie speak volumes about it. (The leading lady draped in a black outfit, sitting in a very suggestive posture, with a background of the same colour). So does pre-release promotional campaigns done by the female lead of the movie (Bipasha Basu). Months before the actual release of the movie, its songs were at the various countdown shows, that have become a part of television and radio programming in India in the recent decade. Millions of viewers saw fragments of this song along with certain clippings of the movie. A regular exposure to these

...fragments before they saw the film established Bipasha Basu (Sonia Khanna) as reference point for this film. Moreover, the promos and reviews gave the audience the security of knowledge about the film, which allows the audience (at least the male members of the audience) to accept Sonia's sexuality and even revel in it. This brings us to the next aspect of the film that calls for analysis-the types of dresses that Sonia sports and their colours. Her wardrobe is predominantly black and white. Black as is known represents the darker side of an element, hence when Sonia is clad in black, it may be interpreted as complementary to the darker side of her character- as she indulges in an extra-marital affair, an immoral activity as defined by the social set up. In certain sequences she is draped in white, for instance, when Kabir sees her for the first time, she is clad in white, which is wet and clings to her well-sculpted body. Divested of all politically unsettling possibilities, Sonia lapses into.... " The traditional exhibitionist role in which women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearances code for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness", as Mulvey puts it. As soon as we come within proper sight of her, the camera preserves the two-dimensional nature of her image by rushing in and showing us parts of her body. In the process Sonia serves as an erotic object for Kabir as well as for the male components off-screen. Added to all this are the plunging necklines, and the long side slits of the leading lady's dresses that show off a lot of her well toned body that caters to the voyeuristic and scopophilic pleasures of the male audience. From a positive side, Sonia's dresses compliment her complex character; they depict the rhetoric of a proud young female sexuality combined with sheer physical enjoyment of body movements (read dance), working together to produce euphoria of pleasure and power. The question

however remains un-answered power of what? Or power over what? In conjunction with the dresses the camera work exploits her physical litness to the maximum, to the point of what Mulvey refers to as sheer fetishization of the female form to serve male fantasy. Stretching the study a little further (as put forth by Clair Johnston and Pam Cook) the male protagonists' search for self-knowledge converges on the woman: it is in her that he is finally faced with recognition of 'lack'. The idea that women signify castration basically refers to the way in which her difference from man signifies an inferiority or 'lack' in relation to man. In this sense, the image of a woman is potentially threatening to men since the woman denotes what it is to be powerless. This is their threat of castration. In order to avoid this, the mechanisms applied are that of fetishism and voyeurism. By treating the female form as fetish, the male spectator draws away his attention from his notion of 'lack'. And through the alternative mechanism of voyeurism he overcomes the threat that women represent by seeking to investigate her, understand her mystery and render her knowable, controllable and subject to male mastery.

The extreme contrast is between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another), and the brilliance of shifting patterns of light and shade, as well as the picturesque locales. All these factors in conjunction with each other heightens the pleasures since all such factors promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation. Hence, it allows freedom to indulge in the expression of forbidden pleasure which, needless to say, involves the display of the female form as well as the expression of sexual desire. When the movie progresses, in the end we witness the death of the female lead which can possibly be questioned. The death may be seen as a storyline that conforms to the norms of the male dominated society. In a male dominated medium the

end came across as quite obvious. Sonia as a woman does not conform to the standard norms of a society like ours that has a clichéd definition of being a ‘man’ and a ‘woman’. She does not fit into the stereotypical picture of an average Indian woman, who is caring, loving, understanding accommodative, demure wife. She is strong, ambitious, and courageous to the extent of being lethal. A patriarchal society like ours is not yet prepared to accept such a strong willed woman into its fold. Even if it does, the woman is equated with negative identities of ‘vamp’ or the ‘witch’ and more often than not the end associated with such characters is fatal. Moreover, the movie once again reinforces the age-old notion of, women as corrupt, as ones who cannot be trusted. This is best explicated in one of our Sanskrit expressions: “*Striyasya charitram, purushasya bhagam, devow na jana, kuto manushyam*”. That is, even God cannot be sure of a man’s destiny and a woman’s character, how will I know being mere human.

In the film, Sonia dies in the end. In a way she is punished for daring to be different, for challenging the existing norms of the society. This also probably explains the movie’s success all over the country. Finally, though she portrays a strong character different from the rest, she still reflects the mirror of the patriarchal imagination because her ‘aggressiveness’ or her ‘excess’ seems to be an element of typical male fantasy as Hooks puts it, “ she occupies the space of phallocentrism, to be the patriarch, even as she appears to be the embodiment of idealized femininity”⁴.

The release of films like ‘Jism’, denote the paradigm shift in Indian mainstream cinema. There are various factors like, consumerism, globalisation and India being on the global platform owing to beauty pageants, among others. All such developments

⁴ (Bell Hooks(1994) Outlaw Culture Outlaw Culture : Resisting Representations. Routledge, London/New York,p-10

indicate the emergence of the new-age heroine in Hindi Cinema too, and so let us see how far does it hold true.

Emergence Of The New Age Heroine

There is an evolution of a new genre of films, co-existing with the older ones. In these new films we see a new kind of heroine. As Kakar points out, “She is more a junior comrade to the hero than his romantic and erotic counterpart”.⁵ The body language of the present generation heroine is much commented upon. This is in context of the supposed collapse of the roles of the heroines and ‘vamp’, the good girl and the seductress. In the early decades, what Waheeda Rehman’s passion was expressed in her large and soft eyes; and Meena Kumari’s could evoke deep personal grief by merely raising her eyelids; the heroines of today express themselves almost entirely through their assets or physical attributes.

At a macro-level, Hindi cinema reflects the arrival of the perfectly sculpted body to meet international standards. It no longer matters that the international blue print for beauty does not match the time-honoured indigenous one: way taller than the average Indian woman with never ending legs. There is this desirable and narcissist body on display not only in films, but in advertisements, magazines, etc. In this era of globalisation, in the contemporary Indian context, today’s urban, media-driven, consumer culture mirrors the western ideals of the perfect body- perfectly shaped, toned and exercised. Nowhere is this more visible than in the case of successful stars of the Hindi cinema, for whom display of the body and the bodily performances are integral to a spectacle. This arrival of the new age woman who is bold about her sexuality does not

⁵ (Sudhir Kakar, (1990) *Intimate Relations*, Penguin Books, New Delhi,p-44

shy away from making it public, in a way probably indicates a shift in the social scenario of today's India.

All these developments tantamount to projecting a society halfway on the road to becoming fully permissive. Breaking from the conventional mould, a designer lifestyle in the fast lane and handling personal relationships with a new mindset. These conflicting images have resulted in the emergence of a new consciousness inside the female mind as the image of a chain-smoking, strong woman, which clashes with the conventional sari-clad Bharatiya-Nari. The almost overnight social legitimacy of the looking-good came because a woman could sell her physical attributes without being physically available. And it is the media which is possible to sell a woman's capital assets through the visual, "see now pay later", aspect alone, as *Sabharwal* puts it in her essay, "*Femme Fatale: Beauty, Success, Sexual Revolution*".⁶ This is to say that she sells a vision today and the high price has made a tremendous moral difference. There is a jar of cold comfort in a jar of rejuvenating cream, when the most prized asset, the skin itself begins to fade.

Women are more vulnerable to absorb the beauty myth since the entire sexual education is out to ensure their continuing vulnerability. Their sexuality is sanctioned by culture; they do not have to earn it with their appearance. They are a part of the cultural response to increasingly powerful market compulsions. This image to be beautiful though in a way fits in with the popular definition; it also results in psychological problems for some women in accepting their own sexuality. She would like to be sexually attractive but she does not know what role this plays in actually encouraging

⁶ (Cited in) Shanta Serbjeet Singh/ Jyoti Sabharwal(1998) *The Fiftieth milestone: A Feminine Critique*. Ed. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi,pp-330-331

sexual violence. Caught in this culture of consumerism, this conveys the message that the most important thing about a woman is her physical beauty. The impact of much of these movies on the average middle-class is: make them aware of their size, shape, weight, height, skin colour and other associated characteristics. The fashion beauty complex in the cinematic text awakens in them the desire to strive for perfection, and to somehow achieve a semblance of what they see. The cinema at such a level generates sexual meaning of the woman's body which are produced and made prominent through sensuous scenes combined with song and dance sequences. All these contribute towards creation of erotic meanings of the woman's body; focus on certain body parts further heightens this meaning. This view of the body as erotically beautiful leads to a situation where the body of a woman becomes the dominant expression mode.

The question that acquires importance under such developments is, whether or not the arrival of this new age strong heroine imply emergence of a post-modern feminist in the Hindi films with its ramification in society?

Arrival Of The Post-Modern feminist In Hindi Cinema?

The representation of Sonia, the sexy, smart strong woman who has large measure of control over her own image may be inferred as a point of departure for the development of a post-modern feminist cultural phenomenon. Today's female leads can be identified as post-modern feminist in the sense that they combine seductiveness with a gutsy kind of independence. She incorporates a self- confident, unabashedly sexual image that is to quite an extent aggressive. It is her success in articulating and parading a desire to be desired. The image of this strong woman seems apparently to be a far cry from the patriarchal feminine. Kaplan has analysed this post-feminist stance in relation

to the “Madonna” phenomenon, which seems to be applicable in today’s Indian scenario, with films depicting strong female leads. Kaplan uses the notion of “mask”⁷ to investigate resistance to the patriarchal feminine. The dressing and re-dressing in the song sequences also seen in the indi-pop videos drawing from Kaplan can be interpreted in Foucauldian sense of mask. Accordingly, it may be seen as female forms not adhering to any given social identity, rather altering it according to their own notion. Stretching it a little further, it may also be inferred as denying any cultural construction of the feminine. The cultural construction obviously implies a patriarchal construction as far as a male dominated society is concerned.

On a positive note such strong images offer a positive role model for the young woman in refusing the passive patriarchal feminine, unmasking it, and replacing it with strong autonomous female images. Further, Kaplan, talks of three stances with regard to such strong images, namely, “ Perversion”, “Repression” and “ Subversion”.⁸ The response to such portrayals could be as cheap exhibitionist at best, and, a pervert at worst leading to probably censorship of such images. The second response is repression, which is framed within a wider discussion of psychoanalytic theory. Here she draws from Mulvey’s essay “Xala and Fetishism”⁹ to show how an abstracted quality (eroticism, status, power) is added to a material thing (the object to be consumed), and combine this with an analysis of Freud’s notion of fetishism. This partly explains the popularity of such female stars as they cover or stand in for castration anxiety. The third dimension and one which has resonance in the context of the debate around bold female leads, as a

⁷ Ann Brooks(1997) Post-feminist Post-Feminisms: Feminism,Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms. : Routledge London/ New Delhi/ p-149.

⁸ Ann Brooks(1997) Post-feminist Post-Feminisms: Feminism,Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms. : Routledge London/ New Delhi/P-149

⁹ Ibid

potential 'site of resistance' is subversion. It entails deciding whether such portrayal subverts the patriarchal feminine by allowing her body to be recuperated for voyeurism.

From a personal stance the notion of subversion seems to hold true. It comes across as the reproduction of patriarchal modes and fantasies with the use of mask, hence, the mask may be denoted as being deceptive. At the surface, the changing faces, seductive techniques reveal a large measure of control over her own image, yet it remains within those constraints focusing on the 'look' as crucial to identity. *Roseann Maudzuik* in her essay: '*Feminist Politics and Post-Modern Seductions: Madonna and Struggle for Political Articulation*¹⁰ provides a somewhat similar argument. In fact, she critically assesses the viability of the post-modern theory for feminist theory and politics. She sees post-modernism's offer to feminism as based on inauthentic and ephemeral promises of liberation since post-modern feminism denies women any real position from which to speak. From a personal stance one concedes to her argument since to adapt a post-modern feminist position is to simply deny women as 'real subjects', a voice, and a position from which to speak, and involves relinquishing real politics. According to her, the problem for post-modern feminists is that, when feminism accepts the dehistoricizing tendency of the post-modern theory, it loses specificity as a discourse that is different from and in opposition to the historicized power of patriarchal narrative.

For her, post-modernism's interaction with capitalism has through currents of consumerism, led to a 'new postmodern imagination of human freedom from bodily determination, in place of materiality, there is cultural plastic. When post-modern

¹⁰ Ann Brooks(1997) *Post-feminist Post-Feminisms: Feminism,Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. : Routledge London/ New Delhi, p-153

interacts with popular culture what we get is “Plastic aesthetic of the body”¹¹ evident in physical iconography of female forms or stars. She outlines the emphasis on fitness, beauty, diet and what she claims medical science has designated as ‘polysurgical addicts’ who undergo operations in pursuit of the perfect body. She identifies this pursuit of sculpted body as the process of “normalization”. This normalization is not only in keeping with the dominant and accepted notions of femininity, but also to the Caucasian standards of beauty. These normalizing images are suffused with the dominance of gender, class, and other cultural iconography. Thus, when one employs such tools to get that perfect body, in Foucauldian terms, one is disciplining the body, complying with the dominant patriarchal modes.

In this context, one may talk of feminist appropriation of Foucault’s account of deployment of power in disciplinary practices in order to understand social construction of female body, though Foucault talks of various institutions that impose discipline upon the body – like the school, factory, prison etc. In context of disciplining female body, a single institution cannot be identified, rather as he puts it “The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere, yet nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one...” Thus, the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a ‘subjected’, ‘practiced’, an inferiorised body. What is disturbing is that in order to have that perfect feminine body, women painstakingly undergo practices like, diet, electrolysis, makeup, etc. which may be identified as the disciplinary practices (as pointed out by Foucault) that discipline by invading the body and regulating its very forces and operations. Thus, a woman’s body becomes an ornamental surface. Moreover,

¹¹ Susan Bordo-‘*Material Girl: The Effacement of Post-Modern Culture*’ (in) Ann Brooks, (1997) *Post-Feminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory And Cultural Forms*; Routledge London/ New Delhi,p-155

in a patriarchal regime, a woman eventually becomes a prey, an object to be devoured by the men. As Bartky points out: “ It is for him that her eyes are limpid pools, those cheeks are baby smooth”.¹² However, with a widespread cultural obsession with feminine body, it becomes difficult to distinguish what is being done for physical fitness and what in obedience to the requirements of femininity.

This very power play is seen within the cinematic text too as has been identified by Patrick Fuery in his work, ‘New Developments in Film Theory’¹³. The concern here is to show how popular Hindi cinema, through its distorted treatment of women, is reinforcing the socially constructed feminine stereotype. And since it is a two-way relationship, the image makes an impact on the social scenario in India. Fuery draws from Foucault and says that according to Foucault, “ The most effective use of scaffold¹⁴ was its status of the spectacle. It was the body on display that allowed the power structures to be manifested and reinforced within the social order.”¹⁵ The body is the surface on which social control was played out, not simply in torturing it but through exerting restraint over its rights. This model of the tortured, punished body held up for public display, determined through power and knowledge has its equivalence in movies too.

Cinema provides culture with a spectacle of the body as it has been invested with these actions of power, truth and control. In order for the body to be filmed, and for the film to exist within the social order, there is an assertion of power over the filmed body. For instance, the close up of the luminous skin, or a body part of a woman, to signify

¹² Ann Brooks, (1997) Post-Feminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory And Cultural Forms; Routledge London/ New Delhi,p-156

¹³ Patrick Fuery(2000)New Developments in Film Theory-; Palgrave Publications New York.

¹⁴ Any public display of punishment

¹⁵ Patrick Fuery(2000)New Developments in Film Theory-; Palgrave Publications New York,p-83

feminine beauty would seem to be a film spectacle which demands so much of the body that it may be viewed as being tortured; and there is a certain level at which this product may again be seen as the product of the power structures of the “phallogicalised gaze”¹⁶ and in the process turning the female body into an object, a fetish. As Bartky in her article (Foucault, Femininity and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power¹⁷) has suggested, it may be understood as an aspect of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and an egalitarian system of sexual subordination. Fuery further quotes Foucault’s concern with the body and systems of punishment that leads him to assert the following: “ The body is directly involved in the political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it; mark it, train it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies to emit signs”.¹⁸ Here, as Fuery points out, cinema itself is a part of these power relations- it ‘ cinematise’ the body with particular traits, training it to represent certain relationships, marking it with specific effects and meanings; which in turn leads to establishment of a stereotype image of a woman. This cinematized body may be seen as the example of desired body from both culture and nature, specially so when situated within a phallogical dominated system. The function of the female body within the cinematized text makes it either desirable or threatening.

This has a social impact in that; the female body on screen which is not only glamourised but also glorified (for all the wrong reasons) becomes the order of the day. And given the content of the mainstream Hindi movies, the female body more often than not is portrayed as a desirable object. Thus, the mainstream Hindi cinema produces a

¹⁶ Power of the male gaze; Ibid: p- 83

¹⁷ Sandra Lee Bartky-‘Foucault, Femininity and The Modernization of Patriarchal Power’(in),Diana Tietjens Meyers,(1997) Feminist Social Thought-A Reader, Routledge, London/NewYork,P-103

¹⁸ Foucault 1987a: 25; (cited in) Patrick Fuery(2000)New Developments in Film Theory-; Palgrave Publications New York,p-84

body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine. They help in establishing styles of female figure (which may vary over time and across cultures) that become cultural obsessions. In order to have that perfect feminine body as is put forth by the cinema, women go to various extents. They monitor their diets; undergo classes of exercises meant for resculpting various parts of their body. This apart, use of cosmetics, plastic surgery, and electrolysis are common among women. With the media flooding us with images of the female body as spectacle, it is evident that, a crystallization of a pathological mode of widespread cultural obsession with the perfect female body is taking place. In the background of all such developments it is quite apparent that feminine movements, gestures and posture are to be a perfect blend of constriction and grace, as well as exhibit certain eroticism restrained by modesty. However, it seems worth mentioning that, a beautiful and sexy body gains women admiration and attraction, but little respect and any social control or power. Moreover, one may argue that commercial post-modern culture builds on and satisfies the already dominant masculine qualities such as violence, destruction, consumption, phallic sexuality and appropriation of the female in the non-male image.

However, post-modern discourse as is theorized by Kroker and Look¹⁹ envisions a world beyond feminism. For them, in the post-modern world, both men and women are victims. All bodies are invaded and exploited because they are no longer adequate to the advanced technologies. For instance, Kroker Talks about the (ab) use of woman's bodies in fashion and about the reduction of women into baby making machines through new reproductive technologies. At the same time he points out the new "fallen" image of the

19 Shanta Serbjeet Singh/ Jyoti Sabharwal (1998), *The Fiftieth milestone: A Feminine Critique*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi-p-325

penis in the age of AIDS and other sexual viruses, and many other ways in which humans are being drastically altered by electronic implants and additions.

Till now we were speaking about the images on screen but it is equally important to talk about them for whom these images are constructed. The focus for most of the theories including psychoanalytic theory was on male viewers, giving the impression that the female spectating position is a less researched area. The following section attempts to focus on the relation between the so-called bold-women images on screen and the women spectators.

Female Spectatorial Position

As Catharine King points out, "... There are no innocent images, there are no innocent eyes"²⁰ The consumption of visual images is dangerously asymmetrical. Men create most of the images for men; creating a closed, collusive relationship between makers and prime consumers, As suggested by John Berger, women and men have an unequal power in looking²¹. He characterized men as having a privileged gaze that is able to look actively and critically without their look being returned with equal scrutiny by women. Women have always been identified as second-class spectators. In fact, the way most images in masculine visual ideology are created to empower men as spectators, that is, to see themselves as endlessly important with things laid out for their desire. It seems unlikely that these images offer women first-class viewing. As far as theory is concerned, the limitations of the psychoanalytic theory for addressing the issue led women of colour and lesbian feminists to raise debates in the area of feminist film

²⁰ Catharine king: '*Politics of Representation: A Democracy of Gaze*' (in) Bonne Frances/ Goodman Lizbeth/ Allen Richard/ Janes Linda/ King Catharine(1995) *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations And Gender*; Polity Press In Association With The Open University. Cambridge/UK; p-132

²¹ Ibid,p-134

theory which articulated the issue of female spectatorship particularly the pleasure gained from contesting dominant reading of the text.

For Laura Mulvey, on the other hand, the female form within the cinematized text becomes a passive spectacle whose function is to be seen. Thus women are relegated to being the object of look or the gaze as she puts it. What this means is that, scenes are blocked, paced and staged; camera is set up to maximize the display potential of the female form. This schemata as pointed out by John Berger²², for staging a woman as a display object is inherited from western easel painting, where an elaborate scenography for presenting female beauty in frozen moments was developed. This blocking, pacing and staging is grounded by the aim of facilitating the male perceiving subject's erotic interest in the female form, which could be said to be staged in a way that appropriates maximally satisfying those interests.

A thorough theory of female spectatorship was provided by Mary Ann Doane(1987) in her work "The Desire to Desire"²³. For Doane, female spectatorship is characterized by a proximity or closeness between the female subject or spectator, and the female object on screen. She argues as against male spectators, women viewers do not engage in fetishism: that is to say the image of woman poses no threat to them. This implies that the female spectatorship is characterized by 'narcissism', an over-identification with the idealized feminine images of the female stars on screen. In the process, the female subject is invited to a position to consume in order to turn herself into a commodity and object for men. When the female spectator identifies with the

²² Noel Carroll (1996) *Theorising The Moving Image*, University Of Wisconsin, Madison; Cambridge University Press. U.S.A, pp-262-263

²³ Joanne Hollows (2000) *Feminism Fertility and Popular Culture*; Manchester University Press, Manchester, p-51

female star on the screen she is invited to witness her own commodification, and furthermore, to buy an image of herself in so far as the female star is proposed as the ideal of feminine beauty.

In contrast to these arguments there are other theorist who talk of female spectatorial pleasure from an altogether different vantage point. For instance, Jane Gaines differs in her argument. According to her, such pleasures could never be constructed as anything like male voyeurism and in addition, lesbian spectatorship, “would significantly change the trajectory of the gaze”²⁴She further maintains that lesbian feminists consistently claim that psychoanalytic theory can only understand “pleasure” in terms of male-female binary; it is unable to conceive of lesbian and gay spectatorial pleasure. Female spectatorial pleasure has been theorized outside the framework of psychoanalytic film theory. However, some feminist film theorist and cultural theorists claim that, female spectatorial pleasure can be found in particular genres and filmic texts. For instance, Tania Modleski points out that, “Feminists can look for clues to woman’s pleasure which are already present in the existing forms even if this pleasure is currently placed at the service of patriarchy”²⁵. Van Zoonen puts a similar thought forth²⁶. For him, female with strong leads or characters with strong female friendship bonds between women offer possibilities for female spectatorial pleasure. In these instances, the emphasis is however on the way different aspects of the text, for example, narrative or visual device offer different readings. Jack Stacey in these

²⁴Jaine Gaines(1994) ‘*White Privilege And Looking Relations: Race And Gender in Feminist Film Theory*’(in) Ann Brooks(1997) *Feminist Post-Feminisms: Feminism, Cultural theory and Cultural forms..* Routledge London/ New Delhi,p-179

²⁵*The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime, T.V. and Women's Work* (in) E.A.Kaplan(1984) Regarding T.V. or Frederick: MD, University Publications of America,p-104,

²⁶ 1994: *Feminist Media Studies*, London, Sage publications. (Cited in) Ann Brooks(1997) *Feminist Post-Feminisms: Feminism, Cultural theory and Cultural forms..* Routledge London/ New Delhi,p-179

lines opines that it is possible to reclaim identification as a site of resistance, “ By seeing it as involved in the production of desired identities, and thus as potentially empowering”²⁷ notes that pleasures can arise from acknowledged difference between spectator and star; worshipping the star as goddess or desiring to overcome the gap between them; or they can come from a denial of the distance between self and ideal, namely, the widely recognized pleasure of losing oneself in the film.

Thus it may be inferred that mainstream movies apparently might have nothing to offer. However, moving away from the conservative frame of the psychoanalytic theory, lesbian and gay viewership alters the situation of visual pleasures. To stretch this a bit further, psychoanalytic theory seems to ignore the male lead’s glamorous characteristics as if they are not those of an erotic object of gaze. In recent decades, the male stars’ scenes are blocked and staged precisely to afford spectacle of bulging biceps, and pectorals. There are entire genres that celebrate male physique, scantily robed, and these may be read as sources of visual pleasure. In fact, some stars are renowned for their looks, for which the action is slowed down so that the audience may take a grander, often in glamour close-ups. This is evident in the female fan following the male stars have.

Thus, from the above discussion it becomes clear that in the commercial post-modernism exemplified in such bold movies with strong female characters, benefits may be identified for the female spectators: breaking up of the traditional realist forms sometimes entailing in the deconstruction of conventional sex-role stereotype representation that opens up new possibilities for female imagination. The

²⁷ *Feminist Fascinations: Forms of Identification in Star- Audience Relations*/(1991) Cited in Gledhills ed ‘Stardom: Industry of Desire’; Routledge London.

fragmentation of the viewing of subject perhaps deconstructs women's conventional other-centered reception functions- woman positioned as nurturer, caregiver, releasing new ways for the female spectator pleasure in sensations- colours, sound, visual patterns etc. Thus, apparently, we may observe changing modes of femininity, that also emerge as a less rigid category. Ironically though till date it is predicated around the pursuit of identity (in beauty or physical charm), the achievement of success (the fashion consumption) and search for some harmony or stability through happiness. In this new vocabulary of feminism, there is more of self, much more self-esteem and more autonomy but still the pressure to adhere to the perfect body image as a pre-requisite for success and in love, is equated with happiness.

Question Of Censorship

The cinematographic act promulgated by the Legislative Council in 1918 set up censor boards in major cities in India. These were given fair degree of autonomy that at times led to piquant situations: a film passed in one form by one censor board was passed in a different form by another. The ostensible concerns were moral; in actual fact, however, the boards were much concerned about the political content of the films, given the great impact that the films have on mass society. But, with regard to their professional concern- the moral health of the society, the boards were surprisingly liberal. This was the period when passionate kissing was not censored. However, World War-II saw a further tightening of film censorship. No reference, however oblique, to the freedom movement or to National leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru

was allowed in any film.²⁸ Independence in 1947 brought with it major changes in attitudes of the censor boards. These reflected the new policies and concerns of the Indian government. The new Government saw censorship as one that professed concern for the moral well being of the Indian society. Films became a central subject under Constitution of India, and a new Cinematograph Act was passed in 1952 giving legal authority to censorship through a body called the Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC)²⁹. The regional bodies were abolished and in their place the Central board had subordinate offices in cities that were major film centers- Madras(Chennai) and Calcutta,(Kolkata) apart from the office in Bombay(Mumbai).

The guidelines ensure that very prim and proper films are made. Kissing was not allowed in any Indian film, and even embraces were allowed only if they did not offend the very acute moral sensibilities of the Board Members. However, these guidelines are modified and amended from time to time and relate to a variety of subjects. These include violence, child abuse, violence against women, racism, and religious sectarianism among others. There are also explicit guidelines regarding violence and vulgarity. There has been slight modification of the procedures relating to Indian films owing to pressure from angry filmmakers and a growing outrage in the public that the government should consider itself the custodian of the country's morals. A cosmetic change was made and the word "Censors" in the name of the Central Board replaced by the more ambiguous "Certification". Following this the board no longer censored films rather certified them, as "A" or "U". As has already been mentioned, guidelines undergo change from time to time, and are interpreted more liberally than they have been in the

²⁸ Chatterjee Saibal/Nihalini Govind/ Gulzar(2003) Encyclopedia of Hindi Cinema, Encyclopaedia Britannica (India) Pvt. Ltd. And Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai,p-391

²⁹ Ibid: p-416

past. Kissing, for instance, is now no longer a taboo. We come across quite intimate scenes in the recent decade Hindi cinema, implying that, the censorship has changed over the years, has become more liberal and permissive.

Viewers of Indian films are aware that the State monitors the relationship between cinema and society most visibly through censorship. The most glaring manifestation of State intervention in film production is the Board of Censor's Certificate that precedes each film. The inaugural moment of every film publicly released in India informs that the film has been approved by the State and carries with it traces of censor cuts. "The relationship between the State and the films reveal a spectrum of negotiations-from an obedient nationalism to a flagrant flouting of regulations",³⁰ as *Lalitha Gopalan* puts it in her work: *Cinema of interruptions: Action genre in contemporary Indian Cinema*. Although the obscenity codes governing Indian cinema addresses a wide range of issues affecting both image and dialogue, in practice the object of scrutiny is the female body. Here a very interesting analysis done by Lalitha in her above work may be discussed. She uses the term "Coitus Interruptus" to exemplify the different ways in which the film industry negotiates with the code to finally produce the female form on screen. Gopalan explains the term coitus interruptus as the cinematic technique that is most visible when the camera withdraws just before a sexually intimate scene is shown. This scene is replaced with as she puts it " Pastoral evocations of passion"³¹ that is to say when the camera focuses on waterfall, rain, gardens and so on to indicate the physical intimacy between the couples. A more daring technique used for

³⁰ Lalitha Gopalan(2002),*Cinema Of Interruptions: Action Genres In Contemporary Indian Cinema*,Oxford University Press/ New Delhi,p-20

³¹ Lalitha Gopalan(2002),*Cinema Of Interruptions: Action Genres In Contemporary Indian Cinema*,Oxford University Press/ New Delhi,pp-37-38

the purpose is when the camera plays on the female body through close ups of the waist, hips, breasts. Herein lies the problem.

The sequence strictly adheres to the guidelines given by the censor board by not showing the frontal disrobing of the female body, but it gives the male viewer a new pleasure and identification by giving him the scope to fantasize about the entire sequence. Sequences as these keenly demonstrate the impasse produced by censorship regulations in its insistence on clean images that unwittingly disrupt the alignment of national subject with film spectator. There is a recurrent of a cinematic device in Indian cinema: the cinema withdraws and the object in focus is the fragments female body, especially breasts and hips. Thus as a cinematic device “coitus interruptus” not only sexualizes the female body through fragmentation, but also chooses to fragment and sexualize those part of the female body that are intimately related to reproduction function. According to Gopalan, the structuring of this cinematic device also inflects the tenuous connection between national subject and spectator by privileging and drawing the spectator into a scene of masochistic pleasure.

Such a discussion predisposes one to ask the question that under such mechanism how effective is the censorship method. The role of the censorship board is thus subject to lot of speculation as far as treatment of women in Hindi cinema is concerned. Moreover, films today testify to the fact that this censorship does not exist in reality. Glamourised violence, degrading and humiliating images of women that reinforce either the traditional aspect of women or commodify the female form are an integral part of today’s cinema. Whether it is out of respect for freedom of expression or a general interest, we the public is a passive spectator. The problem probably lies in the fact that

the politics of cinema puts it in a different class. Those who control it are treating cinema more like a business industry, than as a piece of art. Even the State recognizes film as an industry. Thus the question follows whether portrayal of women in Hindi cinema has a positive or a negative influence.

The New Genre Of Movies: Future Trends

India has not one but several cinemas, which can be distinguished in terms of film-making (methods of production and distribution), the film text (technical and stylistic features, languages) and reception of the film by the audience and critics. These categories are not entirely discrete, but may be placed on a continuum, with clusters of defining features forming at certain points. The separation of these categories continued during 1970s and is connected with wider issues of social change and political ideology, including the emergence of the new middle classes. During its first few decades, Indian cinema remained within this wider sphere of Indian popular cinema. The early days of Indian cinema are known as “ The Studio Period”, a time when all persons involved in making a film, from the spot boys to the stars, were contracted to the studios. The cinema continued to evolve its own genres (including the mythological, the devotional, the stunt, the historical and the social concern film).

In 1970s, Indian (not only Hindi) cinema split from the previous middlebrow, middle-class cinema into three categories: the Art, the Commercial and the Middle cinema. The Middle cinema is a continuation of the earlier popular cinema while the other two forms which derive from the latter are significantly different. The art cinema criticizes tradition, seeming to support the “survival sector” of Indian society but in fact rejecting its values, which the commercial cinema upholds and romanticizes. Ashish

Nandy³² locates these changes in the social uprooting of this period, in particular, large-scale migration to the cities which has resulted in the cultural displacement of people whose needs are catered for by the commercial cinema.

The commercial cinema caters knowingly to different audiences, screening different genres in various theatres. These include the action films, the inheritor of the aesthetic of mobilization, which is screened in cheaper movie halls, while another is comedy, largely a one-man genre centered on Govinda whose major popularity is among the lower classes. However, the major hits of recent decades, which have broken most previous box office records are the big budget, plushy, romantic films which mark the dominance of the values of the new middle-classes as they find their audiences across social categories. These films revive a form of the feudal family romance in a new, stylish, unmistakably Hindu patriarchal structure which may be connected to their contribution to the resurgence of the politics of Hindutva in 1980s-1990s. The art cinema is appreciated by a small elite, which watches this, and foreign art movies. Its aesthetic is the result of a dialogue between Indian and European culture. Its preoccupations are local rather than global, it is politically oriented and operates largely in terms of box office success, the commercial cinema falls into the trap of making commercial viability the predominant criterion, which is then leveled as a criticism of Hindi cinema.

The commercial cinema is more diffused in that; its audiences are drawn from a wider social spectrum. However, a recent trend has emerged, that is termed as Middle cinema in common parlance. This is the one that literally stands between the popular and the art cinema. Although it takes up important issues, it is their treatment that

³² (Cited in) Rachel Dwyer(2000) *All You Want is Money , All you Get is Love: Sex and Romance in Modern India.* Cassell. London/ New York,p-99

differentiates this genre from both popular and art cinema. For instance, Mahesh Bhatt's *Arth* (1983) is about a middle-class urban marriage on the verge of collapse. The husband leaves his wife to live with an artist, but returns after a while to the wife. The wife rejects him. One of the recent movies that can be identified as middle cinema is Mahesh Manjrekar's *Astitva*. Pitched as a feminist film, raising questions that rake up the very issue of existence, it is justifiably titled 'Astitva'. *Astitva* is not merely about existence as the name suggests on the face of it. It is the assertion of all that which constitutes a personality with it a distinct relationship, anxieties, dependencies, dispositions, impulses and aspirations, prejudices and predilections. The movie is about a woman's poignant exploration of the negation of identity, until transcended to an assertion of self-identity. In this film the protagonist Aditi (Tabu) establishes that the sexual desire of a woman too is a drive much like any man's and at the same time challenges the husband's pronouncement to live under the same roof and suffer humiliation and pain of rejection on the ground of having committed adultery. The film belongs to the category of middle cinema since it has the ingredients of a commercial cinema the song sequence, the twists and turns at the same time including the reality element of art film that is devoid of any sort of exaggeration.

The urban middle-class educated section of the society critically acclaimed the film as it raised relevant questions of not only female desire or sexuality or fidelity within marriage but also attacked the power relationships, as they exist in society. In both the movies, the act of defiance appeals to the middle-class educated woman who sees in the film glimmerings of protest against a duplicitous sexual code which

condemns a woman for infractions of the marriage covenant; but condones similar lapses by men.

These days the big news in the entertainment industry is Bollywood's changing profile. The cause for excitement is mainly the apparent surge of new, "different" films. *Jhankaar Beats*, *Jogger's Park*, *Kaante*, *Teen Deewarein*, *Oops*, are just some of the names being bandied about as evidence that the Hindi film industry is emerging from its straitjacket of the song-dance-fight formula or the more recent family-and-country-first theme. Suddenly, there are new faces, new looks, unusual subjects and an effort — if not a leap — to break out of fantasy into reality. What are the reasons for this unexpected exuberance? The suggestions offered vary from the rise of the multiplex, expanded marketing possibilities, the emergence of niche audiences, passionate young filmmakers, etc. The question now is, how will the new trend pan out? Back in the seventies, middle of the road cinema gave way to the parallel cinema, when films such as *Ankur*, *Aakrosh* and *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hain* began to raise issues of exploitation and injustice. The films at the time were made by newcomers, directors such as Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani and Syed Mirza and starred newcomers as well. Today, perhaps the difference is that much of the experimentation is actually taking place in the mainstream. Bollywood stars seem keen now to do films of a varied kind, actually seeking out challenges in some cases. Similarly, there does not appear to be a clear dividing line for directors — the possibilities of a crossover from the mainstream to the offbeat and vice versa seem far more common. *Jogger's Park*, for instance, has been made by commercial cinema kingpin Subhash Ghai. While Nagesh Kukunoor's *Teen*

Deewarein, a fairly chilling account of prison life, starred the likes of Juhi Chawla and Jackie Shroff.

The upcoming trend, which may be acknowledged as the future trend is that of cross-over films. The pattern was set by popular films like, '*Monsoon Wedding*', '*Bend It Like Beckham*', '*Hyderabad Blues*', '*Hollywood Bollywood*', to name a few. All these have been produced and directed by NRIs, (Non-Resident Indians) which has various implications for the future of Indian cinema.

It is the era of 'crossover' cinema, although what it connotes exactly is eminently debatable. A true crossover film has to have something of an Indian theme or at least an Indian take on a western theme but the crucial test is it should be able to break cultural barriers and entice audiences everywhere (the US and Britain), something like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. But we have such a big range parading under this rubric it could leave you thoroughly confused: from the artistically sophisticated, sensitive and technically accomplished to the most maudlin films; films fixated on the American dreams of young Indians or the dilemmas of expat existence; or the cultural nostalgia and confusions of the Indian Diaspora; films funded by rich NRIs; debut and often amateurishly self-indulgent stuff dished out by young professionals who have made it good abroad; it could be purely Indian films or films made in India and abroad by directors or producers of Indian origin; they could be multi-national collaborative efforts or the latest, competently made small budget films promoted by savvy new-generation corporate film makers to ward off the financial crisis the industry has fallen into with few box-office hits to show. With the rising affluence and influence of the Indian Diaspora, what has really come out is that nothing defines the Indian identity

more than the pervasive formative influence of the Mumbaiyya or the regional dream factories - the sensuousness, the melodrama, the gore, the laughter and the tears, the *latak-jhatak* song and dance sequences in impossibly exotic locales, and the wringing, heart squeezing cathartic effect of it all! But it is evident in the crossover game that you cannot wish away Bollywood. And frankly, how much does the west really care about this trend? That again depends on where you are and how you evaluate it. Nevertheless, the kind of recent commercial successes of films like *Lagaan*, *Monsoon Wedding* (Mira Nair), *Bend It Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chaddha) and *Bollywood Calling* (Nagesh Kukunoor), *Fire* (Deepa Mehta) and the achievements of the likes of Shekhar Kapur, Deepa Mehta, Ismail Merchant, not to speak of Manoj Night Shyamalan have fuelled the global designs of Indian film makers like never before.

Almost all the movies mentioned above have dealt with new subjects, and women have played the cardinal characters in most of these films. The movie which demands mention here is *Fire* (2000). This movie by Indo-Canadian director Deepa Mehta, is a brave and revolutionary film that created a lot of controversy in India, for, it challenges conservative Hindu morality and thus can be seen as depicting Indian women (and Indian men) in a degrading and unrealistic manner. However, in order to comprehend the controversy that this movie has sparked, one must take a deeper look into the importance of film as conveyer of Indian values, and the depictions of women in mainstream Bollywood films. The crucial shift that *Fire* makes, and which has likely been the largely unspoken root cause of the controversy is a shift away from the traditional martyr and victim roles that the Indian women play in mainstream Bollywood to the hero role. This allows her to take her happiness into her own hands, even if it

means going against constricting notions of female duty. While the issues that *Fire* brings to the fore have been made into both religious, and political, the heart of the matter is neither religion nor politics but instead that the conservative Indian psyche has been disturbed at a deep level by something in *Fire*; something that is obviously perceived as a far greater threat than the minor criticisms directed at traditional Hinduism in the film. After all, the core issue that the movie addresses is the phenomenon of neglected femininity that while not being specific to Indian culture is nevertheless an important issue. What *Fire* threatens is the culturally justified disempowerment of the Indian woman through the institution of marriage, as well as questioning the lack of affection in some Indian marriages and the simultaneous lack of choice for women to create alternative realities because of the restrictions imposed on them by the concept of female duty.

Yet, another movie of the same genre, ironically directed by a man is *Mirch Masala* (Ketan Mehta, 1989). This film clearly signals itself to be a part of alternative cinema. One of the most important indicators of this is the role that camera plays. There is no such shot in the film where the female body has been fragmented, the camera throughout keeps the entire body in the frame, and zooms in on the face, in the process attributes person-hood to the women in the film. There are scenes in the film where the Subedar (Naseeruddin Shah) is shown looking at the women lustfully, but not once has his look been focused. Thus subverting the expectation of seeing a woman's body parts. The camera as a voyeur is repeatedly denied its access to the female form on screen.

Thus the future of portrayal of women characters on screen seems to be promising with number of directors taking the risk to move away from the hackneyed love stories, patriotic flicks, thrillers, among others. However, the question that remains subject to various queries is how far are such movies popular, and what is the frequency of such productions? Nevertheless, one can be hopeful of the future given the kind of change that Indian society is under-going.

Conclusion

The recent spate of Hindi films, with their unorthodox themes and experimental styles almost appear to herald a new age in Hindi cinema: an age where directors boldly handle themes like sexuality and where women again become the focus. But a closer look at some of these films – *Boom*, *Dil Chahata Hai* and to some extent, *Jogger's Park* - shows how even our modern filmmakers have not been able to break away from stereotypes. Although the new crop of directors have dropped the conservative family saga theme, their new films fail to capture the liberated spirit of the audience they claim to communicate with.

Boom according to its avant-garde director Kaizad Gustad, is a 'chick flick'. In a newspaper interview to a film journalist, Gustad called it a very woman's film. According to him it is a film from point of view of a woman and not a man. And all the women in the film use their sexuality to beat the men at their own game. The ladies are the ones in charge. They represent today's urban Indian women.

And today's 'urban Indian women' are represented in the film by three super models from the Indian fashion industry. Three models, at the top of their profession, inadvertently get entangled with the Mumbai underworld and go along with the gangsters' manipulations before seeking revenge. Gustad has said in interviews that he wanted to challenge the prevailing notion that beautiful models have little more to them than their bodies. But this is precisely what the film does - reinforce the stereotype. Gustad's heroines are stereotypically dumb, under-clad super models who blunder their way through their professional and personal lives - fighting on the ramp during a fashion

show, petty rivalries with colleagues - and end up on the wrong side of the Mumbai underworld. How the three 'charm' their way out of trouble, obviously using their only asset - sex appeal - is the crux of the film. Not only is the portrayal of the women in the film disturbing, their interaction with the men is also often debasing.

Even the well-received *Jogger's Park*, despite a bold theme and good performances, does not take the heroine (Perizad Zorabian) far from the stereotype. According to producer Subhash Ghai, *Jogger's Park* is aimed at the young city-bred, who are impatient with the cliched formulae of Bollywood and eager for something new. Directed by Balani (who died before its release), the urban Indian woman features again in *Jogger's Park*, this time as bold, beautiful and extrovert Jenny. The promotional literature of the film describe her as "traditional, yet modern" by virtue of the fact that though she flits between glamorous professions, working as an executive in a five-star hotel, and as a popular model of the Mumbai advertisement world her values are intact. The 'values', the film almost forces us to believe, are similar to the Bollywood heroine of the 1950s - marriage and motherhood. Throughout the film, Jenny's single status is pushed as an identity she is not comfortable with. Jenny is a 'bold' character for Indian cinema; unlike traditional heroines, she has been in more than one intimate relationship; but the underlying sentiment is still of a lonely, unmarried woman. And true happiness comes at the end of the film, with husband and children.

The more India became global the more our films regressed. Even '*Dil Chahta Hai*', a cult film for Generation X, made by a young director, has stuck to the traditional role for its female leads. While the three male characters have identities apart from their romantic ones, the females don't seem to. Only one character (Dimple Kapadia) is shown

to have a career but then she does not have a happy ending while the man who loves her (Akshay Khanna) finds a 'normal' girlfriend.

A new trend for movies with sexually oriented themes has gripped a number of filmmakers in Bollywood. Film producers hail the female protagonists in these erotic films as modern woman who use their sexuality to get what they want, but they are reinforcing the age-old attitude that men have held against women at workplaces, which is to negate women's potential by alleging exchange of sexual favours. For Bollywood, a "bold" and "modern" woman has come to mean a skimpily clad female. In Anurag Basu's "*Murder*," Mallika Sherawat and her co-star Asmit Patel sent the cash register ringing with their steamy scenes. Even earlier, actresses in skimpy clothes were used as bait, but the commodification of female bodies reached a new low with films like *Jism*, *Murder* and *Khwahish*, that had nothing else to offer except semi-nude heroines. *Khwahish* actually rode on its '17 smooches'.

Perhaps globalisation results in conservatism as a reaction. That is why the Hindu undivided family is being promoted with a vengeance by film-makers. That this conservatism is coming from a band of young directors who've had the benefit of a westernized upbringing is a dichotomy. Unfortunately, the marked change in the way women are projected on-screen by Bollywood is not only superficial but the reasons are more economic.

A recent reconsideration, along with the rising respectability of cultural studies, may mark the beginnings of a sea change in the cultural legitimacy of commercial cinema as its status is reassessed by a younger generation with a more complex understanding and acceptance of popular culture. However, the question that haunts my

mind under such developments is that, what kind of femininity is being portrayed as female models strip down and sweat it out. Is this what is meant by 'emancipation of women'? The answers to this will definitely be varied, ranging from justifying such exposure to criticizing it, to taking a moderate stance. Whatever may be the response the implication remains that, audiovisual media (both film and TV) is flooded with such images and there is a certain amount of acceptance of such portrayals, thereby lending legitimacy to the objectified image of women.

With regard to feminist ideology, what feminism can mean in any historical period depends upon the specific constraints within which women live and work. Varying constraints require different strategies of resistance and later generations are able to build on challenges made by those preceding them. Like a kaleidoscope, the ideological landscape changes with each feminist intervention in new ways of seeing open up in the wake of prior resistance. While feminists have been cut off from technology in the past, I will argue that, our future may well lie in accommodating ourselves to its challenges. Although all representations entailing the indication of the human figure through tangible and visual shapes entail a form of objectification in that the person is presented as an object for sight and touch in some sense, it seems important to discuss the kinds of objectification that could be dangerous for those objectified, and under which, if in any circumstances objectification can be considered relatively safe. Objectification which ensures that viewer realize that one who has been represented is an individual with will autonomous desires and powers, with a specific personality with rights and human dignity, would perhaps be regarded as acceptable. The test might be-- would the artist represent herself or himself in this way? Does this objectification render

the subjecthood of the person, their ability to be the author, or representer, too? Again, such representations would have to take place in circumstances where those objectified, are empowered with the right of reply in words and visual images.

It is also the education which makes all the difference. The Indian woman has to battle for her right to an education and find her rightful place under the sun. Such women need to realize their dreams while maintaining harmony between conflicting responsibilities. What you are inside is as important as what you show to the world. Enjoy being a woman; but with dignity. From this perspective, to prosper is a human right, having nothing to do with gender. Feminine grace, dignity, the quite rectitude... none of these should be in conflict with feminism. The real strength lies in being able to think, choose, and decide for yourself. The empowerment has to be translated into meaningful achievements, overcome obstacles, and be goal oriented.

We sincerely hope that this work will contribute to knowledge in this field and sensitize the viewers, policy makers, film-makers among others. At the same time stimulate others for further exploration on this issue.

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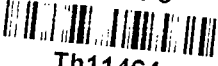
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