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The Changing Construction of Women Characters in Popular Hindi-language Cinema from 1970 to 2007

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A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a degree in

Masters in Dramatic Art

at the

University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Dr. Haseenah Ebrahim

Johannesburg 2008

The Changing Construction of Women Characters in Popular Hindi-language Cinema from 1970 to 2007

Asma Ayob

Abstract

This study examines the changing construction of women characters in popular Hindi-language cinema from 1970 to 2007 using six films, typical of the genres at their times of release, as case studies: *Pakeezah* (1971, Kamal Amrohi), *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali), *Prem Rog* (1982, Raj Kapoor), *Salaam Namaste* (2005, Siddharth Anand), *Baabul* (2006, Ravi Chopra) and *Ta Ra Rum Pum* (2007, Siddharth Anand). The study examines general elements of Indian culture, religion, politics and economics in order to contextualise an understanding of Bollywood films as cultural products. The analysis reveals that in the films of the 1970's and 1980's, women characters were portrayed as docile and submissive, unable to articulate their needs even in the face of oppression, or as independent but cruel or hard-hearted; more specifically, women characters were portrayed as preservers of tradition. The 1980's began to witness a shift in the psyche of women characters, who displayed a need to break free of their environments, thereby rising above what is traditionally expected of Indian women, namely to show tolerance toward society and men, even when unjustly treated.

The findings suggest that more contemporary films show women characters as being more independent and making choices about family and work that are not based on traditional expectations of Indian womanhood. Links to some key findings from the literature are made.

Declaration

I, Asma Ayob, declare that this report represents my own work, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Johannesburg

Signed:_____

____day of _____2008

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my family for their continued support. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Haseenah Ebrahim. I am grateful for her patience in guiding me through this process and for her constant encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

As a member of the Indian community in South Africa, I have been exposed to a wide variety of Hindi-language films from an early age, since they were a form of entertainment in my home. The different Hindu rituals and traditions that were portrayed in these films intrigued me, especially since in many instances, they closely resembled Muslim rituals. Therefore, even as a child, I was able to relate to and identify with the narratives and the depiction of women characters in Hindi-language films. Later on in life, I began to reflect on the portrayal of women in these films and while I understood the premise from which the character arcs were created, I felt a need to explore more closely the messages that are being conveyed through this increasingly popular medium of entertainment.

Of course, the fact that "Bollywood" cinema is becoming increasingly more visible all over the world made me want to probe the matter on a deeper level. In particular, I felt the need to look at the construction of women characters, because it is this construction that perpetuates Indian society and creates a following. I also intend to investigate whether the way in which women characters are constructed has changed over a period of time. Although various scholars in the past have embarked on studying the construction of women characters, these studies did not always clearly study changes occurring over time. With the turn of the century/millennium, new global challenges as well as more global markets opening to the Hindi-cinema industry, this study is timely and one that will be of great value by means of a review of more recent film releases that will be compared to older films. The films selected are considered typical films of the era under consideration and provide a platform for the generalisation of findings.

"Bollywood" is a term associated with the prolific Hindi-language film industry centred in Bombay (renamed Mumbai in 1995) (Ganti, 2004). The term "Bollywood" is, however, often incorrectly used to refer to the whole of Indian cinema. "Bollywood" is only one of several Indian film industries and more specifically refers to Hindi-language cinema. For the purposes of this report, the term "Bollywood" will refer specifically (and correctly) to the Hindi-language film industry.

The Hindi-language film industry is dedicated to the goal of being commercially successful (Dasgupta, 1996; Ganti, 2004) and has become increasingly visible in the international marketplace with box-office success and enthusiastic audiences from India to West Africa to Russia, and throughout the English-speaking world. The web-site Wikipedia.com notes that Bollywood and other major cinematic hubs such as Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Oriya, Malayalam and Assamese constitute the broader Indian film industry, and have the largest output in the world in number of tickets sold. This is indicative of Bollywood's significance in the world-wide film industry. Bollywood is a strong part of the popular culture not only of India, but also of the rest of South Asia, in countries such as Pakistan (despite the ban on Indian films there), the Middle East, parts of Africa, parts of Southeast Asia, and among the South Asian diaspora worldwide.

In order to serve local and international commercial markets, the Hindi film industry has to cater for a vast, heterogeneous, cross-cultural audience that is not always entirely familiar with the Hindi language (Kasbekar, 2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) or Indian culture. Bollywood, therefore, has to produce films that are both locally and internationally appealing in terms of content and texture. In addressing multiple audiences locally and around the world, the bulk of Hindi-language films produced each year are mixtures of family-drama, romance and action-violence. These films are popularly referred to as "masala" or formula films (Ganti, 2004), and are characterised by a preference for visual and non-verbal modes of address. Popular Hindi-language films are constructed with frequent exhibition of colourful choreographed dances, daring fights, sumptuous sets, extravagant décor, dazzling costumes and iconic representation of dramatic tensions (Kasbekar, 2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), as a means of catering to a diverse audience around the world.

Aim of the study

Over time, there has been a continuous change in the construction of women characters in popular Hindi-language cinema. The changes concern aspects relating to nearly all facets of a woman's life, namely her relationships with other people, the work she does and the social activities she engages in. In addition, changes are also evident with regard to the individuality of the woman and level of "self-actualisation".

Such changes can be linked to various events and factors that have had an impact on directors' works, the Mumbai film industry and subsequently the way films are constructed. These include the challenges of globalisation and a changing global film industry, the Indian diaspora phenomenon, changes in the tastes of local and international audiences, and the negotiating pressures of gender construction amongst its audiences. There is a whole new type of audience that is demanding the portrayal of a "modern" woman as opposed to the traditional subservient type of woman whose only goal was to marry and have children.

As a result of these facts, the study aims to examine the changing construction of women characters as portrayed in popular Hindi-language cinema from 1970 to 2007. More specifically, the study examines the role and construction of women characters in six selected films with relation to two interlinking and overlapping aspects. The construction of women characters will be examined from a "self-actualisation" perspective, as well as from an external perspective. The external perspective will consider the woman character's relationships with other people, the work she does and the social activities in which she engages.

Rationale

The construction of women characters in Bollywood films is a complex one and has been studied by scholars such as Kishwar and Vanita (1987), Hedge (1988), Dasgupta (1988, 1996), Gargan (1993 cited in Dasgupta, 1996), Gopalan (1997), Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), and Ganti (2004). Their studies focus on the construction of heroines and how the demands of diverse local and international audiences are served, the stereotyping of women in Bollywood films, the construction of women as "good" and "bad" and what each represents, and how the construction of women characters aims to reinforce nationalism. The important question is: has the construction of women characters changed over a period of time? This question will be examined by means of studying films from different time periods. The films studied are considered typical and representative of a greater pool of films from a specific era.

As early as the 1960's, some film directors of Hindi-language films attempted to challenge some of the stereotypes of women at the time. Prasad (1998) notes that in the period 1957 to 1966, a new generation of young film makers came of age, and modern and progressive ideas

in the social and economic arenas filtered into film where secular themes on urban living and women's rights were explored. Women were constructed as more dominant and powerful, and not in their stereotypical roles as submissive and dutiful mothers and wives. The exploration of women's status and social roles became favourite themes of "New Wave" directors. Although the movement faded in the early 1970's, it nonetheless affected the way future films were constructed.

Bollywood, like other industries, is equally influenced by the processes of globalisation. Cullity and Younge (2004) note that globalisation gave birth to a new form of cultural nationalism in India. This blurs the markers for the "Western" and the "Indian", which are no longer stable concepts or easy to identify. Qin-Hilliard and Suárez-Orozco (2004) also note that virtually all aspects of modern life - our jobs, culture and relationships with one another - are being transformed by the profound forces of globalisation. Goods and people flow across national borders, and data and information flash around the world at an ever-accelerating rate. Not only has globalisation become the central issue of our time, but it will define the world our children inherit. These processes extend to Bollywood films, where some storylines are set in places like New York and London and women characters are "Westernised" in the way they dress and socialise. Yet, some aspects of their character remain "Indian".

It is these aspects that provide a rationale for this study, namely to research the construction of women characters, as well as the factors/forces behind the construction.

I acknowledge the complexities that culture, social factors, religion, class, sexuality and changing audience tastes bring to the study. These aspects are highlighted by Dasgupta (1996), who notes that the issues concerning women may be various such as their subordinate and restricted role in Indian society, the growth of their identity as an important part of their individual development, psychological and economic independence, suppression of rights, discrimination against women practiced in society, harassment and sexual exploitation. Dasgupta (1996) further argues that such gender oppressions are mitigated by culture, class differences, racial discrimination, religious differences and other factors. The intention of this report is not to deliver a critique on the cinematographic merits of Hindi-language films, but to examine the ways in which the representation of women characters has changed since 1970. I believe that this study can contribute towards the existing body of knowledge by examining a sample of recent film releases in order to establish the extent to which the

construction of women characters has changed in popular Hindi-language cinema from 1970 to 2007.

Methodology

An interpretive textual analysis will be employed to examine the changing construction of women characters as portrayed in popular Hindi-language cinema for the period 1970- 2007. Six popular Hindi-language films from the 1970's till the present have been selected for this study. Drawing on converging fields of sociology, film, media and cultural studies, a multi-disciplinary framework will be used to examine the case studies. Case studies include films from the 1970's and 1980's, namely *Pakeezah* (1971, Kamal Amrohi), *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali), and *Prem Rog* (1982, Raj Kapoor). From 2000 to 2007: *Salaam Namaste* (2005, Siddharth Anand), *Baabul* (2006, Ravi Chopra) and *Ta Ra Rum Pum* (2007, Siddharth Anand). These films are typical examples of the genre types prevalent during the time period of release.

In addition, the study will make reference to other relevant popular blockbusters to substantiate or illustrate arguments. More specifically, the study examines the role and construction of women on the basis of two interlinking and overlapping aspects. The first aspect is that of self-actualisation. Self-actualisation considers the individuality of the woman character, including her self esteem, her intellect, creativity sphere, values and norms and the way these elements influence her behaviour. In this study, self-actualisation encapsulates the intrinsic characteristics of the woman character.

Secondly, the construction of women characters is considered from a work and domestic perspective, that is, the external environment or milieu that the woman character is placed in. What kind of work does she do? Is she married? Does her work and marriage mirror Indian tradition? How does her work and marital status influence the construction of the woman character? What other domestic or social activities does she engage in? Can these activities also be linked to the traditional role of the woman in Indian/Hindu society or is there a shift evident towards a woman that exhibits more social freedom with equal rights, similar to her male counterparts?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The literature examines the converging fields of the Hindi-language film history, Indian culture studies, Indian sociology, and gender studies. Hence a multi-disciplinary framework is used to examine the literature and develop a relevant contextual base for the study of a number of selected films under consideration as case studies.

The literature review focuses firstly on some of the key elements of Indian culture, politics and the socio-economy that have a bearing on this study. Secondly, key events over the past 60 years, which I believe have had an influence on Hindi-language cinema (also read as Bollywood), are identified. I believe that this will provide a critical foundation in understanding the context of the construction of women characters in Hindi-language cinema.

Thirdly, Hindi-language cinema is examined from a number of perspectives, notably the growth of Bollywood cinema over time, Bollywood genres, Bollywood films as cultural products, the negotiating forces between the Indian government and film makers, the challenges of a global market, and lastly, the role of the Indian diaspora.

Lastly, the literature considers existing scholarship on the portrayal of women characters in order to provide theoretical and analytical insights for examining and studying the construction of women characters in the films selected for detailed study.

General elements of Indian culture and religion

According to Baron and Byrne (2003), the term "culture" refers to the system of shared meanings, perceptions, and beliefs held by persons belonging to some group. Generally, culture refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Culture can be further defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population which are passed down from generation to generation. Culture also manifests in the way of doing (tradition and customs) and can be

linked to religious and social activities. As a result, culture is often referred to as a way of life for an entire society. As such, it includes unspoken codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, norms of behaviour such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the arts. Cultural anthropologists most commonly use the term "culture" to refer to the universal human capacity and activities to classify, codify and communicate their experiences materially and symbolically (Goodall, 1986). A review of Indian culture and religious elements contributes towards understanding and interpreting the construction of women characters in popular Hindi-language cinema.

Various definitions of culture reflect differing theories for understanding, or criteria for evaluating human activity. Although some scholars identify culture in terms of consumption and consumer goods, anthropologists understand "culture" to refer not only to consumption goods, but to the general processes which produce such goods and give them meaning, and to the social relationships and practices in which such objects and processes become embedded (Boas & Bunzel, 1986).

Tylor (1874) describes culture, in its wide ethnographic sense, as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits which are acquired as a result of living within a society.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco, 2002), describes culture as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

For the purposes of this report, it is essential to take into account the cultures of India, which have been shaped by its long history, its unique geography and the absorption of customs, traditions and ideas from some of its neighbours. India's great diversity of cultural practices, languages, customs, and traditions are examples of this unique co-mingling over the past five millennia (Kobayashi - Hillary, 2004). India is also the birth place of several religious systems such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism (Kobayashi - Hillary, 2004). The various religions and traditions of India that were created by these amalgamations have influenced other parts of the world too. Religious beliefs, especially Hinduism, has influenced Indian culture for a long time in the Indian subcontinent.

The great number of languages in India has also added to the diverse cultures and traditions at both regional and national levels. It is acknowledged that defining culture is no easy task because it means many things to different people. There are easily as many definitions of 'culture' as there are cultures in the world. However, in studying the construction of women characters in Bollywood cinema, it is necessary to examine the underlying perceptions and meanings of cultures that are shared by Indians globally. While it is accepted that this study encompasses a large group of people, and therefore, there cannot be a single meaning to the term culture, there are certain shared elements that shape the identity of certain groups or societies, thereby creating a cultural identity (Hall, 1996).

The notion of "Indian-ness" may be associated with cultural identity. According to Kakar (2007) identity, both personal and cultural, lives itself for the most part, unfettered and unworried by obsessive and excessive scrutiny. Everyday living incorporates a zone of indifference with regard to one's identity. It is only when this zone of indifference is breached that aspects of our cultural identity, in this case "Indian-ness", stand out in sharp relief. This phenomenon is especially useful when examining the construction of diasporic women characters in Bollywood cinema because of the changes in the depiction of women characters from earlier years to present time. More specifically, this refers to the changes in relation to dress codes, mannerisms, eating habits, etc. of women characters.

The terms "culture" and "Indian-ness" cannot be reviewed without considering the different aspects of Indian culture. Traditional clothes, for example saris or punjabis are common forms of dress for Indian women, as is Western dress. Food is also an important part of Indian culture. It plays a significant role in the daily lives of Indian families as well as in festivals. In many families, everyday meals are a sit-down affair consisting of two to three main course dishes with a variety of accompaniments as well as desserts (Ahmad, 2007). Food is not just important for an Indian family by way of eating, but it is also considered as a form of socializing, and getting together with extended families. The Indian social system is based on the joint family system in which all members of the family share the same spirit, tradition and in many cases, property (Ahmad, 2007). In the films *Pardes* (1997, Subhash Ghai) and *Kya Kehna* (2000, Kundan Shah), there is a portrayal of the joint family system in which the families reside together and socialize together. The breakdown in the joint family system is evident when the character of Priya Bakshi from *Kya Kehna* is disowned by her family and asked to leave their common home when she announces her pregnancy out of wedlock.

The consumption of films is also shared by Indian-descent communities all over the world. These films share a certain aesthetic and style and are appreciated by Indian audiences worldwide. Bollywood films in relation to the diaspora bring an added complexity to questions about the definition of culture as well as questions about what constitutes "Indian-ness". It must be stressed that "Indian-ness" is a perception based on the various meanings attached and associated with the term "culture". There is no right or wrong and the comparisons between "traditional" and "modern" are as complex as the definition of the term "culture".

According to anthropologist Franz Boas (Boas and Bunzel, 1986), all human beings evolved equally, and the fact that all humans have cultures must in some way result from human evolution. Large societies often have subcultures, or groups of people with distinct sets of behaviour and beliefs that differentiate them from the larger culture in which they exist. This subculture may be distinctive because of the age of its members, by their race, ethnicity, class, or gender. The qualities that determine a subculture may be aesthetic, religious, occupational, political, sexual or a combination of these factors. However, culture is learned, shared, and integral to an individual or group's sense of identity (Hall and Du Gay, 1996).

The Oxford dictionary defines culture as the customs, institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or group. Hall and Du Gay (1996) agree that cultural identity is the feeling of belonging to a certain group or society. Although a cultural group is united because members share the same norms, it can be argued that they only know what unites them after contact with other cultures. Furthermore, this identification process is not static and may be considered as always "in process" (Hall and Du Gay, 1996:2). The analysis of this process is useful in identifying the changes in the depiction of women characters in the selected films.

Kakar and Kakar (2007) state that the major factors that constitute the perceptions of "Indian-ness" or the Indian identity are an ideology around personal and family relationships that are derived from the institution of the joint family. As opposed to Western society and culture where the dominant value system advocates autonomy, privacy and self-actualisation, Indian culture prizes mutual dependence and community.

The study of cultures within a society is complex and research must take into account a myriad of variables, especially since India is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures (Kobayashi - Hillary,

2004). Therefore, religion still plays a central and definitive role in the life of most of its people. Many practices and rituals that are seen in Bollywood films originate from religious beliefs as well as long-held practices that have been used over the years. One of these is that of the marriage ceremony.

The act of marriage and the accompanying ceremonial events, i.e. the wedding and other accompanying rituals, feature centrally in many popular Hindi-language films. Marriage signifies the start of a lawful and social relationship between two people. Rossella (2002) observes that marriage in ancient and classical India was one of the most important events in the life of a woman. Maternity was the natural flow out of matrimony. Marriage, therefore, determined the fate of a woman to a much greater extent than it did the destiny of a man.

Indian culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries dictated to a large extent that marriage was mostly an expression for a socially sanctioned relationship based less on individuals and romantic love and more on considerations of caste and class (Pande, 2006). Sex was for procreation and the perpetuation of the family bloodlines. Most adults had no opportunity for sexual experience before marriage. Millions of married couples endured segregation when the husband had to migrate to another city for work or trade, faithfully enduring long separations. The Indian script for romance decreed that an ideal man-woman union must be 90 per cent loyalty and mutual respect and 10 per cent sexual gratification.

The literature also makes note of the roles of the man and woman within a marital relationship. The husband is regarded as the master of the house, while the woman fulfils with the greatest obedience her conjugal duties and embodies the guarantee of family happiness (Rosella, 2002). The woman's work is therefore evaluated and approved with reference to motherhood and domestic work (Moore, 1988), and having a career and earning money is not seen as part of the role of the woman.

With regard to the social and religious standing of women, Rossella (2002) notes that during the Vedic age (7 000 to 4 000 BC), according to particular Indian religious life, in social and religious gatherings, women occupied a prominent position; women had an absolute equality with men in the eye of the religion. The wife was not an impediment but an absolute necessity in religious services. The marriage of girls also used to take place at a fairly advanced age, the normal time being the age of 16 or 17. As a consequence, arranged marriages became an act

to be fulfilled by the father. In the post-Vedic period the decline of women's positions in India was represented by the loss of their religious value. The women's roles were firstly formalized in religious activities. However, when women were declared ineligible for Vedic studies and religious duties, they lost their standing completely. This gave rise to a tendency to lower the marriageable age of girls, and as a consequence, to discourage their education. The social standing of the woman/wife in comparison to the man/husband is therefore reduced. This argument is in part supported by Moore (1988), who claims that in many societies, a relationship exists between a woman's education and her socio-economic status as well as to her role and position in society. Women with no or little formal education have a lower socio-economic status. It can therefore be argued that the tendency to lower the marriageable age of women and as a result prohibiting them from obtaining a formal education, promoted gender segregation and created a social, religious and economic advantage to men. Pande (2006), points out that in the 1920's, sexes in Indian society were firmly segregated. Women from "good" families (high social class) dared not come out into the "mardaan khanas" (spacious living rooms for men) of their own homes, where their husbands sat smoking their *hookahs* (oriental tobacco pipe), chewing *paan* (beetle-leaf) and watching girls dance and sing with their male friends.

Moore (1988) recognises the significance of "male bias" for the development of models of explanation in social anthropology. He proposes a theory of "muted groups", in which he argues that the dominant groups in any society generate and control the dominant modes of expression. Muted groups are silenced by the structures of dominance. This theory can be applied to the Indian culture that Pande (2006) refers to, where "male biased-ness" exists. Moore (1988) explains that any group which is reduced in social standing ("silenced") may be considered a "muted" group, and women are only one such case. In other words, if women are reduced in social status, their influence on other matters are also reduced. "Mutedness" is the product of the relations of dominance which exist between dominant (for example males) and subordinate groups (for example females) in society. His theory, however, does not imply that the "mute" should actually be silent. Women may speak a great deal, but they remain "muted" because the males dominate the higher structure of society and control the primary modes of free expression. This is evident in Indian culture, and as a result, women become associated with the "domestic" rather than the "public" domain of social life. There is thus a division between the "domestic" and the "public" – a framework which has,

according to Moore (1988), similarly been advanced as a universal model for the explanation of women's subordination.

When studying the Indian woman, and in particular when studying the construction of women characters in films, concepts such as "self-actualisation", "domesticity", "work status" and "social interaction" are all intertwined to form contributing aspects of the woman's character. In the new millennium, a renewed focus on the contribution of women on all levels of society (family, politics, and economy) has also occurred, and their traditional role of subordination, as noted in preceding paragraphs, is challenged.

Bollywood cinema over the years has adapted and suggests a linear progression of the construction of women characters, often perceived as increasingly "Western" within the narratives of popular films. It is essential to interrogate the connotation of "Indian" as opposed to "Western" in terms of the agendas of film-makers. It must be noted that the diaspora brings an added complexity to questions defining the term "Indian-ness". For example, an Indian born in the USA will not share the same sense of what constitutes "Indian-ness" as an Indian who is born in India. Furthermore, they will differ in their perceptions of moral values, ideologies as well as mannerisms and demeanour. This report will make reference to popular films in which this "Western/Indian" binary is interrogated. However, it is important to acknowledge that the notion of "Indian-ness" as suggested by Kakar (2007), may be similar to the term "culture". These terms are fluid concepts and are constantly being redefined within the narratives of films.

For the purposes of this report, "Indian-ness" and culture will refer to the ideology of individuals around personal and family relationships. According to Kakar (2007), these are derived from the well-known institution of the joint Indian family, as well as the similarities that are produced by an overarching Indian civilization specifically relating to the Hindu cultural patterns that have been dominant in the construction of "Indian-ness", as de-lineated throughout this report.

Key shifts in Indian culture, politics, economy and the social climate that influenced development in Hindi cinema

From India's independence in 1947 to the present – key periods

According to the web-site Bollywood Village (www.bollywoodvillage.com), the Lumiere Brothers Cinematography unveiled six soundless short films at Bombay's Watson's Hotel in 1886. Soon thereafter, two other film producers also entered the market in Calcutta and Bombay, respectively. India's first feature film, *Raja Harishchandra,* was made in 1913 by Dadasaheb Phalke who is known as the Father of Indian Cinema. By 1920 the industry produced twenty-seven films. By 1931, this figure rose to 207 films. Today, India makes about 800 feature films every year.

The year 1931 marked the beginning of the first film with audible dialogue between actors. Similar films in Bengali, Telugu and Tamil were released in the same year.

The era of filmmaking following the attainment of independence in 1947 set in motion the complex tasks of nation building and economic development (Ganti, 2004). It was an era heavily influenced by the desire to identify and solve problems facing the new nation, as well as the outlook about India's position in the world.

Another era of filmmaking followed against a backdrop in the early 1970's of widespread social and political unrest and growing disaffection with the government that culminated in the state of emergency put into effect by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. Films from this era differed considerably from those of the previous one in terms of how the state, the male protagonist (commonly referred to as the hero), and villainy were represented. For example, Ganti (2004) remarks that the film *Zanjeer* (1973, Prakash Mehra) introduced the figure of the "angry young man", which changed the persona of the hero in Bollywood cinema. Ganti (2004) furthermore notes that the main character (hero) was portrayed as a police officer who works outside the bounds of the law.

Films of this period became markedly violent and shifted their focus from the family and domestic domain to that of the state, society and the streets. The state was frequently depicted as inadequate in solving problems like crime, unemployment, and poverty. The inability of

the law to deliver justice became more evident in films of this period and vigilante justice was seen as some kind of bravery and valour. Villains in films of this era were mainly smugglers and black marketers who frequently posed as wealthy, respectable businessmen. The 1980's again saw corrupt politicians becoming the main source of villainy in films with the only legitimate representative of the state being the police (Ganti, 2004).

Ganti (2004) also makes note of another dominant narrative trend that ran from the 1960's and continued through the 1980's. This was the "lost and found" genre. Films of this genre depict a nuclear family, or a subset like siblings, being separated ("lost") in childhood due to traumatic circumstances frequently set in motion by the villain. The family is then (eventually) reunited ("found") after the children have become adults and defeated the people and circumstances responsible for the initial separation. The themes for this genre can be linked with the partition from Pakistan that took place before independence and the experience of separation by thousands of families.

Films produced in the 1990's were influenced by the large-scale process of economic liberalization initiated in 1991 (Ganti, 2004). During the liberalization, certain restrictions and controls around the economy were relaxed. This set the stage for the introduction of satellite TV, which became a competitive force positioned against the film industry. During the post-satellite era, Hindi-language films focussed less on class difference as a theme (Virdi, 2003). Rather than being working or lower middle class as they were in earlier films, the families of the main characters were depicted as wealthy. According to Virdi (2003), the source of dramatic tension came from the conflict between individual desire and duty to one's family, rather than from social differences. One of the main themes that emerged is that of the main characters being in love, but who willingly sacrifice their love for the sake of family honour and harmony. The portrayal of family relationships have always featured strongly in Hindi-language films through the decades. As Ganti (2004) notes, family relationships provide the basis of much of the moral dilemmas and conflicts depicted in Hindi-language cinema.

Another theme that emerged in the 1990's, and which was also evident in Hollywood, is the depiction of villains as a threat to the nation (Ganti, 2004). As separatist insurgencies intensified with bomb blasts, religious riots, high level kidnappings, and hijackings became increasingly common in contemporary India, the nation was then represented as under siege

from acts of war or terrorism and its saviours were the military, paramilitary, or policemen. In other words, nationalism was no longer depicted through a simple East-West dichotomy.

Throughout the decades, elected officials and bureaucrats urged filmmakers to make "socially relevant" films, which will "uplift" the "masses". Ganti (2004) argues that the Government saw the Indian film industry as a way to be used for the "greater good" of promoting Indian traditions and nationhood. The industry was thus regulated and censored. However, with liberalization, the Indian government came to perceive commercial filmmaking as a viable, important, legitimate economic activity that should be nurtured and supported. Pressure on directors to make films that promote 'Indian-ness' was relieved. This in a sense can also be attributed to the effects of globalisation, where Bollywood was being increasingly viewed by a global audience. According to Ganti (2004), the promotion of Indian traditions became less important.

Developing local and international markets

Although the process of globalisation is not altogether new, it has gained significant momentum over the past 30 years. This process is characterised by an accelerating flow of people, technologies, images, and ideas across the globe coupled with advances in communication and information technology, and a convergence of different cultures in a more globalized environment (Qin-Hilliard and Suárez-Orozco, 2004). This contributes to the creation of a global market for Bollywood films.

The changes brought about by the liberalization of the Indian economy have also facilitated the opening of new international markets for Hindi-language films. Though films have been exported by India from the 1950's, the international market has become an increasingly lucrative income generator for Mumbai filmmakers since the 1990's. For example, certain Hindi-language films have even enjoyed greater commercial success in Great Britain and the U.S. than in India, which makes some international markets attractive sources of income. This has led Bollywood film-makers to consciously seek wider audiences outside India by opening distribution offices in New York, New Jersey, and London, creating websites to promote their films, dubbing films into English, Spanish, and French, and subtitling them in English, Hebrew and Japanese in order to expand their markets to include areas without significant South Asian diasporic populations (Ganti, 2004).

Bhattacharya (2004) however, argues that Bollywood has not always travelled well in the West because of its generic and formulaic specificity. Bhattacharya (2004) claims that the entree of the Bollywood film *Lagaan* (2001, Ashutosh Gowariker) as a contestant for the Academy Awards in the foreign film category, Baz Luhrmann's contribution in the making of the film *Moulin Rouge* (2001, Baz Luhrmann), in which the musical performance was inspired by the Bollywood cinema, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Bombay Dreams* (2004, Lena Koppel) have, however, contributed towards focussing international attention on Bollywood.

Diaspora

Estimates from 2004 by the Indian government show that almost 20 million people of Indian descent live outside India, spread across 48 countries (Walton-Roberts, 2004). Dasgupta (1996), in his analysis of the influence of films on the Indian nation, notes that the emerging of a global Indian society fuels the demand for collective symbols that represent continuity through immigrants dislocation from their homeland. Dasgupta (1996) specifically refers here to Indian immigrants in the U.S.

Bhattacharjee (1992) states that central to the creation of immigrant worlds is the idea of the nation – not the nation as a bounded geographical unit, but the nation as an ideological force. Integral to the creation of this nationhood is the grasping for familiar essentials. Dasgupta (1996) argues that Bollywood films have played an important part in the efforts to create this acquainted world for the Indian-American community. Bollywood films are a way for Indians all over the globe to keep "in touch" with their homeland.

Dasgupta (1996) also states that although Asian-Indian immigrants seem to have adapted well to the American environment, they try to distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups by remaining close to their native culture. Studies by Solanki (1973 cited in Dasgupta, 1996) and Sodowsky and Carey (1988) suggest that Indian immigrants in the United States have changed most in superficial behaviours such as dress and language, yet remained conservative in their taste for food, values concerning families, religion, marriage and child-rearing. Essentially, Indian immigrants aspire to be economically successful in America while preserving their cultural uniqueness (Bhattacharjee, 1992).

Hansen (2005 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005) agrees that Bollywood films have for a long time been a type of "mega-signifier" of "Indian-ness" in South Africa. Hansen (2005) suggests that the "Indian spectator" over the past decades has become a global phenomenon, a form of relationship between the film and viewing that are integral to the cinematic culture in countries with populations of Indian origin, for example South Africa. There has been, since the late nineteenth century, a keen and growing interest among educators in South Africa in representing the "Indian community" in proper terms to the surrounding society. However, opposite to first-generation Indians in countries such as America and the United Kingdom, the majority of Indians in South Africa are third or more distant generations of native Indians. According to Hansen (2005 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005), for them, India is immensely distant, at best a part of family history. Despite this, they value the "Indian-ness" in them and some Bollywood films are a reminder of their native "Indian-ness".

In analysing respondents from a group of Indian women living in America, Ram (2002) found that these women participate in varying degrees in community activities, religious and cultural festivals, preserve links with relations and friends in India, develop strong social bonds with other Indian immigrants, subscribe to Indian magazines and news programs, decorate their homes with Indian handicrafts and artwork, wear Indian clothes on special occasions and at home, regularly cook Indian food, and so on. In other words, when situated in relation to their everyday lives, respondents' consumption of Indian cinema becomes one more activity that helps them link their past with the present and their country of origin with their adopted country.

Mishra (2002) argues that contemporary Bollywood cinema relies less on the articulation of broad nationalist themes and more on the "self-projection" of the individual star's physical and cultural desirability onto the screen in order to cater not just to Indian residents, but also to members of the growing Indian diaspora, whose desire for self-representation results from feelings of alienation from their country of origin. Therefore, according to Mishra (2002), Bollywood cinema is a medium used by the Indian diaspora to alleviate feelings of isolation from their country of origin.

The construction of women characters

Bollywood films as cultural products

According to Bagchi (1996), Hindi-language cinema has been a major point of reference for Indian culture. It has shaped and expressed the changing scenarios of modern India to an extent that no preceding art form had ever achieved. Hindi-language cinema allows its audience to identify with the depiction of characters as portrayed on screen. According to Bhattacharya (2004), Bollywood films bring the world home for many Indian immigrants who want to see their own stories of migrations and displacement written into the narratives of these films.

The manner in which women characters are constructed in Bollywood cinema has a strong link to cultural and traditional factors. Culture (and tradition) must, however, be understood in its ancient and mythical contexts to understand changes in the contemporary cinematic output. Furthermore, culture evolves and traditional cultural beliefs might not be upheld by current generations. These cultural elements all help in understanding the nature of the construction of women characters in Bollywood films. Various scholars make reference to Indian films as cultural products, signifying the important role that culture plays in the construction of characters generally (Gopalan, 1997; Dudrah, 2006), and more specifically, in the construction of women characters.

The literature on Indian cinema frequently considers the idea of Bollywood cinema as a tool for strengthening and building Indian nationhood. Indian nationhood refers to the needs of native and diasporic Indians for a cultural and national unity and identity. Various authors have stated that ever since India's independence in 1947, the Indian film industry has contributed to the national dialogue on Indian nationhood (Ahmed, 1992; Chakravarty, 1993; Kasbekar, 2001; Mishra, 2002; Ganti, 2004).

Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) notes that since India's fight for independence, Indian cinema has been concerned with constructing a notion of Indian cultural and national identity. Themes that have emerged strongly revolved around narratives about the family. The family provides a key avenue for melodrama, since it draws upon intense affective relationships shared among its members. By drawing parallels between family and

nation, the same affect becomes transposed on the nation (Virdi, 2003). The film *Mother India* (1957, Mehboob Khan) can be mentioned here as an example, where the film was used as platform to mirror the independence from Britain, and provides a tribute to Indian womanhood. The film grossed over Rs40 million, which is evidence of the appeal of the film.

Ganti (2004) argues that in an era of globalisation, the media have taken on new importance as a symbol of the nation and cultural identity in India. Since the later 1990s, cinema is being touted as part of India's cultural heritage as part of the strategy to maintain local identity in a global world. With the increased presence of Hollywood in India through dubbed films, Hindi-language films have suddenly taken on the mantle of cultural authenticity.

The construction of women characters in Bollywood films have always been in tension with the cultural context of women and the upholding of tradition on the one hand, while trying to sell the film to a heterogeneous audience on the other hand. For instance, Ram (2002) notes that images of purity are maintained by representing chaste characters, whose sexuality is confined within the bounds of heterosexual marriage. Moreover, the common narrative strategy in Indian cinema, where the villain threatens to violate the heroine and is foiled in his attempts by the hero, serves among other things to re-establish the moral order which includes preserving the chastity of the women. However, to meet the demands of a competitive market, Bollywood must balance dichotomies like "traditional/modern", "global/local", "Western/Eastern" and categories such as "culture", "nation", and "Indian" (Ganti, 2004). In doing this, films emerge that are sometimes criticised for being Western, stereotyped, voyeuristic and out of touch with what is actually happening in society.

The feminist movement in India is another aspect that forms an important basis for the portrayal of women in Hindi-language cinema. According to Anagol (2006) the battle for freedom has been fought as much by women as by men. She further states that India's freedom movement brought women into political activism and spawned a generation of female politicians. In this context, the new Indian constitution, born with independence, promised equality before the law and handed voting rights to women. In the decades that followed after independence, feminist campaigners had many successes. Women made their mark on all levels of society as the number of working women increased. Legal reform for example, allowed women to inherit property; ministries for women and child development were developed, and laws against female foeticide, domestic violence and sexual harassment

in the workplace were put into place. According to Ghose, senior editor and primetime presenter at CNN, the Indian government even embraced the slogan of "women empowerment" (http://womensissues.about.com/b/2008/04/24/feminism-in-india.htm).

However, in an article published by Khaleej Times Online (2007), the author notes that despite these advances, Indian women in general - seemingly protected by law, celebrated by the media and nursed by activists – still remain second-class citizens in the first decade of the 21st century. According to the author of the article, Indian women perceive "freedom" as the ability to show skin or smoke and drink in public. Freedom is not thought about as collective freedom of equal opportunities in education and work. Within this lay a problem: Indian feminism was and is largely unconcerned with western, feminist ideas of birth control, sexual freedom or opposing the patriarchal family. The failure of the women's movement could be attributed to the fact that traditionally, Indian women have been used to being compliant, accepting of their fate, dutiful and obedient. Therefore, it could be argued that once they were afforded freedom from major injustices like female foeticide, widow self-burning and domestic violence, to name a few, they were content. Additionally, feminists are often perceived to be unpopular conference-hoppers or political climbers (http://www.khaleejtimes).

While the narratives of Bollywood films continue to depict women characters fighting for justice and equality, they simultaneously recoil from letting women characters deviate from traditional role prescriptions. In the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998), Tina is depicted as "Westernized" in appearance, as she wears mini-skirts, and has grown up and studied in the U.K. Rahul is attracted to her immediately, but does not consider her to be "Indian" enough to take home to his mother. It is only after Tina sings a devotional song that Rahul falls in love with her, because she has demonstrated that she is a "cultural" woman. As a result, sacrifice and surrender are still considered to be the crowning virtues of women characters (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005). Even though the extents of the sacrifices are not as severe as they were before, there is still a tendency to portray women as "fitting into" the roles dictated by the fantasies of heroes. In this case, a woman character that is both Western and Indian (Gangoli, 2002). The feminist movement has therefore failed to develop an Indian definition of women's freedom (Chaudhuri, 2005).

Kakar and Kakar (2007) define "Indian-ness" as the cultural part of the mind that informs the activities and concerns of the daily lives of vast numbers of Indians. Therefore, many Indian women, after gaining an understanding of the "Western" meaning of feminism, choose to combine issues of "Western" and "Indian" and formulate their own agenda. They may contest forced arranged marriages, but if a partner is selected for them based on positive attributes (as is a norm in Indian culture where the elders of the family try to find suitors for their sons and daughters based on appropriate levels of compatibility), then they may willingly accept the decision of the head of the family.

According to feminist author Sahoo (Lowen, 2008), love marriages are viewed as a social sin and are regarded with shame. Many Indians contend that arranged marriages are more successful than marriages in the West, where staggering divorce rates are the rule. They argue that romantic love does not necessarily lead to a good marriage, and often fails once the passion dissipates, whereas real love flows from a properly arranged union between two individuals. As a result, Bollywood film-makers often have to balance the emergence and adoption of "Western" values/perceptions with Indian women's empowerment and the preservation of traditional values on the other when constructing women characters.

The narrative of *Namaste London* (2007, Vipul Amrutlal Shah) depicts the woman character as struggling to balance her values (which are Western) with the imposition of traditional values that are imposed upon her by her on-screen father. While the film is set in England and the heroine is depicted as being patriotically British, her character expresses hesitation in engaging in pre-marital sex before her wedding. The film-maker creates more dramatic conflict in the scene on the boat where India as a nation is mocked by the heroine's in-laws and even though she is depicted as Westernized in terms of dress, mannerisms, body language and her open displays of affection with her boyfriend, her character is visibly perturbed by the negative sarcastic remarks about India.

Leonard (2007) rightfully notes that women characters are depicted as wearing Indian or "Western"- style clothes, following religious or secular values, living with the masses or in the "Western"- style bungalows of the rich. Bollywood film-makers in the new millennium are increasingly depicting women as less shy by placing them in situations where they look into their lover's face and declare their love forcefully. The dress of heroines has also changed considerably over the years and in recent films, many heroines adopt the dress of

Western women such as tight jeans and short skirts. However, regardless of the type of dress, film-makers still continue to depict heroines as willing to conform to certain Indian ideologies, for example, the arranged marriage. In the film *Dilwale Dulhania le Jayenge* (1995, Aditya Chopra), the film-maker depicts the heroine as being allowed the freedom to take a trip to Europe with her friends (this is a departure from conventional Indian ideology according to which an unmarried woman cannot embark on a journey without a suitable escort, which, in most cases would comprise of an elder brother or member of the family), but before leaving, she has to agree to marry the man her father has chosen for her. She willingly agrees as this is what is expected of her as a "dutiful daughter", which ties in with Indian ideology as well as Indian tradition. These conflicting aspects of adopting "Western" elements yet clinging to Indian tradition are often visible in Bollywood films. The effort is to celebrate the Indian within the Western (Kaur & Sinha, 2005).

Linked to the construction of women in Bollywood cinema is the use of song and rain. Perhaps one of the most distinctive facets of popular Hindi-language films is the presence of music in the form of songs sung by characters in nearly all films. Ganti (2004) notes that songs are used to display emotion, which are usually related to love. The general belief in the Bollywood film industry is that love and romance are best expressed musically. Songs are also used as the primary vehicles to represent fantasy, desire and passion. Open displays of affection between man and woman are generally considered a taboo in Indian culture as opposed to Western culture in which kissing and hugging - even in public settings - is a norm (Ganti, 2004). Therefore, film-makers use alternative strategies in which passion and love can be safely explored without alienating the Indian audience. A common scenario that has become a cliché is one with characters singing and dancing in the rain. "Rain has always been invested with erotic and sensual significance in Indian mythology, classical music and literature, as it is associated with fertility and rebirth." (Ganti 2004:81).

Kissing in films has also influenced the way women characters are constructed. Although not enforced anymore, kissing in films was long banned as part of the censorship code for Indian films. Prasad (1998) argues that the ban on kissing may have been related to a nationalist politics of culture. The most frequently offered justification of this informal prohibition has been that it corresponds to the need to "maintain Indian culture". Kissing was described as a sign of "Western-ness" and was therefore considered alien to Indian culture. "It was not until the mid-eighties that films began to appear in which some awkward and perfunctory kissing

scenes were included, as if to merely register the lifting of the ban" (Prasad 1998: 89). The contradictory attitudes towards kissing (which was banned) versus the erotic display of the female body as spectacle (which is widespread) in popular Bollywood cinema can perhaps be explained by the ideology of the public sphere. Prasad (1998) argues that the female body as spectacle is a public representation, a show of erotic imagery for the public that does not violate the code that prohibits the representation of the private. This is because such spectacle occurs in song-and-dance sequences which are conventionally coded as "contracted voyeurism", rather than an unauthorized view of a private world (Prasad, 1998). Kissing on the other hand, and by extension the details of a sexual relation between two people, belongs to the realm of the private.

The stereotyping of women characters

Various scholars have raised their voices against the stereotyping of women in Indian films. These include, amongst others, scholars such as Gargan (1993 cited in Dasgupta, 1996), Dasgupta (1996), Gopalan (1997), Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988), Datta (2000), Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) and Ganti (2004).

According to Dasgupta (1996), the treatment of women in Hindi "masala" films has been a concern of feminists and social scientists. Kishwar and Vanita (1987) argue that women characters are often stripped of all realistic human and social complexities, thus ending up on screen as stereotypes. Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988), and Gargan (1993 cited in Daspupta, 1996) further note that "good" women are generally portrayed in Bollywood films as long-suffering and submissive. The ideal women in Bollywood, according to Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988), have also traditionally been controlled, chaste, surrendering individuals, and have not been afraid of making sacrifices for others, especially their male relatives. The "bad" women on the other hand, have been depicted as Westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988) note that the Hindi-language film industry has repeatedly reinforced the notion that the glory of ideal Indian womanhood lies in the tolerance she shows toward society and men, even when she is unjustly treated and brutally victimised.

Datta (2000), in reflecting on stereotyping, comments on the film *Duplicate* (1998, Yash Johar). In the film, a gangster tries to seduce the heroine and to the tune of a light-hearted song, pulls off her sari and gropes her. Datta (2000) notes that this form of retrogressive representation in a country where some women are battling against physical violation and sexual harassment can contribute towards trivialising sexual harassment. According to Datta (2000), polarises the feminine into the romantic lover and the sexual vamp that is on the wrong side of the law. This polarisation presents a "conservative ideology" (Datta, 2000) where the woman is presented more as an object or commodity rather than a heroine. Datta (2000) also remarks that films from the female avenger genre raise similar problems. Although they denounce rape, scenes of female violation feature centrally in the narrative.

Gopalan (1997) notes that the rape scene provides the narrative ruse of the revenge plan, while providing the spectator with a range of scopophilic pleasures. This is just a way to recycle the old stereotype in Indian films. Virdi (1999) also remarks that films portraying the "avenging daredevils" have sparked complaints about the static two-dimensional portrayals of women as victims or vamps, whores, suffering mothers or pleasing wives. These women, figured as retaliating rape victims, are merely grist for the Bollywood film mill furbished by and for male fantasies.

Such routine depiction of women in commercial films was, however, challenged by a small number of directors in the late 1960's, who became known as the "New Wave" group (Dasgupta, 1996). The "New Wave" films avoided formula themes and focused more on portraying social realities. However, Dasgupta (1996) notes that more than any other topic, the exploration of women's status and social roles became favourite themes of "New Wave" directors. Although the "New Wave" movement started to fade within a decade, "New Wave" cinema affected formula films and the film industry significantly. Films that followed such as *Pratighat* (1987, Narvekar Chandra), *Sherni* (1988, Harmesh Malhotra), *Khoon Bhari Mang* (1998, Rakesh Roshan) and *Kali Ganga* (1990, Raj Sippy), portrayed women as hardened, cynical and vengeful creatures. Director Narvekar Chandra suggested that these films were generated in response to the voracious viewing habits of an audience that wished to see something different from the stock male action films. The actresses of the films argued that the screenplays in which women were constructed as dominant and powerful, were welcome breaks from stereotypical roles as submissive and dutiful mothers and wives.

However, a review of comments made by a blog-writer named Nita (http://nitawriter.wordpress.com) provides evidence of one audience member that still condemns the construction of women characters in Bollywood films. Nita argues that women characters in Bollywood films are often constructed unrealistically, leading to stereotyping, and as a result undermining women's rights. Nita also notes that it is not always realised that the struggle for women's rights is not a Western concept alone, but one of humanity in all nations and societies.

Another researcher found similar viewpoints from respondents. Ram (2002) conducted a study to understand the ways in which Indian immigrant women in the United States interpret the gendered representation in Indian cinema. In her findings, Ram (2002) cites comments from respondents, who protested against some recent films where the heroine did not represent "Indian women". Respondents also complained about films that show too much of women's bodies and actresses that wear very short dresses. Respondents argued that this is not an accurate representation of modern society in India, as most women still dress modestly.

Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that cinema was founded on "scopophilia" (the pleasure of looking), which takes priority over "epistemophilia" (the desire to know). This argument is based on Kasbekar's own psychoanalytical view of cinema. Cinema therefore constantly devises narrative strategies to solicit the "look" and mobilize the scopic drive. Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that the intention of mobilising the scopic drive is based on the industry's attempt to maximise market share by capturing the attention of a wide audience. This, Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues, is in contrast to Hollywood cinema, which seems to cater for its global audiences by organising production and marketing of its films around specific genres that target specific audiences. Bollywood film production, on the other hand, aims to create films that can appeal to female and male audiences at the same time, while encompassing audiences of all ages. According to Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), this is achieved by exploring opportunities for pathos through various scenes in the film in order to solicit female interest and empathy. However, Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) also claims that these scenes are situated within a wider array of other affective and visual pleasures. Male spectators, in turn, are offered the pleasure of "erotic voyeurism". Manipulation of the storyline provides many occasions for the fetishisation of the women.

Central to the pleasures of heterosexual scopophilia, Metz (1975) argues, is the role of the woman, where she functions primarily to address the erotic gaze and constitutes an indispensable ingredient in look-soliciting strategies. Therefore, Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) notes, Bollywood films must engage, because of economic pressure, in cultural negotiations with the regimes of power, namely the state, civil society, and female members of its audience in order to successfully present the woman as an erotic spectacle.

The fetishised screen portrayal of women characters in Bollywood films is a criticised aspect of cinema (Kasbekar, 2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001). The woman is transformed into a commodity, while at the same time as spectator, becomes a consumer (Kasbekar, 2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001). According to Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), Bollywood films must persuade women (and men) to participate in their own exploitation as commodity. In other words, the film creators must accommodate sometimes incompatible desires within the same film and make them concordant with existing cultural and moral values of the society in which it circulates. This is done by resorting to a variety of strategies. Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that the most important strategy has been to create an idealised moral universe that upholds the official definition of femininity within the main plot, and then to provide unofficial erotic pleasures to its target audience through the song-and-dance sequences.

Kasbekar (2001: 298, cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that having "devised the dance performance as a strategy to legitimise erotic voyeurism, film- makers must plot socially acceptable motivations within the narrative for such erotic exhibition". This is achieved by bi-polarising women characters in the film. The "heroine" versus "vamp" is such a ploy that is sometimes used. In the films *Pakeezah* (1971, Kamal Amrohi) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali), the heroines are depicted as both victims and vamps simultaneously. While the audience acknowledges that these women characters are courtesans, through the narrative structure, the audience learns of their unjust fate. According to Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), film-makers are therefore subjected to commercial and ideological pressures to make a "spectacle" of the woman, but at the same time must deploy strategies and subterfuges in order to legitimise such erotic voyeurism without antagonising the state, civil society, or female members of the audience.

Rosella (2002) proposes that one of the problems that arose from Hindu culture is the idea that women possess the skill of seduction. The seductive characteristics of women are universal and apply to all cultures. Film-makers in Bollywood often characterize women characters as either heroines or vamps. According to Gangoli (2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005), the heroine presents traditional values, compliant to the wishes of the hero, while the vamp is characterised as "Westernised" and lustful. Gangoli (2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005) also provides a projection of women in the 1950's, 1960's and early 1970's and notes that films portrayed the ideal Indian/Hindu woman, represented by the heroine as the hero's mother and/or sister, as typically Hindu and compliant with the wishes of the hero, embodying the male/patriarchal view. In contrast, the vamp is Anglo-Indian or "Westernised", most often sexually promiscuous and "knowing", as opposed to the sexually "innocent" heroine. Thus, the vamp is located as being the outsider to "Indian-ness" and to Indian norms and traditions.

Although Bollywood films do not state with finality when a character is Anglo-Indian, markers such as names, appearances and costumes worn by characters are evident to the audience (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005), such as branded clothing, references to "Western" foods like pizza, and sports cars often driven by characters in Hollywood films.

In the latter part of 1970 the portrayal of the male protagonist began to shift towards a hero that was no longer secure in his "Indian-ness" (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005). The new hero was angry, his patriotism jaded, and came from a working class background where he makes it big in the world of crime. The traditionally modest heroine depicted in films of the 1960's has also been replaced by a heroine that is portrayed as more independent and conforming less to what is expected of her by Indian tradition.

Somaaya (2004) notes that the portrayal of women characters in Hindi-language films has journeyed through three significant phases since 1980. In the early 1980's, women characters were portrayed as fending more for themselves and also making independent choices regarding their marital partners and work.

The early 1990's saw the middle-aged woman being portrayed as emerging from the drudgery of domesticity with a new dream. She was now ready to express her desires and negotiate space for herself with her partner. The 1990's also saw the rise in the popularity of films

known as “family dramas”. The Indian woman of the 1990’s took on characteristics that were perceived as less traditionally Indian and more associated with the Western world, for example in the way she dressed (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005). An excellent example of this type of characterisation can be seen in the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (2001, Karan Johar), in which the heroine returns to India after completing her studies abroad and joins the local college, where her father is the principal. Her dress is contemporary; she wears mini-skirts and the camera juxtaposes her body with the effect it has on the hero and other male characters in the film. Yet, when the heroine is challenged to sing a verse from the holy book, she does so with the humility and demeanour that would befit a traditional Indian woman. The male spectators as well as the hero in the narrative are simultaneously stunned and pleasantly surprised. It is after this scene that the hero begins to look at the heroine from a completely different perspective and considers her to be “marriage material”, in other words, he perceives her as still strongly grounded in Indian/Hindu cultural values despite the Western dress.

While the idea of “Indian-ness” is not something that pre-exists, its construction is nonetheless, a perception. However, films, being a visual medium, construct characters to depict “Indian-ness” through dress, make-up, gestures, and eating/drinking behaviours as well as moral and spiritual values. Dudrah (2006) notes that the heroine is depicted in a complex way that addresses the dual sensibilities of being both Indian and Western.

Many directors of the 90’s have studied abroad and as a result, their lifestyles are influenced by the West. Therefore, they place women characters in situations that women characters in Hollywood cinema are faced with, such as Amby from the film *Salaam Namaste* (2005, Siddharth Anand) who is depicted as a woman living abroad, away from her family. Amby then makes a conscious decision to live with her boyfriend and this results in an unwanted pregnancy. Even though Bollywood film-makers are constructing their women characters as increasingly “Western” in relation to their unilateral life choices, the narratives of their films still portray women characters as consciously returning to traditional Indian values. The reasons for this continual return to tradition are questionable. It seems as if “Hindi cinema has lately been undergoing a major makeover such as bodes to redefine or even obliterate its very identity” (Krishnaswamy and Hawley, 2007: 201). In light of the loom of globalization and the influences of the West on Indian society, it could be argued that it is the audience that

demands such stereotyping of women, and it must be noted that the audience is largely male. (Krishnaswamy and Hawley, 2007).

In most of the Bollywood film narratives, heroes are constantly voicing the opinion that they ultimately want a homely wife who will take care of the children and look after their homes. It seems as if despite the strides made by the feminist movement and Indian women themselves, the narratives of Bollywood films are still constrained by the preferences of its male audiences. They still do not want to see women as powerful entities outside the domestic sphere of maternity and wifehood. Indian society still maintains its own unspoken set of limitations which filter through the characters that film-makers create. These limitations are presented in the name of culture and tradition in the narratives of films and the silent "battle" between the "immoral West" and "tradition" is constantly being negotiated.

Mishra (2002), however, remarks that women do not want to be represented simply as voyeuristic objects for the male gaze or as composite other, wife, or lover figures. This is illustrated in the movie *Naseeb* (1981, Manmohan Desai), when the disruption takes the form of a woman being given enough space to voice the need for freedom and control of her body. Somaaya (2004) also notes that although often oppressed and treated as sex-symbols, women characters regain self-esteem from time to time and are determined to "call the shots" in the new millennium.

Films with diasporic themes have also changed over time. Films of the sixties and seventies dealt with the representation of migrants from India to countries abroad. Dudrah (2006) notes that these films invariably cast those who went abroad in supporting roles or as villains, depicting them as harbingers of the bad ways of the West – a corrupting influence, or counter-reference to Indian values.

Bhattacharya (2004) argues that the films not only bring the world home for many Indian immigrants, but that they are also an acknowledgement of a loyal audience abroad that wishes to see its own stories of migrations and displacement written into these films. It was primarily in the mid-nineties that Bollywood films began to develop the Indian diaspora as a thematic issue (Dudrah, 2006). The development of the diaspora theme took place amid a growing international market that has become an increasingly lucrative income generator for Bombay film-makers (Dudrah, 2006). With a significant portion of the Bollywood audience

being located outside of India, the diaspora theme proved a successful formula for Bollywood film-makers, as represented in various films (*Pardes* 1997, Subhash Ghai; *Salaam Namaste,* 2005, Siddharth Anand; *Namaste London,* 2007, Vipul Amrutlal Shah).

Globalisation and the diaspora phenomenon have been influential in audience demand as well as industry film production. The processes of globalisation serve as a catalyst for the remaking or reworking of existing gender divisions (Cullity and Younge, 2004). However, this transformation process raises questions relating to the capacity and changing role of the Indian woman, both as audience member and as film character. To better understand the context of this, Cullity and Younge (2004) argue that it is necessary to consider various aspects, such as the place of women within earlier narratives, family life, the conduct of women, the "westernisation" of women, and the formal/informal and semiotic designs of gender construction.

The literature review focuses on some of the key elements of Indian culture, politics and the socio-economy that have a bearing on this study. Key events over the past 60 years that influenced Hindi-language cinema were mentioned. Additionally, Hindi-language cinema was examined from a number of angles, notably the growth of Bollywood cinema over time, Bollywood genres, Bollywood films as cultural products, the negotiating forces between Indian government and film makers, the challenges of a global market, and the role of the Indian diaspora as well as the domestic market. These aspects are regarded as important for studying the construction of women characters in Hindi-language cinema.

A number of key arguments thus emerge from the literature review. These include the subordinate and restricted role of women in society, the traditional expectations of women with regard to their role in marriage and at home and the stereotyping of women.

Dasgupta (1996) argues that Indian women have fulfilled a subordinate and restricted role in society. Furthermore, Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1998) believe that this position of women was and still is accepted and tolerated as token of Indian cultural and traditional expectations. The literature also shows that women's subordination and restrictive roles are also evident in marriage and work. Tradition dictated that marriage was mostly an expression for a socially sanctioned relationship based less on individuals and romantic love and more on considerations of caste and class (Pande, 2006). In other words, the woman's

right to choose a partner is restricted. The result of an arranged marriage again restricts a woman from obtaining a formal higher education and thus limits her social standing. This argument is supported by Moore (1988), who claims that in many societies, a relationship exists between a woman's education and her socio-economic status as well as to her role and position in society.

The literature also comments on the "mutedness" of groups such as women and widows as a result of their social standing in society. The literature illustrates that earlier films have strong traditional undertones where the women willingly and mutely comply with all the forms of injustices. This scenario emerges when the main character is in love, but willingly sacrifices her love for the sake of family honour and harmony. In contemporary modern films, the heroine is more independent and tradition no longer has such a grasp on her. Married women's domestic roles were also prescribed by traditional expectations. According to Moore (1988), the woman's work is evaluated and approved with reference to motherhood and domestic work, and having a career and earning money is not seen as part of the role of the woman.

The literature further examines the construction of women characters in Hindi-language cinema as voyeuristic objects. Scholars such as Kishwar and Vanita (1987) argue that women characters are often stripped of all realistic human and social complexities, thus ending up on screen as stereotypes. The ideal women in Bollywood, according to Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988), have also traditionally been controlled, chaste, surrendering individuals, not afraid of making sacrifices. The "bad" women on the other hand, have been depicted or stereotyped as Westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that cinema was founded on "scopophilia" (the pleasure of looking), which takes priority over "epistemophilia" (the desire to know). This argument is based on Kasbekar's own psychoanalytical view of cinema. Cinema therefore constantly devises narrative strategies to solicit the "look" and mobilize the scopic drive. Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that the most important strategy has been to create an idealised moral universe that upholds the official definition of femininity within the main plot, and then to provide unofficial erotic pleasures to its target audience through the song-and-dance sequences.

Lastly, the literature provides evidence of the success of Bollywood films outside of India. For example, certain Hindi-language films have even enjoyed greater commercial success in Great Britain and the U.S. than in India, which makes some international markets attractive sources of income (Ganti, 2004). This has led Hindi film-makers to consciously seek wider audiences outside India by opening distribution offices in New York, New Jersey, and London, creating websites to promote their films, dubbing films into English, Spanish, and French, and subtitling them in English, Hebrew and Japanese in order to expand their markets to include areas without significant South Asian diasporic populations (Ganti, 2004). However, to cater for the expanding market, Bollywood films must develop a content strategy that addresses the needs of the local Indian market and the diasporic audience.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AS PRESERVERS OF TRADITION IN HINDI-LANGUAGE FILMS OF THE 70'S AND THE 80'S

Introduction

Films depicting social themes were extremely popular in the 1960's and later, in the 1980's. In numerous films of this period, it was also rare to find a heroine willing of her own accord to stand up to established rituals and traditions. Instead, film-makers reflected upon the sordid aspects of women's lives in their films. They explored the subtle nuances and seemingly impenetrable aspects of their lives, thereby emphasizing their struggles. As a result, the 70's and 80's saw a substantial escalation in the type of films with themes that explored the oppression and exploitation of women. This chapter will examine the trials and tribulations of women during these two decades and more specifically, will focus on studying the changes in the construction of women characters in Bollywood films during this time.
Before embarking on a detailed analysis of specific films selected to understand and de-lineate the changing construction of women characters, it is important to make reference to some of the additional noteworthy films of these two decades. Firstly, mention must be made of the well-known film *Mother India* (1957, Mehboob Khan), which was a remake of the same director's earlier movie *Aurat* (1940, Mehboob Khan). This was the first Hindi-language film ever to be nominated in the "best foreign language film" category at the Academy Awards in 1957. Even though *Nights of Cabiria* (1957, Federico Fellini) won the award, *Mother India* was heralded as India's *Gone with the Wind* (1939, David O' Selznick) and was considered a blockbuster of epic proportions.

Mother India is considered by many as the cornerstone of Indian commercial cinema because of the way in which the glorified strength of a woman is commended. The protagonist Radha is forced to raise her children while paying off the moneylender who seeks to abuse her sexually. The film presents Radha as a woman who survives flood, famine and desertion by her husband. After she loses one son in a flood, she shoots her other son in order to preserve the honour of the village, after he becomes a rebel committed to violent action.

The film traces the bitter-sweet lives of an Indian peasant family as it struggles to survive in a rural community coming to terms with a country newly freed of British colonial rule. Above

all a story about honour, *Mother India* opens with a close-up of the "village mother", Radha. Her weather-beaten features set the tone for much of what is to come. She is immediately recognisable as a woman forged by suffering and it soon becomes clear that it is her story that Khan intends to relay. *Mother India* is the ultimate tribute to Indian womanhood. This epic saga of the sufferings of an Indian peasant woman is perennially cemented and underlined as an ongoing plight of Indian women within the norms of traditional Indian society and is an allegory of the nation itself.

Mother India was made ten years after India became independent of British rule. In the film the director attempts a marriage between socialistic ideals and "traditional values" (Bagchi, 1996). Radha's submissive behaviour towards her husband and her mother-in-law serve an important function in Mehboob's scheme of things. Radha is portrayed as an Indian everywoman. She is the ideal wife and daughter-in-law. Her love for her husband is equated to divine love. She is portrayed as responsible and full of common sense. Essentially the women in the audience are expected to identify fully with her and the men are invited to look at her in a non-sexual light. (Bagchi, 1996).

Similarly, *Khamoshi* (1969, Asit Sen) also deals with a protagonist, Radha, who epitomises the inner strength and resilience of an Indian woman. In *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978, Raj Kapoor), the heroine Rupa defines the true concept of beauty, especially for her husband who believes that beauty is only skin deep. When Rosie in *Guide* (1965, Vijay Anand and Tad Danielewski) dances like a woman possessed while singing "*Dil woh challa" (The heart that walks away)*, and standing in a cave cries, *"Main jeena chahati hoon" (I want to live)*, she speaks for millions of women who suppress their talent and languish in bad marriages.

Lajja (2001, Rajkumar Santoshi) raises an angry voice against Indian society's apathy towards dowry, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, male domination and female infanticide. *Lajja* is the story of tormented women wanting to break free. The victimised courtesan Anarkali revolts and challenges the might of the Mughal monarchy while singing "*Pyar kiya to darna kya*?" (What is there to fear in loving?). More than the prince Salim, it is the poor tormented maiden who cries against injustice, tyranny and oppression. The talented actresses of the times performed in films that presented power-packed and path-breaking roles that aided in igniting social awareness against the discrimination, injustice and prejudices to which women are subjected.

Three case studies are selected to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which film-makers constructed women characters in the 70's and 80's. They are *Pakeezah* (1971, Kamal Amrohi), *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali) and *Prem Rog* (1982, Raj Kapoor). In addition to the fact that these films continue to be popular, they have also been selected because they portray the multifaceted lives of women who find themselves in distinctively different situations.

Pakeezah and *Umrao Jaan* are essentially films with Muslim protagonists and settings that focus on the courtesan as the ultimate figure of love and sacrifice. It is important to examine these films because the Bollywood industry encompasses both the powers of the Urdu and Muslim culture, as well as Hindu culture. While the figure of the courtesan still remains pivotal to the Bollywood conception of the heroine, these film-makers also explore the central tensions prevalent in Indian society between law, justice, cultural norms and love. *Prem Rog* deals with issues of widow re-marriage and will be discussed in greater detail in comparison to *Baabul* (2006, Ravi Chopra), a film produced in the 21st century that deals with similar themes, in the next chapter. The narratives of the selected films trace the ordeals and tribulations that women of the times faced. In studying these films, a baseline for the study of the changing construction of women characters is established so that a comparison can be drawn when examining films of more recent years.

Pakeezah (1971, Kamal Amrohi)

In this case study of the film *Pakeezah*, two main aspects relating to the construction of the woman character are focussed on. First the character is analysed with relation to her work as a courtesan and secondly, the study draws on the woman character's path toward self-actualisation.

The title of the film "Pakeezah" refers to something that is "pure" or "chaste". This strongly evokes the concept of untarnished womanhood even in the face of the most demeaning circumstances. The brothel provides a space where dance and song translate into desire and passion. It is within the confines of this space that reality is changed into fantasy and the courtesan takes to the stage where poetry is used to evoke sexual images freely. The Muslim courtesan demonstrates the centrality of Muslim culture in Bollywood, even though that culture can only exist as a source for poetry and dance (Mishra, 2006). Muslim poets derive

much of their strength from the figure of the courtesan as the brothel has been established as a space where reality is changed into fantasy in the narratives of Bollywood films. Through the movements of the courtesan, sex and poetry can fuse into one, uninhibited by religion or family values. According to Mishra (2006), the Muslim is pivotal for a genealogy of Bollywood cinema, because the language and culture of the Muslim have mediated the industry (especially the Muslims who speak Hindi / Urdu, the language of Bollywood cinema).

The title *Pakeezah* challenges the essence of its own meaning and throughout the film, the hero constantly refers to the woman protagonist as "pure" and "chaste", thereby raising her to the level of the "good" woman as opposed to the character of the courtesan which would otherwise be characterised as the "vamp". The irony of the selection of the title challenges the patriarchal system that categorises the existence of the courtesan as a helpless prey in the hands of powerful men. Under this system, the existence of the character who is depicted as a courtesan has negligible value in society as an individual. As a result, the survival of these women characters is threatened and they are easily brutalized by powerful men and, in the case of this film, by the women who take them in. By referring to the heroine as "Pakeezah" her character is elevated to a higher plane.

The lead actress, Meena Kumari, plays the role of two of the main women characters in the film. The first character that she plays is that of Nargis, a blonde-haired girl working in a *kotha* (brothel). Nargis escapes from the brothel by eloping with her lover Shahabuddin, an affluent man. Through her actions, it is evident that Nargis is trying to exercise control over her life. The manner in which she sleeps on Shahabuddin's lap as he strokes her hair signifies her need to be protected by him as he is the male figure and the patriarchal society of the times placed the male figure as either the protector or the oppressor, in this case the former.

The portrayal of Nargis as a blonde-haired girl is significant. Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988) emphasise that such an image signifies a link with the "immoral" west. The ideal woman in Bollywood has traditionally been controlled, chaste, surrendering, and not afraid of making sacrifices, while the "bad" woman has been depicted as westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. The film also depicts Shahabuddin as an affluent man, and as such segregates the two characters based on social class.

In the scenes that follow, the patriarch of Shahabuddin's family refuses to accept Nargis as his daughter-in-law and she reacts with melancholic mourning, fleeing to a graveyard. In keeping with the films of the times and the manner in which women characters were depicted in the 70's, Nargis, being a courtesan, accepts defeat without a fight, as is illustrated in her choice of the graveyard as her final destination. Essentially, women in the audience who have suffered rejection can identify with Nargis. The men in the audience, on the other hand, realise that a woman character that is portrayed as a courtesan is still an individual with the right not to be victimized. The film-maker skilfully allows the audience to forget for a moment that Nargis is in fact, a courtesan. Instead, the audience is able to identify with a woman character in search of love. This bond that the audience forms with the heroine is an important one that is re-emphasized at various points in the narrative of the film (Bagchi, 1996). The film-maker also establishes the kind of love that Nargis has for Shahabuddin, which is equated to divine love.

Nargis then lives in a room at the graveyard until she gives birth to Shahabuddin's child. On her deathbed she writes Shahabuddin a letter asking him to come for his newborn daughter. However, her sister Veena arrives first and takes the child to the *kotha* (brothel) that she owns. The child is named Sahibjaan (also played by Meena Kumari) and becomes a much sought-after courtesan or *tawaif* (prostitute) like her mother. The link between mother and daughter, although separated after the death of Nargis (the mother), is inevitable. This is also strengthened by the fact that the same actress plays both mother and daughter, and therefore reflects similar characteristics.

Shahabuddin only receives the letter 17 years later. He does not ignore the plea of the mother, but when he arrives at Veena's doorstep to take his daughter away, she asks him to come back the next day. Veena does not mention the incident to Sahibjaan. Veena then flees by train with Sahibjaan who is unaware that she has an ally in her father.

On the train journey, a young man named Salim enters Sahibjaan's compartment and is struck by her beauty as she sleeps. He leaves behind a note at her feet: *Aap ke paon dekhe, bahut haseen hai. Inhe zameen par mat utariyega -- maile ho jayenge* ("I saw your feet, they are very beautiful. Don't place them on the ground, as they will get dirty"). These words are simultaneously ironic and emotive, as the very feet that the traveller refers to are the same feet that dance for hours in order to entertain men in a sexually evocative manner. When

Sahibjaan finds the note, she clutches it close to her heart and harbours a romantic fantasy that this traveller will save her.

Similar to her inner desires, is the *kotha* (brothel) itself, which provides a space of unrealistic romantic transformation. A comparison can be drawn between Sahibjaan's inner desires and the demands of the world in which she lives. She secretly yearns for true love and a saviour to free her from the unholy life that she leads. Yet the persona that she projects is one of a seductress. In the same way, the world in which she lives also compels her to have a dual personality so that she is able to perform and entice her male audience in a setting where sex and poetry can fuse into one. The *khota* (brothel) provides a space for freedom of expression for males, albeit being a fantasy world. Both, Sahibjaan's deep, inner desires and the world that exists within the brothel are spaces where reality is changed into fantasy.

Henceforth, Sahibjaan's moments of sadness in the film are echoed through the sound of a train's piercing whistle that reminds her of her admirer and through him, hope. When circumstances re-unite them later in the film, Sahibjaan feigns amnesia to avoid revealing her true identity. Salim turns out to be Shahabuddin's nephew and even when Sahibjaan confesses that she is a prostitute, he still wants to marry her. This act is significant because Salim is willing to endure possible gossip or even rejection from his family in wanting to marry a prostitute, as did his Uncle. It also shows change in tradition that was reminiscent of Indian culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where marriage was influenced by an expression for a socially sanctioned relationship based less on individuals and romantic love and more on considerations of caste and class (Pande, 2006).

However, Sahibjaan does not consider herself worthy of marrying Salim and leaves him at the altar because she feels disparaged by the reality of her true identity. Sahibjaan's behaviour signifies her inability to break away from her circumstances. She is depicted as willingly accepting her fate of being trapped in the world that she was born into and hence, unable to comprehend a life where she would live with dignity, as those realities are only unreachable dreams to her. Although seeking to move beyond her circumstances towards self-actualisation, her character does not display any sense of individuality except for her inner desires which are very deep-rooted. The only exhibition of self that she ever displays is when she attaches Salim's note to a locket and clips it into her hair. It is this symbol that she relies on as a form of solace in times of loneliness. This act upholds the ideology of Indian women

as sacrificial and submissive, as opposed to narratives of more recent films in which women characters are portrayed as living their lives according to their own ideals. According to Virdi (2003), Hindi-language cinema provides a rich and abundant characterisation of the idealised women figures: passive, victimised, sacrificial, submissive, glorified, static, one-dimensional, and resilient. The narrative structure strengthens the ideologies that depict Indian women as mere objects who claim self-denial as their way of life, in order not to challenge the social hierarchies and taboos.

When Sahibjaan rejects Salim, he indignantly invites her to perform a dance at his wedding to another woman. Linked to the depiction of the heroine as submissive and accepting of her fate without question or complaint, is the use of song and dance. As Ganti (2004) states, songs are used to display emotion, which again is related to love. The dance sequence, as in many Bollywood films, fulfils a significant role in establishing the heroine's battered state of mind. Sahibjaan tumultuously dances on broken glass, symbolically seeking to destroy the feet that Salim loved so dearly. Her movements in this particular dance sequence are filled with a forlorn hysteria, as her scarf flies off her head, and her customary logical rhythm is turbulent as she twirls over the shattered glass, leaving her bloody footprints across the white sheet. In other words, her performance is one of self- flagellation and punishment instead of a display of strength and resolve.

Sahibjaan is depicted as a woman with low self-esteem, therefore she constantly feels rejected and as a result is always passive in her demeanour with those around her. It is interesting, then, to note "her" rejection of Salim. Once again, her rejection cannot be read as an act of power or conscious decision taken by a woman in control of her life. Instead, the film-maker portrays her as a bruised woman, who cannot even accept a love that is pure and of which she is deserving. The film-maker captures the sympathy of the audience through the depiction of the heroine as a victim.

The dance that Sahibjaan performs cements the sentiments of the audience in identifying the fate of Indian women of the times who could not voice their opinions and were compelled, by the ideologies of the times to become either submissive, or sacrificial, or, in this case, inflict pain upon themselves. Sahibjaan seems fated to relive her mother's sad story, but when it is discovered that Salim is actually Shahabuddin's nephew, then all convention is defied and Salim marries Sahibjaan. Hence re-affirming the gender ideologies of the times, according to

which the male is superior. The narrative of this film is dominated by themes of socialist ideals and traditional values as well as conformity to a patriarchal society. Sahibjaan is depicted as powerless in influencing her future and until she is "rescued" by the man, her life decisions are not her own. As a result, her character is not recognized as a sexual being.

Pakeezah's plot is laced with many coincidences as is evident in the way that Sahibjaan keeps on meeting with Salim and there is a heavy reliance on symbolism. The bird with clipped wings that is placed in a cage and hovers over Sahibjaan in her bedroom signifies Sahibjaan as being unable to "fly away" from the unjust circumstances into which she was born. The melancholy music score also echoes the moods of the woman character that is trapped by feelings of unworthiness and a lack of self-esteem.

She is made-up like an adorned doll; her make-up is heavy around the eyes. She dresses in elaborate garments, finely embroidered with gold and her movements during her dance performances are rhythmic and emulate the traditional classical *kathak* (traditional Indian dance). Her eyes relay images of seduction and invoke feelings of lust in the men for whom she performs. Her facial expressions and the movement of her hands and her *dupatta* (long scarf) beguile and entice her audience, thereby affirming the portrayal of her character as a dual personality.

Sahibjaan retreats into herself and her dialogue is minimal, but the sense of her experiences and feelings are conveyed through the way in which the camera focuses on her eyes, thereby allowing the viewer insight into her emotional state. Unlike the more recent Bollywood films that focus on sex appeal, in this film the camera serves as subjective mediator in order to reveal the intense moments of diverse emotions that Sahibjaan experiences through her eyes.

The story carries with it an underlying note of despair and euphoria of a woman's desires against the backdrop of a lavish, almost dreamlike setting as is captured in the regal "Gulab Mahal", the brothel that is draped with flimsy curtains and fountains of water where Sahibjaan with her long, flowing hair wears lavish costumes that are bejewelled with gold and performs her sensuous dance routines for the benefit of hungry, lustful men. The irony lies in the truth that the heroine is confined by outward shows of royal elegance, while at her very core, all her character desires is simple love.

The fact that the actress, Meena Kumari, who plays the role of Sahibjaan, was a great tragedienne (according to critics and audiences), enhances the impact of her performance as a woman grappling with the dualities of her life. Even though her performance appears to be understated, her moist eyes with unshed tears reveal the pain of her soul. Film-makers of the time portrayed the courtesan as an object to be used for the sole purpose of exciting its male audience, both in the world of the film, as well as for the benefit of the male spectators in the audience (Ganti, 2004). The courtesan is presented as the ideal female form, her lips are always moist, her eyes are never puffy from crying and even when in the throes of pain, her composure never falters (Mishra, 2006). The focus is always her graceful dance and the sweet enticing phrases of poetry that she sings to enthral and captivate her male audience. Ironically, while she is the centre of attraction, she still remains powerless and submissive.

Throughout the film, although seeking something more meaningful, Sahibjaan never really believes herself to be worthy of anything, hence the general tone of the film is depressed and carries a sense of hopelessness throughout the narrative. Sahibjaan does not even attempt to save herself, or remove herself from her circumstances. Instead, she waits anxiously for a man to save her and ironically, when he wants to marry her, not only does she not display any form of inner strength, but she is unable to muster the courage or resolve to marry him and returns to the brothel. It is at this juncture that Sahibjaan breaks down into tears and while her friend Dibbin (also a prostitute) comforts her, there is no positive and constructive advice forthcoming. The women of the time accepted their fate and as Sahibjaan says, 'We are just living corpses; our souls are already dead, only our bodies are alive". She compares herself to the broken kite that is caught in a tree. While her mother chose to live in a graveyard, Sahibjaan refers to her extravagant brothel as a graveyard, where she awaits death.

Pakeezah's narrative takes the figure of the courtesan and presents it as a figure of illicit desire and a threat to normative family values (Mishra, 2006). Mishra (2006) further notes that that the culture of the times accepted the courtesan as an emblem of an elusive without which the culture itself would be emaciated and forlorn. Yet, ironically, the culture itself cannot endorse the courtesan because in social practice, no courtesan can be accepted as a mother or wife. Drawing from the representation of a mother in the epic *Mother India*, the term mother and wife is symbolic of a woman who is pure and chaste and whom men cannot look at in a sexual manner. The figure of the courtesan, however, evokes sexual fantasies and

therefore, she can never be accepted or even associated with the roles of a mother or wife. The only form in which she can be acknowledged is as an undisclosed partner.

Another significant woman character worth studying is Sahibjaan's aunt Veena. Constructed as a "femme fatale", Veena is the true antagonist to the character of Sahibjaan. She is depicted as a powerful and well-connected woman and does not ever stop to consider the welfare of her niece. She initially comes forth as a mother-figure when she arrives at the grave of her sister to take the young Sahibjaan away, and one would expect her to shield this child from the harsh realities that Nargis suffered. In her own words, Veena expresses that she cannot even imagine the amount of tears that her sister must have shed before dying a lonely death in a graveyard. Therefore, it is perplexing to note the way in which Veena avariciously imposes the life of a courtesan upon her niece.

Veena is depicted as ruthless in exploiting other women and even when there is a chance for Sahibjaan to lead a normal life with her father, she uses her niece to capitalise on monetary gain as Sahibjaan is revered in the elite social circles by affluent men who shower her with gold and money. Veena conspires with her fellow brothel owners - who are also women - as she fears that Sahibjaan's father will eventually track her down and they assist her in keeping Sahibjaan's identity a secret. When Sahibjaan nearly collapses after performing at Salim's wedding, Veena viciously reveals that she is actually Shahabuddin's daughter and demands that he accepts this courtesan as his daughter and loses his "false pride". However, even after witnessing the heart-wrenching performance of a young woman who could very well have been Veena's own daughter, she attacks Shahabuddin and seeks to humiliate him for belonging to the upper-class society while having born a child with a prostitute. Through the depiction of Veena as a character bent on revenge, the film-maker challenges the societies of the times that pompously claimed to be self-righteous whilst secretly using women of lower social standing for their entertainment and then casting them aside.

Interestingly, in this particular case, neither Shahabuddin, nor his nephew Salim, use and cast aside the women that they claim they love. Despite the fact that they are courtesans, both men are depicted as "good men" who display a firm resolve to stand by the women they claim to love and are not swayed by societal pressures. However, the depiction of Veena as a ruthless woman raises issues of kinship. The male character, i.e. Sahibjaan's father proves to be noble as opposed to the woman character Veena, who, according to Indian ideology, should have

fervently protected her niece and her honour. Yet, Veena is depicted as a woman who is interested in monetary gain above all else, even though in the narrative of this film she is not bound by any codes of honour. The irony lies in the fact that despite all of Veena's accusations against Shahabuddin, he did not reject Nargis and when he discovered that his daughter was alive, he was prepared to claim her as his own.

Importantly, the patriarchal system that allows men but not "good" women to engage in pre-marital sex is overridden by Veena's portrayal as a callous woman who signifies the villain in the narrative. There appears to be no camaraderie amongst the women in this film. It is crucial to note that the life that Sahibjaan lived was imposed upon her by the woman who was her mother-figure. The paradox lies in the fact that although Sahibjaan was "rescued" from her dead mother's body in the graveyard, she described her home as a graveyard despite its splendour and the fact that she was constantly revered and showered with an abundance of gold and luxuries.

In keeping with standard fare for Bollywood films, the lyrics in this film are not only beautiful, but meaningful as well, and tones of sadness and helplessness resound throughout the film. The film ends on a note of wish-fulfilment in terms of Sahibjaan's love for her traveller, Salim, but her one day of happiness is shadowed by the death of her father, whom she never had the opportunity of knowing because the woman who could have been her supporter acted as her foe and thereby her greatest antagonist.

The scenes in which Nargis and Sahibjaan performed the suggestive dance routines can be grouped within the typical narrative strategies that solicit the "look" and mobilize the scopic drive. Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), claims that women characters are presented in a degraded form, in other words as prostitutes, and therefore, as sexual commodities. This representation in films offers male spectators the pleasure of "erotic voyeurism", while female spectators are offered feelings of empathy and affection towards the women characters.

Umrao Jaan (1981, Muzaffar Ali)

A decade later, in the 1981 film *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali), the courtesan flees with a bandit, hoping to marry him and thereby leave behind her world of prostitution. Set among the elite Muslim society in mid-nineteenth century northern India, *Umrao Jaan* portrays a romanticized version of a tawaif, a kind of courtesan who has something in common with Japan's geishas. Tawaifs were accomplished in the high arts of kathak (north Indian classical dance), poetry, and music (Mishra, 2006). This plot is again indicative of the heroine's longing for a better life and a path towards self-actualisation. In this particular narrative, the bandit is the vehicle that will take the courtesan away from the brothel. However, the heroine is confined by circumstances and tradition, making it difficult if not impossible to break free.

The film is set in the year 1840 and deals with patriarchal violence towards women. A young girl named Amiran is kidnapped and sold to Madam Khanum who owns a brothel where she trains young girls to become courtesans. Amiran is renamed "Umrao Jaan" because the woman who buys her decides on a whim to change her name. Thereafter, she is taught not only to read and write, but also to sing, dance and charm wealthy men. Evidently, the heroine is portrayed in line with the traditional role of the woman, in which she is only entitled to minimal levels of formal education. Thereafter, the traditional role requires her to be confined to the home in order to uphold the family and household duties or in the case of Amiran (now "Umrao Jaan"), to dance and sing as a courtesan.

"Umrao Jaan" falls in love with a wealthy man that visits her, and though he claims to love her, he does not commit to her and marries another woman to please his family. The actions of the male lover highlight the strong traditions that govern Indian life, namely to forgo real love in favour of family acceptance. When "Umrao Jaan" returns to her home town years later, her mother embraces her, but her brother will have nothing to do with her because she is a courtesan, even though he is aware that she was kidnapped and forced to become one.

This film questions the idea of the image of the woman, the idea of romance, the imposition of a patriarchal order upon her and her journey towards self-definition. The narrative of this film defies the convention of depicting families as being fervently loyal to each other. "Umrao Jaan's" brother, being the "father-figure" of the family is depicted as cold and heartless as opposed to the norms of family values and ideologies in Indian society according to which the

males in the family are perceived to be the "protectors" and breadwinners of the household, in terms of a patriarchal system. The character of "Umrao Jaan" suffers a great injustice in the narrative of this film, first from society, and then from her blood relatives. Issues of kinship are thus questioned, and both "Umrao Jaan's" brother and mother desert her, even though the narrative does not put her in a place where she can be blamed for becoming a courtesan. In order to understand the social organization from which these characters are drawn, it is important to acknowledge that in the male-dominated societies of the times, women were associated with the "domestic" rather than the "public" domain of social life (Moore, 1998). In this instance, "Umrao Jaan's" mother cannot defy the social codes of honour and becomes subordinated, while her son makes the decision to abandon "Umrao Jaan". However, it is important to note the film-maker's portrayal of "Umrao Jaan", who is depicted to be strong-willed enough to try and break away from the life of prostitution that is imposed upon her.

The issues kinship in *Umrao Jaan* are in contrast with the issues of kinship in *Pakeezah.* Both heroines are depicted as courtesans who have bonds of kinship outside of the brothel. Yet, while Sahibjaan has a father who is prepared to stand up in society and claim his daughter as his own, "Umrao Jaan" is deserted by both her mother and brother. Furthermore, it must be stressed that Sahibjaan's father consciously sets out to find his estranged daughter, while "Umrao Jaan's" family condemn her for being a courtesan when they meet her years after she was kidnapped.

"Umrao Jaan" is a beautiful woman, who, despite her basic formal levels of education, has a love for poetry, which she infuses into the dance numbers that she performs in the brothel. She is adorned with gold jewellery, and like Sahibjaan, wears garments laden with rich embroidery and gold. Her hands are painted with henna, thus she looks like an Indian bride, dressed up and ready to surrender herself to her bridegroom on her first night of marriage, except, the courtesan will give herself over and over again to a different man. It is this imagery of a woman that is used to entice prospective wealthy men into the brothels nightly.

"Umrao Jaan" is not depicted as an ordinary courtesan, but a sophisticated, cultured woman with a love for poetry, who yearns to be loved and is not content to continue living this life of prostitution that has been imposed upon her. Unlike Sahibjaan, the heroine in the film *Pakeezah*, who is passive throughout the film, "Umrao Jaan" vents her anger and when the man she loves arrives at her door to invite her to his wedding, she rips his clothing and cries

bitterly. Determined to escape from the brothel, she agrees to runaway with a bandit, after sifting through a string of lovers whom she rejects. Unfortunately, he is killed and she is forced to return to her dreary life at the brothel.

"Umrao Jaan's" world is confined to the brothel and she spends her free time adorning herself for her performances, as does Sahibjaan in *Pakeezah*, but the major difference between the two women is that "Umrao Jaan" has an innate love for poetry. Ironically, she is stripped of her dignity nightly, but her lyrics are kept close to her heart and she uses them to vent her feelings. Sahibjaan has no other interests or hobbies and her world is confined to the world that exists within the four walls of the brothel. Through her own verses, "Umrao Jaan" sings about her plight and expresses her feelings of loneliness.

While the courtesan is depicted as a woman that is trapped by her own body, it is interesting to note the depiction of the brothel owner, Madam Khanum, who is a big-built woman, out-spoken and has a string of men who will do anything she asks of them for a sum of money. It is poignant, that the woman, who is constructed to resemble a mother-figure (short, rounded body shape), also displays tendencies of a mother-figure when she calls all her courtesans daughters, and ensures that they rest and look after themselves. However, at the end of the day, she expects them to bare all for the wealthy men who will adorn her with jewels and money. Madam Khanum is an astute woman and when she notices that "Umrao Jaan" is restless and wants to escape, prepares to set her straight. She refers to her as a young filly, that is beginning to kick her legs and prepares to "rein" her in before she becomes too independent.

Despite her efforts to escape from the brothel, "Umrao Jaan" is left alone in the end. Even though her mother is happy to see her, her brother refers to her as the renowned courtesan and forbids his mother to accept her. In keeping with the ideologies of the times, in which men had more power than women, "Umrao Jaan's" mother is depicted as weak in contrast to her son. Therefore, it is interesting to note the depiction of Madam Khanum, who is portrayed as uninhibited and does not fit into the model of women as subordinates. Madam Khanum is depicted as the opposite of "good women", yet, she yields power and also has authority in her line of work. Once again, women who are not oppressed are depicted as villainous characters without a conscience. In contrast to the portrayal of women characters as villains, is the portrayal of submissive women characters like "Umrao Jaan's mother.

When she meets her daughter after years of separation, she is commanded to stay away from her. While "Umrao Jaan's" mother is depicted to display an affinity to her son, she simultaneously abandons her daughter. According to Moore (1988), in order to understand the social organization in such societies, it is important to understand the debates concerning the origins and universality of women's subordination. Since films of earlier times promoted male –dominated patriarchal societies, women of the times were unable to express themselves or articulate their basic needs. There is thus a division between the "domestic" and the "public"- a framework which has, according to Moore (1988), similarly been advanced as a universal model for the explanation of women's subordination.

The films of the seventies and the eighties portrayed women as followers and victims of circumstance. Even when the narratives of films placed women characters in the most trying situations, as "Umrao Jaan's" mother, who should have been overjoyed to find her daughter after years of separation, the women characters are forced to deny their maternal instincts and are portrayed as subjugated individuals. Most of these women characters do not have the courage to voice their opinions let alone initiate change; however, muted resistance becomes evident through the song and dance sequences.

During this time, the feminist movement in India was struggling against a patriarchal society in which women faced oppressive gender restrictions. It is interesting to note that while Indian women are projected as a monolithic and oppressed entity in the films of the 70's and 80's (Anagol, 2006), one would expect a courtesan, who is clearly identified as being the opposite of a "good woman", to yield some sort of power and dominance, yet, ironically, even the figure of the courtesan suffers the same fate of oppression and submission.

Since the birth of Indian cinema in 1913, women characters in Hindi – films were portrayed as devoted housewives, sacrificing mothers and dutiful daughter-in-laws. "Umrao Jaan" is portrayed as a female protagonist within a patriarchal society. Her character undergoes tragedies such as being kidnapped, then forced into a life of prostitution and ultimately being rejected by the only man that she loved. "Umrao Jaan's" reaction (she lashes out at him) to her lover's dismissal of her does not fit in with the acceptable behaviour of a woman, as it is in contrast to the ideology of submissiveness and acceptance without question that is prevalent in Hindi-language cinema and more specifically, the depiction of heroines. Sahibjaan, however, portrayed the typical heroine of the times.

Over the decades, however, Bollywood cinema has shown a shift in the roles of heroines as they were grouped into two categories. Virdi (1999) remarks on the static two-dimensional portrayals of women as victims or vamps, Madonnas or whores, suffering mothers or pleasing wives. The vamp has always been depicted as a sex object, and as a result represents all that is immoral as well as bad. In both *Umrao Jaan* and *Pakeezah*, the women characters are simultaneously depicted as the vamp and the heroine. This strategy of the film-maker allows the audience to empathise with the characters of the heroines because the narrative structure traces their emotional journeys and the audience witnesses their anguish. This is especially poignant in the scene where "Umrao Jaan" is invited to sing at the wedding of her lover to another woman.

Pakeezah and *Umrao Jaan* tell the story of two courtesans and were released a decade apart, but the women are constructed in a very similar way in their mannerisms and in the way that they entertain. The films aim to engage male audiences by plotting the female heroine as a prostitute, evoking what Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) refers to as "scopophilia" (the pleasure of looking). At the same time, female audience members can relate to the heroine in her struggle to break free of her environment, and rising above what is traditionally expected of Indian women, namely to show tolerance toward society and men, even when unjustly treated.

The dress of the courtesan remains the same over the years, as does the action of the dance, from the movement of the hands, to the batting of thick, mascara-laden eyelashes. The courtesan plays with the scarf around her head and peeps at the male audience in demure fashion whilst playing with the veil that she tosses open as the dance routine progresses. The seductive style remains the same.

However, if a comparison is to be made between the depiction of the individual characters Sahibjaan and "Umrao Jaan", Sahibjaan is definitely depicted as the more passively constructed woman who lives with and accepts the knowledge of her role in life as a courtesan. It is interesting that Sahibjaan's lover is prepared to marry her and defies all convention when he announces that he will marry her even though he knows that she is a courtesan. "Umrao Jaan", on the other hand, is depicted as desperately in love with the man whom she is convinced will marry her and waits anxiously for him, but he betrays her. Even though she is hurt by his betrayal, she agrees to marry a bandit because her need to escape

overpowers her true feelings. At the time, the bandit represents a form of escape from the life that has been imposed upon her.

Women characters from the films of the seventies and eighties were depicted to mirror the pain and suppression of their lives through their eyes. Sahibjaan's eyes reflect defeat from the very onset of the film, and she does not consider herself worthy of being acknowledged as a person with needs and feelings. The film *Umrao Jaan* relies on the use of the camera to bare the undisguised craving in "Umrao Jaan's" eyes. She is depicted as believing that she deserves to be loved and when she falls in love with the wealthy man who claims to love her back, her character is at peace and she accepts that feeling as a part of her right to live. In direct comparison, Sahibjaan is depicted as too deeply embedded in low self-esteem and she is portrayed as a wounded animal, yet she too, yearns for a better life beyond the brothel. While "Umrao Jaan" is depicted as one who loves poetry and is well versed in the art of enticing the most affluent men, similar to a Japanese Geisha, Sahibjaan is unaware of such politics and moves through her world mechanically instead of purposefully as "Umrao Jaan" is trained.

Both women do not have a social life except for the time that they are allowed to use to adorn themselves in preparation of their performances. The women who rule them are both big-built and well-rounded and appear to be nurturing in the way that a grandmother would nurture and care for her grandchildren, but they pamper their "girls" for the sake of monetary gain only and of course the title of successfully running the most renowned brothel in town.

Another character worth mentioning in the movie *Umrao Jaan* is Hussaini. This woman character is depicted as a grandmother-figure. She is short, stout and appears to be very nurturing in the way that she cares for Umrao Jaan. Women characters of the time were always depicted as being subordinate to men. When the second wave of feminism appeared in the West in the late 1960's (Anagol, 2006), women were encouraged to understand the psychological implications of sexist stereotypes and they began to realise that there was more to life than motherhood and being a housewife. In this film, women are depicted as "working", albeit their job descriptions require them to "sell" the young women who could very well have been their own daughters. Even though Hussaini is aware that "Umrao Jaan" has been kidnapped, she requests Madam Khanum to allow "Umrao Jaan" to live with her so that she can "care" for her like a daughter.

This twist in the plot seemingly supports kinship as the character of Hussaini is perceived to represent a mother-figure and the audience is encouraged to develop a certain liking for the character of Hussaini. To strengthen this image of "nurturing mother", and in keeping with the ideologies of "Indian-ness", Hussaini wears traditional clothes, and her mannerisms reflect those of a "mother hen" figure. However, Hussaini's motives are depicted as having dual connotations, since her idea of "caring" for "Umrao Jaan" is restricted to training her to be a sophisticated courtesan and ensuring that she does not renege on her duties as such. Years later, when "Umrao Jaan" runs away, Hussaini tracks her down and throws her at Madam Khanum's feet, declaring that this ungrateful woman has forgotten her place in life and should be taught a lesson. The woman who at the onset of the film appeared to be the saviour, incongruously represents the enemy in the form of a mother-figure. The film-maker depicts the woman character of an older generation as a businesswoman who thrives on suppressing and then selling other women who are less powerful.

It is pertinent to note the use of the strong juxtaposition of hope and death in both, *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan*.

In summary, the film portrays the heroine as a victim of circumstance, yet the situation is willingly accepted although the heroine is longing for a better life and a path towards self-actualisation. The traditional position of the women in society to accept their suppressing circumstances play a major part in this. The film also uses the narrative to engage male audiences by evocative dancing sequences by the prostitute, evoking what Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) refers to as "scopophilia" (the pleasure of looking). Female audience members can relate to the heroine in her struggle to break free of her environment, and rising above what is traditionally expected of Indian women, namely to show tolerance toward society and men, even when unjustly treated.

While the narrative of *Pakeezah* clearly highlights the character of the woman as victimised and subservient to the point of self-destruction, the narrative of *Umrao Jaan* traces an outcast woman's fight to assert the right to choose her own lifestyle. Issues of women's identity and autonomy are raised and the audience begins to perceive the woman character as a separate individual with hopes, dreams and desires, notwithstanding the fact that she plays the role of a courtesan.

Prem Rog (1982, Raj Kapoor)

Prem Rog (1982, Raj Kapoor) is a romantic film that tells the passionate story of a man's love for a woman who is a widow and of a higher status. The film boldly deals with class-distinctions, a feudal society, widow status, and problems faced by widows in traditional India. There is always an important distinction between life as represented in a story and life as it is actually lived and experienced. Predominantly, *Prem Rog* (1982, Raj Kapoor) takes a strong stance against the rituals that force a woman to live like a "corpse" if her husband dies before her.

Since the director of this film chooses to examine issues around widowhood so boldly, it is important when studying this film, to understand the ideologies on which the subject is premised. In India, widows have traditionally been considered a liability. Shunned by family and society as an ill omen, they are condemned to a specific dress code of white that must be devoid of any adornment (Reddy, 2004). Widows are prohibited from attending weddings or any other social celebrations, and they are stripped of their identity. As a result, these women become totally disoriented in life. They are often found sleeping on roads, begging and they have no one to depend on (Reddy, 2004).

Dhevdhar is a poor orphan who in his childhood had a magnetic friendship with Manorama, who is the only daughter of the rich and powerful Thakur, referred to as the young Thakur. The benevolent older Thakur, who is the young Thakur's elder brother, helped Dhevdhar to go to the city for higher studies. The elder Thakur is the head of the household, and is revered in society because of his wealth and status. The young Thakur (Monorama's father) is also rich and powerful, but it is the elder Thakur's responsibility to make all the decisions for the extended family.

When Dhevdhar returns to his village eight years later, Manorama is no longer a young girl. He falls in love with her, but due to a difference in family status (Dhevdar is poor and is employed by the Thakur family), he is unable to express his love for her. Later, a chain of events leads to Manorama marrying a rich and handsome prince. She becomes a widow within four days of marriage, and returns to her parental home. Dhevdhar takes it upon himself to bring happiness back into Manorama's life.

It is from this premise that the character of Manorama is modeled. She is depicted as a spoilt, pampered, almost child-like woman who is uneducated and has her every need attended to. Manorama's every whim is catered for, to the point that she even has a maid who combs her hair. Her shoes are placed before her, the curtains in her bedroom are drawn open and she has a maid who wakes her up and then prepares every meal for her while she amuses herself by loitering around the house and being driven around town without any purpose even though she is a young adult.

She lives in a mansion with her uncle (Elder Thakur), his wife, her parents and many servants. Her mannerisms are unrefined; she is uneducated and often behaves like a pompous child. She has no hobbies or interests aside from going to the temple and is naïve, not only as an individual, but as a young girl blossoming into a woman.

Manorama's status in her household undergoes a radical change when she returns as a widow. Her privileges are non-existent and she is not treated as an equal member of the household anymore, but more like an unwanted appendage. There are no more maids to attend to her and she is forced to sleep in a room that resembles a jail cell on the lower level of her house, where once she had an elaborate bedroom upstairs. The "privilege" of wearing shoes is taken away from her and she must wear only white clothing. She is allowed only two meals a day (leftovers), and is not allowed to eat after sunset.

In the Hindu tradition, a woman constructs her identity in relationship to those around her; her role as a wife, a mother, and a daughter-in-law. She understands what is expected of her through these roles (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005). Manorama, on becoming widowed, loses her identity in relation to the above aspects. Since she is depicted as being un-educated and childish in her mannerisms, she does not question her status change. Instead, she embraces it as her way of life.

Manorama, the widow, epitomizes a prototypal damsel in distress who must be saved from misconstrued customs by the hero, Dhevdhar. She willingly and mutely complies with all the forms of injustices, while he speaks volumes against traditions, which he claims are merely inhuman practices that stem from rich families that translate into customs and then spread to societies. He audaciously confronts the entire society about rules that are imposed upon

widows such as being compelled to walk bare-foot, being considered worthy of only eating inedible food, being forced to sleep on a mat and having to bury thoughts of love and marriage because it is considered sinful for them.

It is of importance to note that Manorama's daily schedule has not changed considerably, in that she was not accomplishing anything substantial before marriage either. However, it is her status that is fundamentally lowered to that of one without dignity. The luxuries that were an inherent part of her life are taken away from her as a form of punishment for "killing her husband". Manorama's mother accepts this management of her daughter's life mutely. Similar to the character of "Umrao Jaan's" mother, this mother also renounces her kinship for the sake of societal norms. Manorama's aunt, the wife of the elder Thakur, sternly enforces the conditions that "all widows must endure" upon Manorama, once again depicting women as oppressive towards other women.

Another ritual that widows in India are subjected to compels them to shave all their hair off when their husbands die (Reddy, 2004). During this ceremony previously widowed women gather around to witness the hair of the recent widow being cut off. It is at this point that Manorama breaks down into tears and begs to be spared the humiliation of becoming bald. Manorama's mother is depicted as being hesitant about this ritual through her body language, but in the end, she cannot stand up to societal pressures and gently coaxes her daughter into following the tradition.

It is at this point that Manorama's sister-in-law arrives and boldly reprimands the women in the household for punishing this young girl for the death of her husband. Manorama's sister-in-law then takes her back to her matrimonial home, where she attempts to bestow her dignity upon her again and urges her to live her life. It is ironical that this woman is aware of her husband's infidelities as is Manorama's mother. Both women live with the knowledge that their husbands have mistresses, and are of unscrupulous character. Yet, both women claim that they cannot escape from their lives because they have no recourse. However, there is an important distinction in the depiction of both women. While Manorama's mother shares a bond of kinship with her daughter, her sister-in-law, despite having no line of shared kinship with her, takes a firm stance in the name of "sisterhood".

In contrast to the construction of these submissive women is the elder Thakur's wife, who staunchly enforces rituals and follows tradition. Being the wife of the patriarch of the family, she dominates the household with her crass mannerisms and ironically, her husband is the most just of all as is demonstrated when he orders members of the community to allow their widows to re-marry and not torture them. Yet, when his own niece is widowed, and Dhevdhar asks for her hand in marriage, he cannot allow the union because in his own words he says, "We are hypocrites." He explains that his social status is much higher than that of the common man and that he cannot be perceived by society to be going against tradition.

This is an important scene in the film because it highlights the changing perceptions of individuals with regard to tradition. It must, however, be noted that it is the man who is constructed to voice an opinion against injustice, while the woman is still portrayed as a weak victim who cannot speak for herself of express her needs. Instead, she mutely accepts her fate tearfully.

Of notable character is Manorama's father's mistress. When she learns of the treatment that his daughter is enduring, she begs him to allow Manorama to marry Dhevdhar. Once again, respite for the heroine is found through an outsider instead of those who share bonds of kinship with the heroine. Even though the mistress is frowned upon for her low social status and contemptible lifestyle, her suggestion proves that there is a sense of camaraderie amongst women who, within the narrative, are able to identify with the struggles of their counterparts. Interestingly, it is the character of the lowly woman, which attempts to free the suppressed women instead of the "respectable" women (Manorama's mother and Aunt). The "respectable" women characters are confined to loveless marriages and continue to exist for the sake of fitting in with what tradition requires of them. Even though Manorama's mother is aware of her husband's infidelities, her status in the household does not allow her to voice an opinion to the point that when Manorama tells her that she has been raped by her brother-in-law, her advice to her daughter is to "seal your lips".

Manorama is fated to live like a "living corpse" and even though one witnesses the pain and suffering in her mother's eyes, Manorama's mother is constructed in such a way that she is unable to voice an opinion. When she does take a stand against the injustices that her daughter has to deal with, she does so by shielding her face behind a scarf and speaking to the elder Thakur ("The Boss" of the family) from behind a curtain.

It is only when Manorama's brother-in-law comes to collect her and take her back to his home, does Manorama's mother come out from behind the curtain, drop her veil and beg the elder Thakur not to send her daughter back with this vicious man who raped her daughter. The reaction of the elder Thakur is evident in his body language and the bleakness of women's camaraderie is highlighted as opposed to the stance that is henceforth taken by the male. The elder Thakur invites Dhevdhar to his home and asks him to elope with his niece, promising to make all the necessary arrangements. Albeit cowardly, this man demonstrates a concerted effort out of his own free will to release his niece from the constraints of society and the false traditions that it imposes, since the characters of this film harbour the notion that widows are to blame for "swallowing" their husbands.

Manorama eventually does marry Dhevdhar, but only after an extensive battle and after the death of her father.

While making *Prem Rog*, the director himself pointed out that he enjoyed making the film because it was purposeful and had a strong and definite comment to make. This was essentially a statement and a definition of Indian womanhood and its rightful social status. Lambasting society for 'maltreating' the other sex, Kapoor stated, "We Indians are hypocrites. On the one hand, we eulogise womankind as being noble and great and as the embodiment of motherhood. When we want to give our nation the highest respect, we address it as Bharat Mata (Mother India). But in practical life, we always give our women the worst possible treatment. They are burnt alive. They are treated as slaves. Even pet animals get better treatment in many homes. In no other country does one hear of so many cases of rape and bride burning. The birth of a girl is considered a curse in our families. Why is it so? To me, womankind symbolises love, affection and warmth. Women deserve to be respected and put on a pedestal. They have as much right to happiness as any man. My film is a fight for their right to happiness." [Idlebrain.com, 2000]

In conclusion, it is evident that tradition and rituals contribute towards the challenges faced by the heroine in this film. Manorama is treated unjustly because she is a widow. Tradition also silences her to be willing to endure the suffering. Although Dhevdhar tries to speak out against the suffering, the narrative depicts tradition as being too strongly embedded, making it nearly impossible to do otherwise. Tradition and the construction of the woman character

also prohibits a character such as Thakur's wife from voicing her opinion, even though she is aware of her husband's infidelities.

On closer inspection, it is evident that *Prem Rog* raises a voice against the abuses perpetuated against widows, but in terms of the changing construction of women, the women are still portrayed as passive and still struggling to be heard. Manorama, being the heroine, is gifted with a man who fights for her rights, and her character accepts his passion gratefully. While the film-maker forces the issue of widow re-marriage as a right for women, the women characters in the film are constructed as subdued, but their inner constructions are desirous of wanting to express themselves, as portrayed through the characters of Manorama's mother and sister-in-law. Even though they mutely accept their own fates respectively, they "dare" to raise a voice against false rituals (shaving of a widow's hair) and evil (the rape of a virgin widow).

The film-maker depicts women as less willing to merely succumb to tradition and rituals. Still, religion is an inextricably important facet of culture and of life and often features centrally in the narratives of Bollywood films. For these films, the religion is literally found in the translation, and it is this element, for the most part, that makes these stories Indian. As Somaaya (2004) notes, in films of the early 1980's women were portrayed as fending more for themselves and making choices. This trend gained further momentum in the 1990's, which saw the middle-aged woman being portrayed as emerging from the drudgery of domesticity with a new dream.

CHAPTER 4: LIBERALIZATION AND THE "NEW" INDIAN WOMAN

Introduction

Bollywood cinema took a different stance from the 90's onwards, and seems to becoming more liberal and "Westernised" in the portrayal of women, not only of heroines, but of mothers and supporting characters who are portrayed in ways that are a step away from the traditional "good girls" that were a norm for Bollywood films before the 90's.

The reason for these changes is mainly linked to the influence and adoption of "Westernised" values. Ganti (2004) argues that in an era of globalisation, the media have taken on new importance as a symbol of the nation and cultural identity in India. Since the later 1990s, cinema is being touted as part of India's cultural heritage as part of the strategy to maintain local identity in a global world. Bollywood movies are not just produced for Asians within India but Asians all over the globe. People are becoming more integrated into a single society and function together, sharing norms and values and ideologies.

Globalisation and the diaspora phenomenon have been influential in audience demand as well as industry film production. The processes of globalisation serve as a catalyst for the remaking or reworking of existing gender divisions (Cullity and Younge, 2004). However, this transformation process raises questions relating to the capacity and changing role of the Indian woman, both as audience member and as film character. Bollywood films are made to attract audiences outside India because of the NRI (non – resident Indian) phenomenon (Desai, 2004). Hindi-language cinema plays an important role in maintaining continuity for their dislocation (Ram, 2002).

In this chapter, three case studies from the 2000's are presented.

Salaam Namaste (2005, Siddharth Anand)

Salaam Namaste challenges the exploration of female sexuality and women's empowerment. This film is about two Indians, Nikhil Arora, known as "Nick", and Ambar Malhotra, known as "Amby", who left India in order to live their own lives in Melbourne, Australia. Amby is a medical student, who works a part-time job as a radio-jockey to support herself. Nick is an

architect turned chef. They meet after Nick fails to arrive for an interview with Amby at the radio station, where she hosts the show, "Salaam Namaste". Infuriated by his lack of punctuality and courtesy, Amby sets out to defame him over the radio, and a war of public words ensues between them.

When Nick and Amby physically meet, there is a strong attraction between them which is not diminished when they discover each other's true identities. They fall in love and decide to deviate from traditional romantic courting. Instead, they elect to live together first, so they can get to know each other better as their busy lives do not leave much room for romantic pursuits.

After Nick and Amby move in together, they adjust to their carefree and fun life until Amby learns that she is pregnant. Nick wants Amby to have an abortion, but she decides to keep the baby. She cannot move out because of financial reasons and the conflict begins. Amby has no support system since her parents cut all ties with her when she told them she was following her dream of becoming a surgeon in Australia. She finds an ally in her colleague Jignesh and has an ethnically diverse group of friends. Nick realizes over time that he cannot get over his love for Amby and warms up to the thought of becoming a father and decides to marry Amby just before she gives birth to twins.

Salaam Namaste is very similar to the Hollywood film *Nine months* (1995, Chris Columbus). The narrative addresses the issue of pre-marital sex between two diasporic Indians, and provides comic relief with its cleverly constructed storyline and use of supporting characters. It takes a candid look at an unorthodox subject for Bollywood cinema in a very realistic manner. It deals explicitly with relationships and gender differences. While unwed motherhood is not unheard of as a half-hidden side plot of Bollywood cinema, it is very unusual to find it as the main narrative focus. Earlier films that dealt with unwed motherhood are *Kya Kehna* (2000, Kundan Shah) and *Julie* (1975, K.S. Sethumadhavan).

Unlike its predecessor, *Kya Kehna*, *Salaam Namaste* depicts the live-in relationship as a conscious choice of two adults, whereas in *Kya Kehna*, the heroine succumbed to passion for one moment. Although both heroines fall pregnant, Amby falls pregnant because she chooses to engage in pre-marital sex as a part of her daily life, while Priya Bakshi of *Kya Kehna* blames her pregnancy on a single, irresponsible act.

The influences of economic liberalization and the impact of the NRI (Non-resident Indian) communities are all factors that play a part in the shaping of current Bollywood ideologies, more specifically, in relation to the narrative of *Salaam Namaste.* Historically, as discussed at length in the literature review, women's roles in Bollywood cinema have been drawn from a limited menu of formulas, specific to ideologies of the nation, but over the decades, there have been occasional films that break this norm.

There are film-makers who attempt to address difficult, women-oriented issues such as rape, unwed motherhood and surrogate pregnancy, to name a few. *Salaam Namaste* is one such film that is a departure from the ideologies and patriarchal system that is prevalent in most films. Therefore, it is important to closely examine the agenda of the film-maker in his depiction of the woman character. Firstly, her identity is adjusted by her nickname. It is common to find the Indian diaspora adopting foreign names in order to fit into the societies into which they migrate. In this case, both the hero and heroine assume different names. Interestingly, both characters are also depicted to have consciously decided to sever all ties with their families. This is in direct contrast to the Indian social system, which is based on the joint family system (Ahmad, 2007). Furthermore, there is no sign of any religious affiliation in either of the characters. Amby in particular, is depicted as leading an autonomous lifestyle as opposed to the dependence that women characters in most Bollywood films of earlier times display toward their families.

Amby is depicted as a woman who is striving to achieve her dreams. Her decision to live with the man that she falls in love with and engage in pre-marital sex is a taboo that the film-maker explores candidly. The question the feminist poses is, "Is an Indian woman incapable of making the right decision when left to fend for herself?" Amby is depicted as a carefree spirit as is evident when she participates in the impromptu song and dance beach party during which the entire marriage party throws off their clothing and strips down to their swimsuits. Her body language and manner in the way that she participates in this fiesta depict her as a character that is comfortable with the setting. Even though song and dance routines in Bollywood films permit sexual abandon, Amby's character does not appear to need the assistance of this convention. This is displayed in her use of gestures and movements during the dance sequence in which she appears to be comfortable and unpretentious and the dance sequence adds to the spontaneity of the character that she portrays. Yet, when asked by Nick to move in with him, she hesitates. Hence, while appearing to be completely "Westernised"

peripherally, she is still bound by the ideologies of the Indian nation to some extent. It can be argued that many Western women would also hesitate to move in with a man; however, for the purposes of this report, this particular character trait of the woman character is important because it differentiates her from other Bollywood heroines who are tied to Indian ideologies. It is also important to bear in mind that pre-marital sex is a taboo in Hindu culture.

It is interesting, however, that when Nick and Amby do move in together, they have separate bedrooms, and it is Amby who initiates the first move that leads to them sleeping together for the first time. She overtly seduces him without even a hint of bashfulness or demureness.

Amby is depicted as well aware of her sexuality as a woman and is not at all afraid of exploring her needs and desires with the man that she has consciously chosen to live with, even though he is not her husband. Completely out of the norm is the "bubble bath" scene in which Nick and Amby take a romantic bath together as if they were an old married couple. Amby looks more like a supermodel than an Indian woman, and unabashedly revels in the intimacy that she shares with Nick. In the past, such explicit sexual scenes were rarely played out and if they were, then they were only depicted between men of high social status and women of lower social status, as the young "Thakur" and his mistress in *Prem Rog*.

In films of the new millennium, women are constructed to treat sexual passion as a normal part of the relationship between man and woman. They are depicted to actively enjoy lovemaking as sexual beings without any hint of shame or bashfulness as was the case in older films. Of relevance too, is that women consciously decide to be an equal partner in the relationship, as opposed to earlier films in which the hero was compelled to "woo" the woman and this was often represented through a song and dance routine, at the end of which, the hero would have "won" the woman over.

While *Salaam Namaste* promotes the concept of an Indian woman living her life according to her own ideals, it is significant to question the film-maker's intention in dealing with the situations of women who are left alone to fend for themselves in societies without any traditional constraints? Should it be assumed that Indian women who live in societies without social constraints all behave promiscuously? Having broken away from her family, Amby is depicted as despondent when she relates to Nick that she has no form of contact with her

parents except for the odd phone call that she receives from her mother, of which her father is unaware.

However, Amby chose to leave her parents and then took the bold step of becoming involved in a pre-marital relationship. These actions are not in keeping with typical Indian culture or religion where marriage signifies the start of a lawful and socially-sanctioned relationship between two people. By engaging in pre-marital sex willingly, the relationship between the hero and heroine clearly deviates from the norms of Indian tradition as depicted in Bollywood films.

Amby is not depicted as a "traditional Indian woman" who is expected to be domesticated and pamper her man. She is a working woman, pursuing her dream career, loves pizza and hates to clean up. It is Nick who finds it difficult to sleep if the dishes are not washed. Gender issues are challenged by the portrayal of the characters in an almost role-reversal type of setting in the narrative. Seeing a man in the kitchen may have been a social taboo decades ago, but it is becoming more and more acceptable in today's modern Indian marriage as increasingly depicted in Bollywood films. Another scene that departs from the traditional depiction of gender representation is the one where Nick wakes up early to make sure that he can prepare breakfast for his live-in lover before she leaves for work.

Yet, despite the fact that Nick is not portrayed as a traditional Indian male, he still harbours certain chauvinist notions. His vivid comparison between a wife and mistress in which he draws on the age old allegories of women being suitable for the kitchen in aprons and mistresses being the ones who should be decorated and dressed in sexy lingerie, display his immature notions of the representation of women. However, these notions are in keeping with the patriarchal society in which the men are the rulers.

In older films, a lone lady pottering around the kitchen while rolling out perfect rotis and attending to her children was a common sight, but in *Salaam Namaste*, Nick and Amby both clean up together, with Nick even preparing a lavish breakfast for her while she sleeps. Amby does not have the time or the inclination to be the conventional "dutiful Indian wife" who will stay at home and wait for her man to come home.

Instead, when Nick is out, she goes shopping and decorates their home. Significantly, at no point in the film is Amby perceived as being domesticated. In fact, the only time that she is seen in the kitchen is when she is looking for ice-cream. Amby herself admits to Nick that she has been selfish and never stopped to consider her parent's feelings when she made the unilateral decision to study in Australia and remain single. Even though Amby accepts that she will be alienated from her family, the lure of family is retained and this is a source of strain for her. This strain takes a toll on her when Nick refuses to have anything to do with her pregnancy and she is forced to face the consequences of her actions and prepare to be a single mother. This is a progressive step towards the construction of women who are willing to nurture their own goals and ideals as opposed to the heroines from films of earlier times, who succumbed to being victims of circumstance.

While *Salaam Namaste* candidly challenges the reassuring formula of traditional family values which are represented in most Bollywood films, another theme that emerges is that of motherhood. Scholars Dasgupta (1996), Virdi (2003) and Hedge (1998) have commented on the centrality of the woman's generative role in the formulation of nationalist ideologies in India. In *Kya Kehna*, the heroine has to take a stand against the traditional oppressions of family and society, but in *Salaam Namaste*, the heroine, depicted as part of the diaspora, has only to deal with being a single mother. The theme of motherhood has been a favourite for Bollywood directors over the decades and *Mother India* has cemented the role of the "mother" in Bollywood cinema as iconic.

However, in both *Kya Kehna* and *Salaam Namaste*, the notion of "idealised" mothers can only be attained once the obstacle of their status as unwed mother is dealt with. In both narratives, although handled slightly differently, the heroines are "excused" from having to carry the burden of being single mothers. Amby marries Nick and Priya marries her childhood friend, who vows to give her child his name.

Clearly, the women portrayed in films made in the 20th century are more actively involved in the decision–making that will affect their lives. Based on the fact that women's roles in Indian society are highly restrictive, both *Kya Kehna* and *Salaam Namaste* critique the validity of this oppressive system as well as ideologies of the nation and champion women's rights of choice. It is notable that the hero still attempts to dictate his terms as is evident when Nick firmly tells Amby to have an abortion. However, the changing construction of the woman

character allows her to stand up to the man in her life and consciously decide to lead her life according to her own ideals. In doing so, women characters are revolting against the patriarchal system by boldly choosing the lifestyle that they desire.

Amby is depicted as a woman with tenacity as she juggles her job and her delicate state of health in order to survive this difficult period in her life. Not once does she even consider asking her parents for help as was the norm in older Bollywood films, in which the woman would move back in with her parents at the first sign of trouble in her marriage. It is important to note, though, that she has no relationship with her parents, and the fact that she does not waiver when faced with this impasse, establishes her as a woman of strength.

The director of this film has constructed the narrative to represent two non-resident Indians who are happily settled in Australia, with no attachment to their family members or society. Therefore there can be no "social stigma" from Indian society as is the case in most Bollywood films. By taking the focus away from ideologies that would naturally come into play if the characters of the film were living in India, the narrative deals exclusively with the issue of pre-marital sex as a theme without the additional problems that would arise from society or family. Pattanayak (2004) remarks that moreover, feminist discourses have often employed metaphors of space, for example containment, captivity, and immobility, to describe gendered oppression in the sphere of the private and the domestic. In these discourses, the space away from home (either nature or the public sector of labour), functions as a space of liberation. In *Salaam Namaste,* both Nick and Amby have no relation with their family members and move away from Indian society with the intention to live their lives according to their own ideals. By removing themselves from people that were familiar, they were able to make their own decisions without the interference of extended family members or the imposition of traditions.

Amby is vulnerable, as is expected of a pregnant woman, and while arguing with Nick, she immediately places his hand on her belly when she feels the baby kick for the first time. In contrast to earlier Bollywood films, Amby wants Nick to love her and accept her decision as opposed to "going along" with everything that he commands. Women characters in films of earlier times would continue to live with their husbands even when they were aware that they were engaging in sex with other women, like Manorama's mother in *Prem Rog.* Their justification was, "Where will I go?" Referring specifically to the construction of Manorama's

sister-in-law in *Prem Rog*, she boldly raises her voice against the practice of shaving off a widow's hair by pointing out the injustice of the ritual. However, she is depicted as powerless and cannot raise objection to her husband's adulterous behaviour, nor can she raise an objection to the fact that he mercilessly raped Manorama.

In contrast, Amby is depicted as forthright and as a woman with the courage to carry out her convictions. Yet there is still the issue of live-in relationships, which is considered a taboo in India by many traditionalists. Hypocritically, the same traditionalists did not put a label to the famous *kotha* (brothels) that were so naturally frequented by men in India. It was something that was accepted, as is seen in films like *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan.* Men, after a hard days work, would go and unwind in a *kotha (*brothel*)* just as modern day man stops at a bar for a drink. At the *kotha (*brothel*),* he would watch as women performed gyrating sexual dances and then for an exchange of money and gifts, he would have all his sexual fantasies played out. In other words, there was still sex outside of the marital relationship. Often, women characters who were portrayed as the "vamps", would engage male characters in their fantasies.

Amby does not represent traditional values in any sense, nor does she embody the male / patriarchal view. Instead, she decides, against the will of the father of her child to give birth to their baby. Yet, she still gains the audience's sympathy, similar to the heroine in *Nine Months* (1995, Chris Columbus), which is a Hollywood film, and therefore her behaviour embodies a Western ideal. A possible reason for the audience empathising with the heroine despite the fact that according to Indian culture, she has displayed 'loose moral behaviour' could be the narrative structure that cleverly combines the roles of the heroine and vamp.

Clearly, audiences are demanding and welcome a shift in the portrayal of the heroine, as is evident in the fact that *Salaam Namaste* was one of the biggest box-office hits of 2005. According to the website www.boxofficemojo.com, domestic revenue accounted for 15.2% of gross revenue as opposed to 84.8% derived from foreign audiences. Additionally, according to the website Wikipedia, the script of *Salaam Namaste* was also invited to be included in the Margaret Herrick Library, which is operated by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Focusing once again on the discussion surrounding live-in relationships, male characters were always "permitted" to have women, whether they were in a relationship or not, but the difference is that a name was never given to that relationship, and all sexual encounters were underhandedly concealed for the sake of appearances. The narrative structure of *Salaam Namaste,* in dealing with the issue of pre-marital sex overtly, challenges the notion of gender stereotypes by depicting Amby as unconcerned with traditional and patriarchal ideologies. Indian society claims to be "pure" and "chaste", yet, as the elder Thakur in *Prem Rog* (1982, Raj Kapoor) so candidly points out to Dhevdhar on the subject of widowhood, "We have double standards."

Some contemporary films like *Salaam Namaste* take a realistic and truthful look at life as it is experienced by our youth today, with all its complications and challenges. Amby portrays the diaspora as it is, culturally split, sometimes lost, and wanting to fit in to the new societies that are forming all over the world as a result of increasing migration away from India. As a result, Amby agrees to live with Nick out of choice. Initially, they did agree to live in separate bedrooms, but it was inevitable that they would eventually end up sleeping together. However, it is interesting, that women in films like *Pakeezah* and *Prem Rog* are not criticized for "not" having the conviction or self-esteem to speak out for their basic human rights. They are merely accepted as victims of the situations and times in which they live. Is this precisely not the case in *Salaam Namaste?* Amby is away from her family, has no form of family support and after witnessing the monotony in her sister's life, she makes a conscious decision not to marry. Naturally, when she meets someone with whom she has chemistry, she considers the option of moving in with him as a means to having someone to share her life with.

The narrative of *Salaam Namaste* also addresses the issue of the diasporic woman who is faced with the challenge of finding a suitable life partner who is able to share her values abroad. Amby is seen dancing with a "white man" at her friend's wedding, but there is no indication of a relationship. Since severing ties with her family, her character is focused on becoming a surgeon. The only other close male relationship that she fosters is with her colleague, who is also of Indian origin.

The support that Amby receives from her friend Cathy is commendable as opposed to films of earlier times when women were constructed to suppress other women, as was the case with

Madam Khanum in *Umrao Jaan* and in another light, Manorama's mother in *Prem Rog*, who was suppressed and could not vent anger at the man who raped her virgin widowed daughter. In that sense, the portrayal of women characters has made great strides. Even Nick's friend (Ron), who is married to Cathy, is supportive of Amby and offers her a place to stay in his home when she and Nick are estranged. This is noteworthy, because he does not alienate her and take sides with his male counterpart; instead, he shows empathy and fairness.

In light of recent films portraying women as having a voice and setting their own parameters for living their lives, *Salaam Namaste* honestly shows the pros and cons of the live-in relationship in an unbiased manner.

The change in the way that characters are constructed is a reflection of the change that Indian society is witnessing today. Films like *Salaam Namaste* do not portray women as homemakers whose only goals in life revolve around maintaining immaculate homes, tending to the children and serving their in-laws without any help from their spouses. Indian society is also experiencing a departure from traditional ideologies in the relationships between husband and wife. In today's urban society, both within the narratives of films and in the real world, many men are stepping into a new world of domesticity and housekeeping.

Shedding some light on this trend, Dr. Minnu R Bhonsle, Consultant Psychotherapist and Counsellor at the Heart to Heart Counselling Centre (http://www.naaree.com), Mumbai, says "This change has been more dramatic in urban areas. It is evident in those areas of society where the woman has received higher education, and is in a managerial post which gives a huge pay-check and demands long working hours and travelling on the job at times. More and more women getting into engineering, business administration, the financial sector, the civil services, and other well-paying and demanding professions has been the turning point of this change in psyche. Along with this, there has been the exposure to western trends via satellite television and the internet, where the western working woman is viewed as a role model for the urban Indian woman, and this trend is slowly permeating into Indian society."

For a long time, Indian women have faced subjugation and been relegated to the confines of their homes as a homemakers. The younger generation of women find this in itself motivation to orchestrate change, and as a result, women are now seeking a balance through

what has been their traditional area of dominance – their kitchens. It is merely a metaphor for the change that has been sweeping through the urban, middle class of society.

According to Dr. Bhonsle, Consultant Psychotherapist (http://www.naree.com), "Women of course are trying to seek equality at home with regard to the husband pitching into equal homemaking or sometimes even more than her." She also mentions that there are instances where women want to be treated as equals, but also want to be indulged by their husbands in a throwback to conventional husband-wife roles. This theory is clearly played out in the scene where Amby and Nick attend the house-warming party of their friends. While viewing the nursery, Amby immediately fantasises about the possibility of Nick supporting her during her pregnancy as they are estranged at the time. The song sequence through which this fantasy is played out and the lyrics are indicative of her need for him to share her life and support her. While the Indian woman in recent films is depicted to live her life according to her own rules, her character is simultaneously depicted to yearn for the support and love of a man.

In summary, the film is evident of a genre where tradition and customs with regard to relationships are challenged. Amby and Nick engage in a pre-marital sexual relationship. This act is against Indian tradition, where marriage is regarded as the social norm before engaging in a sexual relationship. Amby is portrayed as both educated and independent, and her construction is not confined to the traditional characteristics of Indian women who are subordinate and lower in social rank. Her manners and ideals are less Indian and tend to be more "Westernised". She "blends" in with her new adopted country, Australia. She pursues her own goals and ideals and portrays a woman who seeks to be fully self-actualised. The film is thus a clear break from "traditional" ideologies and portrays the woman character as independent and free from male oppression.

Baabul (2006, Ravi Chopra)

More than two decades after the release of *Prem Rog* and with several film-makers attempting to do justice to the issues and debates surrounding widow re-marriage, Ravi Chopra attempted to change the perceptions of audiences towards widows in *Baabul* by rehabilitating the widow through the portrayal of the heroine.

Balraj is a wealthy businessman married to Shobhna. Their son Avinash falls in love with Milli, who comes from a middle-class family and is an artist (painter). The two get married and have a son named Ansh. Tragedy strikes the picture-perfect family and Avinash is killed in a car accident. Milli is devastated. Her father-in-law Balraj cannot see her pain and decides to bring the "colours" back into her life by re-uniting her with her childhood friend Rajat. Milli always loved Rajat as a friend and is unaware that he has always been in love with her.

Milli, before the death of her husband, is depicted as a young, beautiful woman with a passion for painting. Even though she does not come from a wealthy family, her family are portrayed as middle-class, cultured people, who allow their daughter to experience and live her life without any traditional constraints. It is refreshing that Milli, albeit educated and pursuing her own career path, is dressed modestly, unlike other films of the 21st century where women who have a career are automatically stripped of most of their clothing and frequent bars and nightclubs.

It is clear, that the main focus of *Baabul* (2006, Ravi Chopra) is to highlight the plight of widows as experienced by women in India. The question is: how much do these ideologies perpetuate the psyche of the women characters themselves? Clearly, more sophisticated situations are created in the narrative and the impositions of the laws against widows are much less, but have the inner mind sets really changed or is everything still a façade?

Baabul, even though it claims to a coming-of age film in terms of dealing with the subject of widows, still shows a struggle for Milli to move on with her life after being widowed. Her father-in-law Balraj is portrayed positively in that he sees the pain of his daughter-in-law after the death of his son and his heart genuinely aches for her plight when he witnesses how lonely she is. He actively sets out to convince Rajat to marry Milli.

However, Balraj's decision is met with strong opposition from his elder brother Balwant, who sanctifies age-old tradition above all else. Proof of his belief is Pushpa, the widow of their eldest brother who lives with Balwant and his family. Pushpa dresses in white and is not allowed to attend any social functions with the family. In her own words, when asked about the state of her existence, she says, "I get two meals per day, am provided with colourless clothing to wear and am allowed to breathe in order to survive. If this is living, then yes, I am

living". Nevertheless, Balraj is adamant in his decision and contacts Rajat, who agrees to win Milli's affections.

Milli, even though she is a woman of the new millennium, dresses in white immediately after the death of her husband. It is interesting that Milli's mother-in-law openly tells her not to wear white clothing because "the family doesn't believe in age-old traditions". Milli is depicted as a woman who is self-actualised in the sense that she has a clear understanding of what she wants in life. However, when widowed, she clutches to the age-old tradition of donning white clothing. According to her, she believes that her husband, who was the love of her life, took the colour out of her life. Is this not precisely one of the premises from where the tradition of widows wearing white originated from?

Film-makers over the years have focused on rehabilitating the widow in popular films like *Ek hi Raasta* (1977, Mohan Segal) and *Sholay* (1975, Ramesh Sippy). In these two films there is an effort to rehabilitate the widow. That sentiment continues in *Baabu*l, however the films highlights the fact that the widow remarriage pattern is still a taboo in the so-called "modern" Indian society.

An article posted by IANS on the website realbollywood.com (2006) notes that films have been considered a medium that possesses some power to mould the perceptions of society. However, it has not achieved much success in changing the attitude of people towards widows. Old customs and beliefs are still deeply rooted. The 1856 Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act gave women the legal right to remarry and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave women the same inheritance rights as men. However, those rights are rarely put into practice. Widows are still seen as a curse. Furthermore, the article states that many Indians shrug off widow abuse. This has been done for centuries as the accepted way of life. The husband is called a god and the minute a woman loses her god, her life and existence are considered worthless.

The narrative structure of *Baabul* does not impose any social or cultural restrictions upon Milli. However, within the same script, Pushpa is living the life of a widow that is in accordance with repressive Hindu customs and ideologies. While Pushpa is depicted as melancholy, Milli is depicted as heartbroken and unable to move on with her life after the death of her husband. Both women share the same sense of loss, and if examined in terms of

a patriarchal system, Pushpa's life is dictated by the demands of her brother-in-law, while Milli falls under the rule of her father-in-law. The difference in the two approaches is notable.

Milli makes no attempt to move on with her life and even when it is her son's first day at school, she is subdued and only smiles when her old friend Rajat comes to "the rescue" and escorts her son inside. So what actually is the film saying about the "evolution" of society and more specifically, women characters? It is the father-in-law Balraj who is the driving force behind the rest of Milli's life. Hence, the notion of women being rescued is played out in a different manner. While helping to dispel the notion of widowhood being a taboo, the question to be asked is, how active is the woman herself in this regard? It seems as if even after 20 years and the birth of films that try desperately to portray women as "liberated" individuals, women are still depicted as being trapped in certain behavioural patterns. For example, Milli immediately puts on the traditional white clothing considered be-fitting for a widow; Milli's mother-in-law Shobhna is furious when Balraj tells her that Milli is going to re-marry, and Milli herself expresses her gratitude to her father-in-law for encouraging her to re-marry.

At this point it is important to look closely at the construction of Shobhna. A contemporary woman in terms of dressing as opposed to her sister-in law (Balwant's wife), she does not wear a sari the traditional way with a scarf over her head, nor does she impose the traditional widow attire upon Milli and she allows Milli to live with dignity in her home. She also offers to babysit her grandson so that Milli can attend Rajat's musical show with Balraj. Yet at the mere mention of re-marriage, she is outraged.

The question is: how deep are these notions about widows embedded in the psyche of women? Are the contemporary women of today merely masquerading as "liberals" when in actual fact they still agree with the imposition of repressive tradition? This is confusing, because both Shobhna and her other sister-in-law are clearly troubled by the manner in which Pushpa is treated and they both fight for her to attend social functions, but, it seems they are not willing to let go of tradition completely, since Shobhna is appalled at the thought of even considering that Milli should re-marry. Conveniently, she justifies her reaction by stating that in the event that Milli re-marries, she will lose contact with her grandson. Once again, as in films of the past, there is a lack of camaraderie amongst women. In the narrative, when

Shobna is asked by her husband what fate she would want for a widow if she was her biological daughter, she is taken aback.

It seems as if the only person who has evolved in terms of uncritical adherence to tradition is Balraj. It is evident at the onset of the film that Balraj does not agree with tradition, nor does he want to follow it. However, he tries to appease his elder brother (who insists on following rituals and traditions) by going along with his demands for the sake of keeping the peace in the family.

When Balraj's son Avinash returns from America after seven years, Balraj doesn't inform his elder brother, fearing the performance of rituals that he does not believe in. When his brother coincidentally learns of his nephew's return, he arrives at Balraj's house and insists on carrying out the ceremony of "warding off the evil-eye" that is customary in Hindu tradition. Balraj, out of "respect" for his elder brother obliges, but it is clear that he does not agree with these "outdated rituals" as he calls them.

More than two decades later, the same cries are heard from widowed women, who are regarded as a "bad omen" if they are allowed to participate in joyous occasions. The women in *Baabul* are distraught about Pushpa's existence, but in the 21st century, Pushpa is depicted as a suppressed woman, who lives according to the rules of the patriarchal household in which she was widowed. Her demeanour resembles that of women from earlier films who were bound by the ideologies and traditions of culture.

Balraj's brother Balwant, at the death of Avinash blames Balraj for allowing their brother's widow to attend the wedding, adding that it was the "shadow of a widow" that cast an unlucky spell on Avinash, causing his death. Balraj solemnly asks his brother not to insult the death of his son.

Milli's father urges her to go back home with him so that she can leave her past behind her, but Milli refuses, asserting herself and making a conscious decision even in light of the loss that she has suffered. Milli chooses to continue living with her in-laws and does not follow the age-old tradition of moving back in with her parents the moment her husband dies. Admirable, too, is the relationship that Milli has with her in-laws. She is able to be herself around them and shares a deep bond with them similar to the one that she shares with her

natural parents. Unlike Manorama in *Prem Rog*, whose own blood family turn against her, leaving her with no one whom she can turn to, the narrative of *Baabul* provides an intensely strong support system for their widow.

In opposition to the tradition that Balwant tries to force upon his brother, Balraj vehemently ensures that Milli does not fall prey to the traditional customs of widowhood. Issues of tradition surrounding widowhood are challenged in this film and it is refreshing that Balraj, being the next in line of authority according to the patriarchal system, is portrayed as fervently fighting for his daughter-in-law's right to love and be loved again. Whether or not Milli is depicted as wanting to initiate change in her status is questionable, because in her own words, Milli compares herself to a sunset when trying to explain her state of heart to her friend Rajat, not only revealing that she is immersed in her own grief, but giving a clear indication to the audience that she acknowledges the fact that she is depressed.

This is in direct opposition to Manorama of *Prem Rog* who was so involved in dealing with the abuses perpetuated against her by society that she was unable to focus on her own state of mind or grief. Both heroines are victims of the surrounding beliefs prevalent in the societies at the time. Both heroines have male allies who speak out against the abuses that are perpetuated against widows by society, but with more than two decades between the releases of the films, it is notable that the women characters, despite having lost their husbands, are reacting to different issues internally.

Milli is aware of herself, her capacity to love and the fact that she was so much in love with her husband that she may never get over his loss. In other words, she depicted as being fully self-actualised, having catered to all aspects of her life for herself. She loves freely as is illustrated in the intense love scenes between Milli and Avinash; these are similar to the scenes between Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore in *Ghost* (1990, Jerry Zucker). Milli is not constructed like the women of earlier times who blushed every time their lovers looked at or touched them. She is depicted as a woman who believes that she is an equal partner in her relationship with her husband and therefore plays an active role during lovemaking.

There are no impositions of culture or demands enforced upon her as a woman, except for the white clothing that she puts on after the death of her husband, and it is important to note that she does this out of her own free will. It seems that the white clothing that she is seen wearing

for only one moment can also reflect the mood that she is in, which is a natural progression that ensues after the loss of a loved one. In her own words, she tells her mother-in-law that her world is devoid of colour after her husband's death.

The narrative of *Baabul* cleverly plays out the grieving period of a woman taking into account the "roller coaster" of emotions that she goes through as a woman in her own entity. It does, however, definitely deal with the issue of widowhood, while the construction of Milli, a widow in the 21st century is certainly more emancipated than that of her counterpart Manorama two decades ago. Pushpa, on the other hand, who lives in India, still faces the same subjugation of widowhood that was enforced centuries ago.

Nonetheless, Balraj keenly tries to pair Milli up with her childhood friend and takes her to a concert where Rajat performs a song in which the lyrics that Rajat sings promise to fill Milli's life with love again and take away all the sadness. Milli is seated beside Balraj, her father-in-law during this performance and when she feels emotions for the first time after her husband's death, she gets up to leave, but Balraj holds her hand and forces her to stay. This is an intense scene in terms of change, because while Milli wishes to suppress her emotions, Balraj wants her to love again as he believes he is mature enough to recognise that the void in her life will consume her. Once again, there is the reinforcement of the notion that "man must rescue woman".

Even though Milli doesn't have to deal with injustices of society, she is battling with her inner-self. However, while there are feelings of being inadequate because she is a widow, she is also dealing with the loss of the only man that she ever loved. This is in direct contrast to the character of Manorama in *Prem Rog*, who has no self-esteem of self-worth. Manorama realizes that she is in love with Dhevdhar, where as Milli always considered Rajat as her friend and nothing further and it is only at the insistence of her father-in-law that she forces herself to look at Rajat in a different way.

Both films deal with the exact same issues with a span of over 20 years between them. The issues of traditions surrounding widows are still the same, and those opposed to tradition, like Dhevdhar in *Prem Rog* and Balraj in *Baabul*, ask the same question, i.e. "Why should a woman whose husband died be forced to live like a living corpse"? In both films there are the same objections: Because it is a sin for a widow to even think of love, let alone marriage. This

taboo can be traced back to the religious and traditional impositions that widows are forced to endure as a result of age-old mythologies that have been discussed in this report.

While the construction of the women's psyche differs considerably in both films, on closer inspection, there are many similarities too. For example, in *Prem Rog*, Manorama accepts her fate and resigns herself to live like a servant in her own home. In *Baabul*, Milli's status in the household is not altered and routine life continues, but subconsciously, there is the notion of incompletion that becomes evident when she presents Rajat with a painting of a woman without the traditional red dot on her forehead. This could be a bold statement that she accepts her life without a man, or it could be a deep-rooted sentiment within her that echoes her feelings of emptiness and loss and the knowledge that she will not love again.

Once again, a comparison can be drawn between the two films in that while Manorama pines the loss of her husband, it is only because the society in which she lives is unable to deal with the realities of life constructively. Her depression stems from the injustices and rejection of the society that blames her for the death of her husband.

In *Baabul*, Milli mourns the death of love, but she is still aware of the traditions that forbid her from wearing colourful clothing as well as re-marriage. Yet, despite this knowledge, she is still too absorbed in the loss of the only man that she ever loved and her firm resolve that she can only love once in a lifetime. It is her father-in-law Balraj, who is actively forcing the issue of changing mindsets with regard to false rituals and customs that are constantly being perpetuated in the name of faith and religion. Hence, the story of Milli's love is side-stepped by the narrative that deals with issues of widowhood specifically.

While the narrative of *Prem Rog* also deals with other societal issues like class-distinction and the feudal societies of the time, the narrative of *Baabul* makes light of such issues and Milli's humble background is not even taken into consideration by Avinash or his family. They accept Milli for who she is and even when they go to her house to propose they do so in a dignified manner.

Prem Rog, however, shows an almost barbaric society where its people do not hesitate to take up arms and use force to deal with disputes. It is interesting to note, however that many films of the 70's and 80's made use of physical fights and these were a norm of the times,

especially in the narratives of films. Despite the fact that films deal predominantly with the issue of widowhood and both heroines have lovers who were unable to declare their love for them initially, the women are internally dealing with different emotions. As Manorama accepts the injustices perpetuated against her, Milli is aware of tradition, but is too lost in her own loss of love to actually be hurt by society's opinions. Of course, the society in 2006 is much more progressive than it was in the eighties.

As a result, Milli is still free to live her life, except that she needs time to genuinely recover from the loss of her true love. Manorama is portrayed like an overgrown child, spoilt, insolent and stubborn, until all her self-esteem is stripped away from her when she is widowed firstly, and then raped mercilessly by her brother-in-law. While in today's society there are active groups that work to convince women who are raped that they are the victims, in the eighties, rape was considered to be a shame and women were told not to mention it or else they would be blamed.

It is interesting though that both women characters, separated by over two decades, display strong characteristics of self-esteem when they suspect that their heroes might be claiming to love them out of a sense of obligation or pity. Both heroines reject being loved out of pity and then, only when they are convinced that these men truly love them, do they open their hearts to them.

Both films follow the stereotypical, "happily-ever-after" ending and both end with an apology from the elders of the family for forcing tradition upon the widows. Of course, in *Prem Rog* , in keeping with the films of the times, there is bloodshed and death before the issue can be resolved, whereas in *Baabul*, the end is played out in a more sophisticated manner. Nonetheless, both films arrive at the same conclusion.

However, while *Baabul* claims to encourage women's emancipation, it is still the men who are making all the decisions. Balraj and Rajat decide that Milli will not survive without a man in her life. While widow remarriage is an important issue and is dealt with accordingly, and this film succeeds in dispelling all the notions of taboo in a progressive way, why is a widow still not portrayed as being allowed sufficient time to heal before thinking of settling down with another man?

It is noteworthy, that after all these years, the depiction of women characters, especially heroines, is still compelled to adapt into or adjust to the moulds that are created for them by men.

Ta Ra Rum Pum (2007, Siddharth Anand*)*

Radhika is a beautiful young woman who lives in New York City with her room-mate Sasha. She meets and falls in love with Rajveer Singh (RV), a young man with a passion for being a race car driver. RV joins Speeding Saddles, a failing race team, and is successful, hence becoming a well-known and wealthy celebrity race car driver.

Radhika is an aspiring pianist, majoring in Music at Columbia University, while RV has no degree or educational background since he had to drop out of school to support his family when his father died. RV's lack of education earns him the disapproval of Radhika's father, Mr. Banerjee. Despite her father's disdain for RV, Radhika marries him and becomes a wealthy housewife and mother of two children, Priya and Champ. RV soon becomes the number one race car driver in the USA.

However, tragedy strikes when RV is involved in an accident whilst racing and he is hospitalized for a few months. He tries to make a comeback but the trauma of the accident mentally scars him. The family is forced to auction their home after RV endures a string of failures and they move into a neighborhood of much lower social standing. RV and Radhika decide to hide the truth from their children.

The family struggle with their new lifestyle but stick together by using a mixture of fantasy and cheerfulness to pull through. While battling to forget his love for the racecourse, RV is tormented by a newly developed fear for racing. However, when Champ is admitted into hospital and needs to undergo immediate surgery, he takes to the racetrack again, and wins the ultimate race. He reclaims everything he had lost and the family lives happily ever after.

Radhika is depicted as a fun-loving and free spirited young woman who lives without any inhibitions. There is no "Indian-ness" about her dress or manner. She socialises freely with her friend Sasha and the pair even double-date non-Indian men. On one such date, Radhika finds herself unable to communicate with her date and playfully orders wine, gets drunk and

leaves to crash another party where she dances with reckless abandon until her friend Sasha finds her and drags her away. Radhika clearly has no curfew and is not answerable to her father or anyone else as was the case with women characters of earlier times.

The discussion that she has with her father is of significance. Mr. Banerjee is against the idea of his daughter marrying RV based on RV's social and intellectual standing. He advises Radhika to have an affair with him, amuse herself, and then to find a man who is worthy of her. He admits to having done the same before he married her mother.

Radhika is indignant about his suggestion and resolutely informs him that she will be getting married the following morning, whether or not he elects to attend the wedding. This scene defies two renowned conventions familiar to Bollywood films. Firstly, the manner in which Radhika declares her wedding plans and secondly, the shift towards the "no-frills" wedding. Unlike fathers in older films, Mr. Banerjee appears to have no authority over his daughter's life and silently fades into the background.

Radhika is married to RV in a moving car, dressed in a white wedding gown (Western bridal dress) with only the priest and their friend Harry in the back seat. There is no formal ceremony, or traditional Indian prayers. After the wedding, RV takes Radhika directly to their new home which he has purchased for them.

Radhika's father's advice must be noted because it is extraordinarily uncommon for a father to advise his daughter so candidly to 'have an affair", particularly in a Bollywood film. It is Radhika's reaction that is admirable, because this young woman albeit having the freedom to live her own life without the usual restrictions and frills of Indian culture, rejects her father's suggestion and opts to live her life with integrity, having chosen the man with whom she wants to spend the rest of her life.

Notable too, is that Radhika is well aware of the flaws of the hero. He is a spendthrift, has no concept of how to manage money, is uneducated and lives for the moment. Despite having identified his weaknesses, she is prepared to love him and live with him. An accident and two children later, the couple face financial problems and are forced to move into a poor neighbourhood.

Hence, begins the real struggle. Since neither of them have a degree, they both struggle to find jobs. They decide that their children should not have to change schools and while RV battles with the fear of not being able to race again, Radhika actively goes out and finds odd jobs playing the piano for low remuneration. When Harry, (RV's old friend and manager) reappears in their life with a taxi license as a means of earning some extra money for survival, Radhika is grateful, but RV takes it as a personal insult and refuses to accept any "hand-outs".

Radhika is depicted as a practical, hands-on mother and supporting wife even in the face of misfortune. In Hindu culture, servility and humiliation in the marital home are perceived as being exemplary and worthy of praise (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005). However, in Bollywood films, there is a constant reference to the "immoral West". A change in women's clothing is often used to mark a shift in status, for example from being single to a married state. With this change in clothing there is a perceived shift in the responsibilities of the woman too. For example, the "good" married woman will take over responsibilities of the household, which include cleaning, cooking, caring for children. At no point in the narrative of *Ta Ra Rum Pum* is Radhika depicted as making this transition. Yet, when faced with adversity, her character adopts the "traditional" role of motherhood, even though her dress is still contemporary and she continues to play the piano to assist in the financial responsibility of maintaining the household. This film reflects the creation of a new identity for the woman character. It has been suggested that a woman's status as a maternal figure is more important than that of a wife (Gangoli, 2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005). Radhika is portrayed as a woman who has the ability to be both a maternal figure and a sexual being on her own terms. Once again the "Western/Indian" binary is interrogated and the construction of Radhika's character depicts a shift in which being good wife and mother forms a part of her as an individual and does not reduce her status to one of subservience or submissiveness.

As opposed to the depiction of women in films of earlier times, Radhika is presented as being stronger and more resilient than her husband. This depiction challenges gender stereotypes that claim the man to be the stronger individual in a relationship. When her father hands her a cheque for $50 000, she boldly tears it up and claims that they do not need his fortunes to survive since he did not consider RV worthy of her. She defends her man as being the best husband, father and race car driver and walks away from him. This is a memorable moment in the film as it not only establishes Radhika's character as a woman of integrity, but proves

that she believes in herself and her decisions in life to the extent that she is willing to risk losing everything for her convictions.

Ironically, it is RV who is upset with Radhika's obstinacy and demands to know how she could just turn away from the money that they so desperately need. However, Radhika is depicted as an optimistic woman who does not falter in her belief that she has made the right decision in life. She is depicted as a pillar of strength for her husband, a friend and mother to her children and at the same time, nurtures her love for music by playing whenever she has an opportunity, albeit be it un-glorified.

While there is a play on voyeurism in the beginning of the film when Radhika is still single, after marriage and two children the focus is taken away from Radhika as a sex symbol and focussed on her as an equal partner and most of the time, as a more rational and practical person than her husband. In the second half of the film, her dress is more practical instead of revealing and she does not let her children see her vulnerable side, instead she entertains them so that they are unaware of the family's true state of affairs.

In films of earlier times, as in *Prem Rog*, when Manorama confessed to being raped, she was ordered to pretend it never happened, because her mother did not have the courage or power to confront the situation, and when Amiran from *Umrao Jaan* was kidnapped, her mother simply waited until her husband came home from work, after which she relayed the news and then just cried helplessly.

The women characters in recent films are portrayed as being actively involved in all aspects of their children's lives, so when Radhika realises that Champ has swallowed a piece of glass, she rushes to the hospital with him and is fully aware of the problems as well as the solutions. When there are financial problems, she goes out and makes an effort to earn money for their sustenance.

The women characters in films of the new millennium are being increasingly portrayed to be fully self-actualised in every aspect of their lives. They make their own decisions and then live with the consequences thereof, whether they are positive or negative. There are fewer restrictions of societies upon them, especially as they live abroad, away from the close societies that exist in India. As a result, these non-resident Indians do not have to answer to

family or society as their existence is not defined by traditional ideologies nor are they restrained by cultural practices. Therefore, these women become a part of a huge melting pot where they are forced to carve out their own identities and ideals.

The input that they receive from their elders is dependent on many factors. In this particular case, Radhika's father is concerned about his daughter finding a man who is of the same social standing as the circles that he moves around in, however, it is not often that a father of an Indian woman advises her to 'have an affair". Of course, with the double standards that apply to different genders, the males in the family are "allowed" to have as many affairs as they choose, not only before marriage, but if they do so after marriage, it is considered a norm.

If one is to come back to the changing construction of women from earlier times into the new millennium, I think it is safe to say that great strides have been made, not only in terms of appearance, but in terms of their psyche too. Radhika is constructed to have a mind of her own as she rejects her father's suggestion and his money, even when she is living in dire straits. Being career-orientated does not detract her from her motherly instincts and she is able to be the primary care-giver to her children. More important is the truth that she enjoys being a mother and attends to all her children's needs while still being an equal partner in her relationship with her husband.

Having tended to her own needs for fulfilment and self-actualisation when she was a carefree single woman, in other words she dated, attended college, socialised, etc; when she decides to marry, she takes on all the responsibilities of this commitment, and then her priorities change to being a supportive wife, a loving mother and a woman who wants to fulfil her ambition of becoming a musician. Unlike films of before, at no point is Radhika seen cooking or making the traditional roti and waiting anxiously for her husband to come home from work. The climate of Indian couples living abroad has changed, and women are constructed to be living their own lives, tending to their own needs and making decisions about their lives based on their own expectations of relationships and goals.

It is of significance at this stage to take a closer look at the relationship of Radhika with her father as opposed to the relationship of Amby from *Salaam Namaste*. Both are women from the films of the new millennium. Yet, while Radhika is able to confront her father and bluntly

declare her marriage plans, Amby runs away and is cut-off from the family. The issues of parental control that are raised in both films are still being negotiated with audiences. While *Salaam Namaste* conforms to the older tradition and norm of being ostracized if stepping away from the norms, *Ta Ra Rum Pum* takes a different stance. Albeit being against his daughter Radhika's marriage, Mr. Bannerjee offers his daughter financial aid when he becomes aware that she is in need of assistance. Her reaction is notable in relation to the way in which her character is depicted to be able to stand up to her father.

There is a huge shift in the depiction of women characters in relation to patriarchal societies and ideologies. In films of earlier times, daughters were depicted to live according to the rules set down by their fathers and thereafter by their husbands. This is clearly illustrated in the films of the 70's and 80's in which women characters merely accepted the decisions of the men in their lives. Amby expresses her feelings of loss at being detached from her family and her tone and body language affirm the feelings of dejection that she feels. Yet, despite the loss of family, she does not conform to her family's ideals, but leaves in order to carve her own destiny.

When Radhika's father advises her to have an affair, she breaks away from him, and at no point in the film is she portrayed as regretting her decision. She is able to fulfil her life without feelings of remorse unlike Amby. Both women, when presented with life crisis do not turn to their parents for support. Radhika places her faith in her husband even when he loses everything and leaves the family in dire straits. Amby, when deserted by Nick when he discovers that she is pregnant, continues battling through her daily life without ever even considering asking her parents for assistance. This raises questions about the bonds of kinship and familial alienation. It seems as if films that deal with diasporic women depict them as independent not only in their thought processes, but portray them as being too proud to turn to their next of kin even when they are in dire straits. This is in contrast with the patriarchal societies and the strong familial bonds that were depicted in films of earlier times.

The theme of motherhood is also raised in the narratives of both films. Both women display the motherly instinct. Radhika does everything in her power to maintain her children's standard of life, often going hungry herself. In one particular scene, she stuffs her handbag with food so that her children are not deprived of the luxuries that they were used to. Amby begs Nick to have a blood test because she cannot bear the thought of hurting her unborn

baby. These traits of motherly instincts have been constant in the representation of women over the centuries.

The distinction, however, lies in the reality that women characters of before, albeit feeling sympathetic and yearning silently to absolve their children's pain, were unable to voice an opinion, let alone express their feelings or views with regard to their offspring. Of interest too, is the fact that Radhika does not ever consider asking her father money even when Champ is critically ill. Surely, if he could hand her a cheque for $50 000, he could very well have funded the operation of his grandson, but there is possibly the issue of pride involved. She elects to place all her faith in her husband winning the race, even though there is the possibility that her son might lose his life in the process. In this particular case, it seems as if the woman character that stands up to parental authority, and thereby breaks away from the social constraints of traditional societies, places her own ego above the survival of her offspring.

Film-makers are increasingly depicting women characters in roles that promote gender equality. While Rhadhika is depicted as a character that stands up to parental authority, she is also depicted as a woman with the power to make a decision. In films of older times, major decisions were always taken by the hero. By placing the focus on the woman character, the oneness of carrying the burden of being able to live with the outcome of the decision is transferred to Radhika. It seems as if film-makers, in striving to promote gender equality through the depiction of women characters are simultaneously exposing the negative aspects of power. Control is associated with power and as a result, the ego plays an important role in decision-making, as is apparent when Radhika's chooses to place her faith in her husband instead of her father. By affording women characters the option of decision-making, film-makers are demonstrating that they are breaking away from debates that women are only used as objects of desire by film-makers (Mulvey, 1975). While it can be argued that Radhika places her own ego above the survival of her offspring, it can also be argued that she fervently believes in her husband. In contrast to the depiction of women characters of earlier times, Radhika is not a victim of a patriarchal society. Instead, she elects to place her faith in her husband willingly. This in itself is a departure from the depiction of women characters in earlier films in relation to the gender ideologies that were imposed upon them.

On this note, another recent film that has similar themes, is *Namaste London* (2007, Vipul Amrutlal Shah).

"Jasmeet" or "Jazz", as she prefers to be known, is an Indian girl living with her parents in England. Jazz loves everything British and her father, Manmohan Malhotra, a very Indian man with Indian values, does not approve of the manner in which she has embraced Western culture, from her style of dress to her social life, which consists of partying and drinking at bars till late hours. Manmohan's best friend Parvez Khan also has a son named Imraan, who has opted to live with his British girlfriend.

In an attempt to steer Jazz away from her British boss turned boyfriend Charlie Brown, Jazz's father takes her on a tour of India with a clandestine intention to find her an eligible Indian suitor. Realising that she has been conned, she stages a show of her own. She goes through with the ceremony, but on return to England, informs everyone that according to British law, the "Indian marriage" is not recognized and she intends to go ahead and marry her British boyfriend. Jazz's father is devastated, but her "husband" Arjun from India who is truly in love with her and vows to woo her away from her notions of marrying her British boyfriend, who is a womaniser and notorious for leaving a trail of broken hearts.

In this film, Jazz is depicted as an over-the-top young woman who is not only fighting Indian culture, but is unscrupulous in the way that she deceives those around her and does not even display common courtesy or respect toward her parents. She candidly tells her father that her life is none of his business. While there have been similar sentiments expressed by heroes towards their fathers, women characters were not as verbally frank. This depiction of the woman character candidly defies the ideologies of the Indian nation.

According to the website www.boxofficemojo.com, *Namaste London* debuted at number 9 on the UK charts and similarly debuted within the top 20 in the United States and Australian charts. The film collected £ 238,841 in the first week of its release. As of July 27, 2007 the movie has grossed an estimated $31,973,311 USD in five territories which included the United States ($4,149,772), Australia ($197,148), India ($17,267,662), Malaysia ($15,285), and the United Kingdom ($9,021,782).

When Indian families migrate away from India, their children often mirror the societies in which they are raised. Film-makers of earlier films depicted women characters who were residents of India as subservient and demure in keeping with Indian ideologies. *Namaste London* is set in England and portrays Jazz as an autonomous individual as opposed to women characters of earlier films whose roles were defined by the ideologies of Indian tradition. Jazz, being depicted as a woman character of the diaspora is exposed to a society which is in contrast to the ideologies of Indian societies. There is a constant battle in the narrative between Jazz and her on-screen father, Manmohan. While Jazz professes to be patriotically British, Manmohan repeatedly refers to Jazz's behaviour as "out of hand". The film-maker depicts Jazz as a woman who is at peace with the norms of Britain's society and she does not hesitate to socialise freely with her boyfriend, Charlie Brown, even though open shows of affection are considered a taboo in Indian society. From her point of view, she is merely enjoying her life as she should, because, she claims, it's the only way of life that she knows. Therefore, when Jazz lives her life according to her own whims, she is merely echoing the values of the society that she is exposed to, and it is this behaviour that her father, Manmohan associates with "being out of hand", a sentiment that he constantly expresses through out the film.

The role of Jazz's mother is significant because of the manner in which she rears her daughter in England. Having been born and bred in India herself, she explicitly confesses to having allowed Jazz to live a "western life" because she wanted to spare her daughter the humiliation that she herself experienced when moving to England with her husband. She confronts her husband about the manner in which he taunted her for not "fitting in" when in her own opinion she sacrificed her traditional sari and wore jeans so that her husband would not be "ashamed" to take her out as this was a sentiment that he constantly articulated. She also makes reference to her "lack of sophistication" when it comes to her command of the English language and when she is blamed for allowing Jazz to live a social life without limits, Jazz's mother plainly admits to having deliberately raised Jazz to fit into the prototype of an English woman. Jazz's mother is depicted to defy her own cultural beliefs and concepts of womanhood to spare her daughter humiliation. She encourages Jazz to fraternise with the British, condones her dress, allows her to visit discos after work and insists on sending her to a proper British school. While these elements contribute towards the way in which Jazz's character is portrayed, the premise upon which her mother's intentions are based, are noble.

Jazz's mother is constructed as a woman desperately trying to fit in, as is evident in her interaction with the customer that she assists. She makes an effective attempt to socialise with him, even though she completely misunderstands him and her English is poor. When she devours the pastry while visiting Jazz's "British in-laws", it is clear that she lacks the subtle etiquettes of high society, and is a simple woman, who is merely trying to live harmoniously with her husband as a housewife. In other words, Jazz's mother fits the prototype of the traditional "good wife", and her behaviour is congruent with the traditional Indian ideologies according to which married women are expected adjust to the "ways of their husbands". However, Jazz's mother defies conventional ideological teaching in relation to the rearing of her daughter and raises her to display no "Indian" traits. A further comparison can be drawn between Jazz, who is able to freely express her needs and desires, and her mother, who can only voice her opinion up to a certain point, after which she withdraws and allows her husband to pronounce the final judgement.

In terms of kinship, Jazz's mother is depicted as a contemporary woman character who displays resilience as a mother who yearns for a better life for her offspring. She uses her own struggle and experiences to shield her daughter from the embarrassment and shame that she had to live through when migrating to a foreign country. While Jazz's mother's intentions in the choice of upbringing for her daughter are appreciated, the question to be asked is what happens to culture and can the youth be held responsible for their behaviour if they are raised in the midst of conflict between their elders who are culturally split themselves? Arjun, Jazz's Indian husband makes an interesting comment when sitting in the park with her father. He observes, "You people want to run away from India in search of better lives and opportunities, but then covet a traditional Indian son-in-law."

This is a very pertinent observation and fact that leaves Jazz's father speechless and is definitely a point of contention. Women characters are exposed to a certain way of life, and although their home environment within the narrative structures doesn't condone the ways of the west, these girls school in the west, and are exposed to the western values and systems. Since their peers are their allies, is it not only a natural progression of matters that they will follow their ways? The change in construction becomes inevitable.

It has already been established that Bollywood cinema echoes the challenges and struggles faced by Indian society and film-makers attempt to expose taboos and false traditions that

have perpetuated Indian society in the name of religion. The narrative of *Namaste London* depicts the woman character as having lost her identity and through an innovative patriarchal approach attempts to "reel" the woman back to her roots. The character of Jazz's husband is portrayed as wise and all-knowing. His character is further imbued with a deep understanding of women's behaviours as well as patience and a sensitivity which goes beyond the conventional portrayal of the most magnanimous hero. This is apparent when the hero witnesses his wife kissing and embracing her boyfriend and instead of displaying rage as would have been the norm in earlier films, he merely lowers his gaze.

This open show of emotion and affection is in contrast with earlier films in which heroines, even courtesans, were depicted to lower their gazes when in the company of men. Jazz's open displays of affection with her boyfriend in the presence of her family are considered "shameful" from a traditional and ideological perspective. The message that the film-maker stresses upon in the first half of the narrative is that the character of Jazz does not know what is good enough for her and this is demonstrated by her father's relentless pursuit of a "good Indian" suitor for her. This sentiment is then transferred to the character of Arjun, who also attempts to show the woman character the error of her ways.

According to Mulvey (1975), the audience identifies with the hero in the film, thereby giving him the license to play around with the heroine as per his wishes. While women characters in films like *Mother India, Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* all carried themes of socialist ideals and traditional values as well as conformity to a patriarchal society, Jazz is depicted as being patriotically British. Over the years, film-makers have shifted their focus away from traditional and socialist ideologies and have focused more on individual themes and the portrayal of women as sexual beings with their own ideals as represented by Jazz's character. However, even though Jazz is depicted as having assimilated herself into the society that she grew up in, the narrative of the film does not allow her character to find peace until the hero has achieved his purpose of "reeling" her back in. Hence, the gender ideologies carrying socialist ideals and traditional values that were represented in films of earlier times are still subtly present in the narratives of even the most contemporary films today.

In the case of Radhika from *Ta Ra Rum Pum,* she is portrayed as a well-balanced individual. Jazz, on the other hand, is deceitful, selfish and yearns to be as "non-Indian" as possible, yet, ironically, when her boyfriend tries to sleep with her before the wedding, she cannot bring

herself to sleep with him. This touches on the stereotypes of Indian brides who are perceived to be "pure" until their wedding day. Jazz, however "modern" and "liberated" in the way that she dresses and socializes, epitomizes chastity in an ironic way. This is in direct contrast to the way that her character is constructed, which is portrayed as having a contemptible disregard for Indian norms and values.

From the way in which the camera spotlights Jazz's body, it is clear that there is a strong focus on sex appeal. In terms of the narrative, a large number of diasporic Indians will be able to identify with their youth having to deal with split-cultures when migrating away from India.

Namaste London features "An Indian brat meets a Funjabi boy" as its tag-line. This already places the heroine at a disadvantage, almost pre-judging her depiction as flawed. Throughout the film, nationalist themes are highlighted and there is a consistent reference to India and the rituals and traditions of Indian culture which are emphasized by the character of Jazz's father. India's national anthem serves as background music in the narrative when there appears to be a threat to India's pride and honour.

When Jazz and Charlie Brown announce their engagement, the notion of India being a land only of "snake charmers" is raised in a derogatory fashion by a member of Charlie's family. Jazz, even though she is portrayed as an outspoken, free-willed individual who is patriotically British, is at a loss for words. She is depicted as being uncomfortable about the derogatory remarks and withdraws from the group until Arjun finds her and confronts her about not being as anti-Indian as she so proudly claims. He then tells her to translate what he has to say from Hindi to English, in the form of a rebuttal to the Englishman's audacious attack on India. Thus the national identity and the heritage of India is defended in a patriotic way.

The movie *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* (2006, Karan Johar), also deals with diasporic Indians. Dev, a bitter ex-soccer player, is married to Rhea who has a job with a high-flying magazine. They have a son named Arjun. Reserved school teacher Maya is married to her childhood friend Rishi. Rhea is a beautiful, career-orientated woman striving to be the best that she can. She is out-going, and shares the responsibility of caring for her son with her husband Dev and her mother-in-law who lives with them. Maya, on the other hand is a "typical housewife" who is always cleaning her house and cooking, she is portrayed as a perfectionist. She dresses

modestly, doesn't like open shows of affection from her husband and hates to accompany him to parties even though he insists that he wants her at his side. Of importance, is the fact that Maya married Rishi out of a sense of obligation, since Rishi and his father became her family after the death of her parents. Hence, the depiction of a woman in the new millennium who feels bound by a sense of obligation.

In contrast to the way in which Maya is portrayed, is the portrayal of Rhea, who dresses in short skirts, attends corporate functions, fraternizes with men and even dances at events. These are qualities which Rhea's character despises. Rhea is unhappy because her husband, who cannot fulfil his dream of becoming an all-star soccer player due to an injury, is bitter towards life in general, including herself. As a result, Rhea is forced to become the sole breadwinner of the family, and as such, the notion of the traditional role of the woman as homemaker is dispelled entirely.

Maya, aside from her trips to school and back, has no social life except cleaning the house. When she accidentally bumps into Dev, a relationship forms and they sleep together. Rhea, being the glamorous woman that she is and successfully climbing the corporate ladder is also presented with the opportunity to have an affair with her boss, but she respectfully declines, as she believes firmly in fidelity. The narrative of this film highlights the fact that there can no longer be a clear-cut distinction between "Western/bad" and "Indian/good". As discussed in the literature review, various scholars have raised their voices against the stereotyping of women in Bollywood films. If the constructions of Rhea and Maya were to be weighed against their respective stereotypes, according to Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988), Maya would be labelled traditional and Rhea, Westernized. Ironically, it is the woman depicted as the housewife who has an affair, while the "Westernized and sexy" Rhea is depicted to be a loyal wife and devoted mother.

Set and filmed mostly in New York, this film explores themes of extra-marital affairs and although it was a moderate success in India with its earnings waning at the box office after the first week of release, the film was a considerable success internationally and in the United States, it became the highest grossing Indian film of all time. In the United States it grossed over $1.3 million and $1.4 million in the United Kingdom on its opening weekend and was screened in over 1,200 cinemas worldwide.

Older films such as *Pakeeza* and *Prem Rog* portrayed women characters battling with the circumstances that constituted the worlds in which they existed. The issue of sex in these films was presented as a norm categorised into a convention that was silently accepted because it was considered to be a privilege of the "upper class". The women from lower classes were expected to oblige and please the wealthy men or their bosses as depicted in *Prem Rog* by the construction of the mistress and in *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* by the courtesans.

Paradoxically, sex between the men of elitist societies and women of lower social standing in the eighties was not considered an issue, and was accepted as a custom. Of relevance, is the fact that the women from the lower social classes, such as the mistress of the young Thakur in *Prem Rog*, were depicted to be strong enough to voice their opinions about the injustices that disseminated upon other women, as demonstrated when the "mistress" pleads with the young Thakur to save Manorama from the harsh punishment of widowhood and to allow her to marry Devdhar. This is interesting because the mistress herself has no social standing and is constantly being used as an object of sexual pleasure. Yet, she speaks up against injustice, unlike Manorama's own mother and sister-in-law who are depicted as representing "respectable" married women within the society. These women merely accept tradition and quietly fit into the moulds dictated by tradition.

In contrast, films of the new millennium stress equality for women and when Amby of *Salaam Namaste* suspects Nick of having slept with another woman even though he is not her lawful husband, she is outraged and walks out on him. This is clearly a huge step for the woman character of today who is portrayed to expect the same dignity and respect that she is willing to bestow upon her man. There is no room for self-pity or blame and the women characters in the films of the new millennium are upfront about their standards and expectations in relationships.

Bollywood films have long been an international phenomenon, comprising one of South Asia's most conspicuous exports, and rivalling the drawing power of Hollywood film in some markets (Walton-Roberts, 2004). However, thanks partly to the heightened profile of the South Asian immigrant community in Europe and North America, Indian commercial and regional cinemas are now even more popular outside of the subcontinent, and many films are produced with the non-resident Indian population specifically in mind (Dudrah, 2006).

Scholars (Desai, 2004; Dudrah, 2006) have been quick to note the change that occurred in Indian film audience demographics during the nineties, and to theorise how this has changed, in turn, the films themselves, reshaping subject matter, censorship practice, style, and so forth. Not only is the industry benefiting from a burgeoning fan base, but the critical reputation of Bollywood films has seen an upturn as well. Proof of this is in the international acclaim for the Bollywood period drama *Lagaan* (2001, Ashutosh Gowarikar).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It has been established that the turn of the century has brought new global challenges together with more global markets opening to the Hindi-language cinema industry, more popularly known as Bollywood. The Bollywood industry is also influenced by the accelerating flow of people, technologies, images, and ideas across the globe coupled with advances in communication and information technology (Qin-Hilliard and Suarez-Orozco, 2004). All this helps create a global market for Bollywood films. Liberalization, as well as the impact of the NRI community, are factors that play a part in the shaping of current Bollywood ideologies. Over the years, feminism in India has struggled against a patriarchal society in which women have faced oppressive gender restrictions (Anagol, 2006). In addition, Bollywood film-makers have had to deal with the inevitability of the association with western feminism as a result of the challenges to Indian feminism posed by globalization. Very often, feminism is wrongly interpreted to be sexual freedom, or to be directly proportional to modernity (Anagol, 2006).

This report focuses on the construction of women characters in popular Hindi-language cinema and considers the changes in these constructions over time. As part of the report, the study has drawn on the work of various scholars such as Gopalan (1997), Dasgupta (1988), Datta (2000), Ram (2002), Virdi (2003) and Dudrah (2006) who have examined the various aspects of the portrayal of women characters in Bollywood cinema.

The literature review examines scholarship on some of the key elements of Indian culture, politics and the socio-economy that had a bearing on this study. Additionally, Hindi-language cinema is examined from a number of angles, notably the growth of Bollywood cinema over time, Bollywood genres, Bollywood films as cultural products, the negotiating forces between Indian government and film makers, the challenges of a global market, and the role of the Indian diaspora. These aspects were regarded as important for studying the construction of women characters in Hindi-language cinema.

An activity with a strong cultural link is the act of marriage. In the case studies, marriage features strongly as a symbol of love. In all three films of the 70's and 80's, namely *Pakeezah* (1971, Kamal Amrohi), *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali) and *Prem Rog* (1982,

Raj Kapoor), the heroine considers marriage as a way of confirming love and a door to a better life. The literature also remarks on the "mutedness" of groups such as women and widows. The case studies illustrate that earlier films support strong traditional beliefs where women willingly and mutely comply with all forms of injustices. In more contemporary films, women characters are depicted as more independent in the sense that they are not bound by tradition or ideologies of the nation.

The study also draws on scholarship in relation to the construction of heroines in Hindi-language cinema as voyeuristic objects. For example, in both *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan* the women characters are depicted as prostitutes. Suggestive dance routines and the way they dress provide narrative strategies to solicit the "look" and mobilize the scopic drive, especially for male audience members. Female audience members are engaged by relating to the suffering of the women characters.

Scholars Kishwar and Vanita (1987) rightfully note that women characters are often stripped of all realistic human and social complexities, thus ending up on screen as stereotypes. The ideal woman in Bollywood cinema, according to Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988), has also traditionally been a controlled, chaste, surrendering individual, who is not afraid of making a sacrifice. The "bad" woman on the other hand, has been depicted as westernized, blond-haired, individualistic and sexually aggressive, ready to lead men into ruin. Dasgupta and Hedge (1988 cited in Ghadially, 1988) note that the Hindi-language film industry has repeatedly reinforced the notion that the glory of ideal Indian womanhood lies in the tolerance she shows toward society and men, even when she is unjustly treated and brutally victimised. This was certainly the case in the films of the 1970's and 80's as reflected in the case studies, *Pakeezah*, *Umrao Jaan* and *Prem Rog*.

Kasbekar (2001, cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) notes that as far back as the mid-70's, cinema was founded on "scopophilia" (the pleasure of looking). Cinema therefore constantly devises narrative strategies to solicit the "look" and mobilize the scopic drive. According to Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001), filmmakers are therefore exposed to commercial and ideological pressures to make a "spectacle" of the woman, but at the same time must deploy strategies and subterfuges in order to legitimise such erotic voyeurism without antagonising the state, civil society, or female members of its spectating public. Kasbekar (2001 cited in Dwyer and Pinney, 2001) argues that the most important strategy has

been to create an idealised moral universe that upholds the official definition of femininity within the main plot, and then to provide unofficial erotic pleasures to its target audience through song and dance sequences.

While it has been ascertained that commercial Hindi-language cinema relies on voyeurism, it creates tension between how women feel and how men react to the way in which women are dressed or presented as sexual objects. In the specific case studies in this report of the films of the 70's and 80's, the camera lens often focused on the bodies of the prostitutes, spotlighting the dress, movements, and eyes of the heroines which playfully teased the audience members. Movements like heaving breasts and gyrating hips inculcated images of lust and passion in the male viewers while unsettling the female viewers who had to watch their counterparts.

Years later and more specifically in the new millennium, the same camera lens still focuses on portraying women in part as voyeuristic objects to entertain audiences. In a film such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, the manner in which the camera focuses on the body of newcomer Tina, is explicitly demeaning for the female spectators. There is no logic in a woman who returns from abroad being dressed with such minimal clothing. This representation of women is becoming a norm in films of the new millennium. Even though women spectators "cringe" when witnessing this portrayal of their gender, representations of women in this sordid manner are increasing and viewers are being allowed to use the cinematic space as an acceptable space in which to "gawk".

If one is to examine the changes in the construction of women characters from the voyeuristic perspective, then it is evident that there is still a strong reliance on the aspect of pleasing male viewers. While in films of the 70's and 80's, women were preservers of tradition, although not always willingly, the camera lens still panned over their bodies. Over the years and into the new millennium, film-makers, notwithstanding the considerable changes in other domains of women's lives, still use the camera to tenaciously explore the woman's body.

However, despite the unchanging exploration of women's bodies, in examining the portrayal of women from a self-actualisation perspective, women characters are depicted as being more independent and fending for themselves. Drawing from the films analysed in this report, it is evident that women portrayed in the new millennium allot time and energy to the realisation

of their own ideals. Amby from *Salaam Namaste* makes a conscious decision to pursue her own career path and then takes her decision a step further by settling down in a foreign country where she fends for herself, both socially and financially. Of note in this particular film is the depiction of the live-in relationship and her conscious decision to engage in pre-marital sex.

Clearly, the "contemporary" women characters depicted in recent films are not bound by ideologies of the nation, nor are they constrained by "traditional" values and ideals. Instead, the heroines of today are depicted as women for whom the need for distinctive identities, economic self-sufficiency and education are essential components of liberation. In contrast to the depiction of Amby is the depiction of Manorama from *Prem Rog*, who is portrayed as a victim of circumstance. In keeping with the ideologies of the nation and the perception of the traditional Indian woman, her fate is dictated by the patriarch of the family and she is bound to adhere to the customs and rituals that are imposed upon her. Her character displays no inclination to voice her opinion and it must be noted that she is uneducated as well as financially dependent, which was in accordance with the patriarchal societies of the times. In fact, her life has been pre-ordained for her in that she will be married, as all young girls are, when they reach marriageable age and when a suitor comes along.

Over the years, societies have evolved, and with them the expectations of women characters. It could be argued that, in her own way, Manorama was self-actualised. Film-makers have constructed her character as being compelled to live in the reality of the world that is created for her and this reality does not include education or further insight into any other way of life. She is depicted as being satisfied with her world until tragedy strikes and she becomes a widow. It is actually the adversity in her life that forces her inner psyche to crumble. Of note is the progression of her reactions thereafter.

From a work perspective, she displays no desire or ambition, but the majority of the women of the times were content to sit at home and wait for their men, alternately, unmarried women dreamed of the day when they would be married. It could then be argued that Manorama is self-actualised in her own way up until the point that she becomes a widow. Thereafter, the injustices that are perpetuated against her as a widow disturb her world or her reality as she knows it. Of significance is the fact that she is depicted to accept the rituals that are unilaterally imposed upon her. Were it not for the hero, who impudently confronts society

and her own family members on her behalf, she was prepared to spend the rest of her life wishing for death to release her of her miserable life.

The heroines of the new millennium, in direct contrast to the heroines of times before, are depicted as exceptionally vocal in terms of their needs and desires and the choices that they make as to the direction that they envisage their lives moving. Of particular interest, and worth mentioning are the similarities in the way that film-makers portray the male characters to "rescue" the women from a number of different scenarios. From as far back as 1971, the affluent Shahabuddin from the film *Pakeezah* rescues the love of his life Nargis from a brothel. His nephew, almost two decades later, within the narrative of the same film, rescues Sahibjaan. Significantly, both women yearn to be rescued and their spare time is pre-occupied with dreams of being rescued by their "knights in shining armour". In 1981, the character "Umrao Jaan" filters and examines a string of lovers whom she hopes will rescue her from her dreary life at the brothel. Both Nargis and "Umrao Jaan" do not find amity, but Sahibjaan is united with her lover. The film-makers of *Umrao Jaan* are bold in their depiction of the courtesan, whom they construct as having enough self-esteem to consider herself worthy of a life beyond the brothel. However, in the end, the narrative of the film also gives in to the patriarchal societies and ideologies of the times and as a result, "Umrao Jaan" is forced to suffer defeat at the end.

In 2007, Jazz from *Namaste London* is portrayed as the "liberated" new woman. Jazz is insolent to the point that she candidly tells her father that her life is none of his business, and admits that she consumes alcohol. She is depicted as an individual without common courtesy and judgement. The film-makers then depict the hero as the man who must save her from herself. Despite the international locations away from India, representations of "modern" are often depicted as being "out of hand" and the "Western way" as a result symbolises bad, while "traditional" is the ultimate embodiment of good values. Film-makers depict Jazz as being determined to defy all traditional conventions as is evident in the manner that she embraces and kisses Charlie Brown at their engagement with her parents present. The notion of voyeurism is evident in her scanty dress sense; yet, she finds it difficult to engage in pre-marital sex, despite all her exhibitions and profuse declarations of being laissez-faire.

The narrative of this film negotiates the "Western /Indian" binary and it seems as if the agenda of the film-makers, despite dealing with a woman of the diaspora and portraying her

as the "contemporary" woman who is in direct contrast to heroines of earlier years, hasn't changed. Film-makers still depict the woman character who does not display traditional values as "bad" and it is still inevitably the man who must "reel" her in and "teach" her values. While it seems as if Indian cinema has made great strides in establishing women characters as carriers of their own destiny and portraying them as being able to plan their own lives, film-makers appear to cling steadfastly to the notion that man must "rescue his woman". *Namaste London* is not the only film that propagates this concept. In *Baabul*, Milli, albeit constructed as being self-actualised with regard to every aspect of her life, must be guided into another marriage because as her friend Rajat says when he learns of the death of her husband, "she will die." In the context of the narrative, this is translated as meaning that Milli will not be able to live without her husband or, without a man in her life. Her father-in-law Balraj spends endless hours with her convincing her that she needs a man to bring colour back into her life. While the film successfully deals with widow re-marriage on one level, it also portrays Mille as a woman who cannot move on without a man at her side.

Ta Ra Rum Pum, however, presents a distinctly different narrative. When Radhika falls in love with RV and decides to marry him, she makes a conscious decision to leave her studies to become a full-time mother and wife. Of note is the fact that this decision is not imposed upon her by society or family within the narrative structure. Paradoxically, in this film, it is the man who needs rescuing. Radhika is constructed as a pillar of strength, for her children as well as her husband and does not ever doubt her life choices, even in the face of adversity.

Hence, the notion of "Indian-ness" is challenged through the depiction and characterisation of the woman character. To most Indians, "Indian-ness" is synonymous with culture and, as has been de-lineated throughout this report, this refers to the shared customs, rituals and practices that are common to Indian families (Kakar, 2007). The film-makers of this film, interrogate the validity of the notion of "Indian-ness" by portraying Radhika as a woman of the "Western" world in terms of dress, socialization, and her unilateral decision to defy parental authority and marry RV. Therefore, when her character displays domesticity, it reinforces the reality that terms like culture, tradition and "Indian-ness" are fluid.

As opposed to the depiction of traditional women from films of earlier times, Radhika, albeit depicted as a woman who defies conventional traditional values, actually fulfils all the roles that a "traditional" woman is expected to fulfil as a dutiful wife and mother. The difference

lies in the fact that Radhika is depicted as a loving wife and doting mother out of choice as opposed to duty, and the narrative clearly depicts her as being happy and content within herself.

From as early as the 1960's, filmmakers have challenged the portrayal of women as stereotypes, and the 70's and 80's saw a substantial increase in the type of films with themes that explored the oppression and exploitation of women. The 80's, according to Somaaya (2004), portrayed women characters journeying through three significant phases. In the early 1980's, women characters were portrayed as fending more for themselves and also making independent choices regarding their marital partners and work. The early 1990's saw the middle-aged woman being portrayed as emerging from the drudgery of domesticity with a new dream. She was now ready to express her desires and negotiate space for herself with her partner. The 1990's also saw the rise of films known as family dramas. Consequently, according to Gangoli (2002 cited in Kaur and Sinha, 2005), the Indian woman of the 1990's took on characteristics that were less traditionally Indian and more associated with the Western world, for example in the way she dressed.

Film-makers are consciously attempting to break gender stereotypes. This is evident in the narratives and the depiction of women characters in films like *Salaam Namaste* and *Ta Ra Rum Pum*. The fact that these films were successful at the box office proves that audiences are not as bound to traditional and cultural ideologies as they were in the past. It has also been established and it must be stressed that Bollywood film-makers are constantly interrogating the Western/ Indian binary. This could be attributed to the fact that India has become a part of the global economy and as a result is a global player. This has impacted on its youth, who are now exposed to non-traditional ideologies as a result of the combination of local and social changes in India due to geo-political and economic positioning.

Films of the new millennium deal with the struggles which women characters have to deal with currently. The narratives of the more recent films address issues and obstacles that diasporic women have to deal with. These films suggest that Indian women are not a monolithic and oppressed entity anymore. As a result, the heroine's of today are facing new challenges and film-makers are using the realities of their lives to create narratives that attempt to satisfy audiences who are searching for a means to see their own stories of migration and displacement written into these films. (Bhattacharya, 2004).

In conclusion, it is evident that the construction of women characters in Bollywood films has changed over the years driven by the demands of a global market. Clearly, Bollywood could not avoid the changes that took place amongst the Indian community due to their exposure to the "Western" world. Women all over the world have become more independent, and less connected to their traditional roles within the household and society. Therefore, the depiction of women characters has also changed in the sense that they are being increasingly represented as individuals who are not bound by the cultural norms of any specific society or ideology.

However, since film-makers depict women characters as having choices, many narrative structures incorporate issues of cultural identity into their scripts. As a result, many women characters combine issues of Western and Indian, therefore there is still an element of cultural identity prevalent in the film-maker's agenda. While the Western/Indian binary is constantly being interrogated, and the depiction of the diaspora is becoming increasingly contemporary, the narratives of films still negotiate issues of cultural identity, but in ways that have become quite complex.

Following this trend, as de-lineated in this report, films of the new millennium increasingly construct women characters as individual carriers of their own destinies. They are portrayed as being self-actualised in terms of tending to their own needs and in relation to external factors; their lives are not subject to being dictated to by cultural norms and traditions. Clearly, Bollywood cinema has made great strides in changing the construction of women characters over the years.

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Pakeezah (1971, Kamal Amrohi)

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