

# **THE EMOTIONAL POLITICS OF BOMBAY CINEMA AND THE BRITISH ASIAN IMAGINARY**

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis interrogates the ways in which British South Asians engage with Bombay cinema (known commonly as Bollywood) and assesses the cinematic texts in the context of diasporic cultural affects and identifications. The study analyses the uneven geopolitical power relations between the British South Asian Diaspora and the Bombay cinema industry by deploying a plural trans-national 'circuit of culture' methodological approach; combining an empirical study with cinematic textual, historical and production analysis. Semi-structured interviews with participants in London and Manchester (audiences) as well as in Bombay (producers) provide the empirical focus of the thesis. These accounts are used to examine the ways in which research participants interpret both the cinematic content and the contexts in which the films are watched and enjoyed. The consumption of Bombay cinema offers the symbolic means of expression, or the textual framework, through which ideas about the politics of gendered, classed, sexual, national and religious identities are explored and sometimes challenged. The research focuses on the respondents' interpretation of Bombay cinema discourse as a significant aspect of the British Asian decolonising and anti-racist struggle. The key argument of the thesis is that Bombay cinema is a cultural mechanism through which shared affective emotional experiences are facilitated.

The thesis interrogates the interviews and argues that the interviewees weave fictional and imaginative narratives with real life experiences to create self-narratives of pleasure and pain. The differences between the real and the fantasy become irrelevant in 'cinema talk' as symbolic struggles of the 'reality of emotions' associated with alienation, recognition, nostalgia and survival are narrated and underscore the migratory journey. The thesis argues that the Bombay cinematic discourse produces a contested site of post-colonialism where many rejected and shamed cultural memories are reconfigured to claim public spaces in contemporary Britain. The cinematic visual and sonic spaces are converted into public and urban spaces as well as psychic and sublime spaces of sustenance for migrant identity. Moreover, this study illuminates the deployment of these narratives by the interviewees as a tool to mediate different power relations in the context of their private and public lives in order to subvert and transform dominant meanings in contemporary Britain. In this sense the cinema screen becomes a popular imaginary upon which memories are projected and identifications are made but also where values and traditional customs are opened up to critical scrutiny and assessment.

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# **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of London. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

**SIGNED:** .....

**DATE:** .....



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Hazaaron Khvaahishen aisii ki har Khvaaish pe dam nikale  
bahut nikale mere armaan lekin phir bhii kam nikale  
(Ghalib, Mirza Asadullah Beg Khan, b. December 27th, 1797)

A thousand and more yearnings exist in such a way, I want to give my life to each one/  
Even when many of my hopes and desires have left me/ Yet very few have actually been  
satisfied. (My translation)

This thesis is one such yearning and explores the nature of subjectivity and the desires of British Asians through the study of cinematic practice. I doubt when Ghalib wrote these words, he had any idea that his conception of subject formation (subjectivities with insatiable appetites) would be appropriated by global capitalism. The ideas for this thesis originated in 1991 in Glodwick (Oldham) when I was working with a group of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women homeworkers on employment rights. However, the idea only came to fruition when I started the PhD in 2001. My connection with many of the homeworkers was through ‘cinema talk’, where many differences were ‘negotiated’ and erased. Cinema talk created a familiar space for many of the homeworkers (and many other South Asians) to assuage the isolation and alienation of migration and settlement in Britain. I set out to explore the ways British South Asian subjects give meaning/s to their emotions in their articulation of Bombay cinematic experiences. I wanted to understand, the seeing, feeling and thinking of themselves and their world through the engagement, engulfment and embodiment of cinema experience in their daily lives. I had thought about the relevance of the idea of an amoeba, as a one-celled organism, that lives by engulfing things.

The aim of the thesis is to interrogate the production of British South Asian subjectivities through theoretically guided empirical research, using the ‘circuit of culture’ model (Hall, 1973, Johnson, 1986, Du Gay et al, 1997) to investigate the viewing practices of Bombay cinema in contemporary Britain. The global economic and cultural transformation affecting the production of ‘locality’ and its interdependence on transnational media circuits is well documented (Appadurai, 1996). By applying theories of transnational diasporic cultural productions, I explore aspects of the production of British Asian private and public spaces to comprehend the power dynamics of cultural and global flows. I combine Appadurai’s (1996) ideas of culture with the ‘circuit of culture’ model to understand the power relations between the British Asian Diaspora and the Bombay cinema industry.

I use an eclectic theoretical framework in order to explain the melodramatic, the inter-subjective, and the emotional and sensorial politics of Bombay cinematic experience in British South Asian communities. I utilise a multi-disciplinary approach by using conceptual frameworks and theories produced in the diasporic and the transnational study of culture, race and postcolonial identity. In addition an exploration of the feminist study of cinema, culture and media, embodiment, and spectatorship was key to producing concepts and understanding the data. Theories on Indian cinema helped shape an understanding of national identities and cinema biography. I am indebted to Ravi Vasudevan for his prolific scholarship on different aspects of Indian cinema and the interview he gave me when I was in Delhi in October 2004. In addition I have gained an insight into Indian cinema due to my interaction with body of work produced by Madav Prasad, Ashis Nandy and Punima Mankekar. My research is different from these theorists in that it is situated in Britain and is heavily influenced by the race and cultural politics of Britain. However, my research could not interrogate the geopolitical, transnational and the postcolonial aspects of British Asian subject formation without engaging with their scholarship.

The Bombay film industry (or 'Bollywood' as it is popularly known) is the largest in the world, producing 800<sup>1</sup> films per year distributed throughout the South Asian Diaspora. Indian commercial cinema has been popularised by different names such as Bombay cinema, Hindi cinema and Bollywood. Bombay cinema refers to its city of production. The term "Bollywood" came into existence in the 1990s after the increasing popularity of Bombay cinema (two films entered the top ten of British cinema charts in 1998) in the South Asian Diaspora, in its imitation of the Hollywood genre and its ambitions to equal the transnational success of that genre. It is problematic to call it 'Indian cinema,' as this elides the fact that the regional cinema of South India (since the 1980s) produces more films than Bombay cinema and is much more popular in regional areas. Bombay cinema is however, the model for

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<sup>1</sup>The National Film Development Corporation, a government agency whose aim it is to build quality cinema movement claims that on average, there are seven hundred feature films and nine hundred short films made every year. <http://www.nfdc.com/index.html>

Screen Weekly, a film trade magazine organised by the *Indian Express Newspaper Group* has an article on 'Emerging Trends' written on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2005 claims there are 800 hindi films made every year. Hindi films are subdivided into three categories of 'high grade' 'middle grade' and 'low grade' films. High-grade films cost 20,000 rupees, have a star cast and target big cities and the diaspora. Middle grade films have unknown casts, cost 10-15,000 rupees and target smaller towns and cities in India. Low-grade Hindi films cost 10,000 rupees are adult orientated and target smaller towns and cities. Between the years 2001-2004, there has been an increase of 62 percents in release of high-grade Hindi films by cinema Production houses and Companies. See <http://www.screenindia.com>

popular regional cinema and is in this respect closer to being an all-India cinema (Vasudevan, 2000). In this thesis I shift between all three terms depending on the context of analysis.

Globalisation has been described by Appadurai (1990:55) as a “highly complex and disjunctive process of global cultural flows: of peoples, media, technology, finance and ideologies” which has eroded geographical boundaries of the nation-state. After forty years of state-led development India ‘opened up’ to forces of global multinational capital. Since the early 1990s, the ‘liberalisation’ policies that have brought about a drastic change in its media industry. Bombay cinema is a transnational cultural commodity circulating in an ever-expanding capitalist consumer culture. The popularity of Bombay cinema in Britain has led to changes in its cinematic production (Rajadhyakha 1999, 2004) to cater for this market. The transnational and diasporic circuit of culture that Bombay cinema brings into being can be understood in terms of the relationships and interactions of people, place, space, time and imagination. Geographical distances are reduced and historical narratives reorganised and reinvented through an imaginative and habitual engagement with cinematic visual, aural and sensual media. This thesis illuminates that the ‘keeping in touch with back-home’ discourses of earlier South Asian generations combines and proliferates with other desires of recognition, visibility, consumption and the drudgery of culture to generate multiple sites of identifications for British Asian subjects. Opportunities to consume Bombay cinema have greatly multiplied in recent years, as there are now thirteen cable channels catering for the British Asian appetite for films, music, fashion, gossip and news. There are numerous spaces for the distribution and circulation of cinematic discourse through magazines, cinema halls, fashion shops, restaurant, bars, clubs and websites.

Electronic media link Bombay cinema producers to British Asian audiences across national boundaries and set in motion a creative processes of reconfiguration of place (of Oldham, Brick Lane, Hounslow, Leicester, Leeds, Manchester, Tooting, Bombay, Delhi and Banglore), space (of home, weddings, community dances, clubs, shopping centres), and of national culture (British, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Trinidadian, Guyanese, Indian, and English). This has a considerable impact on the quality of British Asian lived cultures. The mass popularity of this genre is due to its multiple modes of emotional address including the melodrama and affect inscribed through its heterogeneous production practices. Bombay cinema in the everyday lives of the South Asian community is not just consumption, but a cultural practice. This cultural practice is an active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a transnational social system. Though most Bollywood films are in Hindi, they have broad appeal across wide ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides within the South Asian Diaspora. This is because of a broadly shared cultural heritage and because of the privileging of songs and dance visuals, cultural references, romance, fantasy, and spectacle.

Bombay cinema as a cultural product acts as a legitimator for the production of the 'new Indian' on the global economic stage. Bombay cinema's striving to compete with Hollywood is an allegory of economic changes taking place on the global stage, where Western capitalism is being challenged by the Asian capitalism of China and India. The birth of cinema and the desire to make modern cinematic technology 'swadeshi' (national) was also part of the anti-colonial ideologies espoused by the Independence Movement. South Asian culture is a shared culture but with many deep differences. The category of 'Asian' is by no means homogeneous. The 'South Asian' identity is a hybridised identity that includes differences of nationalities, religion, class, caste, language and region. The new hybridised cultural meanings transform and challenge established notions of British and Indian national identity as well as the racialised and ethnic identities of 'Black' and 'Asian.' The master signifier 'Indian' carries positive and negative cultural values for 'Asian' identity. Bombay cinema is a site for the postcolonial transnational imagining of identity, which is constructed through cinema aesthetics. In the thesis, I elicit how 'Asian-ness' as difference is articulated, produced and consumed in cinema viewing practices. I describe the unstable processes of 'becoming' and 'belonging' of British South Asian Diasporic identities. My respondents (I interviewed twenty eight viewers) repeatedly create a variety of meanings through their narratives. This practice of respondents' engagement produces notions of belonging from which new cultural meanings emerge. The compromises and adaptations between the British values of the mainstream community (also constituted by diverse groups) and the need to achieve equality and recognition without affronting Asian parental values requires a continual adaptation to specific circumstances. In contemporary Britain the 'Asian' that is legitimised in public culture is the figure associated with that of cosmopolitan London Asian Dance music because the latter has provided a marketable difference for late capitalist markets (Kalra, Hutnyk 1998). This figure has been appropriated by hip global cosmopolitan youth. However while the fashionability of this music has provided cultural spaces for South Asian youth and has provided symbolic value for a "hip, cool, cosmopolitan Asian" this has relegated other representations of South Asians. I investigate the ways these stereotypes get imbibed or challenged and translated into the cultural knowledge of British South Asian identities. The dynamic and complex processes of negotiation around the signifier 'Asian' erupt and dislodge any singular meaning the respondents created.

In the course of exploring race, ethnicity and cultural resistance, Stuart Hall (1991, 1992) addresses the silencing of 'Asian', when the political category 'Black' is utilised in an essentialising way. This has serious implications for Asian cultural production in that the very specific experiences associated with particular history, language, religion and cultural traditions of Asian people are silenced. Just as the essential notions of the category 'Black' created a silencing of Asian cultural differences (and other ethnic groups), the category of

'British Asian' enforces assumptions of a homogenous community by utilising stereotypes based on notions of Indian identity. It makes specific groups within the South Asian community invisible. For example, Bombay cinema with a global pan-Indian audience presents national Indian identity as a normalising discourse; it is a source for transmitting Indian traditions, values and politics (just as Hollywood cinema acts as a medium for transmitting American culture and politics). This highlights the powerful imperial position of India in the South Asian subcontinent. Within the UK, the popularity of Bollywood has the capacity to silence Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan national cultures within the category British Asian. Bombay cinema idealises the North Indian, upper class, Hindu male heroes.

Hall's analysis of 'silencing' provides the platform for my starting point of overcoming this silence and producing knowledge about an everyday Asian cultural practice. Western film theory has generally ignored non-Western popular cinema. This has been changing recently as there has been an increase in academic writing on Bombay cinema (Gopinath, 2005, Desai, 2004). However, there is still a gap in sociological inquiry in investigating the role of Asian popular culture in constituting British Asian subjects (Sharma, Hutnyk & Sharma 1996; but see Gillespie 1995, an anthropological analysis of television watching by young people in Southall). It is this deficit that will be addressed by this study.

Bombay cinema practices are emotional experiences due to the interaction with the melodramatic, sensual and erotic aesthetics of film song visuals. Cinema practice creates a space of emotional flow where implicit and explicit meanings are exchanged and British Asian subjects make sense of themselves, their communities and the world. The feelings generated in cinematic experiences are formed by an interaction of historical and contemporary discourses. These are expressed as narratives of pleasure, pain, recognition, anger and survival. I explore the development of a melodramatic aesthetics in chapter three and compare theories of affect and melodrama. I argue that the relationship of power and knowledge and the way it acts on embodied emotions in shaping and reshaping different relations can be illuminated in cinematic practices. Emotions are embodied affects, which are not antagonistic to reason and not separate from cognitive responses. The common, sensuous and seductive experience of cinema transgresses the boundaries between image, song and emotion where songs and image become translated into an embodied emotional response; emotions, song, images and memory no longer function as separate categories but as surfaces in contact, engaged in constant activity of reciprocity (Sobchack, 2000). The Asianised spaces of the city, the shop window, the cinema screen together with the viewer's body and emotions intersect to articulate cinematic narratives in viewers' personal accounts. There is a gap between the actual experience of Bombay cinema viewing and the theory produced by contemporary film scholars to explain that experience. The gap exists in an understanding of

the ability of Bombay cinema to stimulate its viewers in multiple ways: sensually, cognitively, psychically and inter-subjectively. The repetition and passion of this connection creates a 'feeling and talking' community of emotion and affect.

In Bombay films, people go to see codes of their cultural life repeated and dramatised by actors they admire. This can be a space where codes and symbols of cultural life can be reconfigured and debates on morality, aesthetics and economics can be voiced. People go to the cinema to see themselves in a sequence of images that gives them gestures, faces, manners of speaking and walking, landscapes, colours and emotions – a range of identifications. Bombay cinematic discourse becomes an imaginary public space where collective lived experiences and meanings are created. The concept of a 'community of sentiment' (Appadurai 1996:8) describes this situation of thinking and feeling together that happens in this practice. This research hopes to investigate a similar idea of the 'communities of emotions' created in cinema practice and its significance in the everyday lived experience of British Asian subjects. To understand the respondents' concepts and themes arising in this study, I employ theoretical formulations developed by Laura Marks (1999), Brian Massumi (1995, who utilises and complements Gilles Deleuze's ideas of affect and the potentialising body), Vivian Sobchack (2000, who develops Merleau Ponty concept of the 'lived body'), Richard Dyer's (1977) ideas on non-representative aspects of entertainment, Geeta Kapur (1989), Madav Prasad (1996), Ravi Vasudevan (1989) and Ashish Rajadhyksha's (1987) ideas on Bombay cinema's melodramatic mode, Peter Brook's (1976) ideas on melodrama (he draws on Freud's oedipal crisis), and Ien Ang (1999) defence of women's viewing practice of masochistic melodrama.

For the respondents, the songs and dance visuals form a trigger point by evoking memories of past emotions and thoughts (Marks, 1999) in the habit of cinema viewing. Mark's notion of 'haptic visuality' describes visuality in terms of touch which is useful in framing the respondent's articulation of sensual experiences of cinema viewing. She uses these concepts to understand seeing, listening, feeling and memory and the ways in which we use our senses to create knowledge and stories of our identities. Her understanding of body removes the distinctions between mind and body, emotions and thinking. Sobchack (2000) uses the concept of 'the lived body', which becomes a site for sensuality, carnality and tactile sensations. In following Sobchack's theories, this study focuses on the non-hierarchical relation between body and songs, images, and memory. The emotional, sensory, cognitive and aesthetic impact of experiencing the multiple elements of Bombay cinema opens up the experience of time and history for my respondents. The diasporic public spheres (Appadurai 1990) created by transnational circuits of pleasure and pain provide the context in which people make sense of their world (as in chapter eight). I examine the role of the consumption of Bombay cinema in the cultural dynamic of British urban life in practices of 'going to the



cinema' and 'going clubbing'. The relationship of public and private to a gendered hierarchy has been much discussed in feminist literature, which outlined the lack of access to the public domain for many women (Landes, 1998). The mass mediation of Bombay cinema in cinema halls has opened up a public domain for women viewers. Though the younger generation had access to public domain through music, this was not a possibility for older generations, who did not participate due to their lack of cultural capital. A comparison between the narratives of public and private viewing illuminates the gendered and generational changes shaping British South Asian culture which is examined as part of my methodology. I hope to highlight the role of cinema experience in the private and public spheres in shaping the contours of a collective imaginary for the British South Asian Diaspora (Appadurai 1990).

I propose that the emotion and affect of Bombay cinematic experience forces us to think a different way of understanding the relationship between body, emotions and their connections with other bodies and its connection to the cinematic imaginary. My central argument is that that respondents validate 'Asian' over 'Western' by valuing the production of an inter-subjective sensibility in their cinema practice, which can go some way towards explaining this connection. The connections are emotional flows that pass through objects and images, emotions and subjects, and create intimate experiences. This may explain the comprehension involved in this particular cinematic experience because of its deep history in the South Asian imagination.

My questions originated in a bid to understand the popularity of cinema amongst Asian subjects of different ethnicity, religion, generation and class and the shaping of diasporic cinematic private and public spaces. The key research problems that I explore are:

1. How cultural practices of viewing and engaging with Bombay cinema are understood and articulated to produce desires for origin (back-home/memory/past) and nourish the struggles for recognition (local/here/present) in contemporary Britain?
2. How Bombay cinema is consumed and identified with by the British South Asian Diaspora. How are differences in viewing contested and negotiated in the production of cross-generation and cross-gender positions and affiliations? How do markers of identities and structures of exclusion such as class, gender, sexuality, age, religion, language, and region operate within the multiple discourse of Bombay cinema viewing?
3. What are the implications of participation in publicly visible cultural events such as 'going to cinema' for cultural identity? How do rituals associated with viewing practice create local spaces for cultural engagement through consumption and identification in a public domain?
4. How does the viewing of Bombay cinema in Britain transform the processes of its production in India? How do Bombay filmmakers consciously address the diasporic

audience? How does the transfer of meaning between London and Bombay through multidirectional cultural flows allow for new meanings to emerge?

5. How are the discourses of British-ness/Asian-ness continually re-organised and reclaimed by those on the margins to stake a claim to public recognition? How are certain cultural meanings given more authority than others and how does this translate into the cultural knowledge of British South Asian identities.

The circuit of culture model was adapted to suit the study in that my main focus was to understand the meanings created by the British Asian respondents' engagement with cinema and its significance in their daily life. It would not have been possible to analyze the respondents' meanings without analyzing the meanings created (historically, geographically, politically and socially) by the cinema producers, the cinema texts and by the inter-relations between the different moments in the circuit. To theorise how Asian difference is produced, it is necessary not to take identity or difference for granted but to examine how Asian subjects are produced and produce themselves through discourses. In researching micro-processes of viewing practice as desire-based consumption this study investigates how discourses represents 'Asian-ness' in opposition to 'British or Western' identity. This highlights unequal relations of inclusions/exclusions experienced by the 'Asian' subjects in their everyday lives. By not assuming the differences, this research does not naturalise them but makes them contingent on viewing practice. Naturalisation of differences makes them seem inescapable and entrenched in power relations. Viewing practices can bring about an oppositional discourse that offers competition to the dominant discourse to what Asian-ness means or what Asian visibility should include. The meanings that are produced about a cultural object do not depend on a linear relationship between the producers, text and the audience but are shaped by macro and micro processes as well. The central argument is that Bombay cinema experience is a contradictory space of formation of 'Asian' identity. The 'Asian' identity is validated by articulating its differences to a Western identity and the 'Asian' difference that is produced and valued is that of an inter-subjective way of being and connecting.

The central thesis is that the respondents validate their 'Asian' identity by creating notion of 'Asian' sensibility which values: interdependence over independence; shared interests over self-interest; and sociality over individuality. The circuit of culture model was useful in that it allowed for complex and ambivalent interpretations because there is not a simple relation of determination between the different moments. This revealed a historical depth and the unstable meaning formation in a transnational circuit of culture. The analytical chapters reveal different histories of meaning formations about the Indian state, the cinema industry, the changes in the genre, the contexts of watching cinema within the home and its mobilisation in

community events. The increased consumption and popularity of Bombay cinema since the 1990s has permitted the creation of public space that has led to gendered transformations of leisure practices. In my research I devoted most of my analytical time to the interviews with British Asian respondents. The textual analysis of cinematic texts was to supplement this. One of the weaknesses of the model was that it is difficult to do full justice to the circuit and the analysis is inevitably partial due to lack of time.

I now provide an overview of the remaining chapters. Chapter Two reflects upon my plural research methodological approach, in which I use a feminist philosophy of critical reflexivity, a cultural studies relational model of the 'circuit of culture', and ethnographic insights on modes of authority in writing strategies. I explore two key power relations: between the interviewer and the interviewee and between the viewer and the Bombay cinema. I argue that a critical reflexive approach which uses a range of methods to reveal the multiple discourses constructing the interviewer, the interviewees (as the cultural subjects) and Bombay cinema (as a cultural object) can produce a complex picture of the subjectivities that are produced in the cultural engagement with cinematic practice.

Chapter Three is a combination of a literature review of Bombay cinema and an ethnographic account of interviews with cinema and cultural academics, cinema professionals and film journalists in India. I explore the history and biography of Bombay cinema by examining the changes in the Bombay cinematic genre and themes from its birth to the present. I highlight the three key debates shaping cinematic texts: the representation of gender using tropes in a 'traditional' and 'modern' binary; the class conflict created through the notion of the ideal subject and 'good and 'bad' culture; and the representation of religion through unity and difference. The two key transformations in the last two decades have been the globalisation of Indian culture and the rise of Hindu fanaticism. The selling of commodified 'authentic' Indian culture to the Diaspora through the transnational cultural industry of Bollywood (Rajadhyksha, 1999) mobilises a reconfiguration of diasporic identities. I reflect upon the cinema's exhibitionist aesthetic, which is primarily a melodramatic address combining traditional and modern artistic ideas to produce a heterogeneous aesthetic. This multi-sensorial and affective cinematic address allows for the possibility of a range of subjectivities to be produced. I argue that cinematic aesthetic reflects and reproduces popular culture and therefore becomes a site of popular memory and an archive of historical changes.

Chapter Four is a film analysis chapter and I analyse three sets of films made over four decades. I contrast *Mother India* (1957, Mehboob Khan) with *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975, Ramesh Sharma), *Deewar* (1975, Yash Chopra) with *Sholay* (1975, Ramesh Sippy), *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977, Manmohan Desai) with *Bombay* (1995, Mani Ratnam). I argue that the

relations of gender, class and religion are mobilised in these films to produce an ideal Indian identity. I chose these films to analyse because of their immense popularity and because I wanted to foreground key issues highlighted in chapter three by a comparative textual analysis.

The next five chapters focus on interview analysis. The key themes emerging from the interviews pointed to narratives of enjoyment and celebration, and a continual struggle over the meanings of 'Asian', 'Western' and 'British' categories in the processes of a positioning of British Asian identities. The contestation around key issues of family, gender, sexuality and religion underscore cultural identifications and dis-identifications. These narratives include seeing 'glimpses of oneself' (representations being largely absent when the respondents were growing up, though this has been gradually changing) to a cathartic release through an engagement with cyclical narratives of discovery, loss and reconciliation. The subjects of family, culture, and identity are employed to guard against exclusion, racism and the threat of a changing world. The ideologies of decolonisation as an opposition to Western hegemony are also employed as suturing devices by the respondents to create coherent and strategic British Asian identities.

Chapter Five examines the much parodied but revered symbol of 'Mother', who becomes a complex melodramatic space through a chain of signification and identification. The emotional charge associated with this symbol is historically constructed through the power of her suffering, victimisation, renunciation and morality. The symbol of the 'mother' generates contestations in viewing practices and represents historical and cultural struggles.

In Chapter Six, I reflect upon the respondents' criticism of the aesthetic and sexual display of female bodies symbolised by the Miss Universe figure. Though male bodies are also displayed these representations were parodied rather than criticised. The shift from a Mother India to Miss Universe syndrome articulates dramatic changes taking place in Indian economic and cultural life; it also reflects anxieties associated with these changes in British Asian communities. Respondents challenged the regulation and disciplinary norms of the perfect 'Miss Universe body.' They also expressed anger over the fetishisation of white norms of beauty and femininity internalised in this ideal, which negated their racialised bodies.

In Chapter Seven, the respondents' contradictory narratives criticised the excessive sexual display of the heroine and simultaneously validated aspects of her sexual performance as sexually assertive in her expression of self-pleasure and sexual autonomy (specifically relating to the first female Superstar, Madhuri Dixit from 1990s onward). Sexual autonomy and assertiveness becomes a space to express Western cosmopolitan subjectivity of choice and freedom for British Asian respondents. I argue that the excess affective pleasures of the female heroine and the song and dance sequences generated multiple consumption practices,

which included miming, impersonation and parody in private and public spaces such as weddings, clubs and community dance competitions.

Chapters Eight and Nine explore the pleasures of song identifications. In Chapter Eight I delve into the pleasures of pain in the song practices of cinema. I argue that the respondents articulate a complex affect of the pleasure of pain in their engagement with cinema. The recurring pain of the feminine body in the songs recalls the pain of displacement of migration (of self or parents) and loss of home (real or imagined) for the respondents. The compulsion to return to the site of loss and pain through the song scenes expresses a melancholic nostalgia to experience the loss repetitively and to not forget the struggles of displacement and marginality. I argue that the development of the cinematic figure of the 'tawaif' (courtesan) is because of her pain and yearning. She symbolises the pleasure of pain and the respondents' loss. A complex affect is expressed where the pleasure in pain arouses historical knowledge of cultural and religious devotional aesthetics<sup>2</sup> and of Urdu poetry. The desire to transcend suffering but simultaneously to feel the pain of yearning; the pleasure of sharing pain also creates the pleasures of an inter-subjective sensibility. The significance of spiritual, erotic, intoxicating affect, which overcomes personal boundaries, is often the subject of devotional (particularly of Sufi) singing. The shared pleasure of melancholia, marginality, sensuality and solidarity creates spaces and relations of intersubjectivity. This can lead to the formation of ephemeral communities based on sharing and intimacy. The need and desire to create an emotional community for subordinate and marginal groups in a society to survive hostile conditions is a repeated strategy.

Chapter nine, I consider the affect of belonging through respondents' interaction with cinema's utopian aesthetic of the pleasures of the songs, romance, fantasy and eroticism. I argue that song identification and its utopian possibilities is the key to negotiations by diverse groups of Asians in Britain to see 'glimpses of themselves' in the cinema aesthetic. I highlight the sectarian conflicts respondents face when interacting with Bombay cinema. The different contestations of religion, race and class are based on social, economic and psychic factors but are mediated temporarily through cinema's aesthetic. I argue that respondents create subjectivities where an inter-subjective sensibility is valued as respondents explore the pleasures of home, comfort, romance, eroticism, sectarian conflicts, fears of deculturation and the desire for the decolonisation of Bombay cinema.

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<sup>2</sup> I have defined 'devotional aesthetics' in Chapter eight (p224) as a way of relating to the world, which is an intense desire or affect for the beloved. The 'beloved' can be an abstract idea, divine form or human. The intensity or affect of devotion is fervour, intoxication, and a loss of self into this affect in yearning to unite with the other. It is a sensory-based emotional relationship. It incorporates a suffering, yearning and an aesthetic of the expression of pain.

# CHAPTER 2

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

In this chapter I outline the research methodology used in investigating British South Asian subjects' experiences of popular cultural practices in relation to Bombay cinema. I explore the theoretical and conceptual reasoning underlying my decisions for selection of methods deployed in the process of knowledge creation. In my research design, I deploy a plural methodological approach (Rose, 2001) appropriating the feminist philosophy of critical reflexivity and the cultural studies relational model of the 'circuit of culture', as well as ethnographic insights on modes of authority in writing strategies. I employ the 'circuit of culture model' (Johnson, 1986, du Gay *et al.* 1997) to explore the relations between the processes of production, representation, reception, consumption, and regulation in the diasporic circulation of Bombay cinema.

The aim of this chapter is to clarify and therefore demystify my thought processes in the production of this knowledge. In the first part of this chapter I explore the process of deciding which theories and concepts would underpin my research into the articulation of a cultural identity and the embodied experiences of a specific media form. In the second part I explore the process of the 'circuit of culture' and the meanings produced through this model. In the third part, I explore and reflect upon ways in which I used the chosen research methods and techniques.

My aim was to produce knowledge about British Asian social realities or glimpses of South Asian lived experiences and cultures through the interpretation of interviews with cinema viewers. I wanted to understand how British Asian subjects created meanings of cultural codes and symbols of cinema in their life here. I wanted to elicit how 'Asian-ness' as difference is produced and reproduced through the articulation of this everyday engagement. By 'everyday engagement' I mean that cinema watching formed some part of the respondent's life. There were many differences in viewing patterns as some watched films once a month whilst others who had satellite TV watched them every day. Some respondents watched films as part of their daily routine, which structured their time and space on a daily basis, whilst others would leave the TV on in the background. For those who watched it rarely, it was more of a special occasion, a leisure activity shaped around their busy working lives. I interviewed twenty-five viewers who saw themselves as 'Asian' or 'British Asians', apart from two who were overseas students. The main differences amongst the respondents were those of: gender, age, national origin, region, language, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic background and length of migratory settlement in Britain. Research questions were defined to

begin the process of research and then as research progressed, other questions arose. My questions originated in a bid to understand the popularity of cinema amongst Asian subjects. I wanted to understand the rewards it offered. The research questions guided the study and I explored a range of themes: identification and consumption; differences in viewing; inter-generational and gender relations; public and private viewing; rituals of viewing; the transfer and translations of cultural meanings between London and Bombay; and notions of Asian-ness, belonging and the desire for origin.

The sequence in which the chapters were written is set out here. Chapter three and four covering the history of Indian cinema and textual analysis were the first to be written (between October to December 2001). I then began the interviews in London through targeting: networks; students on Goldsmiths campus; and the Asian video shops in Tooting. I started writing the analytical chapters in August 2002 based on interviews in London. In June 2003, I went to Manchester and Oldham to target the cinema hall at the Trafford Centre, and the 'Asian' shops in Rusholme. I also went back to my earlier work related contacts in Oldham. Once I had written a few chapters, I went back to Tooting Video shops to find more interviews. In addition, I also targeted Club Kali whilst I was writing up the analytical chapters in late 2003. I went to India to for three months (14<sup>th</sup> September to 15<sup>th</sup> December 2004) to interview cinema academics in Delhi and Bangalore (also targeted Organisation focusing on Indian cinema) and the film professionals in Bombay. I partially integrated these interviews in my already written analytical and literature review chapters. Between January and September 2005, I wrote the last two analytical chapters and revised the earlier ones. Finally I wrote the research methodology and the introduction before submitting the thesis.

I began with a literature review, which allowed me to create a picture of the contexts of my research. Theories that inform my research are derived from different disciplines and situate my interpretations of respondents' talk. I explored feminist and transnational cultural theories of experience, identifications, identity and meanings to interpret ethnographic interviews. I explored theories on subject formations, which included culture, class, gender, race and postcolonial theories (Hall, 1991, Skeggs, 1994, Rajagopal, 1999). Feminist study of cinema, culture and media (Gledhill, 1987, Stacey 1994, Ang 1996), embodiment, and spectatorship (Marks, 1999, Sobchack, 2000) provided crucial understandings of the interviews. A discourse analysis of the production of cinematic texts was situated in postcolonial and transnational cultural theories. I explored the reproduction of 'Asian' cultural (British Asian) practices, spaces, identities and communities by deploying race and culture theories (Hall, 1991, 1992). The theoretical framework I highlight here is to understand three main relationships: emotional experiences and relations; cultural identifications with cinema; and Diasporic relations of self and space.

From this, I created a theoretical framework and constructed research questions. The concepts and the research questions then lead to an exploration of a range of methods to select from and further decisions were made in discussions with supervisors to begin the research. A continual process of going back to data and reading, re-reading and connecting it with theories allowed me to create new patterns of interpretations and a reconfiguration of present theories. Initially I chose theories to help me determine how to structure my research and then through interview analysis formulated new modes of theory by which to conduct the study. This is also part of the grounded theory approach and is pivotal in a critical reflexive method.

I utilised 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Seale, 2004) to generate data and to evaluate and analyse my findings. I used thematic and discourse analysis to code my data, which generated new concepts, and directed further data collection. I used grounded theory to interpret, analyse and evaluate the interviews and ethnographic accounts because it is a reflexive research theory, and is a method that is based on a process of repeated observations, theory creation and evaluation. Grounded theory is a meaning making research method, which generates ideas, concepts and theories from collecting and analysing data from repeated and dynamic observations of social life (Seale, 1998). It reconciles aspects of realistic and interpretivist traditions, in that it has an inductive logic which subscribes to theoretical generalisations from a particular setting to the general. Seale (1998:230) proposes that, 'The discovery of grounded theory supplies a logic for ethnographic research helping it gain scientific status.' A process of continual re-evaluation of observations in light of emerging concepts is central to grounded theoretical approach and ensures the quality of research. The micro politics of cinema experience can then illuminate the macro politics of British Asian experiences.

Glaser (1967) emphasises the centrality of continual comparison whilst analysing data to generate categories and their different properties. This method of constant comparison is essential in systematically constructing and enhancing theoretical categories and their interconnections to other analytical themes. The emerging theory coming out of the data analysis directs data collection and analysis to explore emerging concepts and theories. This process can be limitless but usually research and funding frameworks prevent limitless data collection. Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose a technique of theoretical saturation, which is the point the researcher, feels confident that her category is saturated and therefore can stop collecting any new data. Grounded theory was a popular method for anthropologists. However, Denzin (1988), a proponent of ethnography has criticised the limitation of this method because he argues that a scientific coding scheme interferes in listening to people's common sense ideas and theories about their lives. He questions the desire for the authority of scientific method in ethnographic methods.



I wanted to produce ethnography of Bombay cinema viewing which would situate different voices and enable an interpretation of the context of articulations of those voices. I was not interested in the authority of an objective account but more in a multi-layered account, which illuminated historical, geographical relations of the respondents' creative stories. The writing of my research then becomes a space of production of a specific story about British Asian subjects, an account where knowledge is generated through the interactions between respondents, myself, and the history and techniques of social research. Geertz (1973) espouses that the task of ethnography is to produce its own distinctive form of knowledge, which he calls 'thick description.' 'Thick description' refers to densely layered description with many discourses interacting to form a map of cultural meaning. Geertz's analysis interprets 'culture as a system of signs.' Therefore the ethnographer, by deciphering the significance of different patterns of meanings of these systems of signs, comes close to producing a combination of primarily discourse, but also to some extent semiotic analysis.

Meaning about Bombay cinema is produced in many different sites and circulated through different processes and practices. I focus on the relations and the sites of meaning making of Bombay cinema in its production, representation, reception and consumption. Bombay cinema is produced not only by filmmakers and other film professionals but also by advertisers, marketing professionals, academics, magazines, journalists, viewers and consumers. Needless to say state, national and transnational discourses of regulation and proliferation also shape its production. To understand different meanings that are encoded in the production of this cultural product, I interviewed twenty-one key informants in Bombay, Delhi and Bangalore. The key informants were from three groups who produce knowledge about Bombay cinema. These were academics, journalists and film professionals, the latter including producers, actors and writers. To understand a biography of Bombay cinema I used discourse analysis and aspects of semiotic analysis to deconstruct and unravel different meanings being circulated by cinematic images, sounds and narratives. Lastly and most importantly, I explored the reception of this popular cultural product by interviewing twenty-five individual viewers in London and Manchester, in order to explore the kinds of meanings that are created by them. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed with permission. I used grounded theory analytical insights and methods to generate themes and concepts. The key themes that emerged from analysis were: gendered roles, especially those of 'mother', 'Miss Universe', 'vamp', and 'courtesan'; cultural notions of femininities and masculinities; fantasies of romance and the heterosexual imperative; sexual expressions; Western and Asian notions of body and beauty; memory and mourning; melodrama and suffering; fantasy and embodied sensations; the loss of self in sensations; and a desire for an inter-subjective sensibility which valued emotion, intimacy and relationships.

## **Section 1: Feminist Epistemology and Methodological Approaches**

Feminist knowledge production aims to empower women (or research subjects) in the research process and interrogate institutional epistemological norms that are based on a disavowal of the categories of gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, class, sexuality and disability. Feminism and cultural studies are most strongly connected to one another in their common concern with 'voicing' of or 'visibilising' subjugated knowledges of the marginalised, the silenced and the oppressed groups by questioning normalised practices of culture, society and institutions, which also includes academia. In this way, both have aimed to represent the experiences of marginal groups. British cultural studies began by studying working-class experiences and the subcultures of the young (see Williams 1958, Willis, 1977, Hebdige, 1979).

Feminists challenged the power structures of objectivity inherent in masculinist epistemology and validation of the rational autonomous neutral 'knower' (as Haraway, 1991, calls it 'the God-like view from nowhere'). Feminists have transformed the definition of objectivity and re-appropriated it to include the subjectivity of the researcher (Code, 1991). The subjectivity of the researcher is integral to her objectivity and her quest and desire for knowledge. She can only produce situated knowledge from a located position that imparts a partial view (Haraway, 1991). Harding (1991, 2004) using Standpoint theory calls this strong objectivity where critical reflexivity is vital for producing knowledge. The first task central to feminist research methods is that of critical reflexivity. Reflexivity is a crucial process of evaluation in producing knowledge to evaluate theories in relation to their condition of production. In this research a critical reflexivity approach means I needed to question my assumptions, critically examine my process of enquiry, consider my effects on the research setting (whether in terms of my presence in the interview or in my observations or in the way I select and code the data) and how my theoretical framework shaped the process of data collection and analysis. In what ways did my funding or my academic supervisor' or department's interests affect processes of research? Critical reflexivity also involved attention to writing strategies that as a researcher I deployed to construct a research account. I adopted a self-critical reflexive approach towards the research by engaging with interpretations of feminist cultural studies in producing knowledge where an interrogation of ontology (the context of the researcher's being and the discourses constructing the research, the institution, funding, the supervisor) is central to the epistemology (the theorising of the process of knowledge production); however ontology is not epistemology.

The criticism directed at feminist reflexive (constructionist) epistemology is that the level of reflexivity required could produce too many contradictions and paradoxes that can create an impasse in the research process and undermine the researcher. Inherent in this debate is also a fear of losing objectivity and sliding into the subjective relativism of no one

discourse having more validity than another. Though there is truth in this criticism, it can also be argued that these contradictions and paradoxes are gaps that reveal the power relations between researchers and those they choose to research. Furthermore, the investigation of contradictions and paradoxes resists closure, certainty, finality and simplification in the last instance. Therefore this can result in a more complex analysis that can have wider implications. A good example of this is the study of media by Valerie Walkerdine (1990, as outlined in Rose, 2001) whose accounts of watching a family watch a video of Rocky II, was dismissed by many cultural researchers (Lull: 1990) as being too personal therefore not objective. Walkerdine felt that whilst researching a working-class family's viewing of Rocky, she was appalled at the father's (a working-class man) pleasure (by cheering) of violence when the boxer Rocky smashes his opponent. In a later viewing of the film by herself, she took pleasure in Rocky winning as a working-class man. She argued that her disdain for the father as a working-class man was because the class dynamics of the situation were invisible to her as a feminist academic horrified at the male violence. She came to the conclusion that she was complicit with the ways in which the academy so often denigrates working-class understandings.

### **1.1 Critical Reflexivity and the Researcher**

Participant observation makes the researcher a research instrument and therefore critical reflexivity is required. My knowledge and my motivation shaped the conceptual decisions I made and in turn this framed the research questions and the interview format I employed. This is not to say that the research process is an individual process but instead the motivation and desire driving the research was mine. The process of research is very much a collective knowledge production as conversations with friends, relatives, tutors and many others shapes the growth of the an idea and slowly it takes root and eventually becomes a reality. The research process is very much an extension of the researcher's desires and writing of her self. The personal and political motive for my research came out of a political belief that Black / South Asian identities are not just constructed through categories of 'race' and 'religion' but also through a 'politics of pleasure' amongst other factors. Within a sociological framework, there is gap in knowledge production about the politics of pleasures among British South Asian subjects. Though there are changes in contemporary sociological representations of British Asian cultures (Puar and Raghuram 2003, Alexander, 2000), some of the dominant racialised representation still prevail. These are of Asian women who are either sexually objectified as 'Oriental and exotic' or as an 'oppressed housewife' needing to be rescued from a primitive sexist culture or as an 'oppressed young woman' waiting to be rescued from arranged marriages by a Western progressive and civilising discourse. It is also difficult to find representations of Asian men which were not depicted as 'effeminate', or 'gangsters' or,

‘Muslim fundamentalists.’ I wanted to research and produce knowledge which both filled the gap in existing knowledge about Asian subjects and which also challenged many of the dominant orientalist and racist ideas about them. This research hopes to provide a space for the voicing of stories of everyday culture of a marginal group. Activists from feminist, black, queer and disability movements used similar methods of voicing of counter stories, as a powerful form of critique of mainstream epistemology. They retrieved the telling of stories as a political act – to voice was to visibilise oneself against the grand narratives of patriarchy, racism, heterosexism and able-bodied normalisation. The voices of these groups of people had been erased out of history and knowledge production. In earlier interviews carried out with South Asian women, there was a kind of urgency expressed by the respondents. Shabnam (a British Pakistani woman, aged 41, from Manchester) who is a writer and a poet and community activist elaborates on her political identity and speaks for me, when she says:

For me as an Asian Pakistani woman living in Britain, in a sense as British Asian we are looking at anything which will give us a Black identity and within the Asian cultural struggle, film is part of that cultural struggle. When I left home and went to study in Manchester I became conscious of my identity and the politics around race and identity. I began to speak Urdu and there was a kind of revival of Asian films in the 1980s and 1990s and a sense that young Asian people were taking their identity seriously and that there was strength in identity of British Asians.

Shabnam’s identities include being ‘Black’ and ‘Asian’ and ‘Pakistani’ and they are interrelated and the films are part of cultural and anti-racist struggle to be visible and be counted in Britain.

### **1.1.1 Cultural Stranger**

My quest to understand Bombay cinematic experiences began when I worked with a group of home-workers in Oldham in 1991. One cold winter day, I made my way up the hill of Park Road in Oldham and knocked on doors to introduce myself to the home-workers in the area and to give out flyers on employment rights for home-workers. I was trying to set up a home-working support group in Glodwick, Oldham. Samira had translated the flyer into Urdu and Punjabi and also informed me of the streets where mainly Pakistan women (working from home, sewing skirts for 65 pence a piece) lived. In fact, in this area, many women’s access to the labour market was only through homeworking, as many women did not speak English and often found it too conflictual to work outside the home. A few weeks earlier I had received a phone call from a woman asking about employment rights for workers working from home, as their employer was refusing to pay them. At the Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit, we had run a winter campaign on homeworking in partnership with National Homeworking group, Greater Manchester Homeworking group and National Citizen’s Advice Bureau to increase

awareness of homeworking as we were lobbying the government to permit full employment rights to homeworkers. When I got to Oldham, I was a bit exotic (due to my differences) for the women here because I was Indian and not Pakistani, single and not married (at my age) and I was employed. However, after the initial discomfort, our communication was not too difficult because I spoke a version of Urdu and because I had knowledge of Bombay cinema. Cinema talk broke ice and other obstacles of single status. When I visited another area in Oldham to target Bangladeshi women homeworkers, and where there was a language barrier, we were able to communicate though hesitantly in broken Hindustani and filmi talk. Also I understood Bangla because it resembled my mother tongue, Maithili (a language spoken in the state of Bihar in India). When I visited India for fieldwork I came across independent filmmakers who were using Bombay cinematic conventions and language to work (for organisations or for research) on issues of domestic violence and masculinity with different communities.

Once in Oldham, I became aware of the importance of videos and satellite TV (especially Zee television) in the lives of first and second-generation Asian subjects, mainly women, who had limited access to public spaces. Most homeworker's houses had videos and some had cable. I also came to understand the power of Bombay cinematic discourse in countering loneliness, depression, and isolation in homes of Asian women home-workers. This understanding was then reinforced when I observed and talked to my friends and with my mother and her friends about the role of Bombay cinema in their lives. The public gaze of racialised contempt and the private gendered realities could be momentarily transcended and exchanged by viewing and consuming a few hours of Bombay cinema. Most women talked about the familiarity of the language, images, values and songs that evoked memories of 'home' and familiarity though this was also true for some men I talked to. So, my motivation for this project was to understand my own and many other Asian subject's close relationship to Bombay cinema. As I started to talk to other women and men, my own understanding of structures of a marginal community and the cultural resources it deploys to survive (by using what is available) and exist have deepened. More and more within the context of the UK, Bombay cinematic engagement has opened up public spaces for groups of people who had very little access to any leisure space. I echo Probyn (1993b) in her excavation of 'the self' when she states:

I want to stretch my experience beyond the merely personal, not as a way of transcendence but as a way of reaching her experiences, the experiences of selves and women. In other words, I want to put forward a mode of theorising that encourages lines of analysis that move from her experience to mine, and mine to hers. (Quoted in Skeggs 1995:4)

### 1.1.2 Activism and Academia

When I started my PhD I often had to explain the reasons for choosing this subject. This was not a straightforward 'why' explanation but a why which implied, why are you wasting your time or have not you got something better to do with your time and why are they funding you? Should not they be funding something more worthwhile such as 'the rise of fundamentalism in Asian communities' etc. This was true both in academic and activist circles. I must admit I felt ashamed sometimes and angry other times that they did not understand that what I was studying was political, a politics of imagination no less or the politics of the media...that politics had moved from the streets to the home and we had to be prepared in different ways. Was I not studying the politics of culture? Of course it did not help that Bombay films were viewed as politically oppressive. In addition, it was not original as it plagiarized Hollywood films and adapted them to Indian contexts. Of course, the reason I felt ashamed was because in an earlier incarnation, I had developed a strong sense of identity as a community activist and Black Rights Worker in a Law Centre, and as a Project Worker on low pay. My PhD took away my activist credibility but gave me no academic status. As an activist, I had a very strong sense of what was right and what was wrong and I did not have any confusion in discerning truth and demanding direct action. The loss of confidence due to confusion is normal for people changing their environments. Needless to say, like some of my respondents, I had also suffered from the 'not cool' status of Bollywood when young Asians only listened to R'n'B, soul, funk, and some remixes, and felt that we were 'fob' (fresh off the boat) because we listened to Hindi songs, like our parents, and had not been intelligent enough to adapt to the new environment. The levels of adaptations required in the master's eye is a continual process of survival and learning in the processes of cultural and social normalization that is to be a 'good or bad' native.

During the research process, I became aware of significant negotiations of meanings employed by me to understand viewing practices of Bombay cinema. I became conscious of my deep embroilment in both Bollywood spectacles and emotional quagmires, especially with family and friends. There were many angry arguments that ensued whilst watching some films with family members and this has changed perceptions of my subjectivity. The arguments are spaces of anger and judgement but they also open up spaces of engagement with each other's views and subjectivity. My focus was to explore how gendered (and racialised) subjectivities are constructed through the discourse of Bombay cinema in Britain. This focus was on the processes by which subjects are: gendered - the disciplining and normalising discourse of Bombay cinema; racialised - the continual negotiation of position between Asian and Western categories; excluded by - racism, sexism, mental and social isolation from family and community due to migration; and included - by bonding with others on commonalities such as viewing Bombay cinema through their experiences. Walkerdine (2003) explores how we

understand the experience of research, the researched and ourselves. In the particular experience of doing research (spending time, knowing the interviewees), one starts to believe that this gives one access to particular forms of knowledge which others may not know about; that it is authentic and privileged. I agree with Scott's (1992) idea that subjects are constituted through experience and this explains that (aspects of my) subjectivity will also be constituted by the experience of my research. The link between the researcher's 'being' and her 'knowing' is vital but it does not mean that the possession of the experience of interviewing allows me as a researcher, a critical understanding of all Asian subjects or even the ones being interviewed. As Haraway points out, it is a complex politics of location at stake not relativism. A politics of location recognises that I can have commonalities with my respondents but these are by no means universal. (Haraway, 1988).

## **1.2 Empirical Interviews**

Both feminist and cultural studies methodologies have utilised interview and ethnography to research their subjects. Interviews were used to study popular cultural forms and explore cinematic and media experiences of audiences/viewers. Anthropologists have criticised the use of ethnography in feminist cultural studies because they do not fulfil the anthropologist's rigorous demands of lengthy 'immersion' in fieldwork. But, feminist and cultural studies (Rose, 2001) researchers have argued that there are good reasons for the deficiencies of cultural studies in this respect due to lack of time and funding. I used a selection of practical methods such as interview and participant observations at two research sites. In addition, when doing cinema analysis, I found that getting access to people's houses for suitable lengths of time is difficult requirement in ethnographic study. Interviews were used to explore not only what respondents watched (resource) but also the sense they made of cinema (topic). A questionnaire or survey can determine what people watch but only through depth interviews was I able to decipher their interpretations of their viewing experiences. In this way, as a researcher I can have access to subject's interpretations in terms of their opinions, patterns of language usage, arguments and theories (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984). The flexibility of semi-structured questions allows a space for valuing people's knowledge and opening up of interviewee's voices and language, in a way that achieves depth and complexity. I deployed a feminist approach, which is based on the agency of the interviewees rather than viewing them as passive. It also takes in to consideration the importance of the existence of context-bound, constructed social realities, and the impact of the researcher on the research process.

Instead of interviewing, I could have focused solely on cinematic texts and underscored the significance of symbolic codes such as 'mother' 'sad songs' 'vamps' and 'courtesans.' I could have researched the meanings produced by Bombay cinema by just doing textual and discourse analysis of films. Though I have done this as one aspect of my research, the central

core of my research has been to focus on British Asian cinematic experiences. For example, in my chapter on textual analysis, I come to the conclusion that heroic sacrifice in films sutures the spectator to the cinema by reconciling and affirming the spectator's emotional attachments. This is repeated in my analysis of viewing practice when the pleasure of pain provides a much stronger form of emotional attachment than other pleasures. So, could I have reached similar conclusions by analysis of cinematic texts only? What are the differences? I believe that the differences are as follows; that textual analysis closes the analysis whereas interviews leave it open; the textual analysis cannot produce the depth of the ontological differences of the interview analysis; the ambivalence is more intense in interview analysis; and the contradictions in the different voices are more obvious.

Therefore I am arguing that empirical analysis creates a more ambiguous text and therefore keeps us open to the realities of life. If discourses of history, culture, locality and dimensions of structures produce bodies, they would produce interview transcripts with different investments. For example, I discovered that respondents identified with the pain of the suffering of the female heroine due the intensity or affect of the pain. They also identified with the performance of determination by female heroes. As Sonali (a British Punjabi woman from London, aged thirty-one) said, when watching the female heroine dance on broken glass in the film *Sholay (The Spark, 1975, Ramesh Shippy)*, she felt the heroine exhibited endurance and was challenging the villain by saying "I have got one on you." Sonali focuses on the 'battle of wills' between the heroine and the villain and thus between men and women.(please refer to the textual analysis of this film in Chapter four). In her experience, this is the case for her where as a woman she has to perform and find a space of winning in unusual circumstances. Another instance of ambiguity is when many female respondents accept the sexual objectification of the female heroine and go beyond that to enjoy the homoerotic sensuality in interacting with her performance in chapter six. An example of change in cultural practices is that of Shahid (a British Pakistani man of thirty from Rochdale) and Irfan (a British Bangladeshi man of twenty-three from East London). They both adapted to the changing realities of the popularity of Bombay cinema and taught themselves to engage with Bombay cinema in order to impress a loved one or due to desire for work or for academic capital. Just doing discourse and textual analysis of cinema could not have discovered these instances. I am therefore arguing for methodological pluralism, which has the capacity to produce a dense and thick description of a situated reality.

Interviewees like all speakers have rhetorical strategies (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) that achieve particular effects and what they include and exclude depends on multiple factors of their location, biography and their comfort with the interview situation. If the researcher and the respondent interact dynamically to produce meaningful conversations and stories, this can confer agency on the respondents. Needless to say, this happens sometimes and depends on



the two people involved in the interview conversation (matching and trust between researcher and the respondent) and their sharing of locations. Respondents can ask question of the researcher (which is limited by the framework of topic guidelines) and suggest analysis and theories as many did in the interviews. I used my topic guideline to ask questions and prompt the respondents in their stories. I used the questions as a focusing and a framing device (Seale, 1998). I was flexible with this structure, as I wanted to leave enough space for the respondents to communicate their experiences in their own words. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview permits the space for respondents to participate and offer their own theories, accounts and explanations. This technique generated a specific kind of language. Some of the phrases used by the respondents were 'Bollywood is like going home', seeing 'glimpses of ourselves', 'learning about home', 'suffering mothers', 'sexy ladies' and many more.

### **1.2.1 Experience, Translation and Authority**

The concept of experience within feminism has often been given authority and the commonality of the experience of 'women' as a category has always produced dilemmas about essentialism for feminist theorists. Within early feminism the category of "experience," was utilised as evidence and was troubling because this was used to naturalise and essentialise women's differences exactly in the same way the masculinist discourses had done but for different purposes than those of subjugating women. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, and how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world. Standpoint theorists such as Hartstock (1983) and Hill Collins (1990) argue that the experience of subjugation generates authentic experience of that condition, and grants authority to that experience. They argue that the experience of being a woman or black person generates specific knowledge that cannot be known by others who do not have that experience. They have been criticised (Scott 1992) for collapsing ontology with epistemology that a subject's being determines what and how she/he can know. Within feminist cultural studies the idea of resistance identified with marginalised groups can fall in the same essentialist trap, in that being marginalised necessarily means one takes on a resistant/subversive positionality (Ang 1990). Political and economic marginalisation does not guarantees resistance to power or a critical understanding of power structures and ideology. The criticism of feminist film theory was based on films unilaterally constructing positions of identification and meaning. Feminist cultural theorists need to be cautious not to create an essentialism of a critical or contestatory viewer due to factors such as experiences of race, class or gender.

For example when respondents relate their accounts of shame and isolation, which had silenced their expression of experiences of Bombay cinema for the fear of being ridiculed and excluded, this can be understood as a process of racialisation of Asian subjects but it does not necessarily mean that these Asian subjects have understanding of other forms of racism, though of course some do. The processes of subject formation require identifications. What to include and what to exclude in that process is very much learnt by an understanding of a hierarchy of taste distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984). The subjects have learnt that Bombay cinema, as a product of India, was devalued for its songs, stories and emotions and for its 'backwardness.' The Orientalist discourses of the West as 'the progressive and the developed civilisation' and therefore 'knowing the right way of being' predominates. In the same way, stories of the representations of cultural norms of femininity and masculinity provide a space of struggle to understand processes of gendered and classed subject formation.

British South Asian film experience is constructed by a number of discourses in the context of postcolonial, racialised, gendered, classed politics of U.K, and like any analytical category is discursive, contextual, contingent and contested. I use a number of discourses to interpret the interview conversation on film experiences, which are themselves interpretations by subjects who are deploying a number of discourses, even if they are not explicit. My task is to interpret these from my location, unravel those discourses and make them explicit. However the talk of cultural identification is often articulated in naturalised categories, in terms of the authenticity of experience and culture. In analysing respondent's responses to see what contexts and relations produce the desire to naturalise experience as authentic and different, I explore processes of subjectification or subject formation; not the fact of difference (based on race, gender, class) but how that difference is being produced. Filmic talk and experiences mobilise ideas around 'Asian' identity due to the specificity of sound, images, bodies, rituals and values based on differences and similarities.

Bombay cinema is a Hindustani (a mixture of Hindi and Urdu) text but is consumed by most South Asian linguistic groups. The problems of language barriers were partially overcome by my linguistic skills and also by translating and integrating the questions in an accessible everyday language. However, I was aware that in a similar way to representing respondents' words and meanings, I was not only translating words into another language (Urdu to English) but also everyday language and understandings into an academic language. There were many levels of translation I was responsible for and I was not always sure if it would be an accurate representation of their language and intended meanings. With first generation respondents for whom English was a second language, it was evident that they first translated their mother tongue into English before communicating with me. This produced a very different language from the younger generations who were born and brought up in Britain. For example, the metaphors used or the structuring of language or the way issues of

gender were communicated was totally different. What was a live issue was also different for people who were living with parents and family compared to those who had left home and either lived by themselves or with partners. Interviews with male respondents produced very different stories when talking about sex or emotions. This was obviously due to my gendered identity.

The translation of personal experiences into words and language poses a problem when we are translating across many different language systems, which have different conventions of meaning making and which prioritise different ways of knowing and being. Many respondents voiced that the orality and aurality was very significant in Bombay cinema practice because it was important in their parent's cultures and because they had to communicate across different languages, as English was often their parent's second language. Though there is incommensurability in translation across two cultures and some aspects can't be translated, I believe there are adaptations and newer meanings that take their place. It's the comparisons and differences in language between the different generations that illuminate meanings in this study.

### **1.3 Research Accountability**

I evaluate my research on the basis of whether I have produced a strong and robust account through my use of a range of methods. I believe that my analysis is a robust interpretation of my respondents' talk and stories. I am representing a version which is influenced by my location. However, as I have argued earlier I believe that the respondents do have a real existence independently of the researcher's mind and her language and what they say does blur the boundaries between her representation and their reality. I deploy a critical reflexive ethnographic writing style using plural cultural methods. I provide a coherent rationale for the choice of plural methods. I was rarely, interested in the interview as resource but more in how the respondents created meanings in their accounts that is, mostly as a topic. In analysing interviews as topic (Seale 1998) I looked closely at the way in which interviewees chose to use particular words and phrases to describe their realities. Conversely, I analysed the interviews as resource ('facts') by finding out the frequency of cinema viewing at home or going to a cinema hall. In this way, I analysed the interviews both as resource and topic.

The issue of validity and reliability is complex for ethnographic research as it is derived from scientific traditions. The quality of my research findings can be evaluated by its validity and reliability. The validity of my finding can be evaluated by working out if my 'research devices' are measuring what I intended them to measure. I have used measuring devices such as the interview topic guideline based on theoretical concepts coding scheme (concept indicator links) and my own critical reflexivity as research instruments. Seale (2004) proposes that the ways of enhancing the quality of qualitative research include triangulation

methods; respondent validation, searching and accounting for negative instances, producing well grounded theory with good examples of concepts, and demonstrating the originality of findings by relating them to current social issues or social theories. Seale advocates demonstrating to the reader the production of a complex and comprehensive account of observations. I have tried to do this by producing a reflexive account. He proposes using Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggestions of measuring validity by replacing notions of internal validity with notions of credibility. Respondent's validation can be done by checking with the respondents their agreements and disagreements with the research findings. When I tried to do this, many respondents did not seem that interested, though some were very excited about my analysis of their interviews and we had constructive discussions. Some agreed with some of my ideas and others said they had not really thought about it 'in that way'.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that validity can also be tested by the transferability of research findings and by making theoretical generalisation. This is achieved by giving a 'thick description' of the respondent's setting. If the researcher can give the reader of the research an experience of being in the same cultural spaces as the respondents, then the validity as transferability has been achieved. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also propose that the reliability (consistency) of research can be achieved by proving dependability. This is the consistency of the researchers' document trail, also known as the 'audit trail.' Lincoln and Guba suggest that the neutrality or the objectivity of research findings should be replaced with confirmability, which can be shown by a self-critical reflexive account of how the research was carried out. I have tried to do this by following a feminist critical reflexive approach of transparency so that this trail can be followed.

I have deployed three out of the four types of triangulation (Denzin, 1978, as outlined by Seale 1998) suggested by Seale to test the validity of the research. I have used methodological triangulation, which is achieved, by using a combination of interviews and ethnographic observation. I have deployed data triangulation in that I carried out interviews and observation with viewers and key informants in the UK and India that is, I used varied sources and sites of data so that I could compare instances of themes in several different settings in different points in time or space. I deployed theory triangulation in that I approached my data with several research questions in mind to see how each fares in relation to the data. I also analysed negative or deviant instances to test the credibility of observational data (such as respondents who disliked Bombay cinema watching) to test the emerging analysis. I believe that my research findings are broadly replicable and reliable in that if another researcher repeated and tested the same research agenda using my research design s/he should deliver broadly similar findings and analysis. I would add that my understanding of Bombay cinema and empathy based research model also helped in this process. I set out to see my respondents as imaginative and creative beings, but at the same time, I was aware of

the critical issues around media consumption. I set out to explore the deep emotional connections that Bombay cinema engagement produces. I believe that my findings might be generalisable to other marginalised transnational South Asian communities, for example, in Canada. The contradictory and yet clear polarities of the positions of the Asian subjects in creating narratives of intersubjectivity and a consistent desire for community formation is generalisable to other marginal cultural contexts, not only in the UK but also in other countries. This is because one of the desires for community formation is partly mobilized by an invisibility of a marginal culture and secondly by the fears of deculturation and assimilation of the marginal communities. This is not to say that the majority communities do not fear assimilation and deculturation. But what I am proposing is that the silencing, invisibility and fear of assimilation of marginal communities by the mainstream arouses stronger desires for engaging in specifically cultural practices such as Bombay cinema and generates an affective engagement due to fears of loss. Needless to say that fear of deculturation is not the only stimulus for the engagement with this practice. I have demonstrated the multiple pleasures of this cultural engagement. The concepts of gender relations, sexuality, melancholia, the contradictions in transnational cultural norms and regulations, the negotiations of binaries of 'Asian' and 'Western' and the negotiations associated with differences of religion, generation, language are debated in the various pleasures of the cultural engagement. These concepts are relevant to many marginal culture.

Lincoln and Guba's final criterion is 'authenticity.' This is judging the quality of research by examining its effects in society. This is difficult to do but following Seale (2004) I believe I have demonstrated a range of different British Asian realities in my analysis chapters. My modes of authority rely on a political value, in that my aim was to rectify the gap in sociological knowledge and to produce a complex account of the cultural, racial and a transnational imaginary of a marginal group.

### **1.3.1 Representations and Writing**

My writing of chapters translated respondents' experiences into a specific language shaped by academic and personal discourses. The power dynamics between the researcher and the researched exist not only in the interview but also in processes of analysing and writing. I was aware of being the person who controlled the structure of the interview and also imposed her interpretations on the respondent's quotes, opinions, understanding and theories. The task of representing respondent's experiences of cinema required some strategies, which began with selecting who to interview. The interview data was then coded by constant comparisons between the interviewees' accounts. This generated major themes. I made decisions on whose voices would be heard and whose silenced. My categories were derived from a combination of theoretical explorations, respondents' stories and voices and also of course my own

reflective sociological analysis and judgement. I needed to decide if I was using respondents' accounts as examples to vouch for theories or was I using respondents' ideas to displace the theories. I wanted to be aware in my analysis if I was validating the respondents or the theories. There are not many representations of British Asian subjects that engage with the politics of pleasure from their point of view. I had wanted to create an alternative representation of South Asian subjects and their experiences of pleasure to address a gap and to displace racist, exotic and Orientalist representations of South Asians in Britain. I had wanted to get away from victimhood and wanted to portray ordinary human experiences of pleasurable activities, in the respondents' own words.

I have come to understand that writing is the one of the most crucial aspect of analysis due to its reconstruction of social lived experiences. Writing is often reflected upon (Clifford and Marcus 1986) in anthropology due to its crucial role in the production of cultural contexts. Clifford (1986) has argued that there are six ways in which a poetics of ethnography can be constructed: the contextual aspect of writing, which creates a particular social situation; the rhetorical aspect of writing, which refers to the expressive conventions; the institutional background, which has a specific tradition, discipline and audience; the generic aspect of writing, for example sociological writing or cultural studies writing; the political aspect, which is the authority to represent cultural realities; and the historical context, which illuminates conventions and constraints shifting through time. I have elaborated on these aspects in the critical reflexivity and in the analysis section.

The responsibility of making choices and decisions about 'what is significant' and 'what is not' in representing the culture that one is researching is a difficult one. I have already discussed the importance of critical reflexivity in this process. If as sociologists we tell stories then my location and motivations are a vital part of telling this story. So for example, this could be a story of cultural survival by imaginatively deploying emotions as the energy to recreate languages and meanings to legitimate selves and make a claim to recognition and cultural citizenship. This is not only the story of cultural sovereignty but also of macro processes such as transnational capitalism for legitimating popular cultural products. If writing is representing then writing is a vital way of thinking about the data. How I structure the form and content of my writing decides what story I produce. Writing the chapters deepened my analysis and often revealed the emergence of new theoretical patterns. I used reading and writing as acts of sense making. This allowed me to create analytical frameworks. My writing is an account of pleasure, migration, survival, transformation, cultural transmission and reproduction communicating the lived experience of respondents.

The translation of meaning between two people, the interviewee and the interviewer, is a complex process of communication. I analysed transcripts of spoken interaction to look at the ways in which respondents convey meanings by using language figuratively. For example,

uses of metaphors included figurative tropes established through comparisons and analogies (Coffee and Atkinson, 1996, Atkinson, 1999). Specific language codes and symbols were used to convey or create shared cultural meanings, e.g. 'aapney' meaning 'ours' when describing Bombay cinema and the emotions it evoked. A particular way of using language (specific vocabularies, intonation and the mixing of words from the mother tongue) can express cultural familiarity to the members of the same group and express specific values, shared knowledge and collective identity. Another example was the word 'desi' (a term used for Asians in UK) or 'aapnay' (ours or our own) imported into English and which expresses situated understanding. The symbolic references of 'going back home' in cinema watching are another cultural and language code. This often also included facial and embodied gestures of pain and nostalgia. I was aware of how interviewees use a variety of devices such as imagery in their language to convey meanings and motives.

As a researcher I shared a cultural knowledge of cinematic experiences but I was also aware that there were differences between myself and specific individuals I was interviewing and I tried not to impose my own meanings. I was a cultural insider and my knowledge of Asian cultures and specifically my knowledge of cinema assisted in forming rapport with respondents. But my position as a cultural insider probably prevented me in some situations exploring assumptions and aspects of the interview accounts. Bombay cinema was most people's experience and it is only recently viewed as an aspect reflecting the internalising of racist representations. I wanted to be open to the variations in the data to explore conflicting ideas, contradictions or uncertainty and also to enable alternatives. The production of alternate accounts is made possible by attending to the silences or taken for granted assumptions and what I chose to emphasise. For example, why were younger men finding it so difficult to admit to watching Bombay cinema? Many women respondents commented that their brothers would not usually watch it and this was confirmed by some of the male respondents (such as Shahid and Irfan). What were the processes of masculinisation and racism that prevented them or how did they understand Bombay cinema in terms of 'feminine' romance and sentiment, and which prevented their affiliations. As I have explored in one of the chapters, Bombay cinema has tried to change this by changing its representation; such as using an MTV aesthetic to capture youth (male primarily) culture, avant-garde technological changes; and Hollywood style action including macho heroes and glamorous women.

The voices that are predominant in my analysis are those of women, mainly of second-generation women. This was because most of the respondents were women between the ages of 30-40. They also happened to have given depth interviews compared to men in that age group, or women in other age groups. A crucial reason for this probably was that these women related to me because I was in the same age group and shared many of their pleasures and anger. Some of these women I knew as friends. However other women and men who did

not know me also produced long and in-depth interviews. What was silent in my research was the male respondent's sexual and sensual pleasure of Bombay cinema. The female respondent felt very encouraged to express their sexual and sensorial attachments to cinema song and images but there was a lack of a similar expression by men. This can be explained by two factors. The first factor could be that most male respondents found it uncomfortable talking about sex to a female researcher. Of course this depended on their age, so older men found it more uncomfortable, whilst Kurshid who was twenty-five expressed he liked the sexy ladies! However, this was not the only reason because Irfan was only twenty-three and so the most likely reason for Kurshid's expressions were because of his personality and location. Judging by my prejudices coming up against Kurshid, I probably would have found it sexist and offensive if the male respondents began to sexually objectify the female heroines, though, I obviously did not mind this when some of the women did this.

## **Section 2: 'Circuit of Culture' Methodology**

### **2.1 Circuit of Cultural Production of Meaning**

To understand the negotiations and interpretation of meaning in Bombay cinematic discourses, I use Stuart Hall's (1973) formulation of text/context/reception, which he proposed for an interdisciplinary study of popular culture. This combines textual analysis with a focus on historical and social context. Hall argues that what is needed is a model of text and viewer relationships which would connect for the whole of the communication process. He argues for a process of "Encoding and Decoding" in *Television Discourse* (1973) and describes this process as linked but made up of distinctive "moments" with each moment a site of struggle over meaning. The three moments of production are encoding, text and decoding. The encoding moment is the meaning given to a narrative, that is, meaning encoded by the producers and the filmmakers. This is the ideology of the dominant cultural order, the preferred meaning. The text includes the meaning embedded in the processes of cinema's composition. The reception or decoding is the meaning read by the audience/spectator. The 'circuit of culture' model was theorised using Hall's communication process by Richard Johnson in 1986 and then was adapted by Paul du Gay et al (1997) to apply to a cultural artefact such as the Sony Walkman. Johnson saw this model as a heuristic device to understand the different moments of cultural processes and interdependability of these moments on each other. Du Gay et al's model comprises representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. Du Gay et al follow Hall and Johnson in that in each moment and its articulation, processes come to produce the meaning/s of a cultural object by its interaction. In this way one element of the circuit is not privileged; instead there is an amalgamation of processes which 'continuously overlap and intertwine in complex and



contingent ways' (Du Gay et al 1997: 3) to produce a map of meanings about the cultural object.

This circuit also accounts for the power relations between producers, distributors, multinationals, state policies and the viewers and consumers. Each part of the circuit reappears in the next part and has a other relationship with other parts, hence exhibiting the complex power relations between different moments in the circuit. Du Gay and Johnson propose that a researcher has to go the whole way around the circuit before the study can provide a meaningful analysis. This provides for an interactive and overlapping process orientated model to study cultural objects and to account for the complexity of the viewing process, which incorporates the concept of the cultural subject and objects as historically, situated. I use this model to understand the relationship of British Asian subjects with Bombay cinema, as a cultural and historical object has a different biography at different times and in different places (Lury 1996). I followed the journey backward of the cultural product in the circuit of cultural production of Bombay cinema. I carried out my research in two sites first exploring the reception of meanings of Bombay cinema in Britain and then went to India and explored the different sites of meanings of production of Bombay cinema. The meanings associated with the British Asian Diaspora is an integral aspect of the Bombay cinema's 'circuit of culture.' In Indian culture, Bombay cinema became socially meaningful only within specific discursive contexts, and has changed through time. The 'circuit of culture' model is useful in studying these processes of popular cultural formations. The transnational cultural circuit of emotion and imagination (Appadurai: 1996) that comes into being through an engagement of British Asian subjects with Bombay cinema is a complex and dynamic space which I explore using this circuit.

Rajagopal (1999:132) <sup>3</sup>in his analysis of mass media in India proposes that popular media cultural forms become the space of mass participation and contestations over collective meanings. He proposes that consumption of popular media by the masses<sup>4</sup> can illuminate the relationship of capitalism, consumption, democracy and citizenship. Cultural theory takes the role of analysing popular cultural media and the process of conflict it embodies. A discursive analysis of the conflicts can highlight the assumptions, opinions, and concepts on which

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3 Arvind Rajagopal "Thinking through Emerging Markets: Brand Logics and the Cultural Forms of Political Society in India" *Social Text* 17:3 (1999) 131-149

4 Raymond Williams (1958, 1983) argues that there are no masses. There are only ways of conceiving of people as masses, see "Culture and Society: 1780-1950." Also see Williams in "Keywords" 1985, pp192-196 " Mass is not only a very common but a very complex word in social description. The masses, while less complex, is especially interesting because it is ambivalent: a term of contempt in much conservative thought, but a positive term in much socialist thought...Masses (i) is the the modern word for many-headed multitude or mob: low, ignorant, unstable. Masses (ii) is a description of the same people but now seen as a positive or potentially positive social force...Mass society, massification (usually with strong refernce to the mass media) are seen as modes of disarming or incorporating the working class, the proletariat, the masses: that is to say, they are the new modes of alienation and control, which prevent and are designed to prevent the development of an authentic popular consciousness."

popular meanings are based as well as revealing historical debates. The focus of cultural studies on the masses and their 'ordinary' experiences tends to romanticise and essentialise the 'ordinary' experience and knowledge of 'real' authentic people unlike the textually produced spectator of formalist film analysis. Cultural studies becomes a space of celebration of 'ordinary' experiences, a celebration of cultural competencies and knowledge (Morley 1980, Moores 1993) of ordinary people, the viewer or consumer of cultural product as opposed to the auteur, artist (the producer) or expert academic. In this way, cultural studies voices a critique of academic institutional knowledges. However, this focus on ordinary experiences creates distinctions between 'ordinary' and 'expert' knowledges and in the end repeats issues of power and authority that it was trying to challenge in formalist analysis. In feminist film theoretical production the theorists worked out the hidden meaning of cinema but now the empirical researcher works out the hidden meaning of respondent's stories and sometimes there is also the assumption that the researcher knows the true meaning of popular cultural texts. In ethnography, there have been debates on this issue of 'crisis of representation.' This debate is about who speaks for whom? Do academics and experts have the authority to speak for ordinary people or their interview subjects? Spivak (1988) in her article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' addresses this issue of marginality (the masses and the ordinary people) and representation. In the history of epistemology, those with power and knowledge have always spoken for/or represented those without power, the 'marginal' or the 'subaltern.' She argues that the subalterns cannot represent themselves. I have elaborated on the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee in first section of this chapter. However, others (Morley, 1980) have validated a cultural studies critique of the incessant focus on classical and high culture in film studies, and the struggle to restore and revalue the popular as an area of serious theoretical concern.

## **2.2 Reception meanings: Audience Studies Debates**

The development of audience studies (television) was instigated by a development in cultural studies that paralleled its anti-formalist stand. Cultural theorists not only objected to the formalism of semiology and psychoanalysis, but also to the focus on the study of 'high culture' (Morley, 1980). They argued for 'active viewer' theory using Hall's formulation of a preferred meaning of cultural texts or images by the viewer. The reader/viewer made a preferred/oppositional or negotiated meaning of the cultural text by bringing their own experiences and knowledge to bear upon it. This was a conceptualisation of subjects as having agency as opposed to being positioned only by cinematic or cultural texts, that is by ideology. This was derived from Althusser's conceptualisation of subjects as interpolated by ideology. Gledhill (1987) using a cultural studies perspective criticised the cine-psychoanalysis of 1970s feminist film theory. She argued that the sign of 'woman' in popular

cinema or cultural texts was competed over by the different social groups, such as the producer and the viewer as both have an investment in that struggle. She believes that the feminist critic does not have a neutral position in exploring the range of positions the text makes available for the viewer. She is interested in some readings more than others and her own interpretations are also an intervention in the process of meaning-negotiation because of her political location. Using this analysis opens up new spaces of agency for viewers and interpreters in this research process. There are multiple codes of understanding verbal, and non-verbal communications and their truths. There is inter and intra-textuality and this leads to multiple meanings – polysemy. All texts, such as such as cinema, writing or an interview conversation have the capacity to carry multiple and diverse meanings. Ambivalence or an incompleteness or just the deferment of meaning is a reality of everyday dialogue and acts as a value in writing. This leaves the window open for a future re-reading and an emergence new meaning in a new context. It was in order to explore cultural competencies and knowledges of viewers (Morley, 1980) that early studies of media turned to interviews with audience members to understand and interpret their meanings. Within the audience studies context, the ‘active’ viewer was also the ‘resistant’ ‘empowered’ subject and the sovereignty of the ‘semiotic democracy (Fiske 1987) reigned.

Fiske’s (1987, 1990) celebration of ‘semiotic democracy’ and postmodern pluralism of multiply resistant differences was criticised by Morley and Curran (1990). They felt that the audience study analysis of the polysemy of media cultural products was facile in that it often effaced the power relations between the audience and the media and cultural industry. The key debate on ‘active’ and ‘passive’ viewer and consumer dominated audience studies. Morley and Curran (1990), and many others argued in their criticism of audience research, that there is an assumption that viewers are critical and active and not cultural dopes manipulated by media text ideologies. The discovery of a different response (than the dominant or preferred reading) to the media text did not constitute resistance. Ang (1990) argues that while audiences may be multiply active in their consumption and viewing, this did not make them powerful. The equivalence of ‘active’ with ‘powerful’ was challenged. The discourses of consumption often rely on concepts of ‘improvement’ ‘choice’ and ‘freedom.’ Ang (1990) argues that choice does not mean empowerment or freedom. Curran (1990) proposes that there a difference between having power over media texts in your room and having control or power over the agenda within which the text the cultural product is constructed. The viewers, consumers do not have the same power as the producers and the multinational global media institutions. However, Morley (1990) suggests a way out of the audience studies quandary by understanding the concept of ‘negotiation’ as elaborated by Gledhill (1987). Gledhill proposes a synthesis of the politics of micro and the macro processes and structures. That is, the politics of viewing and engaging with cinema on an

everyday level, the trivial, the private, and the psychic at home or on the streets very much reproduces the macro-processes of dominant ideologies and power structures. The imbrications of social structures in our emotional everyday life can be explored by a historically situated analysis.

I focus on the reception of popular culture and provide an analysis of cinematic experiences of viewing and consumption in order to understand the complexities of everyday practices in processes of cultural reproduction. By using the circuit method I hope to understand how South Asian subjects interact with cinema and produce a particular understanding of that cinematic experience. Also by exploring how different South Asian viewers respond and interact to the same image I may be able to demonstrate the complexities of the process of meaning creation of that experience. However to research only the reception of cinema by the spectators/audience is to neglect the power of institutions in producing cinema and the ideologies it deploys to establish specific (usually dominant) social, cultural and political agendas to construct certain aesthetics and not others. As I have outlined above, the trend in the celebration of the 'resistant and subversive viewer' in media and cultural studies ignores the power dynamic of the production and circulation of cultural products.

### **2.3: Production Meanings**

Bombay cinema carries diverse meanings at various sites of production, representation, reception, consumption and regulation. To explore the complexity of meaning of Bombay cinematic experience it is necessary to illuminate the interconnections between the production of cinema, and the reception of cinema. Using this model, the production of Bombay cinema includes not only how it's technically produced but also how Bombay cinema is produced culturally, that is how it is encoded with specific meanings during the production process. The cultures of production of Bombay cinema can be glimpsed through my observations and interviews with some key informants who were members of the Bombay media industry in Chapter three. They provided an understanding of questions of representations and of identity of filmmakers. The organisational structure of the Bombay film industry as a network of family and friends with very little employment rights was glimpsed and illuminated the discourses of risk and safety involved in formulaic composition of Bombay cinema. The encoding of certain the formulaic meanings into cinema is an effect of the financial risks taken by individuals in making films. Another commercial strategy is that of diasporic global marketing to recuperate the commercial risks taken. I explore the national and cultural discourses shaping cinema in chapters two and three. The meanings produced by the British audience travels to and fro between the site of production, representation and reception to transform cinematic codes and meanings. I attempt to produce a multilayered interpretation to get away from the reductionism of 'textual determination' or the 'resistant viewer.' Instead I

situate the interpretations as contingent and travelling between sites of production, representation, consumption, reception and regulation. By utilising discourse analysis I have tried to explore the significance of differences in meanings between different sites and processes and illuminated understanding of naturalised assumptions, and essentialist interpretations, rather than simply to mark their existence.

Bombay cinema as a cultural product acts as legitimator for production of the 'India shining'<sup>5</sup> and 'new middle-class yuppie Indian' on the global economic stage. I provide a partial view by interviewing some key informants within the Bombay media industry. A good example of how a cultural product accrues different meanings and legitimation through its circulation can be seen in the Bombay cinema poster exhibition, called "Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood"<sup>6</sup> from 26<sup>th</sup> June to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2003 in the Victoria and Albert museum. The artistic credibility gained from such an exhibition is publicised to gain alternative audiences and also to disperse its credibility to its viewers who affirm their identification with global credibility. The distribution of Bombay cinema in film festivals adds to this credibility. The recent Cannes Film festival selection of Aishwaraya Rai as a judge added credibility to her status and to the film industry. A combination of marketing and branding strategies added to her status as an exotic Indian beauty; her previous 'Miss World' title contributed to the idea of 'India' as not 'backward' but competing on the global stage with the 'West.' Many respondents and critics do not consider her a 'good' actor, and saw this as a marketing ploy. My respondents in the UK took a position where many saw her as affirming their 'Asian' identities (usually not the critical ones) whilst some others saw her as someone without talent who contributed to a predominance of a 'Western beauty aesthetic'. The technologies of circulation and display in this case affect the audiences' and film critic's interpretation of her. Another example of circulation and accrual of values is the West End and Broadway staging of the musical 'Bombay Dreams'<sup>7</sup> produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber and composed by A.

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5 "India Shining" was an advertisement campaign launched in February 2004 election by Bharathya Janatha Party (BJP), a Hindu fundamentalist party. The BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) claimed that they were responsible for the success of the Indian economy after a decade of liberalisation and market reforms. The adverts were targeted towards middle-class families who are the main beneficiary of the economic restructuring. They were defeated in the elections and this advert was analysed as a key to their failure to include the vast majority of the population who live in poverty and do not have access to this life. See an article by Parwini Zora and Daniel Woreck 's "The BJP's "India Shining" campaign: myth and reality" 7 May 2004. <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/may2004/ind-m07.shtml>

6 "Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood" exhibition was a joint venture between the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), the British Film Institute (BFI) and Imagine Asia from 26th June to 6th October, 2003 exhibiting film posters from pre-Independent to contemporary India. This exhibition celebrated the art practices and the artist of film posters. Many artists were commissioned to do workshops to demonstrate their poster creating skills and technoque. It also highlighted the influence of the posters on contemporary artists and their imagery. The themes of the poster exhibitions were: Nationalism; The Glory of India; Independent India; Youth Culture; Crisis in India; Formula Film; Global Perspective; 'Love and Romance'; and Depictions of Women. See website [http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1153\\_cinema\\_india](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1153_cinema_india)

7 see <http://www.reallyuseful.com/rug/shows/bombaydreams/facts.htm> "Bombay Dreams" ran in the West End from June 16th 2002- 2004 and it was seen by two hundred thousand people. Meera Syal wrote the script. It was seen as a fusion of stage, film, television and contemporary music.

R. Rahman. The meeting of a theatre (high culture) director and composer (of 'Cats', 'Evita' 'Jesus Christ Superstar' 'The Phantom of the Opera') and of the famous Bollywood composer (A.R. Rahman) and choreographer (Farah Khan) may have allowed for new audiences. Some of the respondents felt this was progress in the politics of cultural assertions of Asian identity. For example, two of the respondents who live in Oldham wanted to come to London to watch this because they had heard so much about it (through publicity on satellite channels and magazines and on the internet) whilst three respondents living in London who were very much part of a London scene were very critical and did not enjoy the musical.

I use discourse analysis to understand and interpret the complex processes through which social meanings are produced. A discursive analysis includes exploring economic and political aspects of production. I have focused on the historical development of Bombay cinema as it intersects with the nationalist and transnational politics of the Indian Diaspora. I explore questions about the development and growth of Bombay cinema. The processes of nation formation and the development of cinema are intertwined. The fieldwork in India (face to face interviews and observation research) formed an essential component of the circuit of cultural production, distribution and reception of Bombay cinema. The fieldwork comprised of 22 interviews and other primary data collection with key specialists from Bombay, Delhi, and Bangalore involved in Indian cinema. The key institutions included the Centre for the Study of Society & Culture (Bangalore, the latter also hosts a cultural and media archive); and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (Delhi, the latter also houses an academic archive on Indian cinema, and coordinates the work of Sarai, a unit focused on Indian cinema). I interviewed some key authors writing on Indian cinema. I analysed the Indian data from interviews with key informants and from ethnographic observations and integrated this into the already drafted chapters on the history of Indian cinema, gender and family, sexuality, class and embodied practices. The key informants were mostly educated upper class Indians and formed part of an elite groups that included academics, intellectuals, documentary filmmakers, cinema professionals and journalists. They were usually part of a globally mobile group, either because of financial or academic capital. Their knowledge of Euro-American information was extremely competent. Also I was very aware that the Bombay cinema and media industry reproduces notions of Indian culture and identities, through discourses of advertising, marketing, technology, film, television, music, and through multinationals. The selling of national identity as an amalgam of the traditional, the modern is explored in the following chapter.

Using discourse analysis I was mindful that the respondents' language was not just reflective but was crucial in constructing their social world. I use discourse analysis to carry out a textual analysis of some key films (see chapter four) in order to interpret the genealogy and discursive themes of Bombay cinema. Further, I also use discourse analysis to interpret

the interview transcripts. In cinema and in the interview analysis, I was interested in the themes, language, signs, codes and symbols used to reproduce specific discourses, the significance of those discourses and their social meanings. In Foucault's (1984) approach, discourse is a realm in which institutions (such as the family), norms, forms of subjectivity and social practices are constructed and made to appear natural. For the discourse analyst language is both active and functional in shaping and reproducing social relations, identities and ideas (Tonkiss: 1998). I compared key emblematic films of different decades to illuminate specific themes, codes and symbols that predominated in different political and historical climates. This included representations of codes and symbols and the kinds of discourses that were being deployed to present them. Furthermore a discourse analysis of cinematic signs permits an understanding of key role of historical and political factors in production of cultural signs. The continuity between filmic analysis and interview analysis can form a continuum in illuminating the similarities and differences in the meanings produced and provide a 'thick description.'

### **Section 3: Research Methods and Techniques**

The range of methods I deployed included face to face and depth interview, ethnographic observations, discourse analysis of a set of Bombay cinematic texts, and documentary analysis of cinema magazines, film trade journals and film websites. My methods for generating data were depth interviews with a semi-structured topic guideline supported with ethnographic participant observations in three sites (London, Manchester and Bombay). Before embarking on the interviews, I had watched and analysed Bombay cinema using film theory. I wrote a chapter exploring the biography and genealogy of Bombay cinema and the discourses affecting the changes in its form. I used textual methods primarily discourse analysis in comparing some key films. This not only allowed an exploration of literature on western film theory including feminist and postcolonial aspects but also a huge oeuvre of Indian cinema and cultural theory. My fieldwork in India, later in the research process (September 14th 2004 to December 20<sup>th</sup> 2004) also assisted me in discovering and obtaining publications on Indian cinema and culture. The cinema analysis ( the first chapter written in 2001)was really useful in that it allowed me to comprehend cinema in terms of the discourses it constitutes and is constituted by. In this way, mixing methods (Rose 2001) strengthened my research by allowing a comparison of the results derived using one technique with those derived from another. For example the interviews with respondents in London (carried out between Jan - September 2002) could be compared with interviews with respondents in Manchester (June to August 2003), highlighting any key differences. Further, the interviews with respondents in the UK could be compared with interviews with key informants in India and these highlighted deep differences. Comparative analysis (by writing analytical chapter between September

2003 to 2004) within the interview material between men and women, between the different generations, nationalities, religions, and linguistic groups, and the migration differences all contributed further to deepening my analysis.

### **3.1 Interviews and the Fieldwork**

In planning the interview, I began the process by devising a topic guideline (see Appendix I) arising from my theoretical and conceptual framework. I was very aware of the need to use accessible language so as to make sense to the respondents. This was difficult because a word like 'gender' is common usage in academic settings but means very little to most people. The interview began with giving the respondent some information about myself, the general aims of the PhD, such as 'I want to explore the sense people make of watching Bombay cinema and the reasons for its popularity within South Asian communities.' I usually explained about privacy, confidentiality and consent, asked if they were comfortable with being taped and whether they would like me to change their names. I began the interview with a question on their favourite actors and actresses and the reasons for that, which usually opened people up to talk about their likes and dislikes, and highlighted some usual emotional responses. Sometimes, people liked so many actors and actresses; it was difficult to move on to the next question. The selection of interviewees was framed by my research questions. Semi-structured interviews are extremely time consuming because of the loose structure of the questions, which limits the possibilities of large samples. I tried to limit the interviews to one hour, but some of the 'good' interviews lasted two hours because I felt respondents were exploring their responses in such detail, I did not want to stop them. Other interviews lasted twenty-five minutes because the respondent had very straightforward answers, or felt uncomfortable talking or did not understand the questions or were short of time. One key reason for the short interviews was the triviality attached to cinema watching in that it's seen as entertainment and not something to talk about at great length.

I wanted a wide or reflective sample in that 'British Asian' is a heterogeneous category and taking account of differences of nation, language, gender, generations, class, sexual orientation, region and religion would generate data, which would be more insightful for my purposes. Of course, I was also aware that it was impossible to get a representative sample because I was interested in depth of analysis and I chose respondents for their contribution to the development of a theory of affect in subject and community formation. This is called theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss: 1967). So for example, once I had some idea that the emotional connection of cinema was through discourses of family, I was interested in gender, generation and class variations. I targeted certain age groups. I used a snowballing technique to select my interviewees, but I was aware that this can end up with people who are similar so used a variety of ways of finding people. The face-to-face semi-structured



interviews were taped. I used a grounded theory approach of coding and analysing by making notes of main themes and selected similarities and differences to analyse. On two occasions I carried out one to two interviews (couples) for convenience. I interviewed four members of one family separately. One to one interviews can access the specificity of individual experience. I recruited a cross section of people to interview and the logic underlying selection was gender, generation, national origin and socio-economic position. I wanted to explore the significance of different meanings created by individuals who saw themselves as part of an Asian community.

In Britain, my fieldwork involved interviewing cinema fans and viewers in London and Greater Manchester (Oldham). I began by targeting South Asian students on Goldsmiths college campus. I utilised anti-racist and feminist email networks and word of mouth friend networks to request interview participants. I visited Tooting video shops (three shops in Tooting) to ask customers buying or borrowing Bombay films if they would like to be interviewed. I also interviewed the video shop owners. I also targeted Club Kali, a long established Asian gay club night venue in North London, which mixes Bollywood tunes. I also asked people working in a Pharmacy I was working in, in Kings Cross because Bollywood music was being played and cinema posters were displayed inside the Pharmacy. In Manchester, I went back to Oldham where I had worked with a group of homeworkers in 1991 and interviewed four women (three daughters and their mother; one of the women is a friend now and her mother still works as a homeworker and she is also a friend). This was important for me because it was here that I had understood how cinematic language was a common experience across the diversity of South Asian communities. I targeted the Asian restaurants and shops in the Rusholme area of Manchester and cinemagoers in Trafford center (which is the only cinema venue for Bollywood films). I also gave out flyers to the shops and to cinema viewers at Trafford center.

The discourses of triviality attached to Bombay cinema created some difficulties. Some expressed that it is something they enjoy or do as a habit as its entertainment rather than something they talk about. Even though people were initially very excited about talking about cinema, they found it difficult to understand why I would want to talk to them for more than ten minutes about it. So, often they did not agree to be interviewed because it would take more than half an hour. Another factor that contributed to this was that some first generation respondents did not feel comfortable talking about Hindustani cinema in their second language. This is because they would have to translate something they watch habitually into English, which they may not have done before because there was not any need for it. Another aspect was discomfort with being taped, a discomfort with technology. Some first generation respondents found it either amazing that I would want to tape their voices or found it too scary. Many people I asked to interview felt they would not have that much to say apart from

they watched Bombay cinema for entertainment. Another obstacle that I faced was my status as a PhD student. This could be due to the levels of veneration attached to education in South Asian communities and they found it surprising that I would be doing a PhD on Bollywood, which was 'just entertainment'. Of all people (more than 50) I gave my flyers to at the video shops and at Trafford cinema hall, I obtained four interviews. After initial interests (even excitement) from six people from club Kali, only one person actually made the time for the interview.

The method of targeting that worked best was friend networks and students on Goldsmiths' campus. Friend interviews sometimes generated depth analysis because a trust had been built up in some of these relationships so that it felt like there were commonalities between the respondents and interviewer. The emotional and intellectual openness had the capacity to produce depth interviews but it did not always do so due to different understandings of cinema. I chose friends who were film fans so they knew a lot more than me and their engagement with Bombay cinema was more in-depth. However, I had different relationship with different friends and knew some of them only as acquaintances. Sometimes I felt some friend respondents felt they had to give me the 'right' answer, which created a tense and anxious interview situation. Other times I felt I had been too relaxed and not followed the interview guidelines and was unable to control the interview. Once when interviewing a friend's mother I was hardly able to move the interview at all because I found it really difficult to keep to the structure as there was too much going on in the room. I was really obliged for the time she had made for me and I was unable to ask for a quieter space. I felt like a failure. With other friends I found it difficult to limit the time spent chatting on topics not related to the interview. In some interviews I was aware that I had asked the wrong question when respondents either completely did not understand my question or misinterpreted the question. One example was when I asked about the ways in which women were represented in cinema. This was an academic understanding and language, in that most people may not use words like 'representation.' An accessible way to ask this was to ask about their favourite heroines and then to proceed from there, which I did. But some respondents were happy to talk about the gender relations of Bombay cinema, so it was not always an easy task to assume the competencies of specific respondents.

### **3.2 Reflections on the Characteristics of Sample**

The analysis of the twenty-five interviews revealed very different interpretations of Bollywood cinema. Many of those differences were related to those of cultural, historical and biographical locations of the respondents. The foundations of the research relied on subjects digging into their memory, relating it to their present life and expressing their interpretation of viewing practice in an interview. The interviews relied on memories of viewing practice.

Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed by me and then analysed. It is therefore useful to briefly contextualise these interviews. Most respondents expressed a combination of positive and negative relationships apart from one man in the sample, Jitender, who said ‘he hated Indian cinema’. This was because of a traumatic childhood experience in which his parents left him in a cinema hall to watch a tragic film in order to learn Indian culture. He expressed a disgust of Bombay cinema’s unrealistic, melodramatic and tragic narratives and visuals. He felt Bombay cinema was uncivilised and compared it to Jazz, as a civilised and entertaining pursuit. As I have analysed in the later chapters, the discourses of ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilised’ structured Bombay cinema viewing in many different circumstances and were more often invoked by male respondents compared to female respondents. I used the interview topic guide to structure the interviews but when people were really talkative I asked many more related questions and sometimes when people hardly spoke I found it difficult to stimulate them.

Name	Age	Gender	Nationality	Ethnicity	Sexual Preference	Employment	Class	Religion	Town
Kiran	16	F	B, Pa	Asian	Straight	Student	W	Muslim	O
Ruji	18	F	B, Ba	Asian	S	Student	W	M	L
Shahib	50	F	Pa	A	S	W, HW	W	M	O
Palika	56	F	I	A	S	Retired	M	Hindu	L
Mr Prahar	74	M	I, K	A	S	Retired	M	H	M
Mrs Prahar	65	F	I	A	S	Retired	M	H	M
Sonali	31	F	B, Pun	A, Black	S	W	M	H	L
Naseema	27	F	B, Pa	A	S	W	W/M	M	O
Samira	30	F	B, Pa	A	S	W	W/M	M	O
Sunita	34	F	B, Pun	A	S	W	W/M	H	L
Irfan	23	M	B, Ba	A	S	Student	W	M	L
Manind	31	M	B, Pun	A	Bisexual	W	M	Sikh	L
Shahid	30	M	B, Pa	A	S	W	W/M	M	O
Jitender	39	M	B, Pun	A	S	W	M	S	L
Kurshid	25	M	B, Ba	A	S	Student	W	M	L
Gopi	21	F	I	A	S	Student	M	H	L
Neela	21	F	I, M	A	S	Student	M	H	L
Salim	24	M	B, Ba	A	Gay	W	W	M	L
Kamar	35	F	B, Pun	A, Black	S	W	W/M	S	M
Shabna	41	F	B, Pa	A, Black	B	W	W/M	M	M
Charan	37	F	B, Pun	A, Black	B	W	W/M	S	L
Aman	31	M	B, I, G	A	S	Student	M	H	L
Shakira	30	F	B, T, Pa	A, Black	B	Student	M	M, H	L
Asha	34	F	B, Gujarati	A, Black	B	W	W/M	H	L
Noseera	25	F	B, Ba	A	S	Student	W	M	L

F= Female, B= British, Ba=Bangladeshi, Pa=Pakistani, I=Indian, K=Kenyan, Pun=Punjabi, M=Mauritian, G=Guyanese, T=Trinidadian, HW=Homeworker, W=Working Class, M=Middle Class, O=Oldham, L=London, M=Manchester.

The age ranges of interviewee in the UK were from 16 to 74 years. Kiran was sixteen; living with her parents in Oldham. Mr. Prahar was seventy-four and lived in Stretford, Manchester. This sample comprises 16 women and 9 men. In addition, I interviewed two more men (aged

45 and 60) but did not have time to transcribe the interviews, hence have not included them in the sample. There were eight respondents in the age range 16-25, two were under twenty and six under twenty-five, eleven between 30-45, ten were between 30-40 and six were between 45-78, under eighty. In terms of identities, all respondents identified themselves as South Asian. Most identified themselves as British Asian apart from two overseas students and all the first generation respondents in the age group of 45-78. The first generation respondents identified themselves with the identity of their national origin – Pakistani, Indian and Indian-Kenyan. They did not mind identifying as British but wanted to assert that firstly they were Pakistani or Indian. The range of national and ethnic identities that participants had affiliations to include: British, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Mauritian and Kenyan, Punjabi, Gujarati, Tamil.

Six women identified themselves as Black. But only four of these six still retained the category Black when describing herself whilst the other two said that ‘it did not make sense anymore’. All but six interviewees described their sexual orientation as straight. One man described himself as gay and another as bisexual and four women described themselves as bisexual. Twelve interviewees were in full time work. One was a homemaker and one was a restaurant worker. Six were full-time students, one was in part-time education, and one was in school. Four women expressed strong affinities to their working class identities. Six of the interviewees described their class or class origin to be working class, four others as middle-class. Many described themselves as in-between middle-class and working-class, because even though they were in middle-class professions, their parents had working-class origins. Eleven identified as Muslim, one as not practising. Ten interviewees described themselves as Hindus but three as not a practising. Four identified as Sikh.

### **3.3 A Portraiture of the Interviewees**

Nine respondents were from North West, from the Greater Manchester area (Manchester, Stretford, Oldham and Rochdale). Fourteen were from the Greater London area: four from East London (Brick lane, Stratford, and Ilford); two from North London (Holloway, Somers Town); three from West London (Hounslow) London; and five from South London (New Cross, Tooting and Brixton). There were twenty-eight interviews altogether but five of these I did not have time to transcribe so I have only provided portraiture of twenty-three respondents’ interviews. The interviews were from thirty minutes to two and half hours in duration, depending on the respondents’ desire to engage with me and also their level of engagement with Indian cinema.

**Samira 30.** Born in Pakistan, came to England when she was two. Brought up in Oldham but lives in Rochdale since her marriage. She describes herself as a British Pakistani Muslim who

also identifies very strongly with her parents' Pathan identity. Speaks English, Urdu, Punjabi and Pashto. Educated to Masters level. Mental health counsellor (working with Pakistani and Bangladeshi clients). Considers herself working class.

Samira loved the old Indian films and feels close emotional connection to the actors/actresses, the music, the songs because of the language and cultural identifications. She tells me "...the old films they are part of our history, part of family history." Watching Bombay cinema for her is about seeing other bodies like hers, the way they walk, talk, and sing.

**Shahib Jaan 50.** Born in Pakistan near Islamabad, came to Oldham in 1975, and has lived there ever since. Educated to school level; in her family one of the first girls to attend school due to her father's encouragement. Speaks Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto and can understand English but does not speak it. Shahib Jaan is a homemaker and she is married and has four daughters and two sons, oldest daughter thirty and the youngest daughter is sixteen and she also has two grandchildren.

She tells me that she thinks 'cinema can cause disease, in that when you are anticipating and caught up with the story, it can be too stressful and emotional'. Later on in the interview she told me that 'you could forget your own problems watching cinema'. She thinks it cures boredom but it can be addictive. She loves watching Pakistani dramas, which have a more of a realist base. Her and her daughter-in-law watch many of these dramas (serials) throughout the day as they run the household. She tells me she feels trapped here in England and that she knows being here is economically better for the family but emotionally she misses her family even after all these years.

**Shahid 30.** Born and brought up in Britain (Rochdale). Considers himself British Pakistani Muslim and middle-class. Education Masters level. Information Technology lecturer at a college for Adult education. Married.

He believes that Indian films are about entertainment and he does not waste time in trying to make sense of it because he thinks a suspension of disbelief is required to watch them. He thinks fantasies of big houses, gorgeous bodies and success is fine because its what everyone wants that and he feels being ambitious is a good thing and its something to move towards. Throughout the interview Shahid focused on the acting abilities of different actors and if they had managed to survive by making the necessary changes in a very competitive film industry. He was impressed with Bollywood for adapting and surviving. He did not watch many films growing up, as his dad was not keen on Indian films, not because they were Indian but because of their sexual connotation. Shahid told me that he used the cinema stories to understand 'back home' family and cultural politics, family relations. Although, he did not like the new films copying hip-hop MTV style videos by presenting women "in bikinis"

because he felt this was not 'Asian culture' and this was disrespectful towards women. However, he admired Bollywood because of its success in competing and succeeding in the global market.

**Naseema 27.** Born and brought up in Britain (Oldham). Considers herself British Asian Pakistani Muslim and middle-class. Educated to University level. Works in the Information Technology section of a University Library. She speaks English, Urdu and Punjabi.

She feels that escaping into the Bollywood dream world is about 'total escapism and releases stress'. However she does not like the way women are portrayed in Bollywood. She feels that 'some of the emotional release in cinema brings you to reality, that you are not the only ones with problems'. She does not like realist films where women are shown to not get out of their suffering. She would rather watch fantasy because it she leaves the film feeling hopeful about life. She feels some recent Bollywood films portray Pakistan as a terrorist state and they promote hatred and divisions.

**Kiran 16.** Born and brought up in Britain (Oldham). Speaks English, Urdu and Punjabi, and describes herself as British Asian and Pakistani. She is about to start her 'A' levels. When asked about religion, she tells me 'kind of Islam'.

She watches films three times a week on video at home with her mother. She liked newer films which were about loving your parents. She does not like action films. She sometimes watches films with a group of girlfriends (mix of Bangladeshi and Pakistani with only one Indian) from school. They go to Trafford Centre where they can shop, eat and watch films. She loves the clothes, the fashion, the dancing, the songs and the beautiful women in Bollywood films.

**Sunita 34.** Born and brought in Britain (Hounslow, London ). Describes herself as British Punjabi Hindu and middle-class woman (points out working class parents'). Educated to University level. Mentoring Co-coordinator for young people for a voluntary sector organization. Speaks Punjabi and Hindi.

She has lived most of her life in London, apart from when she left to study Sociology in Liverpool University. Her parents still live in Hounslow. Sunita loves Indian cinema because of the emotional world it creates for her, it reminds her of her visit to India. The films she likes the best remind her of her own family situation – her distress at her parent's joint family breaking up. It was a link with India and the strong feelings of cultural belonging and discovery she had encountered whilst traveling. She has an expert's knowledge of the films, the stories and the songs and also the actors and actresses in these films. Sunita took me to the video shops in Tooting and educated me about the films, stars, the gossip and stories attached

to film stars. Whenever we went to Tooting, we would rent videos, she would buy a few film magazines such as (Filmfare) and we would look for very specific films for a particular song or a scene that she wanted to watch again.

**Sonali 31.** Born and brought up in Liverpool but has lived in London since University. Considers herself British Punjabi Hindu and working class. Co-ordinator of a community organization to access to music for young people in the East end of London. A professional singer primarily of Hindi film songs.

Her attachment to Indian cinema began with her father's obsession with Indian cinema. She thinks 'Asian' viewers have a different relationship to cinema compared to European viewers in that they don't watch to accumulate information, and its not about the intellectual capital as film buffs do in the West. She thinks 'Asians' watch Indian cinema 'more for the emotional joy of it and for sentimentality'. She talks at length about public visibility of British Asians in the recent years and how Indian cinema has been an aspect of that struggle. She thinks that Indian cinema is popular because of its common language of "family values".

**Irfan 23.** Born and brought up in Britain (London East End). Educate dto university level. Considers himself British Asian Bangladeshi and working-class. Anthropology student who was a Journalist for an Asian newspaper. Speaks Sylheti.

Irfan became interested in Bombay cinema when he started studying anthropology and also as a journalist he was fascinated by Bollywood gossip; he loved the sleaziness. When he was growing up he often watched Indian cinema with his sisters and his mother and cousins but he did not like watching Indian cinema when he was growing up in the 1980s, because 'they were dark and scary.' He thinks (like Sonali) that 'Asians watch films and listen to music differently compared to a European audience'. He thinks there is acceptability of Bollywood in Bangladeshi community because of sharing of a common language of family. He thinks most films don't peddle religion and he likes that. His liking of some contemporary Bollywood is because he thinks that they are a bridge to a diasporic Asian identity.

**Salim 24.** Born in Bangladesh (Sylhet) and came to London (Ilford) when he was fifteen. Describes himself as a Gay Bangladeshi man. Educated to School level. Speaks Sylheti. Works in a restaurant for ten hours a day for six days.

He loves the songs and dances from Bollywood films and has been watching them since he came to England. He told me whilst talking about the emotions in the films that ' I like films with sad stories, I cry a lot, I like family stories I don't like fighting films.' He loves the clothes and the jewellery and told me 'I want to become like that; in the film the actresses

wear so much jewellery and short dress. I want to become like that, dress like that.’ He would like to become a ‘make-up’ artist but feels that because he can’t speak English properly he may not be able to.

**Neela 21.** Born in Mauritius. Living in London as an Overseas University student. Considers herself as Mauritian Hindu Indian and middle class. Can understand Hindi but can’t speak it.

Neela explained that her childhood years were spent in Egypt as her father was a diplomat, they were often traveling, and one of the ways they kept close to Indian culture was through watching Indian cinema. For Neela, watching Indian films was ‘like going home’ – like being in India. She often watched the film at home with her mother and her sisters. She only liked family and romance themes, and did not like action films with violence. She agrees with values of respecting your parents portrayed in the Indian films. But she does not like the way women are treated in these films. In Mauritius, there are several Indian programs on television. She related an incidence of an interview with Shah Rukh Khan (One of the most popular Bollywood Stars who is Muslim) on national TV where Shah Rukh Khan was asked questions in Hindustani but he responded in Urdu. She felt very upset with him because she felt he was emphasizing his Muslim identity through his use of Urdu.

**Shabnam 42.** Born in Pakistan, parents came to Britain (Leeds) when she was one. Lived in Manchester since went to University there. Considers herself British, Asian, Black and Pakistani Muslim. She is a Poet but has also worked in the voluntary sector for a number of years. Speaks Urdu and understands Punjabi.

When she was growing up in Leeds, she has memories of going to see films the cinema halls in Leeds (there were two) with her elder siblings. She remembered the chaos and excitement – of meeting friends and community members – at the cinema hall. She told me that her head would be so full with the cinema images and songs and then meeting family friends and the chaos was exciting but also overwhelming. Shabnam remembered the poignancy of the emotional and sensory chaos of cinema going. She told me that the popularity of actors who were/are Muslim (Dilip Kumar, Shah Rukh Khan) also allows for a space of identification and affirmation for many Pakistani and Muslim viewers’ identification with Indian cinema. For Shabnam, Bombay cinema was also part of the ‘Asian and Black cultural struggle.’

**Asha 34.** Born in Kenya came to Britain (Leicester) when eleven years old; her father is originally from Gujarat. Considers herself British Black Asian Indian Gujarati, Hindu and working-class. Educated to University level. She has been in London since she came for last thirteen years and now lives in North London. She has been involved with the anti-racist



movement for last thirteen years in London. Works for an Immigration organization within the voluntary sector in London.

She loves feeling engaged with Bombay cinema; likes the melodrama; the colour; and likes seeing south Asians on the screen. She likes 'Amitabh Bachchan films' because these were stories about poor people and their struggles, now the films are about the middle-classes and very sanitized. She thinks that Indian women grow in their suffering; they are not meant to be happy and she tells me that 'you might as well forget about sex if you want validation' as an Asian woman. However, she thinks women (in Indian cinema) are stronger characters than male characters – strong, stoic and suffering and 'those sons will do what their mothers tell them!' She loves the sarcastic comedy of Indian cinema. She thinks her identity of British Black Asian does not relate to her Indian Gujarati identity. 'The more time I spend in England, the more distant I get from India'. She tells me the way she tries to bring these different parts of her together by looking at the universal human values'.

**Kamar 34.** Born and brought up in Leeds and now lives in Manchester. Parents from Punjab. Considers herself British Asian Black Punjabi middle-class. Educated to University level. Works in the voluntary sector. She was involved with black politics ten years ago but she felt Asian issues were invisibilised. She tells me religion is not important to her and that she is more into spirituality. Her parents are Sikh.

She does not watch cinema nowadays but she did when she was a child. She has fond memories of watching films at Hyde Park cinema halls in Leeds with parents and family friends. She loves the costumes and women's clothes in contemporary cinema but she has always found representation of women in Indian cinema problematic specifically in eighties when she was growing up. It put her off watching it. She tells me that 'its only recently that she is realizing that there is something of value, when she remembers going to cinema hall as a kid'.

**Mrs. Prahar 65.** Born and did her Masters there in India (Jamshedpur, Bihar). Considers herself Indian, Hindu and middle-class. Married. Speaks Hindi and Punjabi. Worked for Custom and Excise in UK and then opened a newspaper shop in Manchester.

She loved Indian films because it was a connection to her family back in India and to her childhood and youth. She was educated and 'brought up free' in her parent's family. She was arranged married to Mr. Prahar in India. Then they came here and her two children were born here. She has a daughter who has emigrated to Canada and has a son who lives in Salford. Her key theme throughout the interview was the role of women in cinema and society and the changes happening for women from traditional (when she was growing up) to modern times

(contemporary). She felt that 'life has improved for women' in comparison to her experience of being a workingwoman and the pressures her husband's family put her under.

**Mr. Prahar 74.** Born in Kenya, educated in India, where he got married before coming to Britain. A retired Engineer. Considered himself Indian Kenyan middle-class Hindu man. Speaks Hindi and Punjabi.

His father was from India, and Mr. Prahar went back to India where he studied for his engineering degree. After his retirement, he helped his wife run their newsagent shop. His key theme was how modern 'life has become very fast.' He compared his grandfather's life who was born and brought up in a village in Punjab to his grandchildren who were living all over the world - Kenya, Canada, UK, Australia and Germany. He felt that the changes have been drastic within two to three generation. In a discussion on the changing roles of women in cinema, he told me that 'its good, things have changed but women going out to work has had an adverse effect on children and the divorce has gone up.'

**Palika 56.** Born in India brought up in Malaysia (Her parents migrated there in the 1950s). Came London in 1967, when she was eighteen to have an arranged marriage to please family. Considers herself as an Indian Hindu middle-class woman. Speaks English, Malayalam and Hindi and understands Tamil. The marriage fell apart three months later and single since then. Educated to PhD level (Neurophysiology) but was forced to give up just before completion to join the civil service because she desperately needed the money. Retired from Civil Service. Palika's passion for old music and films was backed up by her vast knowledge of old Hindi and Tamil films, music and dance. Palika wanted to be a dancer as a child but as she told me 'you know middle class parents would not allow it in those days.' She also told me, 'I like the music. I go down to Tooting Video shop (SamRas), I get Hindi films because I can't get Telugu. I like Indian cinema of the 1940s and the Tamil cinema from old days, for example M R Subralakshmi's film. In those days cinema was like music recital and it would have forty-four songs, raga based songs.'

**Shakira 30.** Born and brought up in Britain (South London). Parents from Pakistan and Trinidad. Considers herself as a British Black Asian, working-class, mixed race, straight woman (with strong attachments to her London, south Asian and Caribbean identity). PhD Student.

She remembered when she was growing up 'it was shameful to like Bombay cinema but now it's acceptable'. She loves the colour, the sound in specific scenes and the watching these scenes evoke memory of when she was young and used to watch it with her mother. Shakira

described herself as feeling attached to aspects of Muslim, Christian and Hindu identity due to her parents mixed religious backgrounds.

**Aman 31.** Born and brought up in Britain (West London). Considers himself a British Indian/Guyanese middle-class. Anthropology PhD student.

His interest in Indian cinema was sparked when he went back to Guyana and realized that Indian cinema was very popular in Guyana and he decided to use it for his PhD. He had not grown up liking Indian cinema and had negative attitude towards it due to "... people's perception of Bollywood cinema and its mimicry of Hollywood." He felt that "When I talk to Indian middle-class – they despise Bollywood". The things he did not like about Indian cinema were its lack of reality, the duration of films, flimsy cardboard character construction and its convoluted narrative construction. Aman talking about his enjoyment of the emotional aspects of cinema, 'When I tell people I actually enjoy the film, I am not lying, I have cried so many times. Why am I crying at this meaningless interaction and then they wrap it up in a minute'.

**Jitender 39.** Born in Kenya brought up in Britain (Hounslow, London), parents originally from Punjab, then migrated to Kenya. Speaks Punjabi. Considers himself a British Sikh man. Educated to University level. Manager of an Information Technology firm.

Jitender told me he was disgusted by Indian cinema because of its unrealistic and melodramatic representation..

**Kurshid 25 and Nosira 25.** Born and brought up in Britain (East London), parents from Bangladesh. Consider themselves British Asian Bangladeshi Muslims. Speak Sylheti at home. Both were final year University students and they could only allow me forty minutes of their time. Both were from working-class background.

Both watched lots of Indian cinema and explained that their parents watched mainly Bangla TV at home and rarely watched Bollywood films. Nosira had seen many films and loved the songs and the dialogue. She loved '*Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jayeng (Lovers Win Brides, 1995, Aditya Chopra )* and other newer films. She loved Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol who were the actors in both films. He liked the women and the glamour, success and the richness and he thought the films were well made. He liked Mithun Chakravarti action films. Irfan, another Bangladeshi respondents had also liked Mithun Chakravarti's films. Mithun Chakravarti is a Bengali actor who was famous in the eighties. Both these men explained that they could identify with him because he was Bengali like them. Mithun Chkravarti is a

Bengali Hindu actor from Bengal in India and the two respondents are Bengalis from Bangladesh and are Muslims, living in UK.

**Ruji 18.** Born and brought up in Britain (Somerset town), parents from Bangladesh.. Considers herself British Asian Bengali Muslim and working-class. Computer science student, studying in a further education college and working part-time in a Pharmacy (where I met her) as a Pharmacy assistant. She has grown up in an area where many of her uncles, aunts and cousins are nearby.

She loves the dance, music, fashion, the actresses, the gossip, romance and the beautiful clothes in the Bollywood films. She often watches the films with her cousin sisters and whole group of friends and relatives go by going to the Warner village. She does not understand the language (Hindustani) in the films, fluently but she can understand most of it. She tells me (with a wishful look in her eyes) that her favourite actress 'Aishwaraya is beautiful' and is a 'superb dancer'. She would like to become like Aishwaraya.

**Gopi 21.** Born and brought up in India, parents still live there. Lives in south London. An overseas sociology student. Speaks Hindi, and Tamil. She was brought up watching Tamil films of Kamal Hassan, who is a famous south Indian actor. She would usually watch films in cinema halls with her college friends. There is a tradition in India for college students 'to bunk class and go and watch films and eat out cheap street food'. This is where college girls and boys meet and have fun and flirt. She seemed to like Tamil films better than Hindi films.

### **3.4 India Fieldwork**

Amongst the twenty-one key informants in India (mainly Delhi, Bombay), I interviewed seven academics, ten film professionals and four film and magazine journalists. During my three months fieldwork in India, I undertook interviews with key informants (Goetz & LeCompte 1984) on Bombay cinema in India (see Appendix II) in Delhi (mainly academics), Bangalore (visited and attended lectures and surveyed the library in Center for Study of Culture and Society) and Bombay (mainly producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors and journalists). The aim of my fieldwork and interviews in India was to gain an understanding of the meanings constructed about cinema and the industry by the Indian key informants. This would illuminate the significance of the differences in meanings constructed within the British South Asian Diaspora. I recorded my observations as field notes, in my diary. The fieldwork in India required a lot of preparation, convincing my supervisors this was significant in developing my understanding of the circuit of meaning produced between India and Britain. I had already contacted three institutions and many key informants by email to request an interview. I had identified the key informants through my reading and by talking to Indian friends to work out

who would be good to talk to on my topic. My sample of key informants included cinema, feminist and cultural theorists, journalist and film producers, actors and writers. Once I got to India, access was difficult as most key informants were very busy and they did not know me and therefore it required a lot of persuasion. Some were unconvinced and did not make time but most were very kind and provided their time, but articles, PhDs (such as Susmita Das Gupta's), references, magazines, and other publications. In Delhi where most of the academics are based, issues of power relationships between India and U.K, the geopolitical contexts of academic capital were brought up because there was a vast amount of literature on Indian cinema, which was not being published outside of India.

Film people were extremely short of time and they did not see how the interview could benefit them. In Bombay, getting interviews was even more difficult, because of the film professional's corporate ethic of 'Time is money,' which meant bigger stars or filmmakers would only give interviews if I would have provided them with publicity abroad, which I obviously could not, so I was unable to get big names such as Karan Johar whose films do very well in the Diaspora. I did approach him but he said he was away for a few weeks, which in Bombay filmy terms means 'chase me and we will see! As another film director and producer told me, it can take six months to a year for struggling film directors, actors and producers to get time with more well-known 'filmi people.' I had two examples of trying to interview such film directors. One was Farhan Akhtar, director of the famous *Dil Chahta Hai*. This film did really well amongst the 'thirty something' in the Diaspora. After several phone calls, I was invited for an interview at Farhan's house. When I got there, I was told that Farhan had been out partying until the early morning and that he was asleep. I waited for the interview but Farhan did not wake up. I left a note and left. Another example was Mahesh Bhatt: after chasing him for a while, I was asked to come to his office within the hour. Mahesh Bhatt invited me to eat with him and listened to the ideas around my thesis. He asked me call him on Sunday 6pm and to meet him the day after at 7am for a long chat, because he said, his head is clear at that time of the morning. When I rang at the designated time, I was told he had gone to Pakistan and would be back in a week's time. When I called in a week's time, he told me he would be really busy over next month, as he was making a film combining efforts with the Pakistani film industry. At that time, December 2004, the film industry was initiating projects with combined Indo-Pak efforts, with new gestures of friendship between the two countries.

### **3.5 Interview Analysis and Interpretation**

My interpretation process included an exploration of the theoretical framework, the interview process, and the method of analysis. My methods included film analysis and an analysis of interviews. In analysing my interviews, I used a grounded theory methods proposed by Glaser

and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1999) for interpreting interview transcripts. The aim of this method is to explore the data to generate theories and then to explore those theories by further data collection and analysis. The theories are “grounded” in the group’s observable experiences, but researchers add their own insight into why those experiences exist. This method values creation of new meanings from the respondent’s realities by trying to use their words and combining them with research questions to create major themes. I listened to the tapes and made detailed notes on each interview, listening for similarities and differences the specificity of stories, quotes, how the language was framed and relating the language used to biographies and the location of the respondents. I transcribed in full the interviews that I selected as providing rich analysis of cinema viewing. The analysis of interviews was complex and time consuming. I used my comprehension of discourse and semiotic analysis to highlight specific themes. Respondents often used contrasts for example, between Asian and Western ways of viewing and listening, or excess and subtle performances to produce their accounts of the social world.

### **3.6 Methods of Data Analysis**

Coding is an interpretative device or mechanism by which we can explore and organise data into meaningful categories or themes which then provides ways of interacting and thinking with data (Strauss, 1987, Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Codes can come from the theoretical framework, the research questions or the data. We can create sub themes and sub codes. I used coding to create themes by looking for similarities, differences, patterns, regularities, contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities. I noticed a commonality amongst women viewers of the enjoyment of romance and fantasy, though there was also cynicism by some respondents, such as Asha (a British Gujarati woman of thirty-four), who felt that ‘young sickly romance’ had taken over and sanitised Bombay cinema and there was lack of struggle in the films, which prevented the older generation identifying with the new films. The younger respondents however, loved the romance and some felt this created hope in cinema watching. Most female respondents felt it was escapism and fantasy and they enjoyed it with a strategy of ‘suspension of disbelief’ a kind of fun and parody and with a hint of yearning for an idyllic lover. I collected examples of this similarity and then wrote a section on this by asking the data questions and generating theories and frameworks. This was a process of data reduction or simplification (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Coding can also be used expand or transform and reconceptualise data opening up more diverse analytical possibilities.

After coding, the broad themes that emerged were those of identifications of cinema with family either through characters such as mothers or through rituals such as weddings. Cinema was seen as replicating feelings of home, often-imaginary notions of home. Bombay cinema was seen as a family language and cinema practice was a space of familiarity and

home feelings' due to the songs, sounds, food and eating that accompanied the viewing. The identifications with romance, the fantasy of travel to scenic places, the fantasy of ideal lovers, the songs, sounds, music and melodrama, a happy ending, and the simple moral framework contributed to this familiarity and pleasure. A few respondents also claimed, that through fantasy-based narratives real issues are debated. The emotional aspects were multi-sensorial and included sensual descriptions, erotic connections, nostalgia, loss and yearning. Many interviewees expressed disgust with the representations of gender. Palika (a British Indian Tamil woman of fifty-six) vocalized this when she related that in Tamil films women characters are slapped when they don't follow cultural norms. Many second-generation (born and brought up here) interviewees expressed how they would feel shame admitting to watching cinema in their younger years. Some respondents relayed their mimicking of their favourite hero and heroines fashions and dancing. A few respondents, such as Samira (a British Pakistani woman of thirty whilst talking about Dilip Kumar, one of the stars of old classical cinema) talked about their connections to specific actors whose performances permitted them to connect beauty and spirituality with artistic performances. The most intense emotions were associated with songs, music and melodramatic performances of actors, often women actors. There were differences in viewing based on age, national affiliations, religion, and gender and class positions. The younger respondents often loved the glamour, dressing up, fashion whilst some others from older age group hated that aspect of Bollywood and thought it made it empty and shallow. The ones who could speak Hindi and Urdu expressed pleasure with the words and songs and sometimes had extensive and in-depth knowledge of cinema. Language was seen as an obstacle for others but this did not prevent their analysis of the symbolic role of Bombay cinema. Respondent's national and religious affiliations were crucial markers in viewing positions.

Critical reflexive analysis and interpretation is informed primarily by my ideas of what is going on and combined with my respondent's ideas of what is going on for them. The ideas I use and draw upon are influenced by my understanding, curiosity, sympathy, and antagonism towards particular theories. My writing process generated an analysis by continually shifting between reading, analysing, reflexivity and theory building. The theories that I chose to impose on the interview text were produced within the framework of my location, knowledge and discussions with my supervisors. I generated the themes and concepts by interpreting the interview transcripts and simultaneously exploring the theoretical framework. Bakhtin (1981) recommends that we need to engage in a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation. By this he means that self-awareness is required of the decision process and the drawing of conclusions from the research material. For example, my ways of seeing influenced data collection, observational research, hypothesis construction and

theory building and these processes are not separate but interconnected. Theory building makes ideas explicit that were implicit.

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that the 'intellectual work' of linking data material with theoretical concepts happens whilst writing analytical chapters. The speculation and connections of multiple concepts with the data is one of the most confusing aspects of grounded theory. I wrote draft chapters using cognitive film theory and on respondents' responses to masculinity. Usually, I would start from particular findings by identifying a particular theme in the interviews, for example, the pleasure of pain. I then tried to account for that idea by respondents' quotes and then linked it with broader concepts and in this way empirical research allows for a more dynamic relationship between data and theory. The opening up of data can be used to interrogate them further to identify and speculate about further features. This is called Data complication (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Atkinson (1990) suggests decontextualising (taking it out of transcripts) and recontextualising where coding is a means of providing new contexts for viewing and analysing data. This decontextualising and recontextualising helps reduce and then expand the data in new forms and with new organising principles. After experimenting with writing a few drafts of the analysis chapters, I reached a stage where the themes for my chapters became more fixed into major themes: Asianness and notions of belonging; Mothers and genders relations; Sexual expression and representations of 'Vamps' and 'heroines'; Glamour and embodied practices of mimicry; Songs and pleasures of language, sound and sensuality and romance; and a chapter on sad songs, memory and mourning; and finally the themes of belonging, utopia and alienation.

## **Conclusion**

I set out to explore theories that underpin my research methods, analysis and interpretations. I wanted to understand how people use cinema to make sense of themselves and their worlds and how they recreate ideas of self and community through this practice. My aim was to produce knowledge about the social realities of British Asian subjects through an interpretation of cultural practices of cinema watching. In the process of developing my methodology, I explored and engaged with debates on key theoretical issues. I present them in terms of dichotomies for simplification of writing. The debate on objectivity versus subjectivity for a feminist epistemology is crucial in shaping the relationship between the researcher and her researched and the power dynamics of this relationship. The debate on structure versus agency, which includes an exploration of the deterministic meaning of texts (hidden, unconscious) versus indeterminate meaning (polysemy) created by viewers, is also the core of the formalism versus anti-formalism dichotomy and also contributes to the debate on active/passive interview subjects. I explored the key debate on active versus passive



viewers which is central to audience studies' conceptualisation of power relations between cultural producers and consumers. I chose to use the 'circuit of culture' model to explore the different power relations of the cultural object and the British Asian subject formations. As my end result, I propose that Bombay cinematic experience is a dynamic, unstable, conflictual and contested process of engagement, which permits 'Asian' subjects to imaginatively create a wide variety of regional, national and transnational selves in the past or in the future. An aesthetic of emotional connection and a symbolic inter-subjective sensibility is deployed to validate this practice.

The first evaluation of the thesis was that the second-generation respondents were often speaking for their parents. If I were asked to do this research again, I would select more first generation respondents to compare the differences in viewing practices. In addition, I believe the debates would have been different when discussing traditional cultural norms and expression of sexuality in cinema viewing in chapter five and chapter six respectively. In fact, the thesis may have an altogether different focus if more first generations respondents had been interviewed. Another weakness was that I was not able to select more male respondents who were cinema fans. I could have investigated the emotional and affective charge of cinema better by watching cinema with the participants and then interviewing them. This may have highlighted the debates on affect of media in a more nuanced way. However, considering that when I targeted cinema goers in Trafford Center in Manchester, the response was abysmal, as people do not necessarily want to come out of their 'dream like' state achieved in cinema and begin discussing their feelings and interpretation straight after. I had considered doing focus groups on cinema viewing practices but it was not practical considering the level of data I had already generated. But, another study could carry out focus groups to generate discussions on cinema practices. Family interviews could be another way of ascertaining domestic cinema watching and the power relation of British Asian families. My bias in the analysis was towards respondents who engaged eloquently and deeply because they provided a rich language to link to other respondents. In my data, these were usually women respondents. Due to the number of interviews I conducted I overwhelmed myself with the respondents' voices and quotes and often felt paralysed in case I misrepresented what they were saying. The analytical chapters were difficult to structure because I wanted a set of similar quotes to structure my argument, which in the end was impossible and I had to impose my frame of theories and combine it with the respondents' quotes and concerns.

In my research I do not assume that the 'Asian experiences' I am elaborating on are representative of the wider South Asian population. On the other hand, I know that my findings are not confined to my respondents only. If another researcher using my research instruments repeated the research, I believe s/he would come out with similar themes. The themes were based on the recurrence and repetition articulated by the respondents. I argue

that I produce an analysis, which goes beyond my respondents, that is it transcends the particular and the local. Abductive inferences (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) can lead us from particular findings such as the reproduction of cultural debates on gender in cinema practices in chapter 5-7 towards generalisations that these debates are key to most South Asian contexts. In this way my analysis of this context can be applied to a more general context.

A feminist critical reflexivity methodology permits me to analyse the power relations inherent in producing authoritative knowledge. By making it transparent, one hopes to visibilise some of the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee. In addition, my claim to produce not 'the' authoritative account but 'an' authoritative interpretation opens up the space for other accounts to be produced. By using a plural and critically reflexive methodological approach I have allowed for accountability and transparency regarding how the research was done. In addition, using grounded theory, ethnographic 'thick description' and an evaluative mechanism of accountability and plausibility, I have succeeded in producing a rich and dense map of historically situated cultural meanings, by illuminating glimpses of British Asian realities. I believe that this can contribute to a complex understanding of Bombay cinematic practice and British Asian culture. The historical process is never finished or completed. Therefore meanings created in my thesis should leave the space open for new meanings to emerge.

# CHAPTER 3

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### AND POPULAR BOMBAY CINEMA

#### Introduction

Indian Cinema was the first instance in Indian civilisation that ‘national public’ could gather in one place that was not divided along caste differences. (Sivathamby 1981 as quoted in Rajadhyaksha 2000:35)

This quote expresses the radical role of Bombay cinema in reconfigurations of Indian society and culture in its drive towards modernity. In this chapter I elaborate on the configuration of Bombay cinema and illuminate the transformations that have shaped its current form. In this chapter, I argue that cinema is a historical archive of national changes. I argue that Indian popular cinema as a mass cultural form symbolises and reproduces the dramatic transformations in the social, political, economic and cultural environment while embodying these changes in its form and aesthetic structure. In exploring these transformations, I foreground the articulation of key themes of decolonisation, nationalisation, urbanisation, the failure of secular democratic ethos, the crisis of gender, and the crisis in religious and class relations that are reproduced. I argue the cinema’s exhibitionist aesthetic is primarily a melodramatic form, which combines traditional and modern artistic ideas to produce a heterogeneous performance and address. Cinema song and dance visuals are crucial to melodramatic and emotional identification of the audience. The multiple sensory experience of cinema allows for the possibility of a range of new subjectivities to be produced. In the second section, I examine how the contemporary social and economic changes affecting the film industry and the national culture are thought of through an analysis of interviews with key film informants from Bombay.

In the first section of this essay, I examine changes in the cinematic genre and themes from its inception to the present. I also highlight the three key debates shaping the cinematic texts; the representation of gender using tropes of tradition and modern binary; the class conflict through the notion of ideal subject and ‘good and ‘bad’ culture; and representation of religion through unity and difference. I also examine the cinematic modes of address employed in the constitution of spectator subjectivity. The components of cinematic modes of address and I explore are the cultural antecedents of story telling through theatre, songs and dance genres and the character types through religious and modern texts. I have tried to intertwine three threads in this chapter; a historical thread of social economic changes influencing the cinema themes and form; a second thread of crucial debates that were taking

place regards to cinema and popular culture; and thirdly how the cinematic form internalised these changes and reproduced it through its aesthetics. Bombay cinema is a complex and diverse area and there are a vast number of themes associated with it. Hence, I elaborate on a range of themes. This chapter is also a literature review and I examine the concepts of melodrama and affect in relation to emotional identification of Bombay cinema for British Asian subjects. In addition, my fieldwork in India also finds a voice here, in that key informants from Bombay cinema elucidate on their industry and on Indian culture.

Bombay cinema is a public space for collective imaginations of an Indian identity by creating stereotypes and silencing diversity. Cinema's function as a mode of communication and sociality has made it a significant player in the development of the Indian democratic state and its discourses of nationalism, development and modernity. Indian cinema embodies tensions between tradition and modernity inherent in national, cultural and political conflicts. The oppositions of elite against the masses, the rural against the urban, modernity against tradition, independence against community and democracy against authoritarianism are predominantly invoked in forging this identity. The state and the intellectual elites have blamed the internal others for preventing the development of India. These others have been the poor on the fringes of the city and those from the rural and provincial territories. The cultural conflict between the elite and the masses is articulated through notions of 'good' and 'bad' culture. The 'good' culture of the elite was seen to be the art, social and realist cinema and 'bad' culture of the masses was popular melodramatic commercial cinema.

Cinema has prioritised different aspects in different genres. Most genres have been melodramatic storytelling genres where the hero and associated characters address communities and represent ongoing cultural conflicts. The transformations in key themes gesture towards the relations with a shifting audience. In the fifties, Indian cinema articulated an era of socially concerned nation-building themes. The sixties pre-dominated with romantic family themes whilst the seventies were overpowered by 'action, violence and sex'. The fifties were seen as the golden period of Indian cinema that combined humanist and romantic themes. The seventies brought the working-class hero to the fore and an audience of urban slum dwellers replaced the urban middle-class audience of the fifties and sixties. The eighties were seen as a sterile period, with themes of corruption, violence and gang rapes. Due to state liberalisation policies and an access to British markets, the nineties were the beginning of mass media circuits. Appadurai (1996) and Rajagopal (1999) propose that the media represents the discursive contexts within which communities are formed and reproduced. The nineties have produced the hegemony of the middle-class Hindu and diasporic audience and a homegrown globally mobile yuppie audience. The cinema of the nineties aimed at the diaspora prioritises technological innovations as part of its exhibitionist aesthetic combined with family values and nostalgia. The key transformation from a socialist state towards a

capitalist neo-liberal economy has drastically influenced cinema's renderings of local, national and transnational identities. The contemporary rhetoric of national crisis is expressed in terms of the rise of consumption and the role of the media in Westernisation (read individualism, capitalist materialism and sexual freedom) of the metropolitan cultures. There are drastic differences in values between provincial and metropolitan culture. The filmmakers and critics (Shyam Benegal, Manoj Bajpai, Indu Mirani, Deepa Gahlot) I talked with, expressed the view that the celebrity culture had replaced national leaders and politicians. This was due to changes in the politics of socialism to capitalism which values individualism and the personal over community and broader social ambitions. Many film professionals (Anjum Rajabali, Prakash Jha, Shyam Benegal) I interviewed felt that Indian film industry has been subsumed by the nostalgic and neo-traditional desires of the diaspora and cinema's radical potential has been subsumed in the diasporic regressive politics.

## **Section 1: History, Themes and the Cinematic Aesthetic**

### **1.1 Anti-colonialism, Nationalism and Communalism**

Indian artists from popular art movements including painting, theatre and literature were active participants and reproducers of anti-colonial and nationalist ideologies that spread across the country in the early twentieth century (Kapur, 1989). They deployed traditional Indian artistic practices to voice criticism of the colonial rulers. The painting of Raja Ravi Varma was one such example in that he combined mythological themes and symbols with colonial techniques and technology of reproduction to create Indian paintings (Kapur, 1989). D.G Phalke, the producer of the first Indian film, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), was influenced by these ideas and also privileged Hindu mythology as a completely authentic indigenous form of signification. Phalke was aware of the need to see 'Indian images on the screen' (Rajadhyaksha 1987:47). This was an anti-colonial stance but was also a personal desire for an authentic Indian identity, which erased cultural and religious heterogeneity. Hindu mythological and adventure films had played a very significant role in the colonial period in encoding messages of nationalist patriotism (Choudhry, 2000). The other genres that were also popular at this moment were the adventure story, stunt films and the historical drama which also challenged colonial rule by their anti-British sentiments and placed nationalism as their central ideological force (Choudhry, 2000).

At the same time that the anti-colonial movement was gaining popularity in the country both Hindu and Muslim communal forces were also strengthening (Bhatt,2001 ). The Indian National Congress used a discourse of inclusive nationalism unifying divisions of religion, region and language in the context of worsening Hindu-Muslim relations. Choudhry (2000) also argues that the British imperial cinema used negative representations of Muslims to

divide and create antagonism between Hindu and Muslim communities. The discourses of gender and religion have been key in symbolising the nation and inciting sectarian division by the Hindu nationalists. In contemporary cinema and in national public cultures, the imagery of mother from Hindu mythology is still used as a trope for the nation. There has been a history of mobilisation of the 'mother' symbol to represent the nation by the Hindu nationalists and by secular groups (Zutshi, 1993). The 'mother' symbol usually represents the Indian land whose virtue and purity was defended by Hindu men against British and Muslim male aggressors. Religiously gendered images of goddesses that signified either strength or aggression such as that of goddess Durga and Kali<sup>8</sup>, or a helpless victim of disrobing and sexual dishonour, such as Draupadi<sup>9</sup> were also used to symbolize the condition of the nation (Mankekar, 1999:224).

## 1.2 The Traditional Aesthetic and Heterogeneous Cinema Address

In this section, I explore how filmmakers comprehend the subjectivities of the spectator and the mechanisms they use to entice them to the films and create different subject positions for them. Indian cinema addresses and positions its audience/spectator by using a number of methods and has a history of diverse modes of address. India's storytelling tradition is derived from religious practices. Indian cinema has very specific mode of telling stories, which does not always rely on narrative coherence or linear continuity and is often convoluted, emphasising emotions, moral dialogues, and spectacles of song and dance sequences. The song and dance scenes are a central way of addressing spectator pleasure and either forwarding the story or commenting on the story. The positioning of the spectator is therefore

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<sup>8</sup> Durga and Kali are two incarnation of same goddesses who are understood as feminine cosmic forces. They create, destroy and and recreate the universe by destroying the demonic forces that threaten world equilibrium wielding weapons in multiple arms that testify to her ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. See Vidya Dehejia (1999) "*Devi, The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art.*"

<sup>9</sup> Draupadi is the outspoken and strong heroine of the religious Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Her husband Yudhishthira gambles his kingdom and his wife. Draupadi challenges the assembly and demands to know how it is possible for one who has staked and lost his own self to retain the right to wager her. Duryodhana, the winner of the bet, insists that Draupadi be disrobed. Furious at this insult to her honor, Draupadi loosens her hair and vows that she will not pleat it again until she has washed it in Duryodhana's blood. As she is disrobed, the more her sari is pulled away the longer it becomes due to God Krishna's blessing. It is this event, which turns Draupadi from a contented, but strong willed wife into a vengeful goddess. See Vidya Dehejia (1991) "*Devi, The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art.*"

organised on multiple axes. The stories are predictable, formulaic and originate from religious texts, mythological and folk stories. Mishra (2002:4) argues that the stories of epic religious texts of Ramayan, Mahabharat are the founders of Indian discursivity (as Christ, Marx and Freud are for Western discursivity). These folk and mythic stories are a pool of shared information and form a cultural knowledge base. Indian popular cinema uses signifiers from these cultural and religious texts. Stories are also borrowed from news events, previous successful film and from Hollywood. Stories assume that the audience has previous knowledge and therefore focuses on the presentational aspects, that is, how to tell the story differently rather than to tell different or new stories. The story does not rely on enigma or suspense (usually) but on its exhibitionist and melodramatic emotional charge to attract its audience. The communication with the audience includes a range of techniques of cinematic address such as the use of story, characters, songs, melodramatic style, emotional charge, moral dilemmas, MTV style rhythms and cuts, sexual spectacles, a poetic or rhetoric of language, decorative mise en scene, performance practices using classical dance and folk theatre postures, gestures and ways of looking.

The notion of chance is a recurring device to articulate cosmic destiny and divine discourses, and to critique reason and science re-affirming the sacred and spiritual realms. The discourses of suffering, self-negation and renunciation and the disdain of material pleasures are drawn from Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist philosophies. In Mishra's estimation, there are three concepts from the epic religious texts, which are crucial in understanding Indian popular cinema. These are genealogy, the persistence of moral codes, and the power of the renouncer (2002:5). Exile is articulated as alienation and isolation from family and community. The discourses of genealogy require proof of good birth, either through bodily signs or testing characters on moral ground through suffering in order to assign moral value to male and female characters. The hero or heroine, often through self-negation and suffering, become the renouncer.

Identifications with characters allow the spectator entry into the films. The spectator forms relationships with different characters based on similarities and differences. Male hero and heroines are stereotypical figures who communicate ideological discourses and communicate through notions of patriotism, ideas of the tradition and modern, religious morals to form communities. Indian culture's overvaluation of masculinity is reproduced by cinema. Mishra (2002) proposes that there are two fundamental character types in Indian cinema. The first is the hero in '*vipralambha*'<sup>10</sup>(Mishra 2002:5), describes as the mood of

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<sup>10</sup> Vipralambha is a Sanskrit word for the mood of love in separation, usually for conjugal but also for spiritual separation. It is believed that love grows in separation and spiritual separation is a kind of ecstasy; it is simultaneously bitter and sweet.

the hero estranged from his lover or detached from the world. Examples of these range from Dilip Kumar to Rajesh Khanna, a high level of alienation from the world frames the mood of the hero and produced the melancholic hero with a '*Becara complex*' – the latter being a complex of self-pity that produces melancholia (Mishra, 2002:6). The influence of western literature and the modern novel on the construction of the romantic sentimental hero (such as in the film *Devdas* (1935, P.C. Barua, 1955, Bimal Roy, 2002, Sanjay Leela Bhansali) over a few decades has been widely discussed in postcolonial literature. Amitabh Bachchan as the 'angry anti-hero' replaced the romantic-pathos afflicted sentimentalist hero in the early seventies. The sentimentalist hero of early films often enacted a denial of materialism through his poetic and moral language. However, there was contradiction in that the films often depicted images of rich lifestyle and yet there was a continual verbal dialogue abstaining from material pleasures. The female characters are also sites of intense emotions. Mishra's second character type is the Mother, whose suffering and protective representation changed little in Indian cinema. The filmic mother often renounces everything for the sake of her husband or son. The female characters are often ahistorical, more ideal than the male characters. The four other character types Mishra describes as important are the heroine, the villain, the vidushaka (the buffoon or the courtly fool), and the double (the device of splitting a character). The comedian in Indian cinema is also an antecedence of earlier theatrical traditions of the vidushak (Mishra, 2002:8). The comedian usually plays the fool, with almost grotesque embodied expressions and comportment. The body of the comedian is usually a figure of ridicule and laughter and is used as a contrast to the hero's body, gesture and state of being, the latter constructed as the ideal. The comic's voice can be a commentary on the story or assume a moral position. This allows for different views to be expressed to the audience thus contributing to the heterogeneous address.

Indian cinema was deployed as a tool for nationalist, anti-colonialist and reformist ideologies as well as being a medium of entertainment. The mode of address changed according to political, social and economic changes, and targeted different groups and different ideologies. In this way, cinema's address has the potential to change to suit new subjects and communities. For example, a film like *Lagaan (Land tax, 2001, Ashutosh Gowariker)*, which addresses multiple audiences by using the sport of cricket as a space for an anti-colonial stance affirms the diversity of Indians, and hence invites the patriotic audience in. It affirms tradition and the family while at the same time in competing against the British for their injustice, it brings in elements of modern and Enlightenment discourses of rights and justice. This is a film that affirms Indian-ness on a global stage by marketing itself as a cross-over film to both a diasporic market and a non-diasporic British and American audience. The cross-over films want to compete with Hollywood films by targeting a global audience by also appealing to white viewers. In this way, Indian cinema has transformed its



content and form to target national, diasporic and transnational audiences. In the next section, I explore its melodramatic and exhibitionist aesthetics.

### 1.2.1 The Exhibitionist Aesthetic

The melodramatic address of cinema includes its exhibitionist aesthetic. Geeta Kapur (1987), Anuradha Kapur (1993) and Ashish Rajadhyakha (1987, 1993) and Ravi Vasudevan (1995, 1996) produced studies on evolution of a modern Indian aesthetic in art, theatre and cinema and proposed aesthetics of 'frontality' as key to these realms. The genealogy of Indian cinema includes a fusion of traditional and modern cultural styles and aesthetic. The cinema has cultural antecedents in folk music and theatre, which valued orality and presentational forms of address. The exhibitionist address or the direct address can be viewed as a kind of an expressionist mode (Vasudevan 1997). Melodrama is integral to cinema's address in that emotional states are externalised through costume, makeup, setting and song and dance sequences. The orality and musical transmission of knowledge forms an integral part of cultural practices. The use of calendar art aesthetics (a specific style of representing which I discuss in the next section) in cinema follows from its use in arts and illuminates historical transformations of Indian pictorial art. Its presentational rather than representational style creates its exhibitionist aesthetic. The frontality, decorative style, grand settings and multiple characters give it a carnivalesque aesthetic. Anuradha Kapur (1993) highlighted the merging of Parsi<sup>11</sup> theatre with local expressions such as Nautanki,<sup>12</sup> Raslila<sup>13</sup> and Ramlila<sup>14</sup> as well as

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<sup>11</sup> Parsi theatre was a mobile theatre company in colonial India, inception in 1853. It deployed local languages (such as Gujarati, Urdu and Hindi), used European-style proscenium with richly painted backdrop curtains and trick stage effects, and depended on spectacle and melodrama to create audience appeal. It brought in realism and urban drama. It was displaced by motion pictures after the advent of sound in the 1930s. See Katherine Hansen's (2002) article 'The City as a Spectacle and Performance' in the 'Sarai Reader : The Cities of Everyday Life (2002)'.

<sup>12</sup> Nautanki is a kind of street play popular in northern India especially in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Before the advent of cinema in India, it was the most popular form of entertainment prevalent in these areas. Usually a nautanki consisted of folklore and mythological dramas with interludes of folk songs and dances.

But, now it has taken other forms. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/nautanki>, retrieved on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Raslila is a folk dance drama of northern India, based on scenes from the life of Krishna. Solo and group dancing are combined with singing, chanted recitation, and instrumental accompaniment. The audience joins in singing beat by clapping hands. see 'raslila'. (2006). In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved August 11, 2006, from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9062739>

<sup>14</sup> Ramlila is the enactment of the story of God Rama believed to have been started by a great Saint, Tulsidas. The Ramcharitmanas, written by him till today forms the basis of Ramlila performances. In some places, Ramlila is associated with the religious Vijaydashmi (the worship of the Goddess Durga) celebrations in late Sept. & early Oct. and also with Ramnavami, the birthday of God Rama.

various musical and speech style with colonial theatrical forms. Mishra (2002) similarly elucidates on the creative hybridity of Parsis of India in contributing to Indian cinema by providing stories, themes and dialogues they had used for Parsi theatre productions. These genealogical studies of frontal framing propose an aesthetic of direct address in modern cinema and other arts. These authors have argued this convention invites complicity with the spectator and continues to govern Bombay cinema, in that the eroticism and melodrama generated is partially stimulated by cinema and its composition.

Vasudevan (1997, 2000) proposes three exhibitionist framing devices or modes of presentation in the way cinema frames the scene and positions the spectator: the frontality mode; iconicity mode; and the tableau. Frontality aesthetic can be found in painting, calendar art and theatre. Frontality or a way of direct looking, out of the frame at the supposed spectator contributes to an affective bond. The erotic aspect of this aesthetic is that the character in the painting, calendars and in cinema is seated facing the spectator. Looking directly at the spectator creates an erotic exchange (Mishra 2002:9) which continues to govern Bombay cinema in the framing of the *mise-en-scene*. This mode of framing may have developed from the religious practices of 'darshan' (Vasudevan 1996). The concept of Darshan has been theorized by a number of authors writing on visual culture of India, such as Diane Ecke (1981) and Lawrence Babb (1981), Ravi Vasudevan (1996), Madav Prasad (1998), Geeta Kapur (1997) and Chris Pinney (1997), amongst others. Darshan is a Hindu religious ritual that a devotee carries out by going to the temple and 'seeing' the deity's picture or sculpture. This necessarily involves 'seeing' 'looking' and 'being in the presence' of the deity but also other religious rituals of worship. Devout Hindus would travel a long distance to see specific temples and the deity, as well as sadhus and saints to take 'darshan.' The authors named above have developed a theory of looking and visuality out of the practice of darshan. For example, Ravi Vasudevan (1995) has applied the concept of 'darsinic gaze' in his analysis of the films 'Devdas' (1955, Bimal Roy) and 'Pyassa' (1957, Guru Dutt). Kapur (1987), Rajadhyakha (1987) and Mishra (2002) have argued that construction of the body in Indian art and cinema can be partly traced back to the art of the painter Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906). Varma was much influenced by colonial painters but developed a mode of representation that established an Indian aesthetic. Varma's art acknowledges its colonial origins but then defiantly introduces jarring Indian colours to make an anti-colonial statement. The Bombay cinematic conventions have developed over the last fifty years and these conventions influence the way each frame is composed. The melodramatic mode of address is achieved by a number of techniques and conventions utilised in framing each scene. Iconic framing is melodramatic because it disrupts movement and rhythm of the film by holding the

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image static and suspending time. This way of framing is borrowed from calendar art where meaning is condensed by merging multiple layers of symbolic intertextual allusions to create one image in one frame. Tableau framing was also evident in calendar art where dramatic grouping of well-known painting, sculpture and scene was reproduced. In the next section, I examine the political and social changes, which influenced the nation formation and cinematic modes of address.

### **1.3 Independence, Modernity and the Social Genre**

The Indian National Congress achieved its aim of India as a united independent nation on August 15 1947, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. Indian nationalism before Independence was plural and its diversity was demonstrated in the characters that constituted the Indian National Congress. Independence came with a traumatic division of the country into two nations, India and Pakistan. Mass migration and communal violence swept the country displacing fifty million people. India's educated urban elite led by Nehru began the transformation towards a progressive modern secular socialist state. The fifties in India were therefore the nation-building decade. Nehru sought to consolidate a variety of values: democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism. In the political climate of the post Independence years, however, the differences in language, religion, caste and region that had been suppressed due to a united anti-British sentiment surfaced (Khilnani, 1997). The large-scale migration of talent from Bombay due to Partition led to drainage in creative resources. An anti-Hindi movement in Tamilnadu emerged, led initially by the Dravida Munnetra Kaghamsi (DMK) political party. Regional and linguistic movements began after the Independence in reaction to Nehru's bid to make India one nation with two main languages – English and Hindi. After Partition, the Indian government began to replace Urdu with Hindi as the national language, and there followed a purging of Urdu from national radio and television (Manuel, 1993). As Khilnani (1997) points out in post-Nehru India, the emergence of political Hinduism, of regional voices, and of the claims of caste identities complicated the question of Indian identity.

The need for new myths for unifying the nation into a community was strongly desired. Hence 1950s cinema's "social reform" narrative articulated Nehruvian ideology and vision of India, which economically included an industrialized modern India, articulated along with the Gandhian political (anti-violence and self-sufficiency) philosophy and moral legacy. The modern themes of justice, equality and humanity were articulated through narratives of struggle between the 'haves and have-nots,' 'the rural and the urban,' 'the tenant/peasant,' and 'the landlord/moneylender.' The mass migration of refugees, Hindu-Muslim relationships, and caste hierarchy were common cinematic themes in the films of the 1950s. The end of colonial rule presented with addressing processes of socioeconomic change and

widespread poverty. Cinema was therefore seen as a tool for educating the masses about social reform issues and instilling the ideology of nationalism.

Vasudevan (1995, 2000) locates the decline of Hindu mythological and adventure films in keeping with Nehruvian nationalist secular ambitions. Postcolonial cinema tried to reconcile the trauma of partition by representing Hindu and Muslim solidarity and harmony. Vasudevan elucidates that the post-colonial filmmakers used well-known historical figures such as those associated with Moghul ruler Akbar (1556-1605) who was famous for religious tolerance and cultural and artistic pluralism, for conveying inclusive sentiments. Sohrab Modi's historical explored the Mughal periods, which focused on historical sharing of syncretic traditions and culture rather than differences and enmity between Hindu and Muslim communities. However, other historical films in Marathi, such as the portrayal of Shivaji, as the founder of India's first Hindu Kingdom based upon his Dev-Desh-Dharm (God, Nation and religion) ethics and war against Muslim kings, tended to forward the case for communal segregation rather than integration (Vasudevan, 1995).

Throughout the fifties and sixties the threat of censorship deterred filmmakers from attempting to represent communal themes. But post-Partition trauma was also too painful to confront. In 1973, *Garm Hawa* (Hot Winds, M.S. Sathu) was the first film to examine the conflict between Hindu-Muslim communities and represented both communities as self-serving. The innocence of village life in comparison to the harsh realities of urban living was also a key theme in films in the following decades. Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* (A piece of Land, 1953, Bimal Roy) narrates the story of a dispossessed peasant through which rural poverty and the brutalising effects of city life were explored. It also gives a vivid picture of the living conditions in a great city. *Baazi* (Chance, 1951, Guru Dutt) is the story of a social outcaste making a living in the harsh urban landscape of Bombay. It incorporated metaphors of arrival and survival and the mastering of life in the metropolis. *Awara* (Tramp 1952, Raj Kapur, who was influenced by Charlie Chaplin's) is a story of nurture over nature. The symbol of 'tramp' alluded to the conditions of life for millions living on the margins of the city. *Sri 420* (Mr 420, 1955, Raj Kapoor) was also about the arrival of a rural migrant to the city of Bombay. In the next section, I examine the relationship of the newly emerging state with cinema as a crucial aspect of modernity.

### 1.3.1 State and Culture

Within this historical context there was an intense ambivalence expressed towards the commercial film industry by the state and filmmakers. Cinema was seen by the state as a problem due to its 'magical powers' over the masses but also as an educational tool for modern development (Kaul, 1995). Ganti (1999) argues this ambivalence is connected to the ideology and discourses of developmentalism that informs both state policy and shapes

subjectivities in many postcolonial societies. Ganti illustrates how this identity of underdevelopment is manifest in the film industry both in its self-representation as well as in its representation of its audiences. An example of this was expressed by the director Ashish Bhatnagar of “I Dreams” (a multi-national media and entertainment company, which is involved with production and distribution of films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* in India, and is also involved with The Screen International, a film trade magazine, which considers itself as the voice of film business) told me:

The film industry is disorganised, immature and there is little intelligence and there is a lack of professionalism. People are ‘star struck’ because of media portrayal and glamour. (Interview, 15/12/04, Bombay)

The discourses of backwardness are often connected to the deficiencies of the film industry and articulated in terms of work culture, originality and technology with Hollywood as the usual point of reference. Audiences are characterised as less educated, less sophisticated and less modern than filmmakers and seen as a constraint upon their filmmaking. Most Indian filmmakers perceive themselves not as technically advanced as Hollywood, and their constant drive for legitimacy and respectability is determined by continual comparison to Euro-American filmmaking standards. There were contradictions in state discourses in that cinema was seen as low class entertainment but at the same time was also considered dangerous. However, national leaders also recognised cinema representation as a political tool to mobilise their constituents. The Indian state’s strict censorship and taxation legislation (Vasudevan, 1995) curtailed cinematic freedom but simultaneously the state also organised the International Film Festival in 1952 to encourage filmmakers. For many Indian filmmakers, the latter was their first experience of European cinema.

Hence the relationship of state to culture has been an ambivalent and contradictory one. In the 1950s, Nehruvianism through the various technologies of state tentatively defined an Indian identity - a citizen based on a secular and humanist ethos of critical individualism who integrated traditional values. However, Nehru failed to implement a national cultural policy due to fears of stirring up religious bigotry. The state, national elite and cinema minimised communal conflict and anti-Muslim sentiment. They advocated social harmony and national integration. This set up the historically precedence of the secular state remaining silent under a whole set of political, social and religious conditions. Chetan Bhatt (2001:152) proposes that this avoidance or silence was a failure of secular nationalism. The genocide that followed Partition created a culture of silence on notions of religious difference and rivalry for the fear of initiating sectarian riots and anti-Muslim feelings. The state instituted censorship on cinema and other media and promoted national harmony and unification. However, in this process, it also silenced cultural and religious differences. I discuss this crucial omission on part of the nationalist elite’s ideology in the textual analysis of *Amar Akbar Anthony*.’

Prasad (1998:218) has argued that the film industry as ‘an institution is part of a continuing struggle within India over the form of the state.’ Indian cinema as popular culture becomes the imaginary space of conflicts and contestations over the state. The dominant textual form of Indian cinema, then, is structured by the allegory of the state. The state’s benevolent role towards cinema was to create institutions such as the National Film Development whose role was to promote and develop quality films, such as those produced by the Parallel Cinema genre. The film festival organised by the state institutions introduced Akira Kurosawa’s ‘epic melodramas’ and Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica’s Italian neo-realism to the Indian filmmakers. This was a great influence on many filmmakers in the subsequent years. Up until then, Hollywood films had been the main influence on Indian cinema. Bimal Roy, *Do Bigha Zameen* (A piece of Land, 1953, Bimal Roy) narrates the story of a dispossessed pays homage to *The Bicycle Thief* and Mehboob Khan’s *Mother India* (1957) has been called an epic melodrama. In alliance with literary culture, a middle-class cinema of reform evolved. These currents continued into the late 1950s, the golden age of cinema – the peak of a nationalist ideology with socialist aspirations.

### 1.3.2 Parallel Cinema

The post-Nehru years (Nehru died in 1964) saw the subduing of the optimism of the early years of Independence. This decade highlighted two main themes in cinema. The first was the ‘feudal family romance’ and the second was the ‘struggle against injustice’ mediated through the ‘realism’ of parallel cinema. Parallel Cinema (taking its cue from Nehruvianism) saw itself as a political project, an agent of social change. Its vision was to see filmmakers as architects of a progressive national consciousness. Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, and many others formed the vanguard of Parallel cinema. This movement was initiated as a reaction to the hegemony of a commercially based, profit driven popular cinema. Instead it called for cinematic alternatives in the name of a higher calling to art. Its key terms were ‘authenticity’ and ‘realism.’ The influence of ‘Parallel’ cinema on the Bombay cinema industry was and still is phenomenal. In the late sixties there were also the first manifestations of Naxalite guerilla warfare <sup>15</sup>(Naxalbari started in 1967), which also inspired many ‘Parallel cinema’ filmmakers. The late fifties and sixties also produced ‘Auteur’ cinema. Auteur cinema derives from the auteur theory (Wollen, 1969) developed by the loosely knit group of critics who wrote for *Cahiers du Cinema* and made it the leading film magazine in the world.

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<sup>15</sup> Naxalite is the name of the communist peasant uprising, which began in a village in West Bengal in 1967. Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) led this revolutionary uprising to replace the upper classes and the government, following on from Mao Zedong of China. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naxalite>

The auteur theory does not limit itself to acclaiming the director as the main author of a film. It implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before. The model relies on existential distinctions between art and popular films. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1969) has summed up the auteur theory as a 'structural approach', which discovers the defining characteristics of an author's work. These are not necessarily those, which are most readily apparent, but can be the pattern formed by particular motifs and themes, which give an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another.

Within an Indian context, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor, and Dev Anand defined the contours of the best of popular commercial cinema. These filmmakers are viewed as auteurs of the Golden Era of 1950s, the best of Indian cinema. The idealism of post independence cinema in the fifties expressed a romantic era full of hope, optimism and innocence. It is in the 'social' films of the 1950s that articulated an independent nation and its development. The Golden Era represented the idealism of post-Independence as well as critique of development and poverty. An example of socialist ideas and the value of labour in the post-colonial India was the film *Naya Daur (New Ways 1957, B.R.Chopra)*, which argued for collectivisation as the proletarian way of managing new technology. This is a story of a traditional village community threatened by mechanisation and development allied to capital. This film registers the fifties ambivalence toward the large-scale industrialisation supported by the state.

### **1.3.3 Citizenship, Class and Popular Culture**

As argued earlier, many filmmakers' perception of the audience as a 'restriction on their freedom' was based on earlier state discourses of the 'ideal modern citizen' and utilised concepts of modernity and tradition. The narratives of developmentalism and backwardness relied on taste distinctions and class politics in creating cinema audience into binaries of elites versus the masses (Nandy, 1995). The cultural divide in India between the urban rich and the urban poor and those living in the cities and those living in the interiors are vast due to economic disparities. The city is home to the urban poor who live in slums, who are migrants to the city, and their migrancy status continually shifting as their slums are erased to make space for development of the city/metropolis. They form the non-formal sector of an underground cultural economy and society. They have very little voice in the metropolitan culture of the nation state and form part of various cultures of capitalism within national societies. The filmmakers wanted to educate the masses.

The criticism of popular and commercial cinema is debated through binary of high and low culture, which is mediated through notions of tradition and modernity. The traditional in this debate is associated with poorer and marginalised classes whereas the modern is validated

and associated with the urban elite and middle class intellectuals and the state. The notions of realism as authorising 'good' cinema were initiated by the intellectuals of 'parallel cinema' and also by the newly developing state. The entertainment and spectacle-based modes of address of popular commercial cinema were criticised for miseducating the masses. This discussion reproduced the Orientalist justifications of 'backward and infantile natives' that the colonial rulers had used against the colonised to validate their rule. However, the Parallel Cinema filmmaker's aim was to formulate a new kind of cinema based on realism and on political and social equality. Theirs was an ideological desire to change society of its oppressive structures of feudalism and tradition. There was an engagement with socialist and left wing ideas. The *Progressive Writers Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association* (affiliated to the Communist Party of India) who had many members working for the commercial cinema as well as the Parallel cinema were extremely influential on media discourses and state policies. A binary opposition was posited between popular cinema and its melodramatic modes of fictional, mythical, magical, and spectacular representations and that of a 'Parallel (art) Cinema' based on more realistic internalised, psychological characterisation and restrained performance following on from Western conceptions of neo-realism. These filmmakers addressed a middle-class sensibility of intellectual and art audiences. The aim of Parallel Cinema was to shape the notions of an ideal citizen and an ideal subjectivity and not necessarily to entertain, which was commercial cinema's aim.

Vasudevan (2000) explores this debate using positions articulated by three key cinema theorists: Chidananda Das Gupta and Ashis Nandy. Das Gupta takes the position of validating modernity Nandy takes the opposing view. Vasudevan (2000) argues that the first two positions articulate discourses of psychoanalysis and sociology to understand the identity of the cinema spectator and do not allow this figure to have agency. Chidananda Das Gupta (1968) a film critic and also a founding member of Calcutta Film Society in 1948 (along with Satyajit Ray), believes that commercial cinema produces the mass public as cultural dopes whose affiliations to traditional religious beliefs and other ideas threaten the modern secular and democratic state. The reasons for the masses being cultural dopes are based on their lack of intellectual capacity (a prevalent perception of poorer classes in most societies). Das Gupta's modernist argument authorises the middle-classes as the ones with intellect and rationalism, as ideal citizens. Das Gupta argues that Indian cinema by its usage of Hindu mythology and religious texts from its inception, provides a space for the revival of Hindu cultural nationalism. It is interesting to note that Das Gupta's thesis is still adhered to by contemporary India. Filmmakers often talk about the working-class front-benchers who only want 'item numbers' (the sexy song and dance sequences) as an indicator of their ignorance and degenerate morality.



Ashis Nandy (1995) opposes Das Gupta's view and criticises the project of modernist rationality and Enlightenment and thus Das Gupta's affirmation of modern citizenship. For him, modern development and nation building did not bring liberation for the masses but dispersed rural communities to urban centres causing poverty and mass migration. He sees the formation of the individual rational citizen as a homogenising drive of the modern state, which consequently erased diverse traditional cultures. The traditional values of family and kinship elaborated in popular cinematic narratives and characters such as that of the 'protective mother' or the 'dutiful daughter-in-law' act as 'shock absorbers' and alleviates the trauma of dramatic changes required for survival that modern life imposes onto the masses. Nandy's central thesis is that commercial cinema temporarily empowers the mass public disempowered by modernity. He elaborates that the popularity of Indian cinema amongst the poorer classes or the masses is because cinema becomes a screen for urban cultural class conflict, where the masses are denied access for economic reasons to the gains of modern development and industrialisation. The cultural conflict between the prosperous urban middle class and the 'class-less' positions of urban migrants living on the margins imaginatively becomes articulated through the conflict of tradition and modernity on the cinema screen. In his view the cultural affiliations of the people on the margins has come to define the changes in popular cinema and lies in cinema's ability to assuage fears, anxieties and the loss of identity and culture.

Vasudevan (2000) criticises both these position by pointing out that both Nandy and Das Gupta perceive (even if in opposing ways) a lack of a critical and rational outlook in the subjectivity promoted by mass film. The traditional subject submissive to authority infantilised by Das Gupta is converted in Nandy's evaluations into a defence of 'tradition' and 'community' against an individualising modernity. In the earlier section of this chapter, I argued that Indian commercial cinema has a cross-class appeal even though different genres attract different audiences at different times. However, the family orientated films have often attracted the middle-classes. Das Gupta's thesis is that cinema creates regressive and sectarian 'masses' is contradicted by the fact that the 'masses' replaced the BJP government through democratic means. Conversely, the mythological films of the early cinema were very popular amongst the upper classes. Nandy's thesis that it is the marginalised with a traditional perspective who participate in cinema watching maybe also be difficult to sustain. However, both these arguments have traces of justification. In the next section, I explore the political changes shaping the democracy in India and the cinematic content and form in the 1970s.

#### **1.4 The Crisis of Indian democracy**

Indira Gandhi's 'Emergency Rule' in 1975 interrupted India's democratic continuity. The 1970s were a period of deep crisis where poverty, crime, rising inflation, the weakening state

of law and order and corrupt and sectarian politics surfaced. Cinema reflected and reproduced the class and other conflicts of the nation. In the seventies and eighties the basic metaphor for Indian popular cinema was the 'urban slum'. In the late eighties, the hegemony of Congress Party came to an end. If the fifties were an era of socially concerned nation-building films, the sixties were dominated by 'romantic love' themes whilst from the mid-seventies onwards and well into the late eighties 'action, violence and sex' were common themes. Hence, the cinematic themes, the optimism of the fifties was transformed into the anger and revenge of the seventies and the corruption themes of the eighties. Thus the 1980s were seen by many critics, (Garga, 1998) as a barren period, devoid of any critical social concerns or creative impulse. This transformation in the melodramatic form and the content of Indian cinema reproduced the economic, political and other changes taking place in the nation. The films reflected and reproduced the national crisis through a dominance of melodramatic aesthetics.

### **1.5 Melodramatic Aesthetic**

The melodramatic mode deploys the discourses of family, morals, songs, bodies and the excess of exhibitionist mode of spectacles. The spectator's identification with films is shaped by the film's melodramatic and affective strategies, which are part of the exhibitionist cinematic address. I locate some key authors' conception of melodrama (Elsaesser 1972; Mulvey 1977; Brooks 1973,1995; Kuhn 1984; Vasudevan's 1985, 2000; Rajadhaksha 1993; Gledhill 1987, 2000; Dyer 1998; Mishra 2002) and I will attempt to situate Indian popular cinema's melodramatic strategies. The low cultural status of melodrama was challenged by Elsaesser's (1972) analysis of melodrama in the Hollywood films of Douglas Sirk of 1940s and 1950s. His analysis allowed melodrama to become acceptable in critical discussions of Hollywood films and the New German Cinema. Elsaesser argued that Douglas Sirk's use of melodramatic excess in 'women's weepies' was seen as a parodic strategy to highlight the contradiction inherent in women's life in a patriarchal society. This was a neo-Marxist exploration that analysed the contradictions and disjunctions apparent in the excessive styles in order to highlight the contradictions of the ideology producing it. Feminist critics such as Gledhill (1987), exploring the woman's genre of 1940s and 1950s and the rise of soap operas since in the 1970s as domestic melodrama, also challenged the traditional view of women's affiliations to melodrama. They argued that women's affiliation to melodramatic genres (and their recognition of self in the narratives) was not due to false consciousness and desire for victimisation but could be viewed as a criticism of patriarchy and bourgeois ideology. Mulvey (1977) saw family conflicts between the sexes as a safety valve for social problem arising from overvaluation of masculinity in the characterisation of the hero. Brooks (1973) traces the birth of the melodramatic genre to the time of the French bourgeois revolution at the end of eighteenth century, when modern forms of governance and liberal humanism based on

bourgeois individuality replaced feudalism. While Realist genres value explanation and seek truth and coherence, melodrama genres seek expressions of loss and pain due to social change, of a lost past or loss related anxieties, fears and trauma. Vasudevan (1989) Rajadhyaksha (1987), Thomas (1989, 1991), Nandy (1995) and Mishra (2002) have all theorised on different aspects of melodramatic aesthetic of Indian cinema. Mishra (2002) argues that melodrama in Indian cinema is hybrid form derived from folk plays and theatre such as Nautanki, Tamasha and Parsi theatre and from the British melodramatic novel. He proposes that western ideas were filtered through the pervasive influence of Romanticism on the Indian upper classes. The trans-class coding of Indian cinema has similarities to French melodrama. The prevalence of sentimental, melancholic and romantic heroes (such as that in the film *Devdas*) can be traced back the time of Bengali Renaissance, especially literature which valorised sentimentality and was influenced by Western Romanticism.

### **1.5.1 Tradition and Modernity**

Indian cinema is inscribed by a dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity and the contradictions and conflict between tradition and modernity inherent in the culture reproduces itself in cinematic melodrama. The construction of national identity is based on this dialectic of tradition as authentic and morally good and modern as 'not Indian' but 'Western.' In earlier cinematic narratives the 'Western' is created as sexual, materially corrupt and individualistic and therefore morally reprehensible. Rosie Thomas (1989) believes that in melodramatic cinematic narratives modernity in forms of gender and sexual freedom is rejected. However it is also authorised visually and philosophically in terms of secularism and urban development. Tradition is affirmed morally and ethically by subscribing to prohibition on women's sexuality and their gendered roles ascribed to nurturing of the family. At the same time, tradition is challenged by espousing rhetoric of gender justice and citizenship. The tensions in film narratives often revolve around family and sexuality. These tensions and conflicts are resolved within the constraint of an ideal moral universe in the conventions of a melodramatic mode. A melodramatic mode of address shapes the paradigms of "good" and "bad," or an expected and unacceptable form of behaviour, where a resolution is achieved when good finally triumphs over evil. The Manichean good-evil opposition mobilises audiences' emotional and moral identifications. This melodramatic mode unleashes ideas of an authentic unchanging Indian identity in a rapidly transforming world, which requires dilemmas, debates and negotiations of everyday reality. The affirmation of staying Indian, innocent, rural and traditional (the heroes and heroines) in the face of modern, rational, calculating and sexually aggressive (villains and vamps) is defined narrowly. The ideas of family and sexuality define what it means to be Indian. The discourse of individualism is also not validated. The hero and heroines attain or recover legitimacy only by sacrificing their

desires for the family, community and the nation. The villain and the vamps of early cinema were the 'Other' of the nation. They were morally unacceptable characters. They were constructed as Western, as individualistic, calculating, often lacking emotions, sexually aggressive and greedy. The construction of Indian-ness has changed over the years as 'vamps' have changed into heroines and heroes have imbibed aspects of villain's character. These changes have happened as 'modern' discourses were gradually validated as Indian. Madhava Prasad (1998) argues that popular film mediates the relations of power and oppression through representations of tradition in what he calls the 'feudal family romance' (in films from 1940s to 1960s). Prasad argues that the discourses of romance challenged traditional authority of patriarchal family in these films and to some extent displaced the value of traditional family structure. In addition, the narratives of romance and fantasy released new consumerist and capitalist drives and validated modern ideas and values.

### **1.5.2 Gender, Class, Marginality**

Women and other marginalised groups are often associated with melodrama in that these groups are said to form the popular audience for melodramatic genres. Women (in 1970s Indian films working-class male heroes) are also often the victims or heroes of melodrama. A good example is where some of the most famous female heroes happen to be either Courtesans or Mothers, as remembered by my respondents. The character of the courtesan is idealised and fetishised by filmmakers and by the female audience, but for different reasons. A critique of society that allows women to go into prostitution is expressed at the same time as the voyeuristic pleasures of their painful performance are represented. Women are portrayed as not real but always aestheticised and unknowable, image only. The victimisation of women in melodramatic genre has been theorised by feminists as a masochistic identification. The narrative places the spectator by inviting the spectator to assume a melodramatic subjection, where the positionality of victimhood and powerlessness bind the spectator to the film's vision.

Many theorists such as Brooks (1973) have used Freudian psychoanalytical models to theorise melodrama because of the centrality of family relations (mother, father, child and sibling) within this genre. Family is the space of formation of individual identity (an institution of individual formation) and is the site of love, normalisation (rules, duty) and conflicts and therefore is a key space of the melodramatic genre. Family is a vital category in melodrama for this reason as a space where social changes first and foremost affect the private spheres of the family. Soap operas are popular amongst women viewers because it allows for working through the feelings of family conflicts and forbidden desires. The spectator and audience understand and theorise about the social through personal family relationships. Melodramatic genre is seen as compensatory pleasure for marginalised position

available to women and to the urban poor. The Melodramatic genre externalises the inner conflicts of family and individuals – the psychic enters the public. Feminist work has also shown that the everyday lived reality and experiences of women are expressed in films. Women's cultural discourses are given significance and this explains women's recognition and identifications with these narratives. Nandy's theory repeats the feminist analysis in that Indian cinema as a melodramatic narrative genre compensates for the alienation felt by the lower classes and the class less urban population. This is also seen as a class struggle between producers and the audience. Through the dramatic emotional articulations of imaginary fictional texts, conflicts are resolved morally and yet no change occurs in actual power relations. Nonetheless contemporary issues are debated through changes in ideas of the family. Feminist articulation of the 'personal as political', the private issues of family, and the inner psychic conflicts of individuals are made public, subverting the ideas of inner/private and outer/public as mediated symbolically through the character and through star power.

### **1.5.3 Pain and Gender**

Pain also has a central role in the melodramatic genre. Pathos or the pleasure of pain can be understood as a pleasure of expression and an affirmation of feeling. An externalisation of painful feelings of marginality and alienation can be seen as a critique of patriarchal bourgeois hegemony. The repetition and the intensity can also be seen as generating an authority based on democratic values by feminising of a masculine public culture. The affective flow of mourning and pain also stimulates repetition of the experience. Pathos is authorised spiritually in Indian cinema in that heroes and heroines often gain value through their sacrifice and suffering and through renunciation. The theme of renunciation, in Indian cinema can be understood in a moral framework where authority for individual action is derived from a divine world. Thus the self-negating characters give up on self-pleasure, (material and sexual) to attain ethical and moral authority. The expression of loss and pain is often expressed through the body. The powerlessness of the central character (often the female heroine) is similarly expressed through her body. The self-negation of female heroines and the exhibitionism of sacrifice through bodily performance and symbolism are drawn as a resource from a repertoire of actual suffering bodies. The affective impact of these performances deploys a body language to convey the pain either through excess or a lack. The melodramatic genre is seen as having a psychological function, in allowing the spectator the pleasures of self-pity and the re-experiencing of a past horror. The reward is the experience of empowerment when the hero and heroine overcome their helplessness or assert their voice against authority. The public display of female (and other marginal groups' such as urban working class in the representation of the 'angry hero' of the seventies) desires, fears, values and identities can be used to stake a claim to the public imaginary and culture. The feminist

slogan 'the personal is political' can be used to challenge, reconfigure and rearrange the hierarchy of the binary of the masculine/feminine with that of the rational/emotional. The public expression of private emotional pain related to social conflicts through this genre permits a reconfiguration of private and public space. Thus cinematic representations of bodies become vital in expressing community conflicts and contemporary crises.

#### **1.5.4 The Ordinary (dystopian) and the Spiritual (utopian)**

Melodrama comes into being when there were drastic social changes occurring, for example, as in the French revolution when class hierarchies were being inverted. It has been theorised as a compensatory emotional mechanism to hold onto the past or feel the emotion of undergoing change. Brooks (1973) also points to melodrama as an expression of a spiritual crisis. In the familial melodrama ordinary experiences are made significant through the imagination of a spiritual realm as a space, which is utopian, and 'beyond the real.' The utopian vision acts as a way of disavowing change and dystopian everyday reality. This is a desire to change the future through a creative or spiritual imagination 'going beyond' reason and the rational. The dystopic realism of the everyday is surpassed through fantasy, fiction and imagination. Realism based on the explanatory systems of science, sociology, economics, and psychology seeks newer truths and greater authenticity. In contrast to realism, melodrama does not believe in rational explanations but relies on forces of destiny, desires for the unattainable, and fears of loss. The figuring of good and bad in this genre is a reflection and reproduction of unconscious and conscious fears, desires and conflicts. Modern melodrama distinguishes between the desirable and the taboo. The melodramatic genre has moved from the good and evil characters of Victorian discourses to modern psychological discourses that apportion blame in investigating the innocent, the guilty, and the responsible. Melodrama is seen as a woman's genre whereas realism is assigned to male genres of action and crime. There is a sense of loss in melodrama whereas in realism there is an explanation, truth and authority. Melodrama often represents a relationship between an unfashionable past and the present in which the past is validated in moral terms whilst the present lacks something. However, in melodrama, the end restores the moral values of the contemporary dominant order.

#### **1.5.5 Affective and Embodied Aesthetic**

The concept of affect is crucial in understanding the sensations evoked by a melodramatic aesthetic. Deleuze's theory of image reception offers the concept of affect, which refers to the power of images themselves. Two key film theorists who have explored Deleuze's conception of the power of image are Brian Massumi and Steven Shaviro. Both offer theories of embodiment like that of Brooks. Massumi (1995) develops the notion of affect to understand

the event of image reception. Shaviro (1993) argues that spectators do not watch films as disengaged subjects who then interpret the meaning not from outside, 'looking in' but are very much caught up in this unconscious perception and totally immersed and participating within the cinematic experience. The concept of affect can account for non linear and multiple foci of Indian audience participation not only in the narrative, but the song and dance sequences. In contrast to melodrama theory, that relies on a psychoanalytical formulation of "lack" and repressions that are released when expressed through excess drama or hyperbolic hysterical bodies, affect theories are based on discourses about the potentialising and actualising body. There is not an inner meaning already existing due to past trauma but instead a surface where sensation is felt and there are the possibilities of multiple pleasures and meanings. The body does not have an interior or exterior but, as an entity is part of circuit. The notion of subjects described in terms of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, which prevails in melodrama theory, is not present in affect theories. The notion of genealogy and recognition of an identity is also absent, as language is not the only site of meaning: the desire for an explanation (based on linear evolution) is not any more significant than other desires. This is because affect is a mediation theory. What is significant is the productive nature of mediation, the process of pleasure and not the end or the beginning. Hence the spectator's body immersed in the cinema experience feels sensation and produces mimicry, criticism, expression, creativity, and fulfilment simultaneously.

In the theory of affect, what is being valued is the state of suspension of meaning, the mediation rather than the final fixing of meaning. The pleasure of sensation is what is significant. The difference between realism and affect is that there is no preconstituted explanation or meaning until the subject decides to give the sensations meaning/s. Affect does not rely on the mind and body dualism. Instead the body is immersed in the experience rather than outside the experience. Melodrama is based on emotional release, whereas affect is based on intensity, which energises the subject to make meanings. The affective mode is deployed to grasp the visual, the tactility of visual, the kinetic, the sensuous, the unstructured (outside of language) and the non-representative modes of address. Affect is a sensation that moves the subject to act. According to Massumi, affect is produced in the viewer as an unstructured intensity:

It is the shock that initially impacts the viewer and is outside the circuit of meaning temporarily but is consequently organised into feeling or emotion as the viewer positions herself in the narrative organisation of the narrative. Intensity is energy, which resonates, also produces a static emotional state – a state of suspense and disruption. Massumi (1996:217),

Massumi views the affective sensation of disruption/shock as a body-first way of knowing in the sense that in the reception of images, we are subject to affect in the first instance and this response subsequently becomes meaning. Massumi differentiates between affect and emotion.

Emotion is something which arises out of personal history and experience and has function and meaning. Affect is an unnamed energy, intensity that cannot be represented in that it is diffuse and difficult to categorise and therefore difficult to fix in language. It is meaningless up until it is inserted in the spectator's memory, history and language. Contemporary film 'song and dance' sequences of cinema borrow their style from MTV aesthetic and are constructed as fast moving cuts with a condensation of multiple intertextual allusions of carnivalesque milieux with sexualised bodies, which holds the viewer transfixed. The excess energy and the intensity of musical experience can be understood in terms of meaninglessness and non-representation. With Massumi's definition of affect in mind it is no surprise that the abundance of intertextuality in Bombay films should produce an immediate bodily response, rather than a cognitive one. Also keeping up with range and speed of the intertextual allusions in one frame of the film alone makes it difficult to produce a coherent narrative by which one might explain the images. I propose that a combination of melodramatic and affect-based aesthetics explains respondent's narratives of excess intensity and multiple intertextual sensory stimuli. In the next section, I return to exploring the historical changes shaping cinematic address.

### **1.6 The Rise of Hindutva: The Secular and the Sectarian**

Many scholars (such as Rajagopal, 1999, Vasudevan, 2000, Mishra, 2002) questioned the role of media in the growth of fundamentalism due to increasing religious imagery of Indian cinema and television. Rajagopal (1999) questioned the influence of cinema on the national consciousness and asked if the rise of Hindu nationalism and the BJP was due to their manipulation of mass media religious symbolism and imagery. Cinema and television have played a key role in popularising Hindu nationalism. The pro-Hindutva fanatic with an agenda of Hindu cultural nationalism in the nineties threatened secular politics of Nehruvianism by destroying the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, which led to communal sectarian riots killing thousands of (mainly) Muslims and Hindus. This was the most violent communal attack since Partition. In 1994, the extremist Shiv Sena Party in coalition with the BJP came into power in Maharashtra. In 1998, the Hindu nationalist BJP government was elected to govern India. Aijaz Ahmad writing in *The Guardian* (3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2002) about the recent rise of BJP, says:

It is undeniable that the BJP has changed the agenda of Indian politics, resulting in a situation in which the opposition often competes with the BJP in patriotic and anti-Pakistani statements. The way in which it has become generally accepted that India is a Hindu country with non-Hindu minorities, rather than a secular state of many faiths, is another example of the BJP effect. Pakistan and India are veering toward their own forms of fundamentalism.



The rise in the genre of mythologicals in TV serials such as Ramanand Sagar's television sagas, *Ramayan*<sup>16</sup> (1986-1988) and *Shri Krishna* (1998), and B.R Chopra's *Mahabharat*<sup>17</sup> (1988-90), all construct an ideal imaginary past. The Hindu right used the visual symbols generated from these mythologicals to legitimise their definitions of a Hindu nation. Ramanand Sagar's serialisation of the *Ramayan* in 1988 was a distinctive event in the history of Indian television resulting in a national obsession. The program attracted a monumental audience (for some episodes 80 to 100 million people. – roughly one eighth of the Indian population, (Lutgendhorf: 1995:223). This was probably the largest social act regularly undertaken by any group ever. Though there had been links between Indian film and religion since its inception, only 5 percent of films produced in 1970s were mythological or religious films (Derne 1995).

One of the main reasons for the mass popularity of Indian commercial cinema is the creation of myths of a unified nation and an essential authentic Indian national identity which silences a range of differences of ethnicity, region, language, religion, caste and class. Hawley (1995) points out that the replacing of sectarian rivalry by social secular national integration is contradictory in that "the image of national integration is one in which the distinction between "Indian" and "Hindu" is becoming ominously fuzzy"(Hawley 1995:10). He points to the character constitution in films, which are often from Hindu-mythical stereotypes embodying Hindu values, especially those pertaining to family and social life. Bombay cinema's characterisation draws from religious iconography usually Hindu-mythical stereotypes, which defines national culture. In this way, 'Indian' identity is collapsed into dominant 'Hindu' values. Vasudevan (2001) proposes that after 1970, following the trend of multi-starrers in films like *Amar Akbar Anthony*, the representation of the nation as multi-religious with Hindu, Muslim and Christian characters was a common occurrence but with a clearer hierarchy, in which the Hindu hero, assumed the highest position in a multi-community image of the nation. By the nineties, however, this convention was changed and replaced by a single Hindu hero as in Mani Ratnam's films, I explore in chapter four.

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<sup>16</sup> Ramayan is a Hindu epic composed around the middle of the first millennium B.C., and is the story of Vishnu descending to earth in the form of Rama, a heroic prince, who battles with the ten-headed demon king Ravana. Rama's wife, Sita, is revered as the model wife.

<sup>17</sup> Mahabharata is the Hindu epic that tells the story of the great war between two rival clans: the five Pandava brothers and (their cousins) the hundred Kauravas. Druapadi and Krishna are central characters amongst many others.

## Section 2: Contemporary Bombay Cinema, and my Key Informants

### 2.1 Neo-liberalisation and the Diaspora

The expansion of the media industry, since the early 1990s, has included the cable, satellite, television, DVD, print and cinema industries. The cinema industry was granted 'industry status' in 1998 by the BJP government in an effort to give it recognition. The television, cable, satellite, DVD, music, Internet and print industry deploy media flow from the film industry. The Indian Dotcom boom assisted in bringing in a new crop of filmmakers proficient in technological advances. Two crucial advances in technology, the VCR and satellite TV networks changed the film industry. The future initially looked bleak for the film industry in the eighties due to the advent of the VCR. Throughout the eighties and into nineties, television began to attract large middle-class cinema audiences. Doordarshan, the Indian national TV network introduced in 1959 began to expand dramatically only in the early eighties, when India hosted the Asian Games (Mishra, 2002). Satellite broadcasting began from Hong Kong on Star TV (Satellite Transmission of Asian Region TV) in January 1991.

Since then the media scene in India has undergone a radical change (Mishra, 2002). The Cable television and satellites wiped out the video empires of the eighties. In this proliferation of visual media in India, cinema remains a dominant force. In the nineties, the foreign market, which had been lost through the VCR to the film industry, was rediscovered through cable and satellite. The success of cable and satellite TV in India (and in the diaspora) has also meant that the hegemony of film as the primary medium of entertainment was reduced; however the film industry has successfully diversified into television programs. Pendakur and Subramanyam (1996) point out that "the influence of film world is omnipresent" when referring to India's most popular satellite channel, Zee TV (Pendakur and Subramanyam 1996:68 as quoted in Mishra 2002:2). Another influence of film can be seen in MTV's top twenty chart shows, which showcase song-and-dance sequences. The film industry has responded to this demand from the music industry and television by adapting song-and-dance sequences in films to a MTV aesthetic style. These song and dance sequences attract a younger audience from club scene at home and in the Diaspora. In addition these song and dance sequences can be transferred to live stage acts in concert halls in the UK and the USA to make huge commercial gains for the star. Shyam Benegal<sup>18</sup>, a filmmaker for more

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<sup>18</sup> Shyam Benegal is one of the main film directors of the so-called "Parallel or New or Middle cinema" of the 1970s, which collapsed by the 1980s. He is a contemporary of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak. Shyam Benegal's films *Ankur* (1973) *Nishant* (1975), *Manthan* (1976) and *Bhumika* (1977), *Mandi* (1983) are landmarks of Indian cinema and were part of the 'middle-cinema' movement. Some of the most respected actors from the Film and Television Institute of

than forty years explained the demise of the socialist state and its decreasing powers and the demise of the community ethos in favour of the ethos of enterprising, consuming individualism:

In India there is always individual versus the community. The exclusive notion of nation was made into an inclusive identity in India. The balance between the individual and the community is shifting towards the individual. That's the change. To the generation after Independence, the community and society was very important. Now it is not the case, it is not our problem! There may be struggle and poverty but now it's nobody's problem! The politics of the country is changing. The hold of the Government on people is less than it used to be. People realised that the Government can't do as much for them and that people have to do more for themselves." (Interview, 02/12/04, Bombay).

Shyam Benegal points to the changes since Independence in rise of the individual in capitalist neo-liberal India. The most significant impact has been the finding of a market abroad by selling a certain formula or a specific genre of films called Bollywood. Radhyakasha commenting on these changes cautions:

This has subsumed the Hindi cinema itself and placed it at service of a globalised culture industry that includes cable TV and the Internet, which flaunts a blatantly reactionary cultural nationalism on the world stage. (1999:78)

The selling of national Indian identity and imagery abroad through global networks became increasingly popular. Bombay cinema began to recognise the potential of wider international markets. Bollywood blockbusters such as *Hum Aapke Ke Hain Kaun* (Who am I to you? 1994, Sooraj R. Barjatya), *Kuch Kuch hota hai* (Something is Happening to Me, 1998, Karan Johar), *Dil Se* (From My Heart, 1998, Mani Ratnam), *Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai* (Tell Me You Love me, 2000, Rakesh Roshan) were produced for these markets. Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2003) argues that Bollywood is a new genre of Indian cinema. He claims that Bollywood is

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India ( FTII) and the National School of Drama (NSD) such as Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri, Smita Patil, Kulbhushan Kharbanda and Amrish Puri, were given prominence in his films. Many of Benegal's films were on issues gender and power by exploring feudalism, caste inequalities, corruption within democratic politics, the oppression of tribal communities, the urban and rural hierarchies, etc. His film *Manthan* (The Churning, 1976), was financed by 500,000 members of a milk co-operatives in Gujarat each donated Rs. 2 towards the production of the film. This film explored issues of untouchability and union and labour issues. In *Bhumika* (The Role, 1976), Benegal explores the ambivalent attitudes of Indian society to women's independence. This film is based on the autobiography of the Marathi/Hindi actress Hansa Wadkar. His recent film *Zubeida* (2001) combined aspects of Bollywood aesthetic with 'middle-cinema' style. See <http://www.upperstall.com/people/shyambenegal.html>  
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/culture/cinema/Benegal.html>

actually a diffuse group of complementary cultural industries such as websites, theatre, music, food and fashion designed to sell an authentic national identity to diasporic Indians and therefore can be seen as a separate entity to Indian cinema. It came into existence only since the nineties, whilst Indian cinema has been around for more than a hundred years. Bollywood cultural industries make more money than the cinema box-office. He gives examples of:

.....a range of ancillary industries based in London, including theatre ( the much-hyped London stage musical *Bombay Dreams*, a collaboration between Indian composer A. R. Rahman and Andrew Lloyd Webber), the music industry, advertising and even fashion (the month-long 'Bollywood' festival of food, furniture and fashion marketing in Selfridges, London), all of which culminated in the extraordinary exercise known as Indian Summer, in July 2002 (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/asianlife/film/indiansummer/index.shtml>). (Rajadhyaksha 2003: 25)

Very few films were made for a non-resident Indian audiences in the history of Indian cinema, though there have always been exports to many countries. His main reason for making a distinction between Indian cinema and the Bollywood culture industry is that Indian cinema's role in nationalist, anti-colonial, and secular developments prevented it from becoming part of capitalist organisation. The cinema industry resisted industrialisation because of its crucial role in the creation of a public sphere after the Partition. Bollywood came into being in the 1990s to bring the Non-resident Indian investments by displaying its technological advances with its neo-traditional family politics and nostalgia for an authentic, exotic and sanitised India. In the nineties there were some key films, such as *Lamhe* (The Moment, 1991, Yash Chopra) and *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (Who Am I To You? 1994, Sooraj R. Barjatya) that changed the way the cinema industry produced films and targeted its audience. *Dil Wali Dulhaniya Llee Jayenge* (Lovers Win Brides, 1998, Aditya Chopra) reached the top ten British charts. *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* ("Sometimes Things Do Happen" 1998, Karan Johar), *Mohabatein* (Varieties of Love, 2000, Aditya Chopra), *Kal Ho Na Ho* ( Tomorrow May Not Come, 2003, Karan Johar) all focused on diasporic family politics.

## 2.2 Filmmakers and the Production houses

Bombay cinema and media industry has been criticised by many of the film professionals I interviewed for its obsession with commercial aims, which produces formulaic films. The conservative patriarchal kinship network that operates in the film industry allows a small group of people to dictate standards and prevent change. The criticism that is directed at the film industry are that it survives by plagiarizing and keeping to a set formula for safe commercial outcome; that filmmakers are young thirty-something yuppies entering the industry through family and kinship network but who lack talent; that there are four predominant production houses which control filmmaking; that the disorganized and chaotic word of mouth networks lack discipline and meritocracy; that there is lack of social concern

from the filmmakers, as they are not bothered by the issues affecting larger society; that there has been a definite turn towards marketing strategies where most films rely on advertising and marketing professionals; that cinema became solely an entertainment industry from being viewed as an educational tool for uplifting the masses from illiteracy and irrationalism. Deepa Gahlot, the editor of the National Film Development Corporation <sup>19</sup> magazine 'Cinema in India' talking to me about the changes in the film industry in last thirty years, states:

It's same as before, now corporate houses making it, but its chaotic, there are no contracts, no scripts and there is only the star system. Stars control everything. Cinema industry has moved from auteurs of seventies to business people. Now people who make films are urban centric, mostly untrained, relatives of industry people, about eighty percent are relatives. There is yuppification, they have not come from other cultures (unlike the older filmmakers many of whom were migrants from other states), and they have no education. I am not talking of formal education but life education because they have never stepped out of their air-conditioned cocoon. Their stories are taken from Hollywood films or other Bollywood films. The urban educated filmmakers are able to put glossy packaged products but stories they are telling are the same as fifties and sixties, the mindset does not change. Women stray from marriage are either punished, killed or brought back to the family. (Interview 20/12/04, Bombay)

Similarly, Anjum Rajabali <sup>20</sup> one of my key informants: a script writer <sup>21</sup>(films *Ghulam*, *The Slave*, 1998, *Kache Dhage* 1999, *The legend of Bhagat Singh*, 2002) endorses this view of the new filmmakers:

The newer filmmakers have a certain sensibility, politics is not their concern, and they wont allow politics to come into entertainment. Their belief is that anything that is disturbing will keep audience away because there are enough disturbances in people's life. This is the collusion I am talking about that ...people seek to neutralize their conscience, to disconnect. (Interview, 15/12/04, Bombay)

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<sup>19</sup> The National Film Development Cooperation (NFDC) of India is a government-funded body established to encourage quality cinema. The NFDC (and its predecessor the Film Finance Corporation) has funded approximately 280 films, many of which were films from the 'middle-cinema' movement and won national and international awards. It is also responsible for the organisation of government censorship of all Indian films or films shown in India. See <http://www.nfdcindia.com/>

<sup>20</sup> Anjum Rajabali has been writing scripts for feature films for the last 12 years. Films based on his scripts include *Ghulam* (1998), *Kachche Dhaage* (1999), *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002), *Drohkaal* (1995 – co-written), *China Gate* (1998 – co-written) and *Pukar* (2000 – co-written). He is a script consultant with iDream Production, Mumbai, and also the Course Consultant for the one-year script-writing course at the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune.

But Sorabh Narang ( a first-time film director of the film *Vastu-Shahstra*, 2005, produced by Ram Gopal Varma) and Manoj Bajpai<sup>22</sup> feel more hopeful of the newer small budget experimental films, which rely on niche marketing and multiplex audiences. The contemporary film industry is a series of networks, which filmmakers access either through kinship or through work, which can be utilised as cultural capital through word of mouth, Anjum Rajabali elaborates:

Bollywood is a mad place, very little assessment done on your work, the aura created, the buzz, so I received as many as thirty five offers of writing screenplays before anybody had seen a word of my screenplay, or a single movie of mine, and yet they were keen to pay fairly decent money ... Bollywood is crazy in that way. (Interview, 15/12/04, Bombay)

The structure is informal and most work is carried out through word of mouth contracts. There are certain people who are respected, for example, Ashutosh Gowariker, the director of *Lagaan*, (*Land Tax*, 2001, Ashutosh Gowariker) about whom I only heard praise and no criticisms. For an industry that relies on 'word of mouth' ventures, gossip is a crucial way of making contacts and initiating projects. Everyone I talked to viewed *Lagaan* as having achieved both creative and commercial success. This was the ideal that most filmmakers were aiming for. Sanjay Leela Bansali the director of *Devdas* (2002) was also seen as a creative filmmaker, for this film as well as for his past films. Critics accepted that *Devdas* won acclaim abroad but many voiced that it did not compare to the old *Devdas*.

The four main production houses can be seen as a kind of a studio system and produce most of the blockbusters and 'hit films.' These are headed by four producers/directors: Yash Chopra, Subash Ghai, Karan Johar and Ram Gopal Varma. The India tradition of oligarchy is very apparent here. The first three target their films to an overseas market and to urban centers, which are commercially most successful. They usually use big stars (multi-starrers), big budget films with family values and romance in exotic foreign locations. In contrast, Ram Gopal Varma (production house is called 'the Factory') targets urban and domestic population and produces experimental films on a low budget. Ravi Vasudevan in an interview with me in Delhi (04/10/04) explained that Varma explores the dystopian aspects of Diaspora by focusing on gangsters and criminals and therefore represents a Diaspora of hardship as opposed to Karan Johar whose films focus on sanitized beauty and family. Varma's films usually mimic the action genre of Hollywood style. He supports experimental styles such as

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<sup>22</sup> Manoj Bajpai was praised for his acting skills in the film *Bandit Queen* (1995, Shekar kapur). He received the 1998 Filmfare Critic's Award for his portrayal of the character Bhiku Mhatre in the film *Satya* (1998, Ram Gopal Varma). He has also been praised for his acting in Shyam Benegal's film *Zubeida* (*Princess*, 2001) and in *Pinjar* (*The Cage*, 2003, Chandraprakash Divedi).

Sourabh Narang's<sup>23</sup> *Vaastu Shastra (The Knowledge of Your Dwelling, 2004)*: which was seen by newspapers as a horror film, but Sourabh described it as a 'scary' film rather than a horror film in an interview with me in Bombay (18/12/04). Varma's films are low budget films that target the multiplex audience in India, which attracts a middle-class literate population. The domestic market is also targeted by David Dhawan's film starring the versatile actor, Govinda. This is usually a comedy with sexual double entendre. Govinda is seen as working man's hero and his modes of address can be seen as using a nautanki style which relies on comedy. He usually plays a working class man (the space of street is the usual *mise en scene* for his comic parody of lewd songs) who crosses class barriers to become successful in romantic liaison with a modern Westernized heroine and in the process attains financial security and social capital.

### 2.3 The Star and Celebrity System

Manoj Bajpai, who is a respected actor in the film industry, expresses similar concerns to Shyam Benegal's assertion that the social collective ethos of post-Independent years has been displaced for a more individual ethics signified by the pervasiveness of the celebrity culture.

This country is going through a severe crisis, the role models for people are film stars and cricket players. Politically and socially no role models are left. Globally, celebrity is god. Page 3 socialite [page 3 in India talks about the upper classes and the film star parties], what celebrities are doing? News channel have segments on stars. 90% of people have film stars as role models. People have lost faith in our politics. Politics has become a profession. People have become individualistic. Now, we are only interested in our own interior decoration not our own streets and cinema reflects this. (Manoj Bajpai, Interview, 18/11/04, Bombay)

The star system originated in the 1930s, when Indian cinema had just overcome its first crisis because of competition with Hollywood films, which were extremely popular amongst the urban middle-classes until the 1940s (Gandhy, Thomas 1991). With the introduction of sound and songs in 1931, song films generated indigenous popular appeal through their language and sound entertainment and guaranteed the survival of Indian cinema. Mass appeal also encouraged the sensational formula of spectacles, song and dance and action adventures into the social film. Stars were crucial in the success of film since the beginning, but the idea of the star system was imported from Hollywood. The star system emerged in the 1940s after the

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<sup>23</sup> Sourabh Narang was directing a reality-based show on Sahara Television, called *Haqeeqat*, when he was approached by Ram Gopal Varma to direct his first 'scary' film, 'Vaastu Shastra.' His television documentaries focused on human rights violations, each separate episode heavily researched and re-enacted, with Mahesh Bhatt (a well-known Indian film director and producer) as the program anchor.

collapse of the studio system and strengthened in the early 1950s. The commodification of the star personality became the most important aspect of the cinema in its production, distribution and circulation after the 1950s. Amitabh Bacchan (who played the 'angry anti-hero') came to personify the phenomenon of reverence for the star and no actor before him had achieved his popularity and or his status. In India during the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s, many popular film stars (Sunil Dutt, Amitabh Bachchan, Shabana Azmi etc) entered state elective politics (Gandhi, Thomas, 1991). They deployed their star power and aura to influence political ideologies and many became members of the Indian parliament. In contemporary cinema industry, an aspiring cinema actor can take one of several routes. Many actors/stars are sons and daughters of older stars which smoothes their entry into cinema. Producers and distributors usually feel safe backing films with star children because they believe that the audience would be familiar with them. Sanjay Jha, a film director <sup>24</sup>explained that:

Just because an actor had come in through their relatives did not mean they did not have to work really hard to stay in the industry. The film industry has such tough competition that if you did not work hard, you would not last that long! (Interview, 23/11/04, Bombay)

He gave the example of Hritwik Roshan whose father brought him into the film industry but who is also known for his hard work. However, some of the present big stars did not enter through this route. For example, Shah Rukh Khan was a struggling TV actor in Delhi, who came to Bombay and worked hard to become the biggest star in the film industry (there is a Shah Rukh Khan mania in Bombay!). Most agreed that his acting skills were moderate but they loved him nonetheless for his star people quality. Some of the reasons given for his star quality and power were: his accessibility; boy next-door image; his stories of struggle to get to the top; and his openness about his personal life. In an interview with me, Journalist, Deepti Kapoor explained how everything apart from food is sold by star brands. A journalist for *The Week Magazine*, which has a wide circulation, she covers trends in popular culture, lifestyle and sexual changes. Nandini Ramanathan, film journalist for *Mid-Day*, a daily Bombay newspaper, also endorses the view of branding and marketing when she explains:

The pressures of making money...it costs 5 crores to get Shah Rukh Khan. The entire PR machinery is even more formulaic and the difference is in packaging the film. We are completely in the age of PR; there is PR for the film; for the star; and for the distribution. The financial stakes are high and the films are mediocre. (Interview, 12/04, Bombay)

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<sup>24</sup> Sanjay Jha is the director of films *Praan Jaye Par Shaan Na Jaeye (Pride is More Important than Life, 2003)* and a *Strings-bound by faith (2005)*. Sanjay Jha is a graduate of National School of Drama (NSD) from Delhi. He was one of my key informants in Mumbai. Also see <http://jhaji-jhaji.blogspot.com>



Deepti tells me that she believes that the brand equity of Shah Rukh Khan is high, because he has a pan-Indian following. Both Deepti and Nandini tell me that they think that the two things that sell are sex and Shah Rukh Khan. Shah Rukh Khan sells in the diaspora and in the domestic markets. Deepti analyses that the masculinity Shah Rukh Khan performs is not very threatening in that he is a 'great friend, a passionate lover, a great son and has male buddies.' In *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Tomorrow May not Come, 2003, Karan Johar) he pulled off a parody of homosexuality but there was no backlash from Gay rights groups or Hindu fundamentalist. In the media circuits, there is gossip that he is bisexual and has a relationship with Karan Johar, the director who has made two of his blockbusters. His stories of struggle to become an actor are well known. He is Muslim but Deepti did not point to this in our interview. He is married to a Hindu woman and their children are brought up in both religions. Deepti tells me that that he discusses his feeling openly and is not macho or afraid to be weak. Deepti reiterates that 'anyone can be Shah Rukh Khan' and that is the reason for his popularity. She claims:

Indians are looking for a hero who is warm, accessible, and friendly and is an ordinary person who has struggled. (Interview on 9/10/04, Bombay).

One of the other routes to become an actor is through attending the National School of Drama (NSD), a well-established acting school with a national reputation for producing excellent actors. Manoj Bajpai, who I interviewed came in through the prestigious National school of Drama (NSD). Being a graduate of prestigious drama and film schools such as NSD (based in Delhi) or the Film and Television Institute of India<sup>25</sup> (FTII in Pune), however, does not guarantee roles. Other routes include modeling, advertising, television and beauty contests. Manoj Bajpai commenting on the star system says:

The stars of today, the emergence of Salman Khan, Shah Rukh, Hritwik Roshan...this is what the teenagers wanted, someone who represented them, the internet youth. (Interview 18/11/04, Bombay)

However, female actors have many more obstacles than their male counterparts since acting has always been conflated with sexual promiscuity. Anjum Rajabali, comments:

Women-centered roles are turned down by producers and distributors, they don't make money. Mainstream Industry still only promotes hero films. (Interview 15/12/04, Bombay)

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<sup>25</sup> FTII was established in the 1960 and provides training in filmmaking and television programme production. It is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India. Another influential school for television and film teaching and training is Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, where Sourabh Narang the undertoo his training. I also interviewed Shohini Ghosh who was his teacher there. She still teaches there and writes widely on sexuality, desire and queerness in Indian cinema. Gargi Sen, another filmmaker and academic I interviewed in Delhi also a lecturer at this school.

Indu Mirani, an editor of a film trade magazine, *Box Office*, who has worked in the film industry for more than twenty years told me:

There is sleaze and exploitation below the glamour. Girls are taken to Dubai to sleep with this producer, the rewards are so huge, and a lot of compromises are made. You have to understand that stardom in India is like...like being a god. Stars, producers and directors are worshipped. It is a male-dominated industry and there are very few women directors and producers. Sexual favours are being exchanged, women have much tougher times but they know what they are compromising. The films are hero-centric, you won't have a top rung actor playing with a woman protagonist in a women-centric film. There is not much money in that. (Interviewed, 4/12/04, Juhu, Bombay)

This practice of sleeping with film directors in order to obtain acting roles is called 'casting couch' (old practice appropriated from Hollywood films of 1920s and 1930s). Many interviewees associated with the industry talked about this. However, in one instance a struggling actress was complaining to a film director about how she cannot get parts because most parts are given to actresses unless they sleep with the director/producer, she then named a very well known actress in the industry. The film director later (in a conversation with me) criticized this actress and argued that 'to make it as an actress' is not just through the casting couch, but also because of hard work as there are so many young women with similar aspirations. Even if an actress uses sexual favours to get parts, it is one strategy amongst others to attain success in an extremely competitive industry. He felt that this actress had not 'made it' because of her lack of good work and her negative attitude rather than her virtues and sexual principles. This incident and few others were a good reflection of how people who work in the industry are loyal to it.

#### **2.4 Exhibition: The New Multiplex Audience and Culture**

The multiplexes are comfortable cinema theatres, which have been built since the 1990s to bring the middle classes back to the cinema halls and away from their televisions, videos and DVDs. The tickets are too expensive for the majority of Indians so a rich and elite class can enjoy a specific film without having to deal with the so-called 'front benchers'- the loud, lewd working class men. The air-conditioned halls with restaurants segregate the cinema watching public into different classes and the segregation of the elite from the masses occurs as in other spheres of Indian society. The old cinema hall was one of very few places where the rich and poor, middle and working classes shared a space. Many of the film professionals saw the multiplex cinema halls as a positive change in that there was an audience for intelligent and more experimental films. The actor, Manoj Bajpai told me that:

This is a transitional time with multiplexes opening up. I don't know if they are good or bad but audience are coming back and want to see films with substance not just magic and stars.  
(Interview 18/11/04, Bombay)

Others felt this was not the case and that experimental films did not necessarily mean 'good' films. As Deepa Gahlot, a cinema critic, points out, the hope that multiplexes would generate independent experimental quality cinema has not materialized:

Independent experimental cinema does not equate to quality cinema as can be witnessed by a spate of small budget films, which were no better than most average Bollywood films.  
(Interview 20/12/04, Bombay)

Indu Mirani, editor of a trade magazine (Box office), explains that film marketing strategy is to target youth audience:

Multiplex cinemas attract the 15-25 age group, 75% are college-going students, and they go and hang out in the multiplex. (Interview 04/12/04, Bombay)

According to her, older age groups have work and y busy schedules so they are more likely to watch films on DVD at home. One of the advantages of multiplex cinemas is that women can go and see films by themselves, which I did, when I was in Bombay. This was not possible before the emergence of the multiplex cinema halls.

## **2.5 Print Media: Film Magazines and Newspapers**

There has been a proliferation of print media focusing on various aspects of cinema. The print media is vital in the production of the stars and in the publicity that makes the films hits or flops. Deepti Kappor, a journalist for The Week Magazine, told me that there has been an explosion in lifestyle magazines on popular culture. There are three film magazines; 'Stardust' which is mainly a gossip magazine; 'Society' which is gossip about the high society; and 'Femina' which is a women's a magazine and has pan-Indian appeal. Three national magazines include the 'India Today', 'The Week', and the 'The Outlook'. Women's magazines include 'Cosmopolitan' and 'Elle'. Both of the latter have advertisements on every other page. All these magazines have a segment with gossips about cinema and stars, which are extremely popular and have a larger readership than politics. The film reviews in the daily newspapers and in film magazine can influence to a great degree who goes to see the films. Indu Mirani, editor of 'Box Office' says:

Reviews can change the destiny of films because exhibitors rely on these reviews to make their decision to show a film or not. 'Aaj Tak' a television film review program comes out by Sunday and is relied on. One example of this was the film, 'Tridev' which flopped after bad reviews.  
(Interview, 04/12/04, Bombay)

When I attended two of the film launch parties, many stars were there. The journalists and the cameras were obsessed with following them around. Most actors looked ordinary and behaved politely and by all means looked very normal and not at all very beautiful. It was interesting to see the newspapers and the magazines the following day and in the week later describing the launch party that I had attended in sensational language with much gossip. Something that seemed quite mundane and more like a series of photo sessions was constructed as glossy, sexy and glamorous.

## **Conclusion**

I set out to examine the cinematic aesthetic and the history of Bombay cinema. I argue that an examination of the cinematic history reveals the role of cinema in the reconfiguration of the politics of nation and culture. This is through discourses of class, gender and religion. Indian cinema is affirmed by a diversity of mass audiences and is the national public imaginary where crucial socio-political changes are debated and reproduced in democratic India. The ideologies of nationalism, anti-colonialism, Hindu communalism, patriarchy and socialist democratic humanism have existed in film texts. Parthe Chatterjee (1997) has argued that the cinema acts as a mediating (intermediary) sphere, which arbitrates between civil society and the state. He names this arbitrating domain as the political society, which negotiates the realm of emotion and imagination. Cinema as popular culture is this intermediary sphere or the space of contestation between the classes, state and citizens, secular and communal forces, the Hindu right and feminists, and commercial and social interests. Cinema exports ideologies through global cultural flows to the south Asian Diaspora worldwide. It has always competed with and copied from Hollywood (and other Western genres) but only recently has it been able to stake a position in the global market. The debates on art versus the commercial, fantasy versus realism, tradition versus modern, individual versus community have ensued in its filmic texts.

Indian cinema has roots in myths, arts (like theatre, dance and music) and religious iconography, and adapts modern and western styles of music, dance and storytelling techniques in its form. Mostly it is a hero/star centred text but directors have always been crucial in filmmaking. Cinema's melodramatic aesthetic deploys an emotional and moral aesthetic to articulate criticisms of the social order but rarely does it offer a radical solution. It relies on its difference from realism to illuminate important contradictions. The cinematic aesthetic has combined practices from traditional, modern and postmodern ideologies. The authorization of orality, music and the family melodrama over coherence and realism has produced a distinctive style. The exhibitionist and carnivalesque form has valued emotion, fantasy, and the mythical as a way to go beyond the reality of the everyday. The central role of female body in expressing (pleasure, fear and pain) marginality and pain in Indian cinema

points to an understanding of popular memory through an affiliation to the emotional, the sensory and the relational aspects of history and politics.

Mishra (2002:13) describes the Indian films as a 'sentimental melodramatic romance' and compares this to Ashish Rajadhyakha's (1993) description of an 'epic melodrama' whilst Madhava Prasad (1998) has described it as a 'feudal family romance.' Thomas (1985) proposed that the cinematic narrative created a melodramatic moral universe which depicts conflicts on the axis of tradition/ modernity, good/evil, and Indian/western. The resolution is achieved by the triumph of good over evil and a related hierarchy of categories. The 'mother' and 'the hero' are the two most significant characters. The 'mother' character is utilised to morally authorise the hero or the son in many films and thus normalizes the patriarchal power of Indian culture. The family drama provides foundational structure and gives shape to other themes that foreground the modern, the struggle against the injustices of caste, gender, capital and religion. The patriarchal traditional discourses of sexual prohibition as 'honour' or 'izzat' 'laaz' are morally affirmed over sexual freedom associated with Western and modern. This often echoes the conflict between the maintenance of traditional culture and its erosion by modernist ideology, the latter usually symbolized by the Other/Outsider in the Indian imaginary. This is usually the 'woman' the 'westerner' and or the 'Muslim' but can also include anyone who dares to challenge the sanctity of the Indian family and therefore poses a threat to the national culture.

Hayden White (1996) has argued that films both play in part and reproduce their historical contexts. Bombay cinema therefore needs to be recognized as a valid historical archive for the writing of emotional, political, social and cultural history. Bombay cinema's dynamic ability to engage, produce and interconnect the political and emotional aspirations of the people enables these films to become blockbusters and in this way contribute to our understanding of mass popular culture.

# CHAPTER 4

## CINEMA ANALYSIS: GENDER, CLASS AND RELIGION

### Introduction

In this chapter I undertake textual analysis of three sets of films to explore the themes and cinematic modes of address outlined in chapter one. I contrast *Mother India* (1957, Mehboob Khan) with *Jai Santoshi Maa* (Praise Santoshi Maa, 1975, Ramesh Sharma), *Deewar* (The Wall, 1975, Yash Chopra) with *Sholay* (Flame, 1975, Ramesh Shippy), and *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977, Manmohan Desai) with *Bombay* (1995, Mani Ratnam). These films tell a story about India's history from Nehru's desire for a secular and socialist nation in *Mother India* to a national secular crisis in neo-liberal Hindu India of *Bombay*. *Bombay* depicts India as the exact opposite of what Nehru had envisioned. The central protagonists of both films *Mother India* and *Bombay* are surrounded by social chaos and disasters. Social chaos becomes the metonymy for the nation's condition viewed from the middle-class perspective of the filmmakers. The imagination of the crisis of the family and the nation in each of these films depicts historical changes from a feudal colonial polity to a modern socialist secular democracy to a neo-liberal capitalist Hindu nation of the nineties. The fear of poverty is the main narrative drive of both *Jai Santoshi Maa* and *Mother India* and many other films. The characters in many films evade poverty at any cost. In a similar way to Victorian discourses (in Dickens's novels such as *David Copperfield*) of the dangers of poorhouse, the characters can be plunged into horrible poverty and only chance and coincidence can rescue them from such 'uncanny' evils. Only divine intervention in forms of goddesses, which operate in another regime of time, can rescue them. The fear of becoming poor is an overwhelming paranoia for the middle-class metropolitan characters, when in reality there is little chance of this happening in their lives. However in many films their fear of sliding into this abyss is compulsively repeated; a sudden change catapults them into this horror of a nightmare. Their desire for an environment free of slums and floods; to desire the first world in the third world is a recurring trope. The validation of Western life as that which is not connected to Indian poverty but to the Western prosperity can be understood when analysing the importance of the category Western in the Indian identity.

*Mother India* and *Jai Santoshi Maa* are both films which foreground a female character as the main protagonist, a rare and unusual occurrence in Indian popular cinema. However, both films construct the 'woman' as an ultimately sacrificing and sexually virtuous figure. Both characters gain legitimacy by sacrificing their lives for others - the family, the

community and the nation. An exploration of the texts of *Mother India*, highlights the importance of Nehruvian modernity in shaping the politics of identity for subjects of the new secular nation. The key theme here is the exhibition of the new Indian state and a modern liberal humanist ethos that valorises women as equal citizens. *Mother India* released in 1957, was a 'hit' at a time when many were voicing discontent about the homogenization of industrialization and questioning the promises of modernity. *Jai Santoshi Maa* is a religious film within a mythological genre, and which popularised the regional deity Santoshi Maa all over India. This film centralizes the life of a poor woman and her relationship to her mother goddess. The absence of the portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship in Indian cinema highlights the obsession with mother-son relationship, one of the most common narrative drives in Indian cinema. The central characters in both films confirm the renunciation ethic; they suffer through ascetic practices and self-denial without complaining and or getting angry. This can move gods in the Hindu cosmos as it does in the *Jai Santoshi Maa*.

In comparison with above two films, *Deewar* (The Wall, 1975) and *Sholay* (Flame, 1975) are both 'action films' that construct Indian masculinities. I have selected these to investigate the 'crisis of social order' they gesture towards. There are many parallels in the story of *Deewar* and *Mother India*. The main difference is that *Mother India* has a female hero whilst *Deewar* has a male hero. Both characters are poor and suffer humiliations due to their poverty and marginality. The son of expresses mother's anger and rebellion, whereas in *Deewar* the male hero's mother is deployed to morally authorize his rebellion and criminality. *Deewar* was selected to emphasize the 'crisis of family and nation'. *Deewar's* contribution to Indian cinema is two-fold – mimicking the masculinity of the urban gangster hero of the Hollywood formula, and placing the category of urban class onto the cinema screen (however Zanjeer, "The Chain," 1973, Prakash Mehra was the first film that catapulted Amitabh Bachchan to the hero status and was also the first film to place class onto the cinema screen). The main protagonist is posited as an 'angry rebel' who turns to crime to escape the humiliation of poverty. The hero's anger is due to the humiliation suffered as a child. This reproduced the condition of millions of slum dwellers and became a synecdoche for the cultural and political values of the nation. *Deewar* created a community of poor men who are struggling on the margins of the society and are humiliated daily. One such humiliated boy/man turns to crime, becomes a gangster and is eventually killed by his policeman brother. *Sholay* (1975) was formulated on the Hollywood Western genre and highlighted a community of male heroes that fought against social anarchy and disorder. *Sholay* presents a hybrid construction of Indian masculinity by representing the myths of the Hollywood's 'Western' and the traditional myths of Dacoit (bandits) to the Indian public. The three themes of the films are: vengeance (as the focal point of the plot); male friendship and homosociality; and the lack of references to family loyalty to highlight the independence of the individual. The

next two films *Amar, Akbar, Anthony* (1977, Manmohan Desai) and *Bombay* (1995, Mani Ratnam) highlight the failure of the Nehruvian secular ethos and the discourse of the erasure of cultural pluralism and assimilation at different moments. *Amar Akbar Anthony* was made in 1977 but anticipates the 'crisis of national unity' of 1990s. On the surface, this film espouses a discourse of national harmony and multi-religious nation but a closer scrutiny reveals a discourse of assimilation very similar to the one being used in the Hindu cultural nationalism that arose in the nineties. *Amar Akbar Anthony* is one of the key films, which embodies the transformation of Indian cinema into an entertainment mode. Conversely, *Bombay* is a cinema of the nineties, which depicts a national sectarian crisis. Its techno-aesthetic is a product of processes of liberalization and globalization, which has shaped the emerging Hinduised Indian identity.

## **Section 1. Nation, Gender and Tradition**

### **1.1 The Cinema of the Nehruvian Nation: *Mother India***

Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) was emblematic film in Indian cinematic history. *Mother India* explores key issues of citizenship and gender through discourses of development which foregrounds the condition of the poor rural woman as the condition of the nation. There are a number of discourses on gender relations narrated, including themes of female sexual prohibition and morality, and the conflation of the woman with the mother reproducing patriarchal cultural hegemony. An exploration of *Mother India* highlights the importance of Nehruvian modernity in shaping the politics of identity for subjects of the new secular nation.

There are a handful of films with women as the central protagonist. *Mother India* is a story of an ordinary village woman who gains an extraordinary status as the mother of the nation. This entails the characteristics of suffering and sacrifice and a prohibition on sexuality. Her sexual purity as a wife, and sacrifices she made as a mother, are rewarded by elevating her to the ideal Indian citizen. The mother character only gains legitimacy by sacrificing her life for others: family, community and nation. There is an inevitable conflation of woman with mother reflecting the base culture, where mothers are granted a sacred status in mythology (not in reality). Women as carriers of cultural and national values were a recurrent theme in Mehboob Khan's films. The centrality of 'mother-son' fixation that underlines moral framework of much of Indian cinema is repeated here. Mehboob Khan's identity was shaped by anti-colonial struggle and the post-independence nationalist socialist idealism and euphoria. Among the many issues canvassed by the nationalists, three of the most significant were the development of the nation, the secular ethos, and the role of women in Indian culture. Khan's films were located within the tensions generated by these issues.



Khan was a believer in Nehru's vision of India as modern socialist nation free of feudalism and Gandhi's vision of self-sufficiency and traditional values. Khan deployed the mythology of mother to give voice to nationalist sentiments in opposition to Colonial critique of Indian culture as misogynist.

### 1.1.1 The Story

The story begins with the marriage of the young innocent heroine, Radha, who moves to her farmer husband's village and into his family, as was the custom for women. Radha's new family is in debt and have indebted their farm to the local landowner, Sukhilal. Radha's devotion to her new family is shown in scenes of her working hard at home and in the fields side by side with her husband, without complaining. In the process of paying off the debt to Sukhilal, her husband loses his arms in a horrific accident. Unable to bear the shame of being dependent on his young wife, he leaves home. If it was not enough that Radha had enormous debts to pay, the floods kill two of her sons and destroy her home and crop. The feudal landowner Sukhilal proposes to feed her children in exchange for sexual favours. Radha prays to the goddess Durga and considers this option in order to save her children from death. Her prayers are answered: a tree falls and injures Sukhilal and this is a sign for Radha to not take the sexual option. She considers this a communication from the Goddess who rescues her *laaz* (chastity). She then finds a coconut offering from the goddess to feed her children. The *Jai Santosi Maa* story is very similar to this point in that a struggling suffering devoted wife keeps her faith in her goddess. The floods destroyed much of the poor village farmers' land and many leave the village. Radha is loyal to her land and sings to the others not to leave their beloved village. As she sings to them, in the name of Mother Earth, a map of pre-Partition India forms on the screen. She raises her sons on her own and becomes 'the mother of the village', persuading the villagers not to leave their home.

Several aspects of *Mother India* are imbued with melodramatic imagination. *Mother India* starts with a recognition scene where Radha is being validated by the state for her sacrifice. In Radha's flashback we see innocence being celebrated as she gets married. The obstacles come in the forms of Sukhilal demanding his money back from Radha's mother-in-law. Then, starts a process of struggling against many obstacles by sacrificing her own needs, which ultimately leads to recognition of her virtue not only by the Indian state but also by the audience. The enlistment of the woman into citizenship authorized by the patriarchal state is thus, made possible.

In the second part of the film, Radha is shown working in the field with her sons as she manages to rebuild her life. The scene changes to show an older Radha with grown up sons. Radha's narrative is organised around themes of the ideal wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. As an Indian woman she sacrifices her needs and suffers endlessly (without complaining) and

does not compromise her sexual purity. Her older son Ramu is shown to be obedient whereas her younger son Birjoo is rebellious. There is a special intimacy between Birjoo and his mother, in which Birjoo is the repository of humiliations suffered by his mother but also the voice of anger that she does not express. Birjoo's narrative in *Mother India* is more central than that of Ramu and is organised around themes of revenge and justice.

Birjoo is the 'bad' son who gambles and lies to his mother. He becomes a dacoit/bandit, kills Sukhilal and attempts to abduct his daughter on her wedding day in an attempt to avenge his mother's honour. His mother, who regards the chastity of the village women as her own, kills him rather than let him bring dishonour to the village by abducting one of the village's daughters, even if she was the daughter of the feudal landlord Sukhilal who had tried to dishonour her.

### **1.1.2 Nation, Gender and Tradition**

The director, Mehboob Khan combines Nehruvian politics with Goddess myths to create his ideal of an Indian woman who self-negates herself and is sexually pure. Khan's understanding of women as transmitters of cultural and national values was very much reproduced from nationalist and religious ideologies. The colonial critique of Indian culture was through the concept of gender. Indian culture was seen as uncivilized due to the treatment of women in practices such as child marriages and in the treatment of widows who were not allowed to remarry. Mishra (2002:67) argues that Kathy Mayo widely read book 'Mother India' written in 1927 criticized the misogyny of Indian culture. This was used as 'powerful propaganda by the British against the Indian Nationalists including Gandhi.' It influenced Western attitudes towards the Indian Nationalist movement. To counter colonial criticisms like these, Khan tries to create an ideal Indian citizen at a key moment of nation building. This citizen is chosen to be a subaltern gendered figure who despite her suffering and sacrifices maintains her chastity and virtue as an Indian woman following on from the exemplary mythological figure of *Sita* in *Ramayan* and who also does not compromise on village/nation citizenship given the opportunity sacrifices her son to uphold the law of the national *dharma* (*Hindu religious and cultural law*). *Mother India* borrows cultural norms of ideal suffering wife from *Sita* mythology and the mother as the protector of her children from Goddess *Durga* and *Kali* mythology to create an ideal feminine figure.

Khan's love for nation is evoked through the myth of the religious ideal of "Bharat Mata" (Mother India) is offered as a secular India (Chakravarti, 1993). In 1957, there were voices of discontent against Nehru's modernist and homogenizing development programs. Khan utilised a nationalist agenda to counter these criticisms. The opening scene of the film, in which Congress Parliamentarians in Nehru caps persuade the Mother to open a dam, can be seen as an affirmation of Nehruvian modernist development. The transformation of a

traditional village with feudal relations of inequality and poverty into the modern prosperous village can be seen as propaganda for Nehru's promised India. Urban India's romanticization of 'village India' is often associated with purity, innocence, and tradition. Khan's identity was shaped by anti-colonial struggle, Partition and the post-independence nationalist idealism. He had actually run away from his village to come and live in the city of Bombay. Khan's films often articulated issues of gender, secular politics and the ideas of nostalgic village life. Gandhi's ideas of going back to the village to learn about 'the real India' probably were an influence on Khan who used this to evoke an ideal past. Khan often used the sign of woman to represent tradition, purity and national unity as in *Aurat* (1944) and in *Mother India* (1957). He also used 'woman' to represent the dangers of Western modernity as in *Andaaz* (1949).

### 1.1.3 The Nation as the Mother

The suffering body of the 'woman/mother' in this film becomes a synecdoche for cultural and political values. This is represented melodramatically in the iconic and tableau framing of Radha in many poses: working in the field covered in mud; carrying the plough and sickle as a revolutionary worker; on a bullock cart with her two sons; standing in the flood water whilst balancing a wooden platform on her shoulder on which her children are carried (the burden of carrying and protecting the young nation on her shoulders). Radha, by protecting the village's honour, is accorded the status of the 'mother of the village', which is equated, to a Goddess. It is interesting to note that in *Jai Santoshi Maa*, an ordinary woman creates chaos in the hierarchy amongst Gods and here an ordinary woman is given a Goddess status. The traffic between humans and Gods is also a religious trope not dissimilar to Greek mythology. Durga and Kali (as the mother goddess)<sup>26</sup> are worshipped widely in many parts of India. Their

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<sup>26</sup> Durga and Kali are two incarnation of same goddesses who are understood as feminine cosmic forces . She creates, destroys and and recreates the universe by destroying the demonic forces that threaten world equilibrium wielding weapons in multiple arms that testify to her ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. Durga, the great Warrior Goddess, represents the energy of anger when turned against evil. The world was under attack by Mahisha, the most evil demon in the world, who took many different forms, including that of a buffalo. The male gods, fearing total annihilation endowed Durga with their powers which enabled Durga to slay the buffalo by cutting off its head and destroying the demon spirit. It is through this act that order was established in the world. Durga's victory and power are celebrated every autumn throughout India in the Durga Puja. Kali may be said to represent the darker side of goddess's power. She is often portrayed as emaciated, black, and with a necklace of skulls. The word Kali is derived from Kaal meaning time. During a fierce battle in which the Goddess demonstrates her omnipotence by defeating powerful demons who Gods could not defeat, she encounters the fierce Raktabija. Every drop of blood he sheds turns into another demon as it touches the earth. A unique strategy has to be devised to

powers are feared and revered. Radha as a mother is revered by the village but at the same time also feared for having killed her own son. The reification of women as mothers in Indian culture is linked to fertility and reproduction and generates widespread mother and female symbolism (Roy, 1998).

Mishra (2002) and Roy (1998) both propose that Nargis's (the actress who plays the role of the mother in the film) iconicity as the national mother can be understood by referring to Das Gupta's analysis of empowering mother in Indian cinema. Das Gupta (1991) has argued that the importance of the mother symbolism in the Indian culture has syncretic historical antecedents from 'West Asian culture' derived from Moguls and other influences. Gupta's argument is that Nargis plays this part to perfection because she as a Muslim woman was playing a Hindu goddess role, one which appropriates Muslim ideas of the mother as the empowering and honouring person. Nargis' representation of the new syncretic Indian woman comes into being because of the symbiosis of two cultures and therefore only a Muslim woman could have captured this syncretism. Das Gupta argued *Mother India* brings together a tendency within Hindu culture towards a "West Asian code of female honour." (1991:111) This tendency was directly linked to the dominant Muslim culture in India during second millennium. Hindu mythology does not cite the Mother as the person who suffers (Mishra 2002) but as powerful, ambitious, greedy and self-serving like the 'mother-in-law' representations common in cinema and in television serials. Thus history and mythology are being mistaken for each other.

#### 1.1.4 Female Sexuality

Indian culture's endorsement of a predominantly patriarchal point of view forwards notions of woman as a commodity to be measured in terms of her sexual virtues (that the woman's chastity first to be 'given' to husband's family). In this discourse, the woman is seen as a man's property and therefore as a mother she is given value by her nurturance of a male son. As a wife her sexual virtues are measured by her husband as in the case of Sita, the heroine of the religious epic, the Ramayan. Sita's sexual purity was tested twice by self-immolation. Her husband, Ram still did not trust her. Radha, in *Mother India* is also tested by this sexual purity test. A woman as man's property belongs to his family and community and any sexual transgression brings shame on the family and dishonours the community. Radha of *Mother India* goes beyond the norms required of a woman by sacrificing her son for her nation and

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contain him. Devi asks Kali to step in and contain the demon. With her huge mouth and enormous tongue she ferociously laps up Raktabija's blood, thus preventing the uprising of further demons. See Vidya Dehejia (1999) "*Devi, The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art.*

thus becomes an Ideal citizen. An ideal woman does not compromise her sexual purity and Radha maintains her sexual virtues. Even though the main protagonist evokes Sita's sexual virtues, her name Radha<sup>27</sup> evokes another discourse. Radha in the mythological and religious text is ascribed a sexuality which transgresses many sexual taboos of Indian culture. Firstly, in one interpretation she is married woman who falls in love with Krishna who is younger than her. Secondly the explicit poetry of her erotic and sensual obsession expresses a feminine sexuality, which transgresses many cultural codes. In this way, the figure of Radha is often evoked to signify feminine sexual rebellion. The debates on female prohibitions and freedom are articulated through mythological figures.

### **Section 1.2 Jai Santoshi Maa**

*Jai Santoshi Maa* ((In Praise of Goddess Santoshi or Hail Mother Goddess, 1975) was released in Bombay and elsewhere in the country with an incredible box-office success which matched that of *Sholay*, and confused and astounded the industry in turn. *Jai Santoshi Maa* is a religious film, which popularised the regional deity Santoshi Maa all over India. The success of this film articulated a demand for woman-centered mythological. The male protagonist as a religious character is rare in Indian cinema, whereas women are often shown as religious and moral agents. This was the first film to articulate the potentials of commercialization of religion and retailing of myths. The television serials of 'Ramayan' and 'Mahabharat' followed a decade later. The issue of urban and provincial was also highlighted through the success of this film. The significant differences between the urban and provincial India is usually discussed in discourses of tradition and modernity pertaining to religious and sexual views, the level of religiosity is greater in smaller provincial town compared to metropolitan cities. The success of the film advanced the cult of Santoshi Maa, a lesser-known, regional deity. It was thought that mythological films had had their day but *Jai Santoshi Maa* proved that this was far from the case. *Jai Santoshi Maa* is directed by Vijay Sharma and the story is set in contemporary India (1975) is about a poor young wife and daughter-in-law who worships the 'mother goddess' Santoshi Maa – a minor goddess who was not commonly known till this film was made. There are thousands of local gods and goddesses in India often revered by a single village community or a family.

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<sup>27</sup> Radha is a cowherdess whose story is narrated in the twelfth-century poem, *Gita Govinda* (Love Song of the Dark Lord). Radha's experience of the ecstasy of divine love with Krishna is the longing of the human soul for the divine. Radha is a heroine who symbolises the ideal lover and not the ideal wife.

### 1.2.1 The Story

The film's story is focused around a village woman called Satyavati (translated this means one who speaks the truth) in a joint Hindu family who goes through innumerable trials (by jealous heavenly goddesses and tribulations inflicted by her husband's family) but never once loses faith in Santoshi Maa. The film glorified the suffering of an ordinary Hindu woman. Her tribulations and suffering as a daughter-in-law in a joint family is the condition of millions of women. The only support this woman has is her relationship with her goddess. The female protagonist desires love and nurturance from the mother figure of the goddess when she has no one else to depend upon and the 'mother-daughter' relationship, which is much neglected, in Indian cinema and culture is the focal point in this film. The film starts with a group song to the goddess in a temple. A group of young women, including Satyavati are dancing and singing to the deity. The words of the songs evoke the expansive nurturance of the mother goddess. Satyavati has no mother. After her marriage, Satyavati leaves her father's home to live with her husband's family, as is the custom for daughters. The leaving of parental home is seen as death of one identity (of the daughter, a rites of passage) and the rebirth of another identity of the daughter-in-law in the new family. Others view it as an expulsion of the daughter/girl. In this and many other patriarchal discourses women/girls are seen as a commodity that is exchanged between two families. Often this change is viewed as one of the most traumatic. Satyavati, as the youngest daughter-in-law, is resented by her sister-in-laws. These women scold her and put her through many tribulations, as they are jealous of her new marriage and her husband's romantic and sexual attention.

### 1.2.2 Gender and Suffering

Satayavati's suffering, renunciation and devotion to the goddess Santoshi creates havoc in the heaven when the most popularly worshipped goddesses Laksmi <sup>28</sup>(the goddess of wealth and Vishnu's consort), Parvati <sup>29</sup>(Shiva's consort) and Brahmani <sup>30</sup>(Brahma's consort) in the

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<sup>28</sup> Laksmi is the goddess of wealth, and is worshiped by householders for the health and welfare of their families; business men and women offer her prayers to ensure the success of their commercial ventures. She is frequently shown standing in her lotus throne and holding lotus buds, which are symbols of beauty and fertility. Lakshmi, is also the wife of the Vishnu and as Vishnu has nine reincarnations, so does Lakshmi. The two most popular forms of Vishnu and Lakshmi's reincarnations are Rama and Sita (whose story is told in the Ramayana) and Krishna and Radha. See Vidya Dehejia (1991), "Devi, The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art".

<sup>29</sup> Parvati is the consort of the god Shiva. She is constantly beside Shiva, watching him as he dances the dance of bliss, admiring him in his deeds of destruction or playing with their two sons, the elephant headed Ganesha and the warrior Skanda. Shiva and Parvati, whose love is deep and

Hindu pantheon discover that their popularity has diminished. As in Greek mythology or in the Puranas, these goddesses are furious with jealousy that the poor woman is devoting herself completely to this minor deity whose name they had not even heard. She is made to submit to certain tests of piety, and due to her extreme devotion she passes them all and makes the other gods accept Santoshi Maa as equals to themselves.

The suffering of Satyavati when compared to Radha of *Mother India* has some significant parallels and differences. In the scene in which Satyavati is married and brought to her husband's family the mother-in-law is the same actress wearing the same white sari as that in *Mother India*. Both films frame innocent young women full of hope coming into their husband's family and their suffering begins here. It is almost as if the beautiful colours, songs and dances of the preceding scenes prepare the viewer for the rituals of the slaughter of the lambs. This has strong resonance for many Indian women watching as this is where symbolically their innocence and freedom is terminated and their suffering begins. The suffering of Satyavati is however different from that of Radha in that, Radha's suffering includes the village and the nation (the tableau shots of Radha working in the field and then pleading with other villagers not to leave their land) whereas Satyavati has smaller vision, focused on herself and her husband. It is interesting to speculate on the popularity of this film and the mass popularity of the mythological, a decade later in TV serials such as Ramanand Sagar's television sagas, *Ramayan* (1986-1988) and *Shri Krishna* (1998), and B.R Chopra's *Mahabharat* (1988-90). The popularization of the deity Santoshi Maa was due to its mass mediation, which may have influenced the popularity of Hindu nationalist agenda as I highlighted in chapter three.

After this film Santoshi Maa did, in fact, become the object of very popular cult amongst urban provincial Hindu women of all classes. New temples were dedicated to her and she entered the regular domestic pantheon of gods venerated by Hindu families. An

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abiding, represent the paradigmatic divine family. Shiva and Parvati are often united in a single form known as Ardhanari (literally half woman) to represent the concept that the divine is both male and female. See Vidya Dehejia, 1991 " *Devi, The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art.* "

<sup>30</sup> Brahmani is also known as Sarasvati, goddess of learning and music. Hindus consider her to be the consort of the god Brahma. She is commonly depicted seated on a lotus holding a stringed instrument, the Vina. Devotees, particularly children starting school, and students of all ages, worship Sarasvati as the source of knowledge. As the goddess of music she is particularly sacred to those who sing or play musical instruments. See Vidya Dehejia, (1991) " *Devi, The Great Goddess: Female Divinity in South Asian Art* ".

invocation of Hindu mythology at a time when the country was going through a crisis may point to a religious or spiritual solution or catharsis in a melodramatic mode of address. The psychological release in seeing suffering of another in this case sacrifice of a woman is a common feature of many films.

### 1.2.3 Religion and the Devotional Aesthetic

The Hindu/Buddhist focus on suffering, asceticism, giving up of materiality is reproduced here. The discourses of *Bhakti* and *devotionalism*<sup>31</sup> are main cinematic device of mythological. The female devotee acquires freedom from the learned rituals of the male priest by channeling her energy and devotion directly into the worship of the deity,<sup>32</sup> without the mediation of the priest. Thus the female devotee attains some kind of independence and power in a patriarchal set up (see Mankekar 1999). This is not the case here. The female protagonist here is very much devoted to her husband and treats him like a god by calling him 'swami' which translates into 'my lord.' Thus more than anything, she values the heterosexual union as the ideal and sacred relationship and sees herself as a maid to her husband following traditional and archaic religious view. In fact she uses the services of the goddess to overcome the suffering inflicted by the other daughter-in-laws of the joint family. When the husband leaves the village to find work elsewhere (we are not told if he goes to the city, but somewhere where money and jobs can be found), he finds a job and a rich beautiful woman. The justification for his affair with this woman is given as the magical manipulation imposed on him by the jealous goddesses who want revenge on Satyaavati for her devotion to Santoshi Maa and not to them. Women's participation in devotional religious practices can be seen to be popular for similar reasons to women's participation in watching melodramatic cinema and

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<sup>31</sup> Bhakti is personal devotion to a personal loving God, Krishna. The word is derived from the word 'Bhakt' meaning servant or slave of God. Bhakti was a spiritual movement which began in sixth and seventh century in South India with the devotional cults of the Tamil saints and transformed Hinduism. The focus of religious attention moved from the great gods connected to polytheism to one God and its incarnations, Krishna and Rama. The form of religious expression changed from old sacrificial rites and meditation to an emotional and passionate relationship bhakti to God. Love-songs to God were sung and group singing, Kirtan became a new popular cultural form See J.T.F Jordens in "Medieval Hindu Devotionalism".

<sup>32</sup> An essential part of puja (worship) by the devotee is making a spiritual connection with the divine and most often that is facilitated by *darshan*, or "seeing" an image of a god or goddess. *Darshan*, is not merely "seeing" but is a dynamic exchange between the devotee and the deity. While the devotee "sees," Devi also presents herself for *darshan* and bestows blessings upon those who worship. It is this concept of the dynamic interaction between devotee and Devi that lies at the heart of the creation of images, sculptures of the Goddesses in her temples.



soap operas. It allows groups of women to share through rituals, singing and sharing and dressing up, which we see in many song and dance sequences. The dancing, which may be frowned upon in other instances, is validated here because of its religious context. However, it is important to note that there have been practices of Devdasi, women who danced in the temples. This exploitation of women was sanctioned through religious authority.

The debates on gender and religion in the formation of this identity can be illuminated. In *Mother India* and *Jai Santoshi Maa*, the characters overcome poverty, patriarchy and feudalism. *Jai Santoshi Maa* authorises a Hindu religious identity as the ideal whereas *Mother India* validates a secular one. Though, it was not the intentions of the filmmaker of *Jai Santoshi Maa* that Indian patriarchy should be critiqued but this is articulated through the politics of the joint family. The older daughter-in-laws terrorize Satyavati by starving her and making her do menial but heavy housework. The men in the family ignore this and avoid responsibility. The older daughter-in-law function as the agents of patriarchy in that they subject the least powerful person in the family to what they may themselves have suffered when they newly entered the family home. The film poses their characters as the villainous ones for their rivalry, greediness and pettiness. The jealousy and petty mindedness of the goddesses and the daughter-in-laws is blamed for Satyavati's suffering. Women are blamed for the other woman's suffering, which is a common enough practice of patriarchal cultures.

## **Section 2: The Crisis of Democracy and the Cinemas of Revenge**

If 'Mother India' affirmed the ideal of post-colonial nationalism, *Deewar* (*The Wall*, 1975, Yash Chopra) and *Sholay* (*The Flame*, 1975, Ramesh Shippy) were certainly an acknowledgement of national crisis of social order and democracy. Both films created 'male only worlds' where women were marginalized as love interests or sources of moral affirmation. The Urban gangster in *Deewar* can be compared to 'community of heroes' defending the territory (national/village) against the anarchic uncivilized power of the villain in *Sholay*. *Deewar* articulates the crisis through a critique of society as an institution which allows poverty and humiliations to be suffered by millions of people living on the margins of the city. The pain suffered by millions is personified by the hero, forcing him to turn to criminality. *Sholay* articulates the crisis of social order through an absence of the family in its narrative drive and also through the trope of revenge and the cynicism of its main protagonists. *Deewar* deploys an urban film noir style whilst *Sholay* deploys a western formula. *Sholay* pays homage to *The Magnificent Seven* and the *Seven Samurai*. Both films employed a melodramatic strategy through the significance of dialogue as opposed to the songs.

## 2.1 *Deewar*: the Urban Poor and the ‘Cinema of Anger’

### 2.1.1 The Story

Indira Gandhi invoked dictatorial powers to proclaim Emergency Rule from 26<sup>th</sup> June 1975, which suspended democracy in response to spreading dissent and national crises. *Deewar* (*The Wall*, 1975) was motivated by the ‘Emergency’ period and reflected and reproduced the democratic crisis-taking place. It was a story of conflict between two brothers, one who becomes a gangster (played by Amitabh Bachchan) and the other a police officer (Shashi Kapoor). The criminal and the police officer posed a moral polarity of the different sides of the law, one threatening the nation and the other defending it. Their mother of the two men is morally torn between love for her “bad” son and her moral duty to the society. The story of *Deewar* is presented in a flashback as the policeman brother is honoured by the state for killing a notorious gangster. The gangster happened to be his older brother (Amitabh Bachchan) who had worked as a labourer in order to pay for his education. This flashback has parallels with the film *Mother India* where Radha the mother is being honoured for defending the village’s *izzat* (honour) by killing her beloved son, Birjoo. In *Deewar* the flashback narrates the story of a trade union activist who is forced to betray his comrades in order to protect his family. The father runs away in shame and humiliation, and Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) is caught by the workers who tattoo the young boy’s arm with the phrase ‘Mera baap chor hai’ (my father is a thief). This humiliating incident becomes pivotal in Vijay’s subjectivity. Vijay survives on the footpaths of the metropolis with his mother and brother. Another crucial scene is when Vijay resorts to violence for the first time (by throwing a stone at the shopkeeper who catches him stealing bread) sets the scene for his future. His ability to use violence and a lack of fear in defending his family and his labourer colleagues gets him noticed in the criminal underworld. Eventually, these attributes allow him to become the leader of a criminal gang of smugglers who control the Bombay docks.

### 2.1.2 The Urban Poor

Political crisis and corruption were reproduced in the ‘anger’ and ‘action’ films of the 1970s. Amitabh Bachchan became one of the most popular heroes in Indian cinema through portraying the character of ‘angry’ hero. *Deewar* negotiated the discontent of the marginalized through this symbolic figure. *Deewar* acknowledged the widespread poverty, inequality and the crisis of legality of Indira Gandhi’s regime by representing: the crisis of family to evoke the crisis of nation; an angry humiliated ‘anti-hero’ replacing the principled, romantic hero; and by replacing the romanticism of village imagery with a corrupt, poverty and crime-ridden urban space. In *Mother India* tradition is represented by visuals of woman, innocence and the village. In contrast *Deewar* represents the modern as the male, violence

and the urban. Both families have absent fathers. The greedy feudal landlord in one replaces the criminal gangster in the other. In contrast to the tableaux of village imagery in *Mother India*, *Deewar* shows the margins of city inhabited by the urban poor. This is an acknowledgement of national urbanisation in Indian commercial cinematic imagery and the growing centrality of the city as a reference point in cinematic representation. Modernist development programs and economic liberalism has heightened the differences between rich and poor. The displaced poor migrated to the cities in huge numbers in search for jobs and have often ended up in crime and prostitution. The poor living in the slums provide cities with its every day labour force. Films like *Sholay* and *Deewar* with poor working class heroes articulated their points of view. The heroes standing up to authority appealed to the masses.

One of the other subtext of the film related to the secular working class identity of the hero. This was narrated by the symbolic importance of Vijay's identification badge as a dockworker, a symbol with multiple meanings. The badge has the number 786, which stands for *Bismillah-E-Rehmane Rahim* and has sacred power in Islam. The badge emerges as Vijay's protector from death, until the end when he is separated from it and as a result he dies tragically. His reification of this badge symbolises his solidarity with other labourers and it also forewords a message of his modern non-communal beliefs.

### **2.1.3 The Anti-hero and Violence**

Amitabh Bachchan displaced the traditions of the Romantic melancholic principled hero (from 1930s to 1970s) by banishing the centrality of romance (Valicha, 1988, Majumdar, 2001, Mishra 2002) *Deewar* was the transgression of the traditional moral narrative where the main protagonist (Vijay) does not reflect any of the characteristics of a principled hero. Mishra (2002) proposes that Amitabh Bachchan's angry hero challenged the figure of noble, transcendent Rama as the model for the filmic hero and also challenged the moral framework of cinema narratives. The angry hero deployed features that belonged to the marginalized anti-hero *Karna* in the Mahabharat. Prasad (1998) claims that Bachchan projected this anti-heroism onto the very modern notion of the angry young man in rebellion (maybe borrowed from Hollywood western masculine role models and the Angry Young Men films of the 1950s and early 1960s in UK) and insert this onto the figure of a subaltern hero "as an agent of national reconciliation" (1998:141). The anger reflected the oppression and hopelessness of the slum dwellers. The hero in *Deewar* represents the conditions of the classless poor whose criminality is shown to be due to the society's lack of effective order and justice. It articulated that it is the society that is corrupt and criminal for not caring about the plight of the millions of poor.

In *Deewar* Vijay turns to crime due to the humiliations inflicted on him and his mother by the cruel society he inhabits. The recognition of his virtue or innocence is through the love

he bestows on his mother and his familial duty towards his younger brother. The virtues of the mother morally legitimates the hero. A flashback to his poverty-stricken mother, struggling to support her two young sons, accompanies and justifies the first temptation to join the smuggling gang. The white sari-wearing vulnerable nurturing mother of both films represent tradition, religion, and the law. In *Deewar* even though Vijay's brother is the police officer representing the state and the law, it is the mother who finally gives permission to the younger brother to kill Vijay, the gangster. Vijay's crime is pardoned due to his love for his mother. Both Birjoo and Vijay are ascribed similar motivations for their crimes and both die in their mother's arms. The last scene of *Deewar* evokes a reunification of the mother and son of the earlier film – as the injured Vijay struggles up the stairs of the temple. Eventually the son's blood and tears, and the mother's scream and the temple bells signal the unification of the son and his mother. The hero dies in his mother's embrace. It is only the mother who understands the reason for him turning 'bad' and accepts him in death in her embrace and therefore opens up the space for the audience to understand him and validate him as a hero. The actual judges of virtue are the audience and not the State, which represents the patriarchal law. His sacrifice neutralizes his criminality and places him as a hero. The transcendence of material and moral barriers in these films fulfilled slum dweller's aspirations and fantasies.

The films of the seventies and eighties were criticized (Mishra, 2002) for glamourising and popularizing violence by associating it with a specific masculine style. The debate stimulated discussions on the role of media in a society. Some argued that media only reflects and mimics the violence of realities of Indian state and civil life, whilst others argued that media violence popularizes gangsters amongst young and illiterate masses. Another issue is that the female characters rarely express anger or rebellion. The mother character of *Deewar* is not dissimilar to the mother in *Mother India* in that she accepts her fate, does not rebel and maintains the social order. The rebellion is left to the son, as in *Mother India*. Both these films and many others represent anger as a male emotion. Angry women are rarely represented, the exception being the women's revenge movies that Lalitha Gopalan (2000) has analysed. Anger is an acceptable emotion only when women are raped. Even then, women tend to commit suicide for dishonouring their family rather than get angry. In *Mother India* the mother that kills Birjoo is not an angry mother but a morally duty bound mother. Anger symbolises rebellion in Indian cinematic texts and it seems rebellion is not constructed as a prerogative of woman characters. Rebelliousness is not trait encouraged or valued in women. Women characters seem to exist not for themselves but to nurture, service or discipline men into societal rules. This is because women in Indian cinema and in patriarchal ideologies are seen not as 'real' women but as mothers, wives or daughters, each role created to service male needs.

## 2.2 *Sholay*: The Cinema of the Supervillain

*Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy, 1975) was released just before Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, imposed a 'State of Emergency.' She suspended constitutional rights and jailed thousands of political opponents. *Sholay* depicts an erosion of traditional law and order. *Mother India* and *Sholay* are the two iconic films that articulate the 'moment' of social transformations. *Sholay*'s iconicity has to do with depiction of subaltern masculine identities, which critique dominant ideas of nationalism. It espouses a liberal secular nationalism very different one from Hindu nationalism of BJP in the 1990s. It is a critique of feudalism and tradition and authorizes modern masculine identity. It utilises Hollywood masculine models of male violence and cynicism and combines it with respect for traditional values but from a distance. The unprecedented popularity of this film speaks of a national catharsis. The catharsis and therefore its popularity was due to the agreement of the audience with the film's ideology of new notions of nation. Therefore a bonding at the level of ideas of nation and a new model of masculinity using violence and moving away from Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence is expressed. The film very much endorses the modern and poses a critique of tradition but still does not expel the traditional as in *Bombay*, see later. *Sholay* is also famous for its homosociality and male bonding.

*Sholay* made violence a marketable commodity, initiating a trend, which continued until the end of the 1980s. The large super-star cast contributed to this, as did the memorable dialogues between Gabbar and Thakur, and between Gabbar and his dacoits. Amjad Khan played the role of a sadist villain, Gabbar Singh to perfection. The cassettes and records of his monologue were sold separately to be learnt by rote by millions of fans because of their widespread popularity. *Sholay* made use of several interesting innovations. This included its spectacular cinematography, with shots panning over rocky heights and canyons. This lent the film an eerie tension.

### 2.2.1 The Story

The story was simple and centered on an ex- police officer Thakur Baldev Singh (Sanjeev Kumar) who hired two mercenaries Veeru and Dev (Dharmendra and Amitabh Bachchan) to seek revenge against the dacoit (Amjad Khan) who had chopped off his arms and killed his family. *Sholay* presents a hybrid construction of Indian masculinity by introducing the myths of the Hollywood's 'Western' and traditional myths of Dacoit (bandits) to the Indian public. The three key issues to note in the film are: vengeance (as the main pivot of the plot); male friendship and homosociality; and the lack of references to family loyalty. Two mercenaries, Veeru (Dharmendra) and Jaidev (Amitabh Bachchan) are recruited by a police officer, Thakur Baldev Singh (Sanjeev Kumar) who had seen them defend their train from attacking bandits when he was transporting them to prison. The ex-policeman is also a landowner (*zamindar*) in

an isolated village, whose entire family has been murdered by the bandit, Gabbar Singh (the latter's revenge for having been imprisoned by the Police officer). Gabbar Singh had cut off both of Thakur's arms. The film also has two parallel love stories: one is light and humorous and concerns Veeru with Basanti; the other is a tragic one, focusing on Jai's relations with the widowed daughter-in-law of Thakur. The film also utilises a loyalty test that Muslim characters have to exhibit. The representation of communal harmony is shown by focusing on the wonderful relations between the villagers and the old blind Muslim priest (imam) of the little village mosque. Not only is he blind, but his son is sacrificed and therefore as a Muslim he is not threatening to the Hindu imaginary and designed to invoke pity and little else. The climax is reached when Jai is shot as he protects his friend Veeru and helps him escape. He later dies in his friend's arms by sacrificing his life for his friend. The mother of *Deewar* is replaced by a close male friend in embracing the dying hero, in his arms.

*Sholay* presents interesting parallels with its predecessor by two decades, Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* especially in the enduring trope of the *daku* (Indian bandit, 'dacoit' or highwayman, an outlaw. In the earlier film, Birju becomes the leader of a dacoit band. Birju throughout the film is driven by hatred for the village landlord who had ruined his family. As a dacoit leader, Birju was interested in avenging feudalistic oppression, which his mother had suffered. In contrast, the dakus of *Sholay* have no political desires but are evil and bent on carnage and the forces of social order (Thakur Baldev Singh and his police force) are powerless to defeat them. Gabbar Singh has brutally murdered Thakur's family and has literally cut off his law administering arms. In *Mother India* there is a comparable though "accidental" mutilation of the father. To strike back, Thakur must (as he puts it) "use iron to cut iron," replacing his slain offspring and severed arms with two 'adopted criminal hands' who alone possess the bravery to track down Gabbar Singh.

In a scene leading to the resolution of the conflict, Gabbar's men pursue Basanti, and Veeru tries to save her. Both are captured. In a famous scene, Gabbar forces Basanti to dance on broken glass, threatening to shoot her lover if she stops. She sings, "I will dance as long as there is breath left in my body." This is often compared to the climactic dance sequence in *Pakeezah* (The Pure One, 1971, Kamal Amrohi) where the heroine also dances on broken glass to prove her love. Jai comes to the rescue, the dacoits are killed and Thakur Baldev Singh takes his revenge on Gabbar. The film relies on loyalty in friendship and love, what is notable is the total absence of family ties and values. The heroes have no family ties. The family has been presumed to be the ideal unit of Indian society, though in most modern Hindi films family unit is often in crisis.

The scripwriters (Javed Akhtar and Salim Khan) insert a Muslim character, the kind benign patriotic priest (Imam) and signs of a mosque in the village. As the old maulvi weeps over his dead son, the villagers angrily tell Thakur that they cannot take any more; a debate

ensues over non-violence versus violence against an enemy, recalling Partition and Gandhi's non-violence. Thakur's words point to another time when the country had to stand up to foreign invaders. But the *maulvi (the Muslim Priest)* shames the villagers by asking 'Allah why He didn't give him more sons to sacrifice as martyrs for the village'. This as I have discussed earlier is the patriotic or sacrifice test that the Muslim character has to pass to be acceptable in the Hindu imaginary. As a result, the villagers decide to support the two heroes, instead of handing them over to Gabbar Singh. The screenwriters probably inserted this in their bid to communal harmony and secular ethos.

### **2.2.2 Supervillainy and Affect**

In a rocky hideout Gabbar is seen taunting his men about a failed mission. In a form of Russian roulette, he holds the barrel of his gun to a man's temple and presses the trigger. When the gun fails to go off, he gleefully exclaims, "The bastard is saved". He repeats this twice and no one is hurt. He laughs viciously at his own cruel joke and his men join in. When the laughter reaches a hysterical pitch, he turns around suddenly, fires and kills the three men. Ramesh Sippy, the director orchestrates the action so expertly that it creates a sense of excitement and awe. It has been hailed as a brilliantly executed scene by many critics. His infamous dialogue from this scene was repeated in many streets when I was growing up in India. The sound track of the film sold a record number of copies. The film and Gabbar Singh the villain were merchandised on water bottles, belts, jackets, and sportswear(Thoraval, 2000). It is often remembered for the heights it took villainy to in Indian films. Unlike earlier villains who were content to bring about a misunderstanding between lovers and their families, Amjad Khan's Gabbar Singh seems to pursue evil as an end in itself. Gabbar is unlike the villains of contemporary cinema in that his motivation is not wealth or lust but sadism.

### **2.2.3 Masculinities**

In the narrative plot of *Sholay*, four constructions of masculinities are deployed. Thakur baldev Singh is the ultimate patriarchal force representing the moral and social order; Gabbar Singh is the opposite of everything Thakur represents. It is interesting to speculate that both are named 'Singh' which means 'lion' in Hindi. This is a clue to their equal and opposing force. In earlier films, the bodies carrying the 'good' ultimate patriarchal law were represented as noble, benign but resolute. But in *Sholay*, there is a change in the patriarchal figure - the force of revenge expressed by Thakur (by the constant grinding of his teeth and no words leave his mouth without expressing his desire for revenge). Thakur expresses no pain when he sees his entire family lying dead. He jumps on a horse to search for Gabbar to exact his revenge. His arms are cut off signifying the castration of patriarchal law, but this does not

stop his desire for revenge. Masculinity in this register is constituted as 'action' and there is no exhibition of emotion. The other two models of masculinity are contrasted as man and boy: the amorous, drinking, gambling, 'out of control', boyish Veeru against the self-restrained, cynical man, Jaidev. The femininities against which these masculinities are constructed are marginal to the narrative. The femininity of Basanti is constructed as verbal, not very intelligent, and infantile whilst the femininity of Radha the widow, is constructed in terms of pathos, powerfully embodied in her white saree and her lack of speech.

*Sholay* is remembered for Gabbar Singh's monologue, Thakur's hissing and gritting of his teeth, Veeru and Jaidev's friendship through their famous male bonding song. 'We will never break this friendship, we rather die than leave this friendship' and Basanti's dance when she is forced to dance on glass and sing in the scorching sun to save Veeru, her lover. The trend of using multiple stars in a 'community of heroes' format was mimicked in the film *Amar Akbar Anthony*. *Sholay* introduced the Western genre to the Indian public - men, guns and violence. The film's misogyny was apparent in its treatment of female characters, they were assigned to the role of love interest. The film opened a space for male homosociality and eroticism based on parody and performance of action and violence.

### **Section 3: The Crisis of the National Secular : *Amar Akbar Anthony* and *Bombay***

Both 'Amar, Akbar Anthony' (Manmohan Desai, 1977 thereafter AAA) and 'Bombay' (Mani Ratnam, 1995) employ the notion of cultural and religious differences to affirm the sacredness of modern secular Indian identity by playing on the metaphors of family separation and unification. Both films use the metaphors of mother and lost children to signify the nation and its citizens. Both also deploy a melodramatic plot by employing: ideas of innocence under trial and protest; family separation and struggle; and the unifying of family as resolatory reconciliation. Both films celebrate secularism and religious pluralism based on ideas of assimilative history in that films represent a resolution by advocating an erasure and homogenisation of cultural and religious pluralism into one identity of the 'Indian.' As I have explored in chapter one, 'Indian' identity is often conflated with 'Hindu' identity. In AAA, the main protagonists are three brothers who are Hindu, Muslim and Christian all of whom are modern and secular, whilst in *Bombay* the main protagonist is a Hindu character with modern and secular beliefs.

The crucial difference between the two films is that one celebrates the unity of a multi-religious secular nation whereas the other mourns the loss and crisis of a secular nation. There are a number of other differences between the films. The character format in AAA is that of a community of working-class heroes in AAA (a trend of that time in films like *Sholay*, 1975). However, in *Bombay* there is a single middle-class hero of the 1990s. The next difference is the specificity of the historical moment: AAA was made in 1977 and was a celebration of a



multi-religion secular nation utilising acceptable Partition state discourses of 'unity in diversity.' *Bombay* was made in 1995 after the Communal riots of 1992 in which up to 2000 people, mostly Muslim were killed and put the nation into a religious crisis which many left wing and civil rights groups called a state orientated pogrom against the Muslim community (Vasudevan, 1995). *Bombay* attempts to reconcile the communal violence by offering multi-communal agency and by an offer of a sacrifice from the secular Hindu hero. *AAA* employs an entertainment mode of address whilst *Bombay* deploys a combination of addresses including a realist documentary mode combined with a Parallel Cinema style of linear narrative, a complex psychological characterization rather than star centered text, and aspects of Bollywood aesthetic which uses a song and dance format to entertain. *AAA* is a film for entertainment and leisure with an excessive exhibitionist style but the second is a challenge to communal violence by using a combination of documentary and melodramatic cinematic address.

### 3.1.1 The Story

*Amar Akbar Anthony* is a story of a former criminal who abandons his wife and three little sons, all of whom are separated by various events on 15<sup>th</sup> August, which is India's Independence Day from colonial rule. This convoluted story then has the eldest son, called "Amar" being brought up by a Hindu policeman, the second "Anthony" brought up by a Catholic priest, and the third, "Akbar", by a Muslim tailor. Multiple coincidences and divine miracles allow the three brothers to be finally reunited and to find their mother again. The recognition and unification of the family occurs through a pendant, which has the icon of Santoshi Maa, a goddess created by cinema. *AAA* deploys the popularity of this film by investing the goddess icon with cosmic power of uniting this family. A news item about an alcoholic man who regularly beat up his wife inspired this story of a poor family where the father is a criminal and abandons the mother who is too poor to look after the children and abandons them on the pavement. This happens to many poor families living on the margins of the metropolitan city and is utilised by Desai (film director) to make it into a story of national secular celebration. The date of family separation (15 the August, Independence day) and the iconography of Gandhi was invoked in this film as in other films to signal the trauma Partition and a desired healing of these wounds was articulated through family unification.

### 3.1.2 The Heterogeneous and Exhibitionist Aesthetic

Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (AAA) revels in a theatre of spectacles. It is described as a Nautanki, which is an exhibitionist theatrical style. Its presentational mode of addresses deploys multiple songs and dances, a 'lost and found' formula and a style of pastiche and parody. The key issues arising out this film were the excessive intertextual

referencing and a celebration of unity in the multi-religious nation. In the late seventies due to the increasing popularity of television, many filmmakers turned to making extravagant and spectacular films to attract large audience. This was probably the beginning of shift towards cinema becoming more an entertainment (or cinema of attractions) than a social ideological tool. *Amar Akbar Anthony* remains a cult favourite in the minds of the people and still attracts large audiences whenever it is screened. One scene, which stayed in popular memory, was of the three heroes of different faiths simultaneously donating blood to their mother, which symbolically highlighted the secular vision of the director.

### 3.1.3 National Unity and assimilation

*Amar Akbar Anthony* celebrated the secular nation by uniting the three sons and the their religion. Mishra (2002) has argued that this was the same discourse of assimilative history espoused ferociously by the anti-colonial nationalist movement in their attempt to repress India's highly divisive past. *Amar Akbar Anthony* endorsed this ideological repression by churning out the simplistic discourse of 'unity in diversity.' This assimilative history claims that the underlying origins of all Indians are the same, that is Muslims and Christians were Hindus before they were cunningly converted. Hence, Mishra proposes that, one mother but different beliefs is a variation on Savarkar's original version of Hindutva. Chetan Bhatt (2001:172) has argued that the old Savarkarite formula was that Muslims were originally 'biological' Hindus. 'Hindus and Muslims are blood-brothers' was utilised as a propaganda tool in the deceptive language of BJP manifesto in 1991. This was probably an effort to counter its fascist anti-Muslim ideology. The discourse of assimilation then validates Hinduism as the original and genealogically pure religion through tropes of mother and family. This would also explain the loyalty test Muslim characters have to pass in films to prove that they will not betray the *Bharat Mata* (mother India) by demanding separation from the family. Muslims who left for Pakistan were seen as treacherous to the nation.

Mishra (2002) proposes that *Amar Akbar Anthony* endorsement of national unity is achieved by two main textual drives. The first is through the figure of the mother. As we have encountered in earlier cinematic texts, the use of mother figure as a metaphor is never far from the discourses on femininity and nationalism: mother as motherland, Mother India and Mother Earth. Film imagery and dialogue play explicitly with this metaphor. Thus woman as a sign is used to effect a cohesion due to her imagianry attributes of nurturance. One key scene of *Amar Akbar Anthony* shows the three adult brothers (one Hindu, one Muslim, one Christian) giving blood to their mother to revive her from her wounded sleep. The three sons of different religions are thus united through her to heal Mother India's partition wounds. The second textual drive is through using image of Gandhi. The notion of secular ideology in the film is represented by using iconography of Gandhi, (Mishra, 2002) who is revered in India,

as the father of the nation for his part in the anti-colonial struggles to free the nation from the British rule. Mishra (2002) argues that the secular is celebrated as long as Hindu laws are not transgressed and intermixing is acceptable provided that the Muslim and Christian are assimilated back to their true Hindu genealogy. He argues that film anticipates the return of the repressed of the Indian nation – the unhealed scars of ‘separation and loss’ of Partition and communal violence. There is an attempt here, to balm this scar by the unification of the multi-religious family/nation. Vasudevan (1995) has argued that less than a decade later, the popular cinema’s demonising and conflating of the Muslim insider with that of Pakistani outsider became a common jarring narrative device in the films of the late eighties and nineties (following on from media and national anxieties). They reproduced and exploited repressed fears suffered during the Partition of the country.

### **3.2 The Cinema of Mourning: *Bombay* (1995)**

This film was a response to the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims that plunged India in to violence, especially Bombay from December 1992 to January 1993, after some Hindu fundamentalists demolished the ‘Babri Masjid’ (a 16<sup>th</sup> century Mughal mosque at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh). The crisis of an ordinary family similar to that in *AAA* occurs where children are separated from the parents and the narrative of loss and separation allows for a melodramatic address to bind the spectator to the horrors of loss and pain. The film depicts many scenes which mourns the 1992 communal holocaust: Shaila the mother seen lamenting her missing children in the riots, expressing grief and beating her chest, “Where are my children, find my children”. The words are repeated many times and the dialogue is delivered for emphasis. This may be said to signify the mourning of ‘Mother India’ for its innocent but lost and divided children due to genocidal communal conflicts. This scene is juxtaposed with scenes of burning, looting, and a desolate landscape of burnt out slums. The senselessness of violence and loss gestures towards a cinema in mourning. The politics of family is extrapolated to the politics of the nation in crisis. Communalism is challenged and a desire for a secular nation is promoted by demanding a subsumption of religious differences.

#### **3.2.1 Story**

*Bombay* is a love story between a Hindu journalist, Shekar Kapur and a Muslim woman Shaila Bano against the backdrop of religious riots that tore the city of Bombay apart. The couple run away from parental resistance and aggression to their inter-religious romance. They elope to the city of Bombay (where Shekhar works) from their village in South India and marry anonymously in order to escape the disapproval of their respective traditional families. The birth of their two children brings them closer to their respective families. When the riots break out, they lose their children who barely escape being burnt alive by the rioters

who ask them their religion. Shekar as a journalist interviews the Hindu and Muslim groups leaders who blame each other for the communal violence. The characters are constituted with psychological depth and detail in line with the conventions of the 'Parallel Cinema.'

### **3.2.2 Documentary and Truth**

Mani Ratnam's deployed a combination of documentary realist mode with a melodramatic cinema style, which aroused controversy. A fierce public debate ensued in the media, (in the pages of 'The Times of India' and in the 'Economic and Political Weekly' and on the internet). Liberal and the Left wing opinions understood the film as secularist and felt there was no misrepresentation of the Muslim aggression, whereas and the Muslim and civil rights lobby opposed this view. The Muslim lobby and civil rights groups attacked the film for its anti-Muslim stand, in that the film misrepresents Muslims for having started the riots and the film seems to represent the dominant Hindu view as the reasonable one. The communal lobbies on both sides pointed out that the film's documentary strategies construct a tale of Muslim aggression as a central component of the riots. Earlier in January 1993 sectarian rioting left two thousand Hindus and Muslims dead in Bombay. Mani Ratnam's Tamil film *Bombay* (1995) used these events as a backdrop to an inter-religious love story. Ratnam encountered many problems passing this film through the censor board, due to the violence and the communal elements of the film. After he was successful in getting it through, Bal Thackeray chief of the Shiv Sena (the Hindu fundamentalist wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP the ruling government) intervened and forced cuts in the film as he was unhappy with his portrayal in the film which signaled his role in starting the riots by his inflammatory ideology and ensuing speeches. The film's narrative reinforced Shiv Sena's versions of the riots, as a Hindu retaliation and defense against Muslim aggression. This led to the Muslim leaders demanding cuts of their own since the Muslims were shown to be the cause of the riots but the Maharashtra Government (SS-BJP) dismissed their claims. Though Ratnam's aim was to reconcile communal differences, many critics have argued that the film became propaganda for the Hindu Right. There were three Muslim objections to this film. The first was that the film was shown in advance to Mr Bal Thackeray, the chief of the Shiv Sena, and certain aspects were censored. Mr Thackeray was seen as the force behind the attacks on Muslims in Bombay in January 1993 and so was not considered an appropriate censor. The second Muslim objection to the film was that it depicts both communities as equally guilty of violence, when the Muslim community was by far the greater victim. Javed Anand and Teesta Setalvad, co-editors of the monthly journal "CommunalismCombat" (published on the net [http://www.sacw.net/i\\_ain/bombay.html](http://www.sacw.net/i_ain/bombay.html)), argued that far from being unbiased Ratnam (as the RSS and the Shiv Sena have done) argued that film represents Muslims as being responsible for starting a riot, forcing Hindus to retaliate in self-defense. The third objection of Muslim

groups to *Bombay* was that it shows a Muslim girl getting married to a Hindu boy. They argued that had it been a Hindu girl running away with a Muslim boy, the Hindu groups would definitely have censored the film. Both groups hold traditional patriarchal views and see women as commodity (possession) belonging to men and community. The woman by running away from the community (as Shaila Bano does in the film with a Koran) dishonours the community. Both groups agree on this point. In the Indian cinematic imagination Muslim masculinity is defined as the aggressor, not the femininity. In this film assimilation of community identity occurs through marriage but the authority of the male Hindu hero is evident. The inter-religious marriage would be acceptable to either side as long they return to Hindu and Muslim religious identity respectively. In the film, the children born of this marriage do not follow either religion but a mixture which challenges both Hindu and Muslim patriarchal values.

### **3.2.3 Neo-liberal Indian Fusion**

Mani Ratnam has developed a reputation as an auteur. He has developed a specific hybrid aesthetic, which mixes styles from Bollywood (such as song-and dance spectacles), Hollywood (action, linear narrative), Parallel Cinema (modernist-realist) and South Indian popular cinematic imagery. He uses lush cinematography, sweeping camerawork, inventive musical production numbers, and the infectious music of A. R. Rahman. A.R Rahman has energized the music scene with mixing classical Indian music with Western genres. Rahman's new musical aesthetic has revolutionized the cinema and musical industry. His cinema juxtaposes the images and narratives of his local Tamil dialect, culture, and fashion, which are combined with global MTV, Hollywood and other Western influences in the construction of a national identity. This new aesthetic challenged the earlier North Indian hegemony but it still valorizes a Hindu middle class perspective. Film critics have credited his technological and aesthetic mastery as having revolutionized not only the Tamil but also Indian film industry. The exhibition of technological mastery in his visual style expresses a new middle-class identity, which is founded on educational and technological skills and confidence. The aspirations to compete with hegemonic Hollywood films in the global market are founded on skills in electronic technology. The dotcom boom helped in this aspiration by creating an electronically skilled labour force. His films have set a trend for a whole new visual style in Tamil and Indian cinema. Ratnam's films authorize a nationalist identity which is created by mixing regional images and music with a Hindu perspective but which relies on modern secular beliefs. Three films *Roja* (The Fast, 1993), *Bombay* (1995) and *Dil Se* (1998), all political narratives, established his reputation. His film, *Roja* (Niranjana, 1994, Vasudevan, 1997) portrays the perpetrators of violence as anti-national terrorist or communalists or as misguided fundamentalists as in *Bombay* and portrays the Indian State as benevolent and

rational. The significance of such a portrayal in *Roja* and *Bombay* lies in their understanding of violence as senseless, outside reason or the rule of law. However, many human rights groups such as Amnesty International have exposed the central violent role of Indian State in orchestrating and organizing these pogroms. Violence has been integral to the rule of law to the maintenance of the Indian state, just as it is integral to the processes of liberalization and globalisation, which are helping to fashion the new Indian citizen-consumer (Vasudevan, 1995, 1997). The establishment and reinforcement of nationalism, islamophobia, technological exhibitionism and the authority of the Hindu male protagonist seem to be key features of Mani Ratnam's films (Niranjana, 1994). *Bombay* represents the cinema of the nineties, a product of processes of liberalization and globalization, which have very much helped to create the new Indian citizen-consumer.

### **3.2.4 The Hindu Hierarchy and Cultural Othering**

One of the significant objections by the Muslim Lobby was to Ratnam's depiction of the Muslim father in comparison to the Hindu father. The Hindu father, Narayan was verbally aggressive whereas the Muslim father, Bashir picked up his sword repeatedly in the film and at the slightest provocation. Vasudevan ((1995:49) claims that this depiction of knife wielding Muslim aggressor sets the scene for violence of the communal riots being blamed on the naturally aggressive Muslim and this image reveals a dominant Hindu point of view and authorise this view as the invisible norm. Vasudevan (1995:52) also proposes that even though *Bombay* is a complex and multi-layered film, it constructs an ideology of national unity, which has contradiction by attributing an exaggeration in cultural behaviour to the Muslim other. He believes that 'the attributes of social backwardness, cultural conservatism and deep religiosity are stereotype' accorded to the working-class Muslim in the popular cinema but not aggressiveness which is common in Indian cultural stereotypes. Vasudevan (1995:52) proposes that *Bombay* is part of larger regressive environment in which the Hindu hero is the ideal Indian subject to which others are compared to. In addition, due to the rise of Hindu nationalism, stereotypes of aggressive Muslim have been mobilized. He asserts cinema has redefined earlier secular conventions by showing Muslims as villainous characters in a number of films such as *Tezaab* (N. Chandra, 1988), *Gardish* (Palikadarshan, 1993) and *Angaar* (Shashilal Nayar, 1993). He notes that the even though the Muslims in these narratives come from Bombay's criminal groups and therefore aggressiveness can be associated with their criminality and not necessarily with their religious differences. This is not the case in *Bombay*, which participates in a shift (as did his *Roja*), in that it attributes aggression as a quality of Muslimness not just the Muslim criminals. However, Vasudevan also points out that this film also generated (unprecedented in Indian popular cinema) the most startling image of the dangerous Hindu.

### 3.2.5 Communal Harmony

The communal riots and the Hindu-Muslim relationship after the communal violence of 1992 is presented in a melodramatic form in this film, which endeavours for communal reconciliation. Shekhar's offer of self-sacrifice to save the Muslim family from murderous Hindu rioters is the final reconciliation scene. There are number of other characters who also do this. From the stories of the Partition to Bombay riots and to the Gujarat riots, we see and hear of these emotive stories where many risk their lives to defend their neighbours. These stories are rare occurrence in contrast to stories of horrors of neighbours turning on neighbours and killing them or joining others to hunt them. The agency of those who sacrificed to save others fills the audience with hope when all humanity seems to have vanished. Shekar proposes an ending to the communal antagonism by giving up on religious identity so that communal violence can be stopped and a utopian secular Indian nation can be achieved. Though this is very laudable desire, the problem arises when we unpack 'Indian' which is often conflated with 'Hindu' values and negates other cultural and religious differences either by an exaggerated stereotype or by silencing the differences. In this aspect, the identity of 'Indian' is not an inclusive space but an exclusive one.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed six key film texts to illuminate their themes and their inherent contradictions. The cinematic narratives of these films reflect and recreate major changes in Indian society over the last six decades. The three crises that take place in these cinema texts are those of gender, class and religion. The crisis of class and religion are performed through the category of gender. The desire for a secular modern nation is dominant in most of these films. Three films *Mother India*, *Jai Santoshi Maa* and *Bombay* depict central characters surrounded by chaos and chance. This is the thread that connects them in the evolution of national identity. There is a shrinking of political imagination from a Nehruvian secular collective identity in *Mother India* (1957) which promotes struggle for and sacrifice to the nation to a Hindu religious identity in *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975), which promotes a narrow focus on self and family. The popularity of *Jai Santoshi Maa* may be the precedence for television serialisation of Hindu mythologies such as the 'Ramayan' and the 'Mahabharat' in the nineties. *Bombay* in comparison to these two films legitimises modern secular neo-liberal metropolitan identity as the desired object. There are significant differences in *Bombay* to *Mother India* in that *Bombay* authorizes a critique of traditional (as residing in the village) and an idealisation of a metropolitan identity bereft of any differences. *Mother India* authorised the village as Gandhi's space of authentic and innocent India. There are similarities between the two films, in that in *Bombay*, the Hindu hero offers himself as a sacrifice to stop

the violence and save the nation, whereas the mother in *Mother India* sacrifices her son for the village and the nation.

As I have highlighted, Indian popular cinema provides a public imaginary arena for the definition and celebration of a modern Indian identity whilst negotiating the dialectic of tradition and modernity. In this context the icon of the 'mother' is a crucial signifier of traditional moral order, which is utilised as a repetitive narrative strategy. The cinema analysis underlines the deployment of disciplinary discourses of ideal femininity to represent the crisis of nationalism by the conflation of ideal woman with motherhood and sexual prohibitions. This expresses patriarchal anxieties to control women and the changes from tradition to modernity. The mother figure has some fixed attributes such as her white sari and an absence of her husband signifies loss and suffering but she also shows determination to survive in the world despite her misfortune. She suffers her pain without complaining and very much endorses the traditional moral order. Her rebellious son (as in *Mother India* and *Deewar*) usually expresses her pain and humiliation. The mother-son and relationship is an interdependent one, often part of the same patriarchal discourse where mother acts as son's conscience and the nurturer, whereas the son acts as the dark side of the mother expressing her anger. His criminality is articulated as rebellion against the humiliations of poverty and justifies the transgression of the law of the state. Modern conceptions of masculinity enter the popular cultural imaginary. The rise of the icon of 'angry man' in the films of the 1970s was seen as manifestation of the cultural transitions of the urban poor. I have discussed how this simultaneously articulated the cultural and moral conflict of the urban masses on the margins of the city. The debates on criminality and violence arising out of these films, (*Deewar* and *Sholay*) ensued in the national media.

I have explored the strategies adopted by popular Bombay cinema when representing differences of religion. The differences of Muslim identities are invisibilised or fetishized (in *AAA* and *Bombay*). In dominant Hindu centric discourse, Indian Muslim identity is represented as a problem in its existence. The existence of Muslim is a reminder of the loss of the Hindu (the Muslim is seen as Hindu in origin and becomes Muslim only by forced conversion) or a fear of disloyalty and treachery in case he demands separation as in Partition. The coding of masculine aggressiveness of the Muslim is contradictory (if he was a Hindu, he would be tolerant and effeminate) and arises from the Hindu communalist propaganda from pre-colonial times. A test of the loyalty to Indian-ness is required for Muslim characters. There is a dominant history of Muslim characters in Indian cinema to articulate and prove that they do not support Pakistan. This is done by characters sacrificing their lives for India or shown to be patriots, for example, the Imam in *Sholay* who after losing his son admonishes the village for not standing up to the enemy. In a very similar vein to Hollywood films where 'Black' characters are killed off, Muslim characters die quite early on in the film through



small heroic acts. In the films of the eighties a change in representations of Muslim occurs: the soft patriotic Indian Sufi Muslim is contrasted with Pakistani hard core Muslim killer. But, as soon as one is coded Muslim, the loyalty test is built into the character. A Muslim is thus really a failed Hindu and Indian who is disloyal for adhering to his religion.

I forward an observation that five of the six films have one thing in common – the notion of sacrifice. I would propose that the main characters attain heroic status and stardom through some sort of sacrifice. The struggles for Independence, the Partition genocide and the journey towards democracy have all required great sacrifice and suffering. The giving of one's life to free the nation from its oppressors was a popular directive from the anti-colonial movement. Sacrifice and martyrdom can be seen as cleansing event, which produce the possibilities of reconciliation in many film texts. The staging of the event of the death of a hero who rises above the conflicts that surround him and reunites a divided world by dying, can be seen to produce a narrative of reconciliation. Often the sacrifice involves an offer of their life or by exhibiting a lack of fear in the face of death. This is usually undertaken for another person usually family member such as the brother or son but also for a friend or for the whole community. A sacrifice of some kind is performed for the attainment of higher ideals, which grants the character a god-like reverence from their filmic community and the extra-filmic community of viewers. Sacrifice, death or martyrdom all point to emotions of loss. The discourse of loss usually involves some kind of reconciliation and therefore the narratives of sacrifice in this way become the narratives of reconciliation. Radha in *Mother India* sacrifices her son to protect the chastity of a village girl and in doing so protects the honour of the village. In *Jai Santoshi Maa*, the wife and the daughter-in-law is tested by suffering and sacrificing on a daily basis. In *Deewar* Vijay (Amitabh Bachchan) is sacrificed so that the rule of Law is upheld. In *Sholay* Jai sacrifices his own life for his friend. In *Bombay* the hero offers himself for self-immolation to protect a Muslim family from being burnt. Only in *Amar Akbar Anthony* there is no sacrifice, we see and participate only in celebration. I would argue that the centrality of the hero's body inscribed with the affect of sacrifice and loss sutures the spectator's loss and an emotional imaginary contract is made. Therefore the hero or heroine's body in pain becomes vital in expressing not only community recognition and legitimation but also community conflicts and contemporary crises in Indian cinema. In fact, the body is a crucial signifier of gendered and ethical narrative structures. In *Deewar*, the angry humiliated hero's pain is resolved by death, which makes him a hero. The hero's inability to express pain is an index of masculinity in this context but also a requirement of the heroic portfolio. The stoicism of Radha in *Mother India* grants her a hero's status too. Sacrifice is conveyed either through an excess of emotion or through a dramatic prohibition. The affect of a sacrificing body in pain, or a determined hysterical body writhing in pain – these are bodies that sacrifice to gain admittance to the heroic pantheon.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE 'MOTHER' VERSUS THE 'HERO': BRITISH ASIAN CULTURAL NORMS

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I aim to explore the complex, passionate and contradictory discourses related to gender relations and the crisis of the family in the cinema practices of British South Asian respondents. Bombay cinema's gender relations are narrated through the dialectic of criticism and affect. Gender identifications and dis-identifications become a site for self and collective introspection and reflection by provoking critical debates and arousing a specifically cultural aesthetic engagement. I highlight what gets validated, what gets contested and how these differences are managed. I argue that the respondents, from different locations of gender, generation, sexual orientation, religion and class, interrogate Bombay cinema's gender representation and pose a powerful critique of traditional, modern, neo-traditional and post-modern gendered cultural norms. The respondents were reflexive about their complicity with the structures and values of the traditional family and of the western capitalist desiring machinery.

For many respondents, the film experience was often connected specifically to family viewing and generated memories of connections with their own mothers, siblings and sometimes fathers. For example, Shakira's (British Trinidadian Pakistani woman, aged thirty born and brought up in South London) first memory of Bombay cinema was associated with her mother. Sunita's (British Indian Punjabi woman, aged thirty-four, from Houselow, now lives in south London) first cinema memory (when she was 4) was the displeasure she aroused when she interrupted her mother's cinema watching because she wanted to be taken to the toilet. Kamar's (British Indian Punjabi woman, aged thirty-four, from Manchester, brought up in Leeds) memory was the excitement of going to cinema and her mother used to take pakoras and samosas in her handbag. Kamar's story expressed an adult admiration of her mother's ability not to play by the western rules of cinema watching and yet, she also expressed the embarrassment she felt as a child at her mother's food subversions. Neela's (Indian Mauritian, woman, aged twenty-one, studying in London) desire for glamour and dressing up began when she, her sister and her mother watched the cinema when they felt culturally isolated. Similarly, Salim's (British Bangladeshi man, aged twenty-four, born and brought up in Sylhet lives in Ilford) desires for cross-dressing originated in the space he shared with his mother and sisters watching cinema and mimicking the dressing-up. Irfan (British Bangladeshi man, aged twenty there and has been born and brought up in the East End of London) wanted his mother

to be 'educated into new reality' by watching Bombay cinema so that she would understand the modern sexual politics of British soaps, such as *East Enders*, which she watched regularly. In the respondent's discourses, the self-negation of the mother character is parodied even as it is admired. The memory of the mother was an integral part of the cinema experience. I examine the discourses of the family and of heterosexual cultural norms. In responding to my questions on the representation of women many respondents invoked the dominant figure of the mother in Bombay cinema. The mundane everyday mother symbol is an ordinary, devalued female figure but who symbolises a complex space through the chain of signification and identification. The emotional charge of the symbol derives its power through suffering, victimisation, renunciation and moral righteousness. The ordinary and the devalued mothers are accorded little significance but in cinema these symbol transcend to one of saintly powers of the goddesses. Respondents' voices contextualize the ahistorical figure of the filmic mother through the affective charge of their own experiences.

As I show, the figure of the mother proliferates into a number of other popular signs and relations in Bombay cinema, such as the 'mother-hero' relationship, the 'Saas-Bahu' nexus (the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law relations), and the 'mother-daughter' relations. These are used to explore different family power relations and crises as articulated by respondents. I have highlighted some of these relations briefly in the cinema analysis of *Mother India*, *Jai Santoshi Maa* and *Deewar*. The mother symbol in these films often evoked mythical and historical references to authorise its affect. The subservient disciplining imbibed in the characters of the mother, the daughter-in-law and the heroine is criticised vociferously in its impact on respondents' everyday life. Though the mother's characteristics of renunciation of self-pleasure and desire was used by the filmmakers to symbolise the significance of collective good over individual desire, some of the female respondents propose a contradictory reading. The pleasure regarding the female hero arouses strong desires and identifications even as the critique of traditional patriarchy is voiced in no uncertain terms. The filmy mother is often a widow or a deserted wife, which adds affective charge to her pain and struggle. This mother is often a single parent who brings up her sons through numerous struggles and is morally validated for her hard work, as in *Mother India*, *Deewar*, and *Amar Akbar Anthony*.

### **Section 1: Ambivalence and 'tinsey wincey space'**

This section discusses respondents' views of the changes in Bombay cinema's portrayal of women. Many respondents expressed rage, contempt and discomfort with the representations of women. However, others voiced that perhaps, there were gradual changes occurring in these representations. Samira (British Pakistani woman, thirty, from Oldham) elaborates:

I think it's changed...I think recently there was that film called *Fire*<sup>33</sup> and you know *Lajja*.<sup>34</sup> I don't know if films like that would have been allowed to be made or would...you know be quite controversial. I think the exciting thing is the women can sort of maybe there is a tinsey wincey space; I don't know how wide the window is of opportunity...I think I can't sort of chronologically divide it into but I think there have been phases where women have been presented as quite powerful.

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<sup>33</sup> *Fire* (1996, Deepa Mehta) is a lesbian love story of two sister-in-laws (Radha played by Shabana Azmi and Sita played by Nandita Das) breaking cultural rules and forsaking duty, obedience and tradition to find love and passion for each other away from their unhappy married life. Sita had envisioned a romantic future, but instead finds her new husband has a mistress. His marriage to Sita is to placate his family, to have children. Her sister-in-law, Radha is married a man whose religious fanaticism has caused him to take a vow of celibacy. Duty, not love, is what he demands from his wife. Respondents' liking of this film was because it expresses female emancipation and freedom away from gendered and familial duty. The release of 'Fire' caused violent protests by Hindu fundamentalists (the Hindu militant Shiv Sena party, which ruled India's film capital Bombay ) because they argued that the names of the central protagonists 'Radha' and 'Sita' and their sexual love insulted Hindu religion and corrupted Indian culture. In defence, Deepa Mehta claimed that 'gay relationships were prevalent in ancient Indian society.' She was quoted on a South Asian Women network, "Lesbian relationships are part of the Indian heritage and the film brings into the public domain the hypocrisy and tyranny of the patriarchal family, the issue of women's sexuality and makes a strong statement about women-women relationships." Ashok Kavi, a gay activist argued the Hindu fundamentalist who had attacked the cinema halls showing the film were ignorant of their own religion. He was quoted in SAWNET, "Our criminal laws on homosexuality were bequeathed to us by the British, who had a Christian view of things ... Saint Augustine says lust is suspect because it obstructs in the exercise of free will...Hinduism on the other hand defines sex as one of the three ways of attaining salvation. Hinduism does not run away from sexuality and does not pass judgement on people who have different preferences." See <http://www.sawnet.org/news/fire.html#5>

<sup>34</sup> *Lajja* (*Shame*, 2001, Raj Kumar Santoshi)<sup>34</sup> recounts the story of four women and their journeys (highlighting gendered cultural rules and restrictions) based on the predicament of women in India. Some of the best-known female stars of the time, such Rekha, Madhuri Dixit, Manisha Koirala and Mahima Chaudhry and Urmila Matodkar acted in the film. The four women's names (Maithali, Janaki, Ramdulhari, and Vaidehi) are names of goddess Sita, the ideal Hindu woman. The director Rajkumar Santoshi based this film on a story of a woman who was gangraped, but he felt no one would watch a movie based just on one woman therefore he added the other storylines to represent the everyday situation of women in India. The film has a dance scene between two women friends, enjoying and dancing for each other. The lyrics of the song are about how

difficult life is but the dance is playful and valuing of their friendship.

Sunita felt the pressures of social and cultural expectations from the female representation which were unfair and hypocritical:

I think when it comes to women; there is lot of confusion to how the women are portrayed. I think they can't make up their mind. Because they have got to be good, got to be obedient, they've got to be clever but they've also got to be sexy and they've got to keep their man, turn him on and wear the short dresses that does not really fit in the Asian life.

However, a little later in the same interview, Samira expresses ambivalence about the changes and whether they for the better. She claims that actresses of today were not leaving their mark in comparison to the actresses of older films:

Ehhh and then again we have gone back to women having this 'singing and dancing' role mainly in films...No, I think their roles have got smaller...But, I think they are not portrayed so much as victims now. You don't see that many women just crying. I think they have more fun being injected into their roles... They are not leaving their mark, like the actresses of fifties and sixties. If it is an average commercial Bollywood film, the heroine is just there to look pretty and dance.

This expression of ambivalence was quite common in most interviews, where respondents expressed the changes as positive and as an opportunity, but later changed their mind. Respondents took up provisional identifications in their interaction with Bombay cinema. This was done in many different ways, either through proximity, intensity or distance. By this I mean, some respondents expressed close emotional ties and others used parody or analysis (distancing devices) to understand their position. In many instances the same respondents expressed both closeness and distance. After analysing the interview transcripts, I argue that viewing practice is not necessarily active and polysemous and that it does not always produces oppositional readings but that within a range of meanings prescribed by the producers, viewers find choices, though they are limited by the text, its contexts and their own historical and cultural location. I agree with Tasker's (1998:16) argument that:

Cultural studies has developed critical approaches to popular media, which acknowledges how provisional meaning is, how it is produced and reproduced across a variety of contexts.

This is the case in these accounts. These accounts describe popular culture as having both oppositional and hegemonic potentials. For Dyer, this is

...not necessarily a failure of cultural studies, but an indication of the fundamental ambivalence of cultural products.' (Dyer 1992 paper given at Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference, as quoted in Tasker 1998: 17).

The symbol of 'woman' in Bombay cinema viewing practice represents the historical and cultural struggles between traditional, modern and neo-traditional positions creating dominant, oppositional, resistant voices; the symbol cannot be owned but only contested.

There is a struggle over the meaning of the 'woman' expressed by the spectators/audience and the meanings assigned by the producers and film institutions. Dyer (1992:73) also points out the usefulness of the concept of stereotypes. He considers the stereotype of the gay man as a 'sad young man' and argues that:

Stereotypes can be both complex and a formative mode of representation: What interests me in looking at the gay man as sad young man is a way a stereotype can be complex, varied, intense and contradictory, an image of otherness in which it is still possible to find oneself.

This is very relevant for my analysis, as many respondents identify with Bombay cinematic stereotypes to different extents. They create ambivalent stories and have contradictory relations to these stereotypes. However, it is important to note that not all stereotypes are understood, as 'complex' by the respondents and the identifications with stereotypes are not complete. Instead stereotypes can form the basis for self-narratives at specific junctures – a performative play with language and practices ensues. In applying a provisional frame of meaning to Bombay cinematic identification, I suggest that this allows for a range of cultural characters to enter British South Asian narratives. The interaction with characters, ideology and affect may open up new forms of cultural knowledge not available (previously), or hidden before the popularity and legitimation of this practice.

## **Section 2.0: Self-negation and Martyrdom: *Mother India* and Sita**

This section considers the respondents' engagement with the stereotype of the 'mother.' Sunita identifies with the mother's struggle to survive in *Mother India*:

Survivor, part victim part survivor and you feel for her don't you? You feel for her because every calamity every possible thing that can go wrong, goes wrong in her life but she still survives it hmmm...

Sunita relates the filmic mother to her own mother:

Ya you think of mother and you think of your own mother and you think you are touched by what she is going through and you cry with her and you know you are laughing with her you feel for her and you almost don't think its real but I am sure a lot of women in India in South Asia who are leading those lives at the moment. Very strong...

MJ: hmm strong suffering.

Sunita : Ya, perhaps like martyr, which makes me a bit angry.

Sunita's identification with the mother's survival changes to anger at her martyr-like suffering, which seems similar as her own mothers. The excess of suffering invokes a distancing and dis-identification, and anger at her passivity and victimhood. However, Sunita's identification with this character is also through connection with her own mother's pain, which she relates to the suffering mother in the film. There is also identification with

other women's suffering, because as she points out "back-home women have hard lives," as depicted in the film. She then expresses anger at the filmic mother for being a martyr, a victim who does not voice her pain and negates herself. The anger could be at one's own mother for being a victim/martyr, for not speaking out against oppressive patriarchal rules, and for teaching and compelling Sunita to do the same. When prompted to expand, Sunita continues:

Because in Asian cinema, this idea of suffering is good and woman's life has got to be about suffering but obviously that is not true and...

MJ: What's that about? Why is suffering so good for Indian women?

S: It's almost like, get used to it because this is what is going to happen. Don't say anything, don't tell your parents, uhh just don't go back to your parents and tell them. Deal with it, you know. Fate, this idea of fate and that its Kismet, Karma. You have done bad things in your previous life or that religion stuff is going on.

Sunita articulates her process of watching, the impact of the suffering in the image and then follows this with an analysis. She compares the film's depiction with the disciplinary messages it is putting out to impact her day-to-day life. She verbalizes the cultural law of self-negation and silence that are imposed as a threat to her and other women. They are all expected to 'get used to it.' She explains how the film's ideology is validated by the religious discourses of Hindu cosmic law (Karma' and Islamic law of 'kismet')<sup>35</sup>, whose consequences she as a woman has brought upon herself by her actions in her past life, and therefore is not supposed to question, challenge or fight back.

MJ: Is it (referring to the film) controlling women?

S: Yes controlling women and perhaps this idea I am speaking from a Hindu perspective and if your role model is supposed to be Sita and she is the queen and she has suffered so much and if

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<sup>35</sup> Karma means action and is any sort of action 'good' or 'bad', in Hinduism, which binds humans in recurring cause and effect. In order to attain enlightenment, to escape the cycle of life, death, and rebirth; humans must transcend karma to attain liberation from their ordinary life. Karma implies reincarnation since thoughts and actions in past lives will affect one's current situation. In contrast, Kismet or Fate or Destiny and other such Western conceptions attribute absolute reason and determinism to actions in present life. Karma first came into being around 1500 BCE as a concept in Hinduism, largely based on the Vedas and Upanishads. To the Hindu, karma is the law of the cosmos that is part and parcel of living within the dimensions of time and space. All actions, thoughts, any involuntary and voluntary acts are governed by a law which relies on an intricate system of cause and effect. see [wikipedia.org/wiki/karma](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/karma)

she is going to suffer, what do you expect in your life? Going back to that [religious role model] a little bit.

Sunita explains the cultural and religious strategy of this oppressive ideology by minimising herself in comparison to a Goddess who also had to suffer. Most respondents said that the hypocrisy of women being told (indirectly) that they must suffer and accept their fate in silence was infuriating to them. However, Samira recalls a film, *Mandi* (1983)<sup>36</sup> that depicted women differently:

...an actress had to be clean and pure and saaf (clean) to lead a role or to have a role in the film otherwise she was an extra or something else but here, these actresses were prostitutes or you know they were like women of essence in this film.

*Mandi* was a key Parallel Cinema text and followed a 'social' genre aesthetic (see the discussion in chapter three, section 1.3.2) which relied on realism rather than melodrama. Samira point is that women playing prostitutes were portrayed as complex characters and humanity was attributed to them. Samira elaborates that this was an unusual film but in most mainstream films:

I think that there is a lot of...women have to be virtuous; I think if they could hang out the bed sheet in the morning after a wedding, they would! There is still that about being virtuous and doing the right thing for the society.

Samira compares the usual rules of sexual purity and virtues for women in most commercial films was challenged by this film. Similarly, Irfan in talking about a recent film (specifically

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<sup>36</sup> *Mandi* (Market Place, 1983, Shyam Benegal) is a classic film is based on a classic Urdu short story 'Aanandi' by Pakistani writer Ghulam Abbas. This is a story of a brothel run by Rukhmini bai (played by Shabana Azmi) in a much-desired location of a city that some politicians want for its prime locality. Rukhmini bai runs the brothel as a matriarch presiding over a family. She is kind but firm and often complains that 'no-one cares for her needs.' Each of the prostitute girls' character is complex and allowed time to develop in the film. The manservant of the brothel is played by Naseeruddin Shah and Zeenat (Rukhminis favourite girl) by Samita Patil; both famous for their acting in the genre of 'Parallel Cinema.' The politicians offer Rukhmini an alternative space outside the city for the prostitute and she is compelled to move with her women to their new location, which happens to be near the Dargah (Mosque) of Baba Karak Shah. Ironically, this attracts a lot of people, and the patronage to Rukmini's brothel increases. Zeenat one of the prostitutes elopes with the local politicians' son who wants to marry her causing and forcing another relocation and other women in the brothel to disperse and find their own way leaving Rukhmini bai. She is left with her loyal manservant. The plot revolves around the instability of the brothel and the changes in women's lives.



aimed at a diasporic audience) criticizes the sacrifice of a modern heroine who is playing the dutiful daughter.

...See a film like *Mohabatein* [2002]<sup>37</sup> I am taking that as an example, I have forgotten what happens in that. Does Aishwaray Rai kill herself because her dad does not want her to go out with him? So what does that say about morality? Is it that a woman has to make the sacrifice and she can't have her boyfriend which is you know is modern which is what she wants. But the reason she kills herself is because her father who is paternal Amitabh Bachhan is not paternal in a traditional way, because he is the head of a big college, so we have already hit the aspiration and she is not running away from him because she loves both of them (father and boyfriend) but from herself.

Irfan explains the convoluted story of this film, which begins with the contemporary modern heroine committing suicide because her patriarchal father does not approve of her romance. Instead of running away, as many heroines did in the films of the sixties onwards, she commits suicide. The message that is communicated is that as a modern woman you have choices and freedom but as an Indian woman the only path available is to sacrifice yourself to other's needs. The traditional self-negation of *Mother India* is repeated in the neo-traditional ideology of contemporary cinema, which targets diasporic communities. This film was a hit because of its superstars. The difference between *Mother India* and *Mohabatein* is that the sacrifice in *Mother India* was symbolic of an anti-colonial collective ethos whereas in *Mohabatein* it's about a resurgence of neo-traditional patriarchy; it seeks to assert authentic Indian values through a reproduction of the traditional family.

Sunita refers to Sita as a symbol of the traditional ideal Hindu femininity that she has been taught to emulate. The Ramayana, one of the most popular religious texts in India, tells the story of Rama and Sita. It is well known to most Hindus and is enacted yearly in village theatres and cities all over India. Sita exemplifies the behaviour of the proper Hindu wife. She follows her husband Rama into exile in a forest for fourteen years. The demon, Ravana kidnaps her and Rama eventually rescues her. Rama doubts Sita's fidelity and she is forced to prove her sexual purity by placing herself on a burning pyre. The purity test that women have to undergo in films has its antecedents in the religious text of the '*Ramayana*.' She is only

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<sup>37</sup> *Mohabatein* (Love Stories, 2000, Aditya Chopra) is a film based on power struggle between two men, Amitabh Bachhan and Shah Rukh Khan. One believes in the power of modern romantic love and the other in the power of discipline and tradition. Narayan Shankar is the Principal, of a prestigious college, who forbids his daughter Mehgna (played by Aishwaray Rai) to marry his student, Raj Malhotra (Shah Rukh Khan). Megha is heart-broken, and sacrifices her love for her father and eventually passes away. Raj comes back as a music teacher as Aryan, to the college to teach Narayan a lesson by encouraging three young couples to fall in love.

accepted back by her husband when she remains untouched by the flames; this proves her innocence, sexual chastity and purity. The fire-god Agni appears to testify to her virtue. This also makes self-immolation acceptable in Hindu culture. Within a Hindu discourse, the power of women lies in their purity and in their wifely duty. The cinematic discourses of passivity, innocence, purity and sexual chastity are borrowed from mythology to reproduce disciplinary norms that aim to control women's sexuality. In this way, cinematic institutions reinforce cultural normalisation and sexual discourses of purity, contamination, and endurance and silence.

## **2.1 The Endurance test**

Bombay cinema narratives revolve around discourses of purity, which are associated with sexual chastity, and any deviance from this is seen as contaminating/polluting and is condemned by patriarchal society. Women's bodies in cinema are punished by being tortured or by being in pain. The suffering female body then becomes a sign to discipline and regulate other women into not breaking the limits of cultural norms. The woman's body in pain generates multiple responses in viewers. The viewer either feels admiration for the determination of her suffering or anger and disgust at the injustice of her treatment; alternately it produces fear to follow the cultural norms or be punished like her. It can also produce humour or parody due to repetitive viewing which distances the viewer into a cynical mode. This distancing (and disdain) is in contrast to the over identification with the character that produces the pleasures of masochism. There is a discourse of pain attached to women from birth and seeing women's bodies in pain may be understood as a public punishment for being born a woman in a misogynistic society. Yet this is disavowed by the rhetoric of the idealisation of the mother goddesses. Though men also suffer on the cinema screen they choose suffering and are rarely punished or forced into it. The hero of *Devdas* exemplifies the male suffering of the melancholic who drinks himself to death. The point is that the male character has agency, and this might cause his suffering and his punishment but women are typically denied active agency and made to suffer through the actions not of their choosing. There are no endurance tests for men in their role as husbands but women often have to suffer and endure if they are to be recognised as the ideal wife.

## **2.2: The Widow's White Sari and Renunciation**

In older films, mothers were often depicted as old, wearing white (signifying widowhood, asceticism and asexuality) and as passive figures. These mother characters passed out of fashion during the late eighties. In a response to a question on the representations of mothers, Sonali (British Indian Punjabi, aged thirty one, born and brought up in Liverpool, has lived in London for last ten years) points out:

Yeah, yeah they used to with the grey hair and the white sari and whatever ways.

But she thinks that's changed now:

I find that quite fascinating actually because a lot of the mothers now are old glamour actresses like Rakhee and Mumtaaz and even Rekha who has played a mother in one movie. And they are glamorous; you know they wear the nicer saris and almost competing with their bahu (daughter-in-laws).

The change in the representation of filmic mothers from widows in white saris to glamorous women who happen to be mothers is seen by Sonali as a transgression of old rules. She expresses this, as something to applaud as self-pleasure is made more acceptable. By not conforming to this old rule, the actresses were breaking the normative construction of filmic mothers. She explains the complexity of the portrayal of women:

Again its complex, they've never had as strong role as men, even like in *Mother India*, Nargis is like the strong single mother who brings up her children and whatever but the film carried because of the way her sons were. It was not so much to do with her. A lot of it about romance, I think that it's always been about the man being able to kind of have this conquest. I think that's largely because men are directing that they would make men the central characters. I think women are just part of the formula. I think that its been quite patronizing the way women have been portrayed. Like *Mother India* it was just very patronizing, she brings up her sons on her own sweat working the field by herself. And then you think of the societies in India which are built on extended families working together, very rarely do you have like ousted women. Again you know that's contradicted.

Sonali is critiquing the patriarchal capitalist power structure of the film industry, which prevents the depictions of women as autonomous and human. However, she feels there are some positive changes in the female stars challenging these stereotypes to some extent. She accepts there are a few victories here and there, but overall the representation of women, is patronizing and degrading.

### **2.3: Mother India: Nargis as a Feminine Icon**

This section tries to unravel the different discourses constructing the power of the female star icon, Nargis. Sunita elaborates her reasons for idolising Nargis:

The way she acted, she has quite a strong powerful roles. I really enjoyed watching her and Raj Kapoor romance in films because I knew something was going on in real life as well and they did have an amazing chemistry.

MJ: Hmmm

SK: The films were quite passionate and you don't see that kind of passion today and I don't know if its something about her smile, she has got this endearing smile, there is something very sweet about her.

MJ: what about her as a person the way uhhm the way she was portrayed as an actress?

SK:I always think she was portrayed in a really very positive light I don't think she compromised her like you know, lot of her films were in fifties and she did not show much flesh or anything and she was always in really really powerful roles as a strong woman and I quite admire that.

Sunita reveals a few reasons such as 'painful but powerful performance', 'romance', 'passion', 'sexual respect' and her 'endearing smile' for her adoration of Nargis. The first is Sunita's enjoyment of the performance of a powerful woman. Sunita explains that Nargis only acted in powerful roles. Nargis also played some submissive ones, but the point here is that Sunita only remembers Nargis in powerful roles. The iconicity of Nargis has to do with the portrayal of the ideal Indian woman, daughter-in-law, mother and citizen of the village (symbolic of national community citizenship). Nargis as *Mother India* had become a central symbol of the Indian popular imaginary through appropriating the legacy of the mother goddess. In *Mother India*, Mehboob Khan (the director) deployed the mythology of the mother Goddesses to give voice to nationalist sentiments in opposition to colonial critique of Indian culture as misogynist. The role of 'woman' in Indian culture was one of the most significant among the many issues canvassed by the nationalists in constructing the imagination of the new India. The synthesis of Sita, Durga and Kali creates an ideal feminine figure. In Indian mythology, Kali and Durga are two mother goddesses (they represent reincarnations of the same goddess; Kali is a terrifying aspect of Durga. Durga means 'impenetrable' whereas Shakti means power but also 'forbearance' which is equated with the power or the 'ability to suffer' or tolerate own suffering) who are worshipped for protection, guidance and the removal of obstacles in the worshipper's life. Both are portrayed as supremely powerful, weapon carrying demon killers. Kali is portrayed as a fearsome and as destructive goddess whose power can be out of control when wronged; Durga is a warrior goddess who is in control of her power.

Wadley (1988) has argued that these two goddesses are seen as autonomous in that their power is not controlled by restraints of marriage, unlike that of Lakshmi, Sita and Parvati. These two goddesses can be a cultural ideal for strong and independent women. Woman goddesses are seen as aggressive destroyers but also as powerful protectors. Wadley (1988) proposes that there is entrenched fear of women aligned with their power in Hindu scriptures and mythology. In her understanding the concept of the female presents as duality. On one hand she is associated with nature, reproducing and protecting her children. In this role she is seen as the nurturer and the caretaker. On the other hand, she is seen as aggressive and destructive. The wifely role is one of subordination, and of being dutiful and the mother is the one with authority, who gives orders and must be obeyed. It is goddesses as mothers rather than wives who are village guardians, who are worshipped regularly for their protection and are feared.

The character Nargis played in *Mother India* was a deserted wife and a single mother who brings up her children by herself and gains reverence for this and for her sacrifice for the village. Different generations admired Nargis and remembered her acting in *Mother India* as a strong, suffering, principled and independent woman. This could partially explain Sunita's (and others such as Asha's) understanding of Nargis as a powerful woman. Sunita told me that she fell in love with Nargis when she was young. The iconicity of Nargis among different generations may have helped in this process. It could be proposed that for a young woman watching a powerful woman playing strong gender roles on screen is even more empowering than watching as an adult woman, (though the latter can also be enabling). But the intensity with which Sunita speaks of Nargis leads one to presume that this is a long-term relationship between an individual and her ideal femininity. The desire to be powerful as a woman (when there are many images of women as victims and in submissive roles) in comparison to one's own everyday ordinary powerlessness is an obvious reason for identification with a powerful female star.

Gaylyn Studlar (as quoted in Dyer 1998:189) argues that identification with a female protagonist's pain, and the pleasure of masochism marginalizes the male hero. Therefore 'the image of the female star can represent a power found in performance, which transforms the pleasure and control of the male gaze.' The viewer is enjoying the affect of the performance. Thus a strong female hero 'provides a position for the female cinemagoer directly to contemplate and desire the female star' (Studlar as quoted in Dyer 1990:190). This can be applied to the female icons of earlier cinema such as Nargis, Meena Kumari and Madhubala. This also explains Sunita's pleasure in Nargis. Nargis' strength was the power of her performance of pain, a performance that moved Sunita. Before Nargis' popularity as the mother of the nation, Nargis had been framed romantically but also very much as a sexually transgressive and an eroticised female figure. Her liaisons with Raj Kapoor (actor and film director of films such *Sri 420*, *Awara* in the fifties) created a Nargis who was often sexually fetishized in his films as the camera voyeuristically imaged her as an object of masculine sexual fantasy. Sunita had told me that 'she was totally infatuated with Nargis' in two different moments of the interview. She had a collection of her films, which she watched if and when she was feeling low.

One of reasons for Sunita's identification was a respect for Nargis' lack of sexual exposure. The female actors were often evaluated in terms of how much flesh they revealed. If they chose to wear clothes that revealed a lot of flesh they were seen as 'compromising' themselves. This is then a moral test the actresses and the female stars have to submit to not only for the producer but also for their audience. There is a sexual morality forced on female stars by the viewers, women using their sexual attractiveness, as capital is not morally validated even when an integral aspect of being a female star is about their sexuality. It is

interesting to note that there are many transgressive readings of women's sexuality, even younger women spectators may be judging them on their levels of their sexual prohibition and transgression through how much flesh the actresses reveal. Many respondents (Sonali, Kamar, Neela) argue that there is a new trend amongst actresses who are sexual and reveal more flesh to become an actress but that they are lacking in acting abilities. This is what Sunita means when she says; Nargis did not compromise herself in this way and retained respect in Sunita's mind.

### **Section 3: The Mothers and the Daughters**

The cinematic discourses of reverence for motherhood are dramatically terminated when we come to the figure of the unmarried mother. This is a good example that highlights that the mother is revered only if she is in a heterosexual relationship as an ideal wife at the service of a traditional family. Samira recounts an example of significant change in the portrayal of women's roles in a recent film *Kya Kehna*, (What Can I Say, 2000, Kundan Shah)<sup>38</sup> where the young heroine, (not a marginal vamp character) from a middle-class family has pre-marital sex and becomes pregnant. Samira evokes a space of extreme generational differences in cinema experience between her mother and her younger sisters:

I think one was quite good I don't remember the name, Preity Zinta (the actress), she gets pregnant out of wedlock and I mean its not wonderful but there is some good things in it about...she stands with a great big tummy quite proud going to college onto a stage and speaking out against being stigmatised, there are not many films like that. I remember my mum saying 'Toba stafar' eetni kharab film' (exclaiming how bad the film is)...you know she was shit scared that her daughters were watching this you know. I was like brilliant! brilliant!

The daughters were sixteen and twenty and Samira's mum expresses her horror that this film was showing pre-marital sex and, even worse pre-marital pregnancy as something that could even be talked about, let alone be shown as the central narrative.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Kya Kahna' is a story of young woman called Priya (played by the actress Preity Zinta) who is adored by her family and friends. The film begins with a song and dance scene expressing Priya's excitement in starting college and her adventurous romance with the college 'bad boy', Rahul. The melodramatic music score indicates danger when Priya is shocked to find out she is pregnant. Rahul does not want the responsibility of a child, and would like to marry someone of his own class and suggests that she have an abortion. Priya decides to keep the baby against her parent's wishes and is thrown out of her home for a night before her family decide to accept and support her decision.

In many films and in this film, the innocent heroine is portrayed as a spoilt daughter who leaves a loving family, doted on by father and mother. The father was often admonished by the mother for spoiling her and not teaching her how to be humble and subservient (self-negating) which she needs to be to learn to be able to survive in her husband's home under the mother-in-law's rule. This is the cultural teaching and rule. Up until this point, the heroine is depicted as a spoilt, infantile, modern, independent youngster. She usually engages in a romance. Once the romantic conflict is resolved and the heroine is married to the hero, she is quickly moved to the husband's home. In the past, films would show only bad girls, maybe Vamps getting pregnant out of wedlock, but this film showed the heroine working through the stigma of pre-marital pregnancy.

MJ:(laughing) what did the girls think?

S: They, Kiran thought it was really good. They just empathised with the girl and they were not moved when the family rejected her and they were just watching it and feeling sorry for this girl but they were in tears when the family accepted her. You know that was something about change. That's about how we would like it.

The generational differences are obvious and Samira and her sister's pleasure in the acceptance of the unmarried pregnant daughter by the family were contrasted with her mother's displeasure. The younger sisters identified with the pregnant heroine to such an extent that they wept when she was accepted back into the family. This is significant, in that they did not feel that she was sexually or morally corrupt. Samira told me that their mother felt she had to condemn the film so as to give the correct messages to her daughters. The filmic parents punished the pregnant daughter by throwing her out on to the streets. The melodramatic dialogue of '*izzat*'<sup>39</sup> (family honour) being contaminated was voiced in

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<sup>39</sup> *Izzat* is a Persian/Urdu word, which can mean honour, reputation or prestige. It is often invoked when referring to family or clan identity and loyalty in relations to sexual transgressions which are thought to bring disgrace to the family name. Although most often used to discipline women, it can be used to manipulate men or women young or old. Within the south Asian community the traditional practices of *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame) can discipline women to conform to certain prescribed roles to uphold the honour of the family by, as the dutiful and obedient wife and daughter. Failure to do so results in being treated as a social outcast by their extended family and accused of having brought shame on their family honour and are ostracised, harassed and even subjected to acts of violence. In "honour killings" for instance women may be killed by family or community members. These killings or other honour crimes such as assaults and abuse are justified as punishment for having brought shame on the honour of the family and that of the wider community. See [http://www.bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork/features/hh/awadv\\_03.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork/features/hh/awadv_03.shtml)

theatrical tones before the parents capitulated and miraculously found her ill but unharmed. Another respondent, Naseema pointed out that an unmarried daughter who is going to be a single mother is a space of taboo. Of course the only difference between the deserted 'mother' and this characters is that the husband/lover deserts before the marriage rather than after. However, the unmarried daughter is ostracised because by having sex and getting pregnant outside the institution of marriage, she is a threat to the morality of the heterosexual family, one where female sexual autonomy is prohibited. This is because of the fear of the erasure of the patriarchal family and a fear of assimilation of Western values into the Asian. She must be ostracised so that the younger women learn that having sex outside of marriage is an unacceptable path. This is because sexual autonomy is prohibited for women and cinema often punishes unmarried women as an example of what not to do for young women. Cinematic representation of women instead often propagates ideal characters who play the roles of the mothers and the daughter-in-law.

The younger generations who identified with the heroine's plight were also punished by the messages of family dishonour and the trauma of being thrown out on the street. This can be contrasted with the expulsion of the daughter when she gets married and is sent away from her home. This is not being thrown out on the street. But for some women it is a worse fate to be sent to her husband's home, to become a daughter-in-law and a mother. However, this expulsion is affirmed institutionally. The highlighting of 'bride-burning' or 'dowry deaths' cases by Indian feminists <sup>40</sup>publicized the cultural perspectives of a community towards women who transgress and also the value of women as an object of exchange for dowry. Though there have been changes in these practices, the association of grief attached to daughters is reiterated in cinema and culture. The idea that daughters do not belong to parents and one day will be given away confirms the view of an object of exchange. The sons are also

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<sup>40</sup> 'Dowry death' refers to cases where newly married bride is murdered by the groom or the groom's family for reasons related to the payment of dowry. In dowry-related violence brides are subject to domestic violence and harassment by their husbands and in-laws in order to demand a dowry or more dowry after the wedding. A dowry can include demands for money, jewellery, land and property and other goods, such as cars. In the Indian Sub-Continent, there is a high rate of "dowry deaths", often by burning, where a woman is killed because she has insufficient dowry. In the UK, although dowry demands may be a factor in some deaths, these demands are more linked with violence and harassment of wives and daughter-in-laws. Time magazine reported that dowry deaths in India increased from around 400 a year in the early 1980s to around 5,800 a year by the middle of the 1990s. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/dowry>



seen as a commodity but ones that belong to the family. The notion of 'not belonging' and 'never belonging' is the affective structure that colours the trauma and grief suffered by women. Even if in contemporary society (in Britain and in Indian cities these practices may be less prevalent, but they exist) many women may not go through these experiences, the fear of what happened to their mothers, grandmothers and cousins 'back-home' and here, keeps the pain alive. The representation of pain in Bombay cinema uses archetypes of the mother and daughter relationships (and the courtesan, which is explored in later chapters). In exploring the mother's suffering, the significance of the change in her role from a daughter to a daughter-in-law becomes apparent in her memory. The mother's pain arises from the trauma of abjection, as a daughter in moving from her own family into a new, unknown family where her roles have completely changed. The woman, who is exchanged as a commodity between her father and her husband, also has a mother.

The mother as an agent of patriarchy has the task of teaching and disciplining the daughter in the cultural norms of behaviour and away from her own pleasures and ambitions of autonomy. The daughter's expulsion and separation from her mother, siblings, extended family and community enforces an institutionally sanctioned rejection and trauma, which is relayed as a cultural norm.<sup>41</sup> This loss and abjection can only be articulated through an affect of intensity and melodramatic excess that is reinforced by historical affect. The Western psychoanalytical model based on a masculinist trajectory does not and cannot articulate this abjection because it focuses on male castration and separation. The difference is in the intensity of rejection. I propose that Freud's analysis of the trauma of separation of the male child from his mother is miniscule compared to the trauma suffered by women who having been socialised into their own family and its intimacies and then are forced into another

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<sup>41</sup> An article in the *Annals of General Psychiatry* by Husain et al; licensee BioMed Central Ltd. (2006) 5: 7. Published online 2006 May 22, "Self-harm in British South Asian women: psychosocial correlates and strategies for prevention" found that "South Asian women are significantly more likely to self-harm between ages 16–24 years than white women. Across all age groups the rates of self harm are lower in South Asian men as compared to South Asian women.." They concluded that " South Asian women are at an increased risk of self harm...There is an urgent need for all those concerned with the mental health services for ethnic minorities to take positive action and eradicate the barriers that prevent British South Asians from seeking help... A qualitative study of South Asian women in Manchester found that issues such as racism, stereotyping of Asian women, Asian communities, and the concept of "izzat" (honour) in Asian family life all led to increased mental distress ... The women used self-harm as a response to social isolation and as logical behaviour to reduce distress and ask for help". <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artic=1538599>

family's rules without having much power in negotiating those rules. The psychoanalytical model cannot explain the pain of this abjection. In addition, the socialisation of the idea that their family is really not their own also reinforces the idea of self-negation and of not having the freedom of owning their self. Samira expresses the collective grieving of the future expulsion of the daughter:

I think the classic is if we as a family watch a film with a wedding in it and there is 'Rukhsati' (when the daughter leaves her mother's home) that's it everybody is crying like this was before we got married but still Rukhsati sets something off ...

Cinema viewing of daughters leaving their parents' home after marriage invokes the pain attached to a rite of passage which was historically traumatic (and still is for some) for many South Asian women.

### 3.1 The Ideal Daughter-in-Law

In *Mother India*, Radha's narrative as a woman is organised around the themes of the ideal wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. She sacrifices her needs and suffers endlessly (without complaining) and does not compromise her sexual purity. However, these characteristics of the mother were resurrected in the heroine as the ideal daughter-in-law. Samira, who is herself negotiating her role as a daughter-in-law, recounts an advert, which depicts an ideal daughter-in-law and expresses her anger.

Yeah, the sense of women were mothers and housewives and even now you see the 'Pride sunflower advert' where this bahu (daughter-in-law) is saying you know (Samira's tone is annoyed) "papaji ne bhi kha liya, bete nee bhi kha liya, aur wo to kahtain hain kee mere khane ka jabab nahi. (My father-in-law has eaten, my dear son has eaten and my husband says there is no comparison to my cooking). You know that sort of crap. But that happens in the film.

The ideal daughter-in-law is supposed to take the mother's role as a nurturer for the son and others in the family and in addition, also as a sexual partner for the husband. However this ideal is created in contrast to the threat of the bad daughter-in-law who actually does not want to stay in her husband's joint family and does not want to cook or look after everyone else. This is the daughter-in-law who is portrayed as the Vamp - modern, spoilt, wilful, selfish, fashionable, sexually permissive and a career woman who does not respect her in-laws. Her modern and western ways are signified through her revealing clothes and sexual posture. I explore this portrayal in chapter seven. According to Sudhir Kakar (1988) the daughter-in-law constitutes a threat to the unity of the traditional extended family. She can undermine the authority of her mother-in-law if she can persuade her husband to transfer his loyalty to her through their heterosexual relationship. However, every effort is made by family members to obstruct the heterosexual intimacy between the husband and wife, so that the mother's power

over the son is maintained and the family is not split up. Madav Prasad (1998) and Karen Gabriel (2002) propose that the romance in the popular formula of Bombay cinema can be seen to be subversive, in that it threatens the traditional family structure dominated by the power of the parent-in-laws. Nandy (1988) also proposes that the main problem for women in India is that the Indian family in comparison to a Western family devalues the wife's role over that of the mother. Additionally the nuclear family is not central and the couple's heterosexuality is de-emphasized in relation to the needs of the extended family. This legitimates the traditional structure of the joint family over the modern nuclear family. However, the majority of Indians live in nuclear households but the values associated with the extended family system are still a major influence on family relationships. The role of the daughter-in-law is of subservience and she is under the rule of her mother-in-law who acts as an intermediary for patriarchal authority and rules. Samira elaborates on how Bollywood, by depicting how to be an ideal daughter-in-law, authorises patriarchal family relations, which she feels are not in the interests of most women:

I think sometimes with Bollywood constantly in your face in your home it can be quite dangerous if everybody is sitting down watching it together and then there has been an argument about who has done the washing up or something around children or something about religion or something about women's roles. Then there is a Bollywood film on trying to give out the message that this is how women should be or this is how men should be or this is how daughter-in-law should be. I think it's potentially quite dangerous. Because you can see you know people saying 'hahn dekhaya' (Look! this is how the daughter-in-law should behave) this is how it is this is how it is supposed to be, so it can be used to authorise certain rules....

The power of the "box" as a cultural validator becomes apparent as it mediates values from another place. Samira's anxieties arise out of her fears of being disciplined by elders when they use these images to endorse submissive roles for women within the home. She continues elaborating on generational conflicts with the family:

I think I was talking about generation differences and women's roles and...and...and those sort of things really. I think that there were issues around how it affects the family, especially when Bollywood has come to the screens at home this has moved to the living room really with all these Sky channels and I don't think its always healthy. It can cause conflict but at the same time it can actually give messages that people want to hear sometimes not necessarily positive ones.

One recent film was *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*<sup>42</sup> (Life is Sometimes Happy Sometimes Sad or K3G, 2003, Karan Johar), a major hit in the United Kingdom, and which involved patriarchal family relations, particularly angered Samira:

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<sup>42</sup> K3G is a story of conflict between a father and his son and the plot revolves around family conflict and unity. Rahul falls in love with Anjali which displeases his father, Yash who wants him

I think that some films are crap like *Kabhi Kuush Kabhi Gham* is you know some people treat it like its great. I think it just reinforces so many stereotypes and there was uhhh how people are supposed to be, families are supposed to be how sons are supposed to be how wives are supposed to be, how daughter-in-laws are supposed to be. And it's almost like sort of an ideal, such an ideal world in that film that and if you sway from the norm you will be damned. I can't even remember the film very well because I did not like it enough to want to....to watch but... I mean the song - *Kabhi Kuush Kabhi Gham*) really spoke to a lot of people, and that's everybody's life really maybe it's the song or maybe it's the title. Maybe its because its Jaya Bhachchan and Amitabh in it and Shah Rukh you know all the hit stars so maybe its that but I don't think so...

Samira feels it should not have been so popular when it endorsed such traditional roles for women. The film was about the 'father and son relationship' but depicted traditional roles for women. The film was successful because of its star cast and the songs. The idealism and familiarity associated with stars makes this the norm. Samira is angry that films like this significantly contribute to ideals of Asian masculinity, femininity and family relations. Samira elaborates:

Especially in 2003, I was just sat there thinking c'mon you know I am sure its not and I think for us for my generation of people and people younger than me... it's so confusing because you watch this film and you think are we are like this because we are in England and is this how people are in India, is this what people are like back home ... you know where there is this extended family... wonderful extended family... and here we have sort of lost it and its just not real and its not true.

Samira is incredulous that even in the year 2003, people are hankering after traditional ideals of the family. Samira explains that the generation differences and conflicts occurring in South Asian communities in Britain are explained away by blaming the Westernisation of the younger generation. She explains the kinds of confusion experienced by younger South Asians. She is critiquing two aspects of the traditional extended family. The first is the subservient positions of women in the family and the role of these films in policing women through depictions of the cultural ideal of the daughters-in-law. The second is the illusion and nostalgia of an ideal family gleaned from these films, which serves to discipline the younger generations in conforming to the cultural norms of the past. She also expresses irritation that

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to marry Naina who is of a similar high-class background. The father and son are unable to resolve their conflict and Rahul leaves home breaking-up the family unity. And this situation brings anguish to their kin. Pooja, Anjali's sister, joins forces with Rahul's brother Rohan to reunite the divided family.

these films become weapons in the first generation's emotional manipulation of the younger generations. Samira's comments point to the neo-traditional morals espoused by the 'family romance films' of the 1990s, many of which target diasporic communities.

### **3.2 The Crisis of the Family: the 'Saas and Bahu' Matrix**

The 'Saas/Bahu' discourse (the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) represents the power of the extended family within South Asian communities. These two women are blamed for the crisis of the extended family. The 'Saas/Bahu' matrix is a sub-genre of Indian cinema and has proliferated into multiple television soap opera serials on South Asian satellite channels. These soap operas are female dominated in terms of production and reception (as my key informants such as Indu Mirani and Deepa Gahlot, two film journalists in Bombay told me. In addition, I have watched these serials with relatives in India and with my parents in Britain). Many of the respondents (Shahib Jaan, Samira, Naseema, Kiran, Mr. And Mrs.P, Sunita, Neela, Rijii) also watched these serials. These home-based soap operas attract a vast audience, primarily the first generation, which likes to see the trials and tribulations of the traditional joint family. The daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law are the central characters. These serials often communicate conservative traditional values and have a negative portrayal of women. In these serials, women are rewarded when subservient to traditional values and punished when depicted as or aggressive, competitive and vengeful. The desire to be independent, ambitious or autonomous is seen as a threat and criticised by depicting such women as frustrated, revengeful and ruthless. The melodramatic and affective charge of the conflict between these two characters produces a catharsis for the audience (as demonstrated by angry arguments with relatives after watching a few of these). The negative connotations associated with these characters are signifiers of South Asian cultural and societal anxieties and fears, at a time when there are changes occurring in the structure of family unit. I believe that the neo-traditional backlash is a symptom of wider female autonomy.

The transformation of the spoilt daughter into the disciplined, nurturing daughter-in-law is a journey of endurance. The home is the site where the conflict between the heroine (now a daughter-in-law) and the mother-in-law begins. This is usually constructed as an endurance test (a suffering and purity tests also come into play at different points) for the daughter-in-law. She is constructed as innocent, passive and unable to stand up for herself. She has the most subservient role in the joint extended family. The daughter-in-law is obedient, sacrificing, and a nurturer for everyone else in the family. She is then seen as a younger version of the mother/mother-in-law. In economic terms, the daughter-in-law can be seen as an unpaid servant for the family and the mother-in-law as the head-servant who shapes her by tyrannizing her to the needs of patriarchy. The 'Saas/Bahu' matrix is a hierarchical structure, in that the Bahu, the daughter-in-law usually has very little power.

Conversely, the bad daughter-in-law characterizations are drawn from the same stock in Indian cinema's portrayals of vamps and modern women with careers, sexuality and an independent mind. Also an existing older daughter-in-law (as in the film *Jai Santoshi Maa*, analysed in chapter four) can be cruel figure against a new daughter-in-law. In this example, the older daughter-in-law derives her power of cruelty by appropriating the mother-in-law. In the next section I examine the contradictions embedded in the mother-in-law's position.

### 3.3 The Mother-in-law

The mother-in-law is a character that inscribes power and authority into a female figure. The mother-in-law is the daughter-in-law's future, but she is also the mother of the son. In many of televised serials the mother-in-law is a scheming, older woman who refuses to grow old and instead wreaks havoc and splits the once happy and unified family. The characterization of this figure is adopted from the Hindu religious epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The mother-in-law figure often simulates the greedy and possessive stepmother in the religious epic, the *Ramayana* who wanted her son to have the throne rather than Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*. Rama had to exile himself to a forest for fourteen years due to his stepmother's ambitions. The audience already has this knowledge and her illegitimate position is a foregone conclusion. The history of Indian cinema has extensive depictions of mothers-in-law whose corrupt oppression confronts the daughter-in-law's (heroines) innocent victimhood. The breakdown of the joint family is blamed on her for not sharing her power. In other popular soaps, sometimes it is the daughter-in-law who is the threatening figure. It is her sexuality and modern and Western ways that threaten the institution of the joint family. In this way, these two women are blamed for the crisis of the extended family.

The television serials are derived from older Bombay cinema but have developed their own melodramatic genres, which has a wide following amongst the first generation. During my fieldwork in Bombay, a television actress informed me that these serials with neo-traditional morality are produced by a woman friend of hers, Ekta Kapoor. She manages the Balaji Production Company, which produces eighty percent of these serials for different satellite channels. She has become extremely successful by selling this formula. Many key informant respondents such as film producers and film journalist were full of admiration of her success but not of her formula. An article 'Saas, Bahu and the big bucks' in the 'Times of India' July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 describes her achievement:

On the other hand, the news is that Ekta Kapoor is getting set with a K-serial for Zee TV now. Obviously, the golden goose of the TV industry plans to continue to lay golden eggs for more years to come. (As quoted in an article on the web, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1180816.cms>)

The Bombay media industry is a patriarchal oligarchy and for a woman to stake a space in this set up is admirable. However, it is based on selling a traditional family morality. The two female characters represent tensions between modern and traditional ideologies in South Asian cultures. The mother-in-law represents tradition and the daughter-in-law represents a 'neo-tradition' that can't make up its mind whether it is modern or not. However, these serials have allowed a more central role for female actresses compared to the films.

The mother-in-law character has a different basis to the mother character. The fear founding this character is that of the fear of women with power, a cross-cultural phenomenon. However, as I have examined before, Wadley's (1988) argument that there is ingrained fear of women aligned with the power of Goddess in Hindu mythology, is relevant here. Similarly, Ashis Nandy (1988) argues that the ultimate authority in the Indian mind is feminine; therefore there is a fear of the cosmic feminine principle, one associated with the attributes of competition, aggression and power. Unlike in the West, where these attributes are associated with masculinity, they are not so clearly associated with masculinity in India. Nandy has also argued that this is the Oedipal fear of the nurturing mother turning on you as an angry revengeful mother, the same as that depicted by goddesses Kali and Durga. However, the mother-in-law character is not idealised as is also the mother character, who is also based on a goddess symbology. The mother-in-law is often parodied and disrespected. In Indian cinema and in these soaps, the mother-in-law is portrayed as consisting the characteristics of the 'villain' (as 'evil', as greedy, scheming) and the 'vamp' as (spoilt, petty and 'sexually corrupt'). The mother-in-law character is therefore is an 'evil' hybrid borrowed from both masculine and feminine filmic 'bad' traits.

### **3.4 Revenge Over the Mother-in-law**

The affect of revenge over the filmic mother-in-law by a powerless daughter-in-law expresses family conflicts for the viewers. The mother-in-law identifies herself with patriarchy and misuses her power against other women who are in a powerless situation. However, there was a change from earlier films of submissive daughter-in-laws in a few films depicting the daughter-in-law standing up to the mother-in-law and challenging her injustice. For example in *Beta*<sup>43</sup> (Son, 1992, Indra Kumar) Madhuri Dixit playing a daughter-in-law outwits her oppressive mother-in-law just to teach her a lesson, and yet she does this without

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<sup>43</sup> *Beta* is a story of daughter-in-law, Sarasvatia (played by Madhuri Dixit) who comes into Raju's (Anil Kapur)'s extended family home after marriage. Raju is devoted to his stepmother after having lost his own mother at a very young age. Sarasvati is an educated young woman who sees through his stepmother's plans to control Raju in order to take over the family's property.

disrespecting her. This characterization is also derived from mythology, where Savitri, an intelligent and determined woman, outwits Yamraj, the god of death in returning her husband's life. Once again, this character's role as an ideal wife is valorised but her independence is not. One of the respondents, Sareena (British Indian woman, aged thirty, lives in Manchester) expressed her love of watching these films where she identified with the meek, passive daughter-in-law heroine who transformed herself slowly to overturn the patriarchal injustices heaped on her by her mother-in-law.

I also like the revenge stories between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in Bollywood, similar to Hollywood movies where you have the baddies being conquered by the goodies.

The identification with a victim character who is transformed to a position of power can allow for a fantasy and the pleasure of potential change, agency and empowerment against the power structures of patriarchy. Sonali contradicts this depiction of the 'mother-in-law' narrates a very different relationship between her mother and her grandmother. She begins by explaining how they were portrayed in the films:

Often mother-in-laws were also treated as the ogres; you know they are bad to their daughter-in-laws. Again it was very male thing, so it was either the mother-in-law being oppressive or the daughter-in-law being a bad person.. Or with that whole kind of patronizing ideology it was women being oppressed was so....oppressed that she had to kill herself.

When asked if this was true in her experience, she continues:

No, not at all. And I think there have been times when people do expect that, you know. I mean certainly not in my family. My grandmother was not educated. My grandmother was a bit of a matriarchal figure. Her strict condition was that their wives all had to work, they were not allowed to stay at home. She did not want women who stayed at home. They had to be educated and work separately.

Sonali's story positions the mother-in-law as a powerful woman who definitely had authority and power over her sons but who chose to ignore the traditional roles for women. This is contrary to the traditional depictions of a mother-in-law who abhors the daughter-in-law working outside of the home because this would evoke societal criticisms and also diminish her power. Instead, she wanted her daughter-in-laws to be educated (which she was not) and to be modern women. However, this could also be due to changes happening in Indian society at that time, where the balance of economic demands had to be negotiated with traditional structures. So Sonali's grandmother's desires for modern working daughters-in-laws to bring in the money made sense, and help her sons economically. Mrs. Prahar, one of my first generation respondents (aged sixty-five, lives in Manchester), who left India to get married and who had worked outside the home most of her life, hinted at the difficulties she had encountered as a result:



Life is far easier for our daughter-in-laws. And also life style has changed so joint families are literally breaking but we have a chance as the modern time is much more improved socially, culturally and ethically. We do have a chance to enjoy a lot more. In the modern age we are much more educated, we are lot more improved in our social life.

However, this was not the norm but the exception, as Sonali explains:

I mean I remember growing up and a lot of my friends were like... 'My mum got told off by my grandmother because she did not have enough gold on.' I did not understand that because I did not grow up in the kind of expectation that women were oppressed. We were certainly, as a women... expected to be educated not just get married and live in my husband's home.

Mrs. Prahar contrasts Sonali upbringing with her own when she remembers her childhood in India, and expresses her anger and frustrations at being forced to capitulate.

The atmosphere at home [in India] is very very old fashioned, very stubborn and women has got no voice! You are made to obey and those people (family members) are not made to listen, women are degraded, they are not made to listen those people are born to rule and we are meant to obey.

Mrs. Prahar and Sonali describe generational changes. Though the power of the mother over her son's wife may get less with newer generations, this is still the norm in most South Asian families. The mother derives her power by giving birth to sons, as this is the first time a woman is given validation within traditional patriarchal ideology.

#### **Section 4: The Mother-Son Fixation: Criticisms of South Asian masculinity**

The mother-son fixation in south Asian culture is due to the importance of the extended family, where the mother can act as the central authority. Samira expresses her misgivings:

I think there is a whole thing in not just in our culture by that I mean Asian but also in the human race between mothers and sons. There is something there that just needs to be...there is something between mothers between mothers and sons like the umbilical cord is never cut.

For the Indian mother, her son is the major medium of self-expression. It is her motherhood that the traditional family values and respects; her wife and daughter roles are devalued. It is through her son and on her son that she traditionally exercises her authority. Motherhood is a compensatory mechanism given to women for the misogynist treatment of women until motherhood. Nandy (1988) proposes that for the Indian son, the model of male identification is the father, who is more a mother's son than a woman's husband in the traditional family system where mothers have more authority than wives. The mother-son relationship of *Mother India* was reproduced in many films, such as *Deewar* and to a lesser degree in *Amar Akbar Anthony*. The white sari-wearing mother in these films represented tradition, religion, rural innocence, purity and the law in contrast to the rebelliousness of their sons. These films

portrayed the hero as a criminal without a family but deployed the figure of the mother to validate his transgressions. In the eighties a genre of avenging women films became popular but these were not mothers and they were not depicted as sexually pure. In the nineties, family romance film replaced the violent rape and corruption films of the eighties. The family came to take the centre stage in contemporary films but the mother was not a significant character in this new formula. The mother character is very much dead but the son goes on.

There were many criticisms of South Asian masculinity from female respondents when discussing mother and son relationships. Asha, Samira, Sonali and Charan had very direct condemnation of Asian men as, passive men who do not have the strength to challenge their mothers and family. Samira questions if it is women who are responsible for the break-up of families:

But the worrying thing about the break-up of family is that it's always like a bad bahu or bad mother-in-law. And these passive men who have absolutely nothing to do with it and are tied up in tangled up in this mess.

There were generational differences in expressing such condemnations of men. Two of the first generation respondents (Shahib Jaan and Mrs. Prahar) had different feelings when said, 'men can't cope' and therefore women had to be strong and had to suffer. However, Mrs Prashar went on to express that women are treated badly by men and by their mothers. Both these women had a 'keeping the family together philosophy' as they had done throughout their lives and because they are invested in the institution of the family and their subjectivity arose from their roles as mothers and wives. But Palika, another first generation single woman had no such investment in the ideas of a family. She expressed her anger at her parents who sent her to the UK to be married to a doctor. She decided to leave the marriage a few years later. Usually in 'mother-in-law/daughter-in-law' films, the men in the family, the father-in-law and the husband are portrayed as kind rational, "men of the world", sympathetic to the daughter-in-law but not wanting to get involved in domestic emotional politics. Therefore as rational beings, they do not challenge this injustice. The cinematic portrayal of men emasculated by rationality and education is a critique of modernity and legitimates the feudal and patriarchal male who kept his women forcibly under control.

#### **4.1 Strong Women: The 'Mother' versus the 'Hero'**

Asha (British Gujarati woman, aged thirty four, born and brought up in Leicester, now lives in London) claims that the 'hero' character could not challenge the 'mother' character. When I ask her to explain, she points out that:

Most of the women I have seen in films are the stronger ones, certainly in *Pakeezah*<sup>44</sup> (Pure Heart, 1973, Kamal Amrohi) and in *Dev Das* (2003, Sanjay Leela Bhansali) *Dil Se*<sup>45</sup> (From the Heart, 1998, Mani Ratnam) in all these films women are....much stronger and that kind of reflects my own experience in this country. Once women break away from family they are strong whilst men lack the backbone in challenging the Asian culture.

The men lack backbone because the traditional family privileges them and therefore there is no reason for them to challenge their own privileges. Asha claims that women are stronger without family prohibitions and so become strong only after they leave their family. Yet, in many film narratives women's character and actions are dependent on family relations and are inexorably interlinked. The mother character is defined in terms of family. However in the three films she mentions, there are no mothers but the women characters are central protagonists and are depicted as powerful women. The protagonist in *Pakeezah* is a courtesan who is pathos ridden and wants to escape the prison of her profession through a heterosexual romance. Her power is derived from her performance of pathos. The female protagonist of *Devdas* marries a man who is not her lover (the hero) because her lover was too insecure and weak to challenge his family. This character is not portrayed as a victim but as someone who makes her own choice and decides to live by it. The female protagonist of *Dil Se* is a member of a rebel secessionist terrorist group, which wants to avenge the barbarism and occupation of by the Indian state in of Assam. She is a terrorist. The character is represented as a victim turned rebel. Asha explains that in the films women are strong and proud and their message to men is to 'fucking get a grip on your life.' When I ask her to explain this, she explains that men seem confused, indecisive and lack the strength these women characters possess. She adds that she is relieved that she does not have to be like these women in terms of the

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<sup>44</sup> *Pakeezah* is the story of a courtesan Shahibjaan (Meena Kumari) whose mother was also a dancer and courtesan Nargis (played by Meena Kumari). Her mother's dreams of escaping her dishonourable life failed when her husband Shahabuddin's (Ashok Kumar) family rejected her. Shahibjaan's is prevented from seeing her father by her mother's sister who has brought her up. Shahibjaan falls in love with a mysterious stranger who turns out to be her father's nephew, Salim (Raaj Kumar). Salim's father forbids the marriage. Shahibjaan dances at Salim's arranged wedding where Shahabuddin discovers her identity and claims her as his child. Finally, her desires are fulfilled and she marries Salim, leaving her past behind.

<sup>45</sup> *Dil Se* (*From the Heart*, 1998, Mani Ratnam) became the first Indian film to reach the Top 10 in the UK Box Office Charts, when released in 1998. *Dil Se* was awarded for its visuals and music; National Film Award for cinematographer Santosh Sivan and A.R. Rahman who received a Filmfare Award for the music. The love story is between an urban middle-class journalist and a woman who had turned to violence for a political cause.

suffering they have to go through, but because of their ability to cope, they come through. She admits to a certain relief that her life is not as difficult or requires as many sacrifices. She is happy to have them as her female ideals or heroes to learn from. She continues:

Asian culture puts pressure on how you should be, being a woman means being strong.

She gives me an example of prohibitions put on her when she was younger.

Young women her age (meaning her younger sister) combine it and they are not so... subservient. We did not have that mix, you had to make tea and bring it out to guests.

Asha's point is that when she was growing up there were limited choices available but more options have become available for younger women. Her comment to men, 'to get a grip on their life' is an interesting one because Shahib Jaan who is fifty (and has six children, four daughters and two sons) expressed the same when she voiced that 'men are weak, they need guidance by women'. They are lost without women's strength. Even though Asha is saying the same as Shahib Jaan that women have had to be strong, she wants the men to sort themselves out whilst Sabar Jaan infantilises men and argues that men need guidance. There is a contradiction in the representation of women in cinema as suffering victims but in reality and in women's own voices they are the stronger ones.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I set out to explore key issues of gender relations and the crisis of the family through an analysis of the cinema experience of the respondents. I highlight how Bombay cinema's melodramatic mode embodies the anxieties and tensions of Indian society and culture in the symbol of the 'woman.' The symbol of 'woman' in Bombay cinema viewing practice represents the historical and cultural struggles between traditional, modern and neo-traditional positions creating dominant, oppositional, resistant and ambivalent voices; the meaning of the symbol is contested. I have explored how the gendered representations of the 'mother', 'daughter' 'daughter-in-law', 'mother-in-law' and 'hero' in popular culture are spaces of struggle, contestation and pleasure, where the symbol of 'woman' often serves the purpose of powerful patriarchal cinematic and national institutions. The woman as symbol for the ideological construction of an Indian culture repeatedly functions to regulate real (British Asian) women in the audience, to teach prescriptive rules to men and women and regulate the power structures of a traditional joint family. Samira's account on how Bollywood is dangerous is a good example of this. It typically grants authority to patriarchal cultural norms ascribed to daughters-in-law and daughters and only rarely grants authority to subversive roles such as the pregnant but unmarried daughter. Simultaneously, it is also a symbol which generates female discourses drawn from the social realities of women's lives and is appropriated by respondents to inscribe a meaning from their context.

The asexuality and ascetism of the 'mother' figure is seen as a negative trait but her endurance arouses admiration of her strength and determination. The affect of suffering evokes memories of respondent's own struggle and pain and allows identifications with the characters, and with the suffering of others. The intergenerational conflicts are played out through the 'saas-bahu' and 'mother-hero' relations. These relations highlight conflicts over discourses of freedom and choice. The desire for freedom generates pleasures of the affect. In cinema experience imaginary freedom is acquired through an affective economy. Affect temporarily allows freedom from cultural prescriptions and laws. The fear of being disciplined generates criticism. The women's anger was unequivocal in their criticism of traditional patriarchal and modern heterosexual disciplining messages that cinematic texts carried. Bombay cinema discourse embodied the marginalisation women negotiated every day of their lives. The women's articulations negotiate and collude with patriarchal structures and produce a multiplicity of positions. Traditionally the figures of the mother and daughter-in-law are seen as the cultural transmitters of moral (religious) values within the domain of the home. In this scenario, the women are responsible for the family and social life of the community (as mothers, daughters-in-laws); therefore they are constructed as the protectors of South Asian family and community values from Western influences, as in *Mother India*. The key conflict here is the loss of South Asian cultural identity, which is conflated with notions of extended family. Within a South Asian traditional framework, the extended family is the key site of culture and life. The stability of the extended family depends on the containment of female sexuality (of the daughter) and the exploitation of female labour (of the daughter-in-law). This is why the sexual autonomy of women is viewed as a threatening device.

The conflicts, and tensions between the individual and the family needs and desires are projected onto the idea of an outsider, the West. Women's roles and their sexual freedoms are central signifiers in this anti-West discourse, which works within a British South Asian context in the policing of identity boundaries. The Western is desired even as it disavowed and it is rejected even as it validated for its modern liberal humanist discourse. A good example of this is Sunita's comment that the films seem confused and cannot decide if to represent women as modern or not.

From the respondent's accounts, South Asian femininity can be portrayed as self-negating, suffering, pure, innocent and passive as well as powerful, dangerous, sexually autonomous, and challenging families and cultural structures. South Asian masculinity is constructed as passive and infantile, conforming to family rules and revering strong punishing mothers. The exaggerated emotions deployed through the melodramatic mechanisms of family crisis, the polarity between the good and the bad, the revenge over the 'bad' produced multiple pleasures. The female respondents expressed their anger towards patriarchal norms by projecting this anger on to the sign of men, referring to the men as weak and passive. Most

respondents (male and female) parodied the hypermasculinity of male heroes. A powerful critique of masculinity as infantilism, passivity and dependence is voiced by women respondents through the discourse of the 'mother-son' relationship, which is seen as the central pillar of the extended family. The son is the medium of self-expression for the mother and a vehicle of her power, whereas the daughter is a reminder of her painful past projected into a future. The mother gains her power and freedom through the son. He is her mediator in patriarchal society and he mediates her freedom. Cinematic experiences repeat and touch on the feelings of rejection and intimacy for the women viewers. The values of extended family and its survival are still one of most significant forces of oppression and of strength for many women. Family then becomes the private space of tradition as the realm of female regulation and subjugation, as well as the space of deep emotional connection and purpose in life for the respondents. Here, the narratives of reinforcement and subversion of family rules are voiced. The male respondents have not experienced the rejection to the same degree but some had participated in the intimacy of family viewing experience (which I elaborate on in chapters five and six). The narratives create voices of criticism and dissent but it is not necessary that this has the ability to change the situation of many women; this is only a potential.

# CHAPTER 6

## THE BRITISH ASIAN BODY:

### SEXUALITY AND CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that the body is a key site of cultural expression representing anxieties, fears and conflicts and an allegory of changes happening in Indian/Asian society. In contemporary cinema the sign of 'woman' revolves around an overt expression of her sexualized body. I begin by exploring the relationship of family to sexuality in the respondent's interviews. The memory of the practices of family cinema watching brought up multiple discourses of discomfort around depictions of sex and sexual bodies. Most respondents complained about the increased superficiality of the films due to their over emphasis on beauty, sex and glamour<sup>46</sup>. They voiced that female actresses were forced to reveal much more flesh nowadays than before. One respondent, Shahid felt that the song and dance scenes, which copy a Hollywood (MTV) style, are totally unacceptable for 'Asian' families. He felt that Bombay cinema was 'family cinema' and that Bollywood was trying to increase its commercial gains by targeting a young Asian male audience through the sexual objectification of women in imitation of the Hollywood style. In his understanding this had not been the case before. He felt that Bollywood cinema's mimicking of Black music videos (male protagonist surrounded by women in bikinis) was to attract the younger Asian man. However, when prompted he also admitted that Bombay cinema was depicting sexualized male bodies as a way of targeting a female audience. This points to the significance given to sex and the body in the arsenal of marketing deployed by the Bollywood cultural industries.

There has been a drastic change in cultural norms of body, beauty and sexuality because of the economic liberalization. The shift from the Mother India to Miss Universe syndrome articulates dramatic changes taking place in Indian economic and cultural life. Respondents challenged the regulation and disciplining of the white cultural norms, articulated nostalgia due to the loss of the old style and reflected on and criticized the shallowness of the images and bodily practices generated due to a desire to imitate the glamour of the films. It also points to the increasing importance of a sexual identity and a self-improved and mastered body in Indian culture. In effect, the disciplinary power (Foucault 1984) of these images is internalized and actively used to limit the self and others even as they

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<sup>46</sup> There has always been emphasis on beauty and glamour in Indian films but the key change has been the focus on sex.

are subverted and produced as parody and performance. Some respondents claimed that perhaps women also had some strong roles in a few films and that 'they were not always crying' but seen to be having fun. The focus on female suffering, self-negation and punishment in earlier films has shifted to the centrality of female sexuality and beauty. However, the cultural norm for South Asian femininity that seems to be validated by many respondents is that of keeping within the flesh revealing test and not compromising with the producer's demands of commodifying or objectifying the female body. The discourse of female modesty as a sign of honour (related to Hindu and the Muslim patriarchal religious rule) may have given rise to this test.

The key conceptual frame that structured the gender narratives was the dialectic of the Asian and the Western. This was also expressed as a binary discourse of the old/new and the traditional/modern. The binaries of oversexualisation/modesty, excess/subtlety, self-negation/exhibitionism, purity/impurity reflected a further evaluations along the opposing poles of conformity and transgression. I created these binaries for analytical clarity. They do not reflect the range of contradictions offered in viewer's narratives. The nexus of excess/subtlety is an interesting structure in that it mimics the debates on popular and high culture and a distinct classed sensibility. Another aspect of this voiced by respondents was that the subtle sexuality or the practices of concealment and censorship of sexual acts produced conventions that relied more on orality than visuality. But this has been lost in the new films.

### **Section 1. Family and Sexuality**

Many respondents pointed out that there has not been a comfortable place for sex in Indian cinema. Some explained that they found it embarrassing to watch scenes of a sexual content with their family. Asha (British Gujarati woman, aged 34, lives in London) explains:

I hate the sex scenes and the love around that sometimes.... its just embarrassing because it's never full on.... and yet it's suggesting something and the suggestions are they don't leave much to the imagination...sex scenes around kissing ... you know trying to kiss... and it always reminds me of watching with my parents and that innuendo is sometimes worse than actually seeing it happen because people's minds are running around...you know. I go out of the room if there is a sex scene or start talking very quickly.

Asha expresses her embarrassment and an urgent desire to hide when watching these scenes with her parents. The expression of sex generates much anxiety and discomfort, as it is probably one of the most contested and taboo subjects, between the different generations in Asian families (and in most Western families). It is not something that is talked about openly. In addition, due to censorship laws the ludicrous signification of heterosexual sex has included 'the shaking of two flowers' or the thunderstorm. The rain is a benign way of



expressing sexual intercourse but there were many other suggestive and crude significations. Asha expresses her horror of these sex scenes. They are either too crude or sex is referred to too indirectly, which makes it even worse for her. Many respondents (both male and female) expressed that the over-sexualisation of the female body was distasteful.

The filmmakers developed different conventions to circumvent state censorship laws. These laws prohibited any sexual contact between the male and female protagonists. One convention was to concentrate on sexualizing the female body and the inference of crude and suggestive innuendoes. Close-up shots of breasts and hips signified the space of the sexual. The fragmentation of the female body also assisted in sexually fetishizing the body. Raj Kapoor's<sup>47</sup> films often sexually objectified women for voyeuristic pleasure. His justification of the representations of sexualized female forms was based on linking the expression of sexuality to the 'Indian tradition' as in the film *Satyam Shivam Sundaram (Love is God or Love is Sublime, 1978, Raj Kapoor)*<sup>48</sup>. This film displayed the first kiss since the introduction

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<sup>47</sup> Raj Kapoor was an actor, director and a producer and was considered a naive romantic idealist in his call for social reform in his films of the 1950s. He was also known as the "Charlie Chaplin of Indian Cinema" as he often played tramp-like figure, the 'happy poor honest man' in his films of the 1950s. His films were popular in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union and China enjoyed his films. He established his own studio, R. K. Films, and became the youngest film director of his time. His first movie as a director *Aag (Fire)* (1948) was an immediate success. Raj Kapoor's career as director spanned the years from 1948 through 1988. He produced and directed *Bobby* (1973) which introduced the actress Dimple Kapadia who wore bikinis in the film, which was considered sexually explicit and voyeuristic. Raj Kapoor focussed on the female body and sexuality in later films like *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978) and *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985). His films were very successful and targeted the 'common man'.

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Culture/Cinema/RajK.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raj\\_Kapoor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raj_Kapoor)

<http://www.imdb.com>

<sup>48</sup> *Satyam Shivam Sundaram (Love Sublime, 1978, Raj Kapoor)* is a story of Rajeev's (actor Shashi Kapoor) understanding of beauty. He hears Rupa singing devotional songs and falls in love with her voice and does not see her burnt face which Rupa always masked with her veil. After marriage, he realizes the truth and walks out on her. However as the film progresses he realizes that real beauty is internal which is even more beautiful than fantasy. Zeenat Aman came into the film industry through her modeling career and was considered a sex goddess and Raj Kapoor utilized this aspect in framing her in many poses of near nudity. Zeenat Aman as Rupa, an ostracized village girl wore a very thin short sari, which revealed her breasts and legs. This was probably the first time on popular Indian cinema screen an actress had revealed her body in this way. As an actress Zeenat Aman transformed the representation of women on cinema screen by taking on roles

of censorship laws. An example of an overtly sexual image in this film was the use of thin transparent tightly fitting village costume as a means of revealing sexuality. This sexual imagery is justified morally by alluding to the religious imagery of Radha and Krishna. Another convention was the deferral of the sexual onto a romantic space.

### 1.1 Subtle and Concealed Sexuality

The key themes that emerged on the topic of sexuality from the interviews were: the changes (from old cinema to new) in the overt sexual display of women's bodies; the discomfort of watching such films with the family; and concealment of sexual acts through crude suggestive images or by deferral to romance. There were similarities and differences amongst the respondents, which sometimes followed gendered, generational, and class backgrounds.

One of the questions I asked the respondents was about a specific song and dance scene, '*Choli Ke Peechay*' (*What's Behind the Blouse*) from the film *Khalnayak* (The Villain, 1993, Subhas Ghai), which generated a moral controversy engineered by the Hindu Right (the BJP and the Shiv Sena) in 1993. It was seen as overstressing the limits of sexual licentiousness and it was taken to the courts to be banned, generating a lot of publicity along the way, because it was seen as an insult to Hindu morality. One respondent, Salim (a British Bangladeshi man, aged 24, lives in Ilford) felt this scene was 'hardly sexy' compared to the newer films with the trend of female actresses wearing very little. However, a few other respondents found this scene crude and vulgar and felt it dehumanized women by sexually objectifying them. Sonali claims that Indian cinema displays:

Subtle sensuality versus overt sexuality, sexual not sexy! I am not excited by overt sexuality.

Whilst other female respondents, such as Shabnam (British Pakistani woman writer and a poet, aged 41, lives in Manchester) and Charan (British Indian Punjabi woman writer and a poet, aged 34, lives in London) recounted that they found this scene to be pleasurable due to the sexual assertiveness of the female protagonists, Madhuri Dixit and Ila Arun. Others found the poetry and the dance of the scene pleasurable. Sonali, comparing old film stars to the new ones, explains:

Also because I think also in all these films the actresses were not overtly sexual. They weren't wearing low cut tops or whatever. I mean although some of the costumes certainly ehh Rekha wore you know with cut out bits, she was always always fully clad. You never saw like big parts

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of the modern urban Indian woman, who did not always wear sari and bindi.  
<http://www.imdb.com>

of her belly or often you see very long sleeves and churidaar. I think for me that overt sexuality was not very exciting not when I was growing up.

Sonali is referring to female stars playing characters such as Courtesans where they appeared as sexy but fully clothed. Sonali expresses that overt sexuality takes away her excitement. She had been brought up to admire a hidden sexuality of figures like the courtesan. The fact that sexuality is represented through dance at all or even primarily suggests a 'courtesan' or 'temple' prostitute sensibility. Sonali elaborates that sex is not taboo in Asian culture but simply that it is articulated differently in that it's not as overt as Western sexual aesthetics. Sonali found the 'choli ke pechay' song and dance scene crude and vulgar, expressed that for her the sexual was not about overt exposure of the body and the crude and vulgar suggestions of the dance but a more subtle articulation as expressed in the older films. Sonali elaborates:

I feel it's not true that they don't show sex in Bombay cinema; actually they are very sexual, just in very subliminal messages about sex. Every single film that I have seen, you know, even the more art house movies like in Shayem Benegal movie. I can only remember snippets of things and there is one time when Smita Patel is in a village (about a milk cooperative) washing her clothes and you can see her legs and cleavage and nobody really makes a big deal out of that and its not played upon and... its very sexual but its very real as well. Ehhmm and I don't think it needs to be played out.

She explains that Asian sexual aesthetics in older cinema were different to Western aesthetics and to the newer cinema, which has appropriated more Western ways of expressing sexuality. She claimed that the vulgar/crude and overt referral to sex was not sexy and a subtle nuanced depiction of sexuality was more attractive. She elaborates on her ideas:

I think we have a different relationship to sex. I don't think it's necessarily prudish at all. I think its very very sexual and that's lot to do with the way in which...no I don't mean in today's cinema the Sushmita Sens or the Karishma Kapoors and Twinkle Khanna, you know because that is all about short skirts and its about overplaying it. But certainly up until the early eighties you could have fully clad woman who was extremely sexy and you know desirable and object of desire and they usually were bahu (daughter-in-laws).

Sonali is defending Asian culture and the discomfort around the topic of sex. She is making two points here. The first is that to be sexy, you don't have to be overt but probably can achieve this more effectively by subtle nuances and by being fully clothed. In Sonali's terms, overt sexuality is what's shown in Western films where sexual acts are not hidden, or in contemporary Bollywood films in which heroines are wearing short skirts, revealing a lot of flesh and overplaying sex through gyrating and heaving. In her terms women are being used as a sexual spectacle. She expressed that Asian sexuality was more complicated and that newer trends were due to the Westernization of cinema. However, the western sexual

aesthetics is not as overt as Kama Sutra. Sonali proposes that sexuality in Indian cinema used to be subtle compared to sexuality in European cinema, but this has now changed.

Many respondents in accounts of their favourite heroines articulated a desire for restriction on flesh exposure, exhibitionism and sexual objectification. I propose that a 'flesh-revealing test', is used as an evaluation for the female star. This also applies to oneself and other women. This cultural norm then applies to all women and definitely to female heroines, (who represent ideals of femininity). The female stars were admired if they were not overtly sexual in their costumes and body postures and they were seen as having the strength to resist the pressure from producers, they were seen as 'not compromising themselves'. They were therefore respected for this resistance. This is an interesting contradiction in that some of the contemporary heroines were admired for their sexual assertiveness, though what was seen as 'not admirable' was viewed as compensation for the lack of acting ability by sexual objectification. Nonetheless, this was a narrow regulatory line that female stars had to balance on, as a large part of their attraction and star power was due to their sexuality. A discourse of superficiality or shallowness was also leveled at stars who had relied on their physical and sexual attraction without proving their worth as actresses.

However, Sonali is making a further point when she expresses that she prefers subtle sensuality where sex and sexuality is referred to in an indirect way verbally and visually, where you get a glimpse of cleavage or legs. She claims real sex is not overt. The indirect referral or concealment may increase pleasure. This excess emphasis on the suppression of sexuality (as in the Courtesan figure) was enjoyed by most respondents and was seen by some as 'Asian sexuality'. Of course there are serious contradictions here about what is Asian sexuality and what is Western sexuality but what is significant is the relation between the two in the respondent's interviews.

Sonali defends herself as an Asian, against being called a prude by suggesting that an overplaying of sexuality does not necessarily lead to increased pleasure in watching. Neela, another respondent, also thought that the '*Cholee Kee Peechay*' song was crude. Sonali describes her feelings:

I did not ever watch that [Choli Ke Peechay song scene]. As a singer I always refused to sing that song because it was overtly sexual. I was seen as acting that old idea of you know what's behind my top – I think I never wanted to kind of suggest that about my body.

Sonali as a singer and performer challenges the sexual objectification of women by not singing the song. She refused to engage with this song because she does not want to objectify herself for male pleasure. Bollywood oversexualises women; she counters this by refusing to sing that particular song. Her refusal is an indicator of her agency in engaging with practices of Bollywood cinema. Respondents of all generations felt that there had been a dramatic increase in the exposure of women's bodies. The female actresses who were seen as exposing

a lot of flesh, for example by wearing short mini-skirts were criticized excessively. Salim (British Bangladeshi man, aged 24, from Ilford) explains:

*Khalnayak* (*choli kee peechay*) scene, I loved it! Madhuri Dixit song, I did not think, it was that sexy. Nowadays they wear such short clothes. Kareena Kapoor, Aishwaray don't even wear any clothes. I don't like Kareena Kapoor, she does not even cover herself properly. There has been such a difference, isn't there? You can't watch today's film with your family. Old films you could sit down with your mother, sister, father and brothers. Today's films you can't watch with family members.

Salim is distinguishing between the newer films and the older ones. In the films of the 1950s and 1960s, female heroines often danced in village costumes. They exposed a lot of flesh and the costumes often accentuated breasts and hips. This display of sexuality was not criticized as much and was even made acceptable by connecting it to traditional dance and art forms. Even the Vamp was acceptable in her Western cabaret costume and with her promiscuous Western sexuality as she symbolized how not to be a good Indian woman. However, the familiarity of Vamp stars like Helen also allowed the audience to make a predictable pact. However, the criticism of the new heroines because of their vampish crude sexual display and levels of body exposure point to a drastic transformation in the ideal feminine figure. Salim explains the reasons for his criticisms:

Because it's too sexy! The boys are kissing girls and the girls are wearing clothes that are very short. So you feel embarrassed. I don't like this because you can't sit and watch with your family. The old films had stories and were interesting. The films, nowadays, don't interest you in their stories. You can't sit and watch with anyone because the heroines are wearing such short skirts that you see their knickers. But the songs in the films of today are very good.

Another respondent contradicts Sonali and Shahid's understanding of the dancing by not seeing it as sexual. Sunita explains:

Uhhmmm I do sometimes think that you know, okay...Asian cinema may one day in ten years time but we never see two people making love without their clothes on, which we are quite used to in British cinema. So when you do see women gyrating or heaving you are so used to it I don't think of it as sexual. But then when I sometimes see the camera, it's very sexual, in fact probably it is trying to attract a male audience. It's only then I began to think I suppose for me sex is what I see in English film stuff, but...

Sunita sees the gyrating and heaving of women's bodies as not sexual but as part of its specific style and aesthetic. She points out that having been brought up in Britain she thinks sex is what she sees in English films, that is two people making love without their clothes on. Her understanding of what is sexual contradicts that of Sonali's. For example, the sexual objectification of women is overlooked once it has been understood as part of an aesthetic.

The view of old films as those having stories and new films only having nude women and sex was a common complaint. For example, Mr and Mrs P, Shahib Jaan and Palika, all first generation respondents, complained that they did not like watching the new films because of this. But most younger generation respondents such as Salim, Sonali, Asha, and Shahid also complained about this. The younger generation had affiliations to sexy song and dance scenes performed by stars they admired but their complaint was more that films tried to market themselves on actresses in bikinis and short-skirts. They were criticizing the levels of exposure of the female actress's body, in ways not always connected to her role. Many had admired the Vamps of old films and the sexy heroines of the films from 1970s onwards, such as Parveen Baby, Zeenat Aman, Rekha, Sri Devi and Madhuri Dixit. These actresses had all played the sexy vamp, the prostitute, and the courtesan.

## **1.2 Asian Modesty and the Purdah System**

The cultural prescriptions of hiding your body and keeping it covered are rules drummed into little girls brought up in South Asian families. The women have been taught not to reveal their body to attract male sexual attention. The modesty rules attached to the Asian female body and psyche may be explained in an exploration of the system of Purdah that exists in much of South Asia, and which was developed to legitimate a gender and class hierarchy. The improper display of the body was seen as the behaviour of the lower castes, class and tribal communities. Shabnam contrasts many different bodies in her description of Muslim women's as opposed to Western bodies.

In Bombay cinema, women's bodies reflect Western style to a great extent, big bosoms, curvy figure, and lot of exposed flesh jiggling about. There is a tension here for Muslim people in that there is a lot of pressure to be 'modest' with bodies, not so showing the shape of the body – not so explicit desire-based images of bodies.

Shabnam compares the exposure of the body as Western compared to the covering of the body as that representing a Muslim ethos and modesty. Purdah is a Hindi/Urdu (Farsi) word, which means curtain. The sex-segregated societies of South Asia have practiced the system of Purdah. This is more prevalent in some countries than others and also more a rule in villages than in cities. The Purdah system (Khan,1999) refers to sex-segregation between men and women where women are prevented from using public space or can do so only under restrictions. The system of Purdah defines for women their space, mode of behaviour and the thinking of public and private space as prescribed by the religious and cultural rules of that tradition. These rules prescribe what to wear, how to behave and how to be sexual or not. Purdah of different kinds have been practiced by Hindu and Muslim families. Though it is identified more with Islam, this is not the case, and there are Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh variants. Within Hinduism, Purdah was prescribed more for upper castes than lower caste

women. It often represents the social class status of the family. Within a South Asian context, the freedom to expose the body has been the right of upper-class women or lower-class women, but not the middle-classes. In general terms upper-class women being at the top of the hierarchy did not care if the norms were broken and in fact, their only way of gaining capital was through the emulation of Western liberal body and sexual discourses. The lower-class women had no choice, as their labour demanded they could not rely on discourses of purity, chastity or norms of body exposure. Their bodies were not of importance to society. Only the middle-classes continually needed to protect the sexual purity and body exposure to reach upper class ascendance and to the fantasy of Western materialism.

### **1.3 Criticisms of the MTV Aesthetic: Asian Masculinity**

The viewing positions adopted by many respondents were contradictory in that similar images watched alone or with friends were understood or interpreted very differently to when watching them with the family. Shahid (British Pakistani lecturer, aged 30, from Rochdale) contrasts the mimicking of Hollywood style by Bollywood as one against the Asian family.

Maybe I am uhhh bit sort of [hesitation] old fashioned but I don't enjoy watching a film where its just rude sort of scene, that's going towards what Hollywood. So I suppose they are going towards for their benefit...but for viewer or for Asian community I don't think even if they catering for purely for Indian families...I don't think they want to something that involves lots of sex scenes, lots of rude dancing and that's catering for...for a younger group I would say, do they really want to watch that? I don't know which group I fit into but I don't personally want to watch that especially when I go to watch it in the cinemas I see a lot of families and you see a naked woman dancing about and even on TV, Zee TV now, I mean I was watching a song, and its purely like what black music is like...

Shahid criticized the Western style, MTV influenced song and dance scenes with almost naked women dancing sexually as 'not Asian.' He felt that Indian cinema was imitating 'Black music videos' and he felt this was wrong because Indian cinema was for the family. Shahid explains that Bollywood is trying to attract a wider audience of young men who usually would not watch Bollywood because of its association with romance and emotion; instead they would watch MTV channels and Hollywood films. Bollywood, by deploying sexy, beautiful women and Black hip-hop music video style was trying to attract a younger audience and increase its commercial scope. He admitted that in his younger days (he is 30) he liked that sort of thing but not anymore, as he is married. In Shahid's view, 'Asian' becomes associated with the family and not with sexiness. Also Hollywood and MTV are signifiers for the 'sexual' and for 'young men.' Sex is relegated to young men and to MTV style Black music.

MJ: Is Bollywood copying Black music videos?

R: you know exactly, now Asian girls in bikinis and what black music is like and that's what they are moving towards.

Though there is truth in Shahid's statement that Black hip-hop videos objectify women many other music videos, do too. It is difficult to understand whether Shahid is conflating sex with Black music; or perhaps he is opposing the pervasive influence of Black music on the Bollywood music styles as it absorbs MTV aesthetic. Earlier Shahid had told me he likes Soul and Funk and is not really into Indian music apart from some songs that he loves. So his suggestion that a lot of young Asian men are into Black music comes from his own experience. Most Asian men also see Bollywood as an effeminate form of entertainment due to its concentration on romance and the family. The affiliation to black music (hip hop, R'n'B, funk, and soul) is a common practice amongst British Asian men and women of the second generation. Young Asian men's appropriation of Black music such as hip-hop could be due to the image of this genre in western popular culture as representing a desired type of 'cool' masculinity. (An analysis of the relationship of 'Asian' and 'Black' in production of discourses of masculinity is crucial in revealing how British western popular culture is constructed). It is pertinent to explore how the 'Asian' is excluded from the representations of nude women in Shahid's discourse of family viewing.

MJ: Why is it so popular in Britain?

R: I think it's because of the music and and I can say from the boys or the male side its because of the what women are like, they try to bring in the best looking woman into the film and I think its just to see that and I don't think many people are interested in the story, the young group I don't think. Especially...

MJ: So you think it is for boys and men that all the nudity ...

S: I think it is. I don't think women might be interested in watching but I suppose...[hesitation and thinks]...also women watch good looking male now with the bodies and all regardless of if they can act or not, they are not interested in they are making sure they are good looking, they have good bodies and the height is you know..so whatever the viewers want to see they just put it on the screen. I mean look at Hritwik Roshwan...he can't act...

Shahid adopts and negotiates contingent and multiple masculine identities and identifications as a young Asian male, as a young man enjoying videos of sexually objectified women, as a defender of the Asian family as the non-sexual space, and as a son and husband. The relationship of British South Asian masculinity and its relationship to Bollywood and Black music videos, is a crucial node in exploring British popular culture and its representations of masculinities and femininities. Bollywood films are seen as a feminized practice as opposed to Black music videos, which are signs of masculine practice in Shahid's account. **Kiran who** is sixteen told me that her brothers who are eighteen and nineteen would not watch Bombay films because it was seen as effeminate, though she also told me that one of her brothers



watched *K3G (Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham, 2003, Karan Johar)*, a film about the conflict between the father and the brother and wept. In this way, a dichotomy of the feminine and masculine is created, where the feminine becomes the space of emotion and the masculine becomes the space of sexuality and violence. The feminine is also the space of the family, where the sexual causes discomfort for Shahid and other men. Young Asian men would be made fun of in their peer groups if they admitted to watching Indian cinema, seen as a sign of femininity and emotion. In addition, it was also seen as backward. Not only did it take away one's credibility as someone not adhering to the Western rationalist discourse, but it also put the Asian male back in to the linear process of progressive development but as affiliating to a backward cinema. British Asian men have had to fight the stereotypes of passivity and femininity imposed onto them by Western Orientalist and racist discourses. Very few of the male respondents had engaged with Bombay cinema in the same way as the female respondents. Two male respondents were engaging because of their occupations (a journalist and a PhD student) another two to please their wives; another was a video shop owner.

Conversely, the Black music videos are signs of an urban youth sensibility. However, they can also be founded on a racist and Orientalist imaginary. The Western signifier splits into racist elements of the exotic, passive feminized Asian and the Black as a sexual, aggressive and therefore masculine sign. The MTV aesthetic of Black music videos often represents a homogenized view of Black men (and women) as being hypersexual by depicting images of bikini-clad women fawning over male bodies. Both Black men and women are often sexually objectified in these images. However, these images also add credibility and authority to the images of the black men as 'cool', 'with style' and 'in control.' Young men appropriate these images by adopting the language and embodied practices of a 'cool' and 'bad' masculinity. Masculinity is often defined as 'being in control' and being dominant, in these discourses. At the same time, black masculinity is pathologized, criminalized and presented as an excess of masculinity in comparison with the ideal white masculinity, which is often depicted as 'under control,' 'stable' and the 'protector' of civilized life and the law.

#### **1.4 The Asian Deferral to Romance**

In Sonali's formulation of sex in Bombay cinema, there is another major difference between Asian and European cinema:

Also like the reason why sex in Bombay films is very different to reason why sex is in European films is the way people get together. It's just much more romanticism in Indian cinema than it is in western film and that's what a lot to do with escapism as well. Romanticism is about escaping and you know about idea of something and you know the trauma of how to get it, not being able to get it and spending all your life trying to get it. It's a very romantic notion is not it?

In Sonali's view, sex in Indian cinema is depicted very differently because it is not the reason for heterosexual 'getting together'. Men and women get together through romance, fantasy and yearning. She is referring to the deferral of sex onto romance. In the depiction of sexual moments, there is an effort to eroticise sex scenes by concealing the actual act by focusing on the symbols of flowers, water or rain, which signify nature. The development of a very different sexual imagery has precedents in the erotic language utilized by writers well versed in Urdu poetry. Sex is either represented as vulgar and greedy when associated with the 'villain' or the 'vamp,' (that is bad sex) or as romantic and pure love when associated with the hero and heroine (good sex). The discourses of purity and contamination when representing sex are common and may be derived from colonial Victorian values. This has changed gradually. The cinema screen communicates sexuality through the song and dance sequences, which are often seen as vulgar and crude by some and enjoyable by others. The eroticisation of cinema through dialogues, and the lyrics of the songs in the earlier films have changed to staged spectacles of visually seductive dances in the newer films. There has been a shift in locating sexuality from indirect reference and verbal innuendoes to overt visual sexuality on the cinema screen. Sonali validates the poetry, the aural and the fantasy as genuine Asian sexuality. However, another respondent, Samira, voices a critique of the convention of deferral to romance:

And I think ehm romance is a constant every film has it have that and I think that's unreal even though its real to the point of people love each other and there is romance but then nobody has sex and nobody kisses and nobody ...its almost this pure love. I think that's rather worrying as well. You feel like, oh gawd! My love was really sinful compared to this. It was not this clean. It was not just that we danced around a tree you know.

MJ: Ohh you did!

S: (laughing) Yaaa. You know that sort of just sort of eradicates so much human experience in terms of the only time sex is mentioned is 'it's a sin somebody got pregnant'. And that's sad. And yet there was more unsaid but brought to the forefront about sexuality in old films than there is now.

Samira compares her own sense of romance to that represented in cinema. She claims in humorous tones that romance on the cinema screen is ideal and 'clean' whilst her real life romance is sinful. She validates the sinfulness of her own romance compared to the fantasy of pure love. However, even as Samira parodies the fantasy based romance and affirms the reality of sex, she later contradicts herself by expressing her love of poetic eroticism in old Indian films as the ideal place which articulated more about sexuality than visual spectacles of sexuality in new films.

This nexus of the overt/subtle is an interesting structure in that it mimics the debates on popular and high culture and demonstrates a distinct classed sensibility. Another aspect of this

voiced by respondents was that the subtle sexuality or the practices of concealment and censorship of sexual acts produced conventions that relied more on orality than visuality. The poetic language used to convey these emotions produced highly eroticised *mise en scenes*. The erotic and sexual charge of this repression created an audience literate in this convention, and wanting more. These respondents also welcomed recent representations of female star's performative enjoyment of self-pleasure as a transgression and a much-needed change from the denial of sexual self-pleasure in the older films. In addition, many male stars were now presented as sexually objectified and often appeared in different poses where their muscular bodies were exposed. Shahid asserts that the new films sexually objectify women to cater for a young male audience and later he also adds that there is a trend of presenting 'good looking males with good bodies' to female audiences and hence he points to the importance of 'good looking bodies' in the new cinema. Many of these actresses and actors come from a background of modeling and advertising. The importance of marketing in the construction of the Bollywood industry becomes apparent from these trends. The changes also signify the newer significance of a female audience.

## **Section 2: Asian Women's Bodies: Regulation and Embodiment**

### **2.1 Screen Goddesses and Self-Castigation**

Many respondents complained about the depiction of an ideal slim and sculpted body that many actresses fulfilled and endorsed. Naseema (British Pakistani woman, aged 27, from Oldham) explains the changes:

If you look at the old Bollywood they are all well rounded and stuff but now it's like you know skinny you know or have any figure whatsoever that's what I would say.

Naseema continues:

It makes you feel shit. (Bursts out laughing). You see these Indian Bollywood actresses they have nice figure and the fancy outfits and stuff.... I think that can create a complex. Its like British magazines like Cosmopolitan and how it affects British women [she is not including herself in British women] psychologically and they get anorexia and stuff like that they wanna become like them and they can't and I think same happens with our culture, well its happening now. Don't know about the past but definitely now.

Naseema's self-castigating remark defines the pressure to conform to certain body norms as a 'complex.' It is described almost as if it were a disease; a disease of self-esteem based on a lack of similarity of one's body with the star, latter a norm. This relationship of the spectator to star bodies on the screen is an interesting one to explore. Some women expressed anger at the change in women's bodies from the curvaceous to the thin. They took this rather

personally and explained how this change put them under pressure to be thinner. They expressed nostalgia for the voluptuous body, which was seen as a typical and natural South Asian body. However, there were contradictions in that many participants expressed admiration for the beauty of actresses' slim and sculpted bodies but at the same time felt pressured about their own bodies in comparison. The dichotomy of the physical appearance versus the performance of the heroine was used to evaluate her acting skills. Men and women both complained about the valorisation of bodies over acting skills. The themes that emerged from the respondent's narratives on the topic of the body were: the pressure felt by female respondents in evaluating their own bodies with those of screen actresses; the loss of variations of bodies in favour of a standard (homogenized) body; in particular the loss of the curvaceous, voluptuous Asian body; the loss of covered, hidden female bodies (subtle sexuality) in opposition to women in mini skirts (overt sexuality); a change towards women feeling pleasure in looking at the male body on display and feeling responsible for this change; criticism of the valorization of white beauty norms; and hypocrisy regarding femininity and aging.

Naseema also compares this 'complex' to the pressure felt by British women from women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. It is interesting to note that she does not see herself as a British woman here, even though she had described herself as a British Pakistani woman earlier. She excludes herself from this notion of 'British' and means white women. In expressing her affinity to Bombay cinema, Samira had expressed the pleasure of recognition - of seeing bodies like ours on the screen. The dearth of Asian and Black women on screen has gradually changed but when many of the respondents were growing up, there were hardly any images to relate to, no 'glimpses of ourselves' as Samira, Sonali and Naseema voiced. The mainstream discourses of beauty in British culture negated, excluded or exoticised women from South Asian and African-Caribbean communities. In the (rare) instances where they are given value, it is to frame, contrast with and reify a version white feminine beauty. The racially exclusionary politics of representation of Black women, of Asian and African-Caribbean women in British mainstream magazines may be another example of the complex reasons why South Asian viewers choose to affiliate to Bollywood. For Naseema, Bollywood is one space where she does get to see images of Asian women. There is a complex relationship between self and recognition being articulated here. Naseema's body and identity as a British Pakistani woman was invisible in British popular culture, including in women's magazines. She recognizes herself in Bombay cinema, which represented a few bodies like hers. But, then she loses herself once again as Bombay cinema prioritizes bodies, which fit the Western global norm. This is where her anger and criticism originates. The racist exclusion of her body exists not only in Britain but also in the representations of Bombay cinema.

## 2.2 The Ideal Global Citizen: Whiteness as a Beauty Norm

Aishwaraya Rai, who came into the film industry in the late 1990s after winning the Miss Universe contest began a new trend for beauty pageants in India and also helped to accelerate the growth of a beauty industry. The widespread consumption practices of young women of beauty and glamour were institutionalized due to the promises of economic gain. She is seen as a cultural (universal) ideal of beauty, elegance and femininity. However, many respondents also criticized her for affirming western norms of beauty. Charan (British Pobjabi woman, aged 34, from London) explains:

As for women's bodies, it has really changed over the years. In older films, *Kabhi Kabhi* and *Pakeezah* women were healthy with rounded tummy and full figured and often small in height, now due to pressure from bloody Kate Moss and likes, they have been growing Aishwarya Rai's, tall, very thin actresses as the norm of beauty.

Cinema's representation of women's bodies has changed. In the films from the 1940s to the 1970s, women's bodies were considered sexual only if they were voluptuous with big busts, hips, and following the traditions of Indian classical art. In general, the actresses from the older films were also shorter. This was the ideal feminine figure of that time where voluptuousness was more important than slimness. Though there were some slim actresses, there were many who were not and so there was variation in body height, size and shape. This stayed constant until the late 1970s, when new actresses coming in to the film industry were under increasing pressure towards constructing a slimmer, sculpted body. Many respondents saw this as 'the westernization of bodies'. Aman (British Guyanese man, aged 30, PhD student) also questions the beauty norms of Bombay cinema:

I find it interesting most of the women actresses epitomize a certain sense of beauty, that's in my knowledge is very very far fetched. What are those signifiers, what are they based on, almost whiteness, almost certainly fake contact lenses.

Bollywood beauty aesthetics valorizes whiteness as a norm. Fair skin is revered. It is not correct to say that the idealizing of white or fairer skin has only been appropriated from Western cultures. In Indian culture the fairer northern Aryan ideals of beauty have always predominated and contrasted with darker skins of the Dravidinian culture. Though it is difficult to say if blond hair, blue or green eyes are revered as much as fairness. Long black shiny hair is more a sign of Asian beauty. Blond or short hair and blue or green eyes may be a symbol of westernization and are parodied, for example in the figures of Vamps. Vamps were hybrid characters and carried signifiers of the 'western' but with Indian undertones. Vamps were impersonating being western through using fairer skin, contact lenses and revealing clothing. The connotation of western women with fairer skin and their sexual promiscuousness was associated with 'modern women,' and this simultaneously venerated

and denigrated. The fair-as-beautiful versus darker-skin-as-ugly dichotomy has been a norm in Indian cinema and culture. Shakira agrees with Charan and explains that she feels women's bodies are more disciplined than they were before which makes her ambivalent about the changes in gender representations in Bombay cinema:

They can expose more flesh and can be seen to have their own sexual desires but too much emphasis on beauty, light skin, long hair. I think standards of beauty has become more solid in a way and how often do you see a dark skin woman in Indian cinema or how often do you see a woman who is not a certain body shape and they have become slimmer than they used to be which is prescriptive and about regulation as well. So I don't know if I like the idea that they are allowed to be more things. I would say exactly the same thing as Hollywood. Okay they are allowed to lawyers and doctors not just mothers and wives but they also have to be slimmer and light skinned so take away what's given

Shakira explores an emphasis on light skin, long dark hair and a slimmer and taller body frame, which she thinks is due to the influence of Hollywood. Bollywood imitates the racism of Hollywood and combines it with Aryan cultural ideals of beauty. The freedom to expose more of the body is not seen as a change that is desired. Moreover, the actual power system has not changed, in that the actresses do not have the power to choose the roles they play (as I have examined in chapter 3 on the power structures of Bollywood industry).

### **2.3 Miss Universe: The Postmodern Simulacra and Racism**

Many participants when expressing these changes also claimed that women's bodies had become westernized in these films. One male respondent remarked that this was the 'Miss Universe' syndrome of the film industry. Irfan explains:

Its all about beauty, all the actresses are either ex-Miss Universe or the Miss World. Diana Haydon was on Network East 1997 Miss World and she was resisting getting into Bollywood. This is a new ploy by the film industry and they market themselves as the bed of where these women have come from. There is whole series of beautiful Miss Universes and Miss World have come from India and we are going to project, that and this is the image of India we want.

Irfan claims that a national identity is circulated through Bombay cinema, that of being Indian. India is portrayed as the land of beautiful women and the image of India is constructed as successful by selling the Miss Universe symbol to a global market. The changes in the representations of women from 'Mother India' to 'Miss Universe' is a dramatic change because the first focused on a struggle for existence and transcendence through self-sacrifice while the latter prioritizes a femininity focusing only on the exterior of the body and on physical beauty. The Orientalist exoticism attributed to Eastern women by the West is appropriated and marketed symbolically as the Eastern exotic female figure in the latter symbol. The hybrid formation of the 'Mother India' figure was seen as a sign of that time, just

after Independence, and was intended to mythologise an ideal citizen who was happy to sacrifice for the community. The 'Mother India' character, some argue, transcended its femaleness by her acts and epitomized a sainthood discourse. In contrast, the Miss Universe character, beautiful and yet empty, and is represented (in some films) as an ideal form of beauty. The notions of national citizenship have changed drastically. This character represented by the new heroines lacks complexity. Though this image is also popular amongst the different audiences, it has not touched and mobilized the masses in the same way. Samira claims that actresses of today were not leaving their mark in comparison to the actresses of older films.

Ehhh and then again we have gone back to women having this 'singing and dancing' role mainly in films.....No, I think their roles have got smaller.... But, I think they are not portrayed so much as victims now. You don't see that many women just crying. I think they have more fun being injected into their roles. I am thinking of the average Kareena or Karishma prancing around everywhere but it's very interchangeable. They are not leaving their mark, like the actresses of 1950s and sixties. If it is an average commercial Bollywood film the heroine is just there to look pretty and dance.

The Miss Universe and Miss World actresses are used as signs of Indian success and pride on a global arena. But the parts they play in the films are marginal that is to look pretty and dance sexily. Many respondents described the new stars as clones of the Miss Universe look and, as Samira points out, they are interchangeable. They are compared to the older screen icons that displayed strong star personalities in terms of performance and presence. The newer stars look like each other, have no presence to speak of and have indistinguishable characteristics; they are simulacra of the Miss Universe prototype. It is almost as if they were produced on a mass production line. This is not too far from reality, as the beauty industry has expanded drastically to include cosmetic surgery, dental improvements, hair and make-up salons, fashion boutiques and body fitness centers in the urban centers of India. In this way, what Samira criticizes here is their lack of difference to each other and also a lack of originality. Hence they will not be remembered in the same way as the older iconic actresses. As Irfan points out:

And the roles these pretty women play are almost like pseudo Western women's role. Like we are tough and we are going to get what we want but ultimately they are still chained in or by you know like slaves used to have these chains around their legs by culture. And even though these women you know they are apparently really powerful women and they will do whatever they want to do. Culture still binds them and stops them from flying off and doing ultimately what they want to do. But I think is not that women anywhere?

Irfan, like Shakira earlier on, identifies the common situation of women everywhere: women's financial capacity to transform their bodies into a beauty norm is what is validated as emancipation, but the institutional structures change only very slowly.

The respondents explained their criticisms of the newer heroines in terms of regulation, universalisation, superficiality, and a lack of individuality. The criticisms were that the regulation of the female body was controlled by the Western ethos of the 'perfect' body and its standardization. This disciplined ordinary women and excluded difference and individuality. In addition the superficiality of this regime relied on the exteriority of physical appearance and completely negated the ability and interiority of the person. The contemporary reproduction of the feminine clone created homogeneity and replaced the originality of the earlier iconic stars. This also negated the aspirations of viewers for differences, originality and depth. The nostalgia attached to the loss of the old stars could be due to a slow realization that the original has no value in the contemporary world. The contemporary ability to reproduce and mimic replaces the idea of the original and the aura attached to that idea (Benjamin, 1969, Baudrillard, 1983) is adhered to even more strongly as the realization prevails that there is no need for an original, there can be multiple copies but that the past cannot be repeated. The homogenization of beauty and bodies due to global Western hegemony is challenged in small ways but remains essentially intact.

#### **2.4 Beauty and Temporality**

The temporality of beauty becomes obvious in Samira's articulation about age and feminine beauty in Bombay cinema.

What I find worrying is a lot of the Miss World and Miss India are becoming film actresses... and the youngness. I heard somebody say about Madhuri.... isn't she a bit old for Shah Rukh or even Aamir Khan who she started off with. I think that there is even more pressure now for actresses to be young or young looking but definitely young and that's sad. It almost like 19 and 20 year olds who are inexperienced but will dance and it is sad but there is an element of how many layers of clothing she will take off.

The hypocrisy of how female stars are treated compared to male stars once they reach a certain age, is articulated here. From Samira's account, the industry seems to have moved even more (by young Miss Universes and Miss Worlds coming into the industry) towards legitimizing female actresses only for their beauty, youth and sexual currency rather than their performative experience and abilities as actors. The temporality and shallowness of beauty and appearance highlight the unstable position of women in patriarchal global structures. If women are judged by their appearance in the institutional frameworks of cinema, then with age and when their appearance wanes, they are discarded for those with youth, a standard signifier of beauty. In Samira's terms 'how many layers of clothing she will take off' points



once again to the prevalent sexual objectification of women in Bombay cinema. It is pertinent to remember that the flesh exposure is a recurrent mental construct when evaluating women film stars. Femininity is understood as temporary, shallow and as appearance only. The female heroines are replicable because what they are chosen for (by the producers) is their youth and body, both of which are impermanent and ephemeral.

However, male actors never seem to get old in the film industry. The films adapt to them to allow them central roles, for example in the case of Amitabh Bachchan (who is 70). But the female stars are expected to leave the industry at a certain age (usually after their mid-thirties), get married and have children, very much like the characters they play. In the first half of the film, the female star can be sexually free and exhibit her beauty and body, but after the break (at the age of 30), they suddenly appear in Indian clothes as a wife and mother. The female actors have a sell-by date that is, they are still treated as objects and not as people. The same pressures that women feel in any society about the ageing of their bodies and age related loss of sexual currency, is replicated on the screen. The message relayed is that women are disposable. The idealisation of a woman happens by squeezing into the standards of beauty but for a short time, that is women can be the objects of reification but only temporarily.

## **2.5 Negotiation with the New Morality of Self-Mastery**

In contrast to other respondents, Samira explains her process of coming to terms with the pressures of feeling inadequate in comparison with star bodies. Samira articulates pressures of self-modification and self-scrutiny to those of Naseema but she explains she also has other strategies to counter these feelings of inadequacy:

I think it's quite sad because I thought you know Meena Kumari they were very very female and woman and now there is a lot of size 10s and size 8s around and I think sometimes... I try to say I am not influenced by that and that I am alright. But I think it can be overwhelming sometimes. If you are having a fat day and you go and watch an Indian movie you know that's it. I will go and sit there with my dorritos and chips and coke with lots of sugar in it. So I think that's sad because they seem to be getting thinner and thinner and taller and taller but .....there are a few actresses who are curvaceous. And, I think they are happy with it. They don't look very uncomfortable. I think Kajol and I think Rani Mukherjee and I think Madhuri as well. I think Madhuri has always been, you know, rounded.

She also comes away feeling fat but she also expresses ambivalence and gives examples of some actresses who don't fulfill these body conventions. A body conforming test is produced in the viewer's mind and used to evaluate, the levels of conformity and rebellion. Rebellion is respected and validated as this allows for cultural feminine ideals to have a range of different bodies. She decides to valorize rebellious actresses rather than the ones who have given in to pressure to conform. She comes to a negotiated understanding of the changes in screen

bodies. However, she does express her sadness for the loss of the curvaceous body, such as her ideal Meena Kumari, which is not fashionable anymore, which she sees as more Asian than the ones predominantly on display now. It is interesting to speculate if Samira's sadness is also about an undisciplined body, a body that can have permission to have fat days. There is also nostalgia for the loss of this body. Samira is curvaceous and rounded and as she explains she is happy about that most days. However, other respondents felt satisfied with the new changes. Sunita claims that:

That's changed, its more the western look, they are getting slimmer. They are obviously going to the gym. Their clothes are so westernized, I just can't believe. They are looking great.

Samira ideal curvaceous body is replaced with a western tall, slim and muscular body but Sunita feels this change is acceptable and that the actresses are looking great. These examples show how each respondent has different ways of dealing with the changes in screen bodies and the changes in their everyday life regarding disciplinary regimes of body and beauty.

The growth of media and transport communication and its circulation has meant that the communication between the filmmakers and the diaspora has improved significantly. Since before Independence, the middle-classes have emulated Western fashions and lifestyles as a sign of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). The filmmakers sell a cultural identity by deploying old western notions of India as the exotic and the erotic. Diaspora influences the cultural values of Indians (Ghosh, 1989)<sup>49</sup>. The diasporic identity is admired for its material success whilst keeping to Indian traditional family values. However, another feature of the middle-classes is to uphold traditional values even as they emulate the West and they spout an anti-Western rhetoric. The resurgence of this kind of neo-traditionalism is reflected in Bombay cinema, in that the affluence and material wealth of the West is imitated in female and male bodies and lifestyle, whilst the return to traditional patriarchal family rules of domesticating and controlling women are simultaneously reinforced. The discourse of heterosexual romance is also deployed as a strategy to keep the family unit together as more and more women refuse the demands of extended family rules.

In these accounts the individual self-mastery over one's body is critiqued even as the respondents fight with their self-esteem and challenge these representations, while at other times being complicit with them. There are choices to be made in validating some bodies over others but the homogenizing power of the elite filmmakers and their classed imaginary is understood as an overwhelming pressure to conform. The new morality of the self-mastered body produces shame. This shame has roots in racism (sexism and class conflicts etc) for British Asian respondents. The respondent's past encounters with racist representations in the

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<sup>49</sup> See Amitav Ghosh (1989) 'The Diaspora in Indian Culture' in *Public Culture*, Vol.2, No. 1: Fall 1989 pp73-78.

British media coincides with Bollywood's representations. The politics of global-local capitalism highlights the different investments of transnational identities and communities. The hegemony and the homogenization of the neo-liberal economy institute whiteness as the norm.

## **Conclusion**

The shift from a collective socialist modernism of Mother India (a self-negating body) of the 1950s to consumer cosmopolitan individualism (self-indulgent body) of the 1990s articulates drastic economic changes taking place in India. Beauty, sexuality and morality are articulated through the female body. The body that is reified as a universal norm is a youthful, slender, white Anglo-Saxon female body. This shifts the focus from the family and national survival of the old films to the significance of the individual body and its place in the family crisis of the new films. Respondents highlight the centrality of body fashioning in cinema and a key site of change. The significance of clothing and fashion was always important in Indian cinema but it is a crucial aspect of the films of the 1990s and mobilizes and reproduces multiple consumption practices and desires. The lavish costumes, styles, setting speak of grand affluence and replace and sanitize the poverty and struggle of the earlier films. Popular culture becomes the field of struggle of not only the dominant patriarchal ideologies of containing the woman in the traditional family realm but also the site for individual consumption of star and celebrity culture.

The circulation of fetishized female bodies in public provoked wonder and ambivalence in most respondents, expressing a distancing from the horrors of crude and explicit sexuality. The memory of the practices of family cinema watching brought up multiple discourses of discomfort around sex scenes. Family is a space of disciplining sexual pleasures (Foucault 1984). There is pretence of certain disavowed sexual identity, which creates and maintains specific rituals of tradition. This space, as many respondents have commented, is also the contested space of an 'Asian/Western' dichotomy, one predicated on culturally appropriate and disciplinary sex rules. Samira claimed that in the older films sex was synonymous with sinning and it was only referred to in relation to prostitution, rape or unwanted pregnancy. The concealment of sexual acts through a romantic deferral was seen as a refreshing aesthetic device and many liked this strategy of representation in comparison to western representations of sex, the latter seen as more direct or overt. Others expressed ambivalent views by saying that while they liked certain aspects of this convention, but also found it comical, crude and, in some films, as infantile.

The sign of the female sexual body stimulates anxiety and fear due to the belief that these cultural norms are becoming more and more westernized. Thus Westernization is seen as a kind of universalization or subsumption into Euro-American culture, and articulated

repeatedly as a fear of cultural homogenization in a globalized world. The explosion of new media (such as cable and satellite television in the 1990s) augmented the advertising, fashion and magazine industries and created communities of consumers (Lury, 1996). Consumption practices are symbolic in the formation of individual and collective identity. The role of classed imagination in individual consumption practices is crucial (Bourdieu, 1984). Consumption is a practice of relating to others. It necessarily involves taste distinctions and includes evaluation, competition, ambition and aspiration. The Oriental discourses of Asian femininity as passive and exotic sets the global stage for the exoticization of Indian/Asian women by Bollywood cinema. The transnational global urban cultural sensibility influences local social formations and taste cultivation.

In examining these interpretations I propose that gender as a mode of expression invokes key themes of criticism, pleasure and regulation of sexuality. The discourses of self-negation, repression of desire and nurturance were the prescriptive rules that dominated feminine representations in earlier films. They have only changed superficially. The self-fashioning ethics created by these images permit or enforce a specific use of time and individualize the female body, which earlier gendered representations of self-negation did not validate. The hegemony of neo-liberalization means that the filmmakers adopt whiteness as a marker of ideal female beauty. The kinds of femininities that are validated by cinema are produced by the filmmakers' subjectivities and the socio-cultural context of Bombay media circuits, which prioritize commercial success. The upper middle-class heroine of Bombay cinema who imitates white middle-class Hollywood femininity is the object of desire in this context and is seen as the ideal of successful femininity. In this discourse, female autonomy and liberation comes to rest not on her access to an independent life (access to employment, sexuality and life choices) but in her ability to imitate a femininity based on white beauty ethics. The aspiration to the whiteness of the Colonial master has always been part of Indian subjectivity. The upper classes have always aspired to white values and lifestyles, which for them were the ultimate source of authority. The urban middle-classes also aspire to a hybrid and cosmopolitan subjectivity. The appropriation of Black music videos to sell an urban style that attracts transnational youth audiences may be an indicator of this. The newer representations articulate the filmmaker's identities and investments in the global circulation of the music and media industry. The elite of the Bombay media industry, whose desires are embodied in the new generic conventions of Bollywood, aspire to conquer Hollywood. Their lifestyles have always been influenced by the desires of the diasporic Indians and the Asians of the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. The use of sexy song and dance videos and of the female body as a sexual object is a device for commercial success but also represents their own aspirations and values. The middle-class elite does not want to be stigmatized as backward for their lack of a cosmopolitan hybrid sensibility, a sign of Western liberal

civilized subjectivity. A discourse of self-mastery is propagated through the mastery of the English language, cosmopolitan liberal humanism, and recent technological and commercial success. The self-fashioned body represents the new morality.

The Bollywood filmmakers through new music fusion styles appropriate, hybridity as the marker of Western liberal discourse. I propose that the cinematic female body is the site of a new morality of the upwardly and globally mobile Indian middle classes. It represents the ethos of self-mastery and the increased focus on the formation of the individual through transnational circuits of consumption practices. This morality is based on freedom through participation in transnational consumption practices. The British Asian respondents criticize the new Indian identity of the upper and the middle classes by criticizing the body norms of the new female heroines who replicate the Miss Universe body and reproduce the homogenized white feminine ideal. The clash in values between these two groups is on issues of westernization (levels of racialization), race and class.

I propose that the trend of exposing bodies can be read as sexual freedom for those groups who have the capital to impersonate these trends through consumption. It may be interpreted as a kind of sexual revolution; a shift from concealing the female body under the values of the old Purdah system to the freedom not to conceal the female body. But the question arises, who has access to this freedom in the contexts of their lives. Most women cinema viewers do not have this freedom due to their locations of religion and class. This freedom is only present in specific spheres and networks; more so in cities than in villages; more in middle-class circuits than in working-class life; and more in the elite media circuits of Bombay than anywhere else. Freedom is defined as individuality, material success and a self-fashioned body that connotes sexuality. The feminine desire to be sexy in the way a body looks is an indicator of the legitimation of the Western obsession with the body and sex. However, the sexual that is validated by many respondents is not that of the overt sexual visibility of the female body but that of romantic fantasy and poetry. Many authorize the focus on the suppression of sexuality and the subtle verbal nuances of the old films whilst others enjoy the visual excesses of the song and dance styles. What gets valorized are the different ways of consuming, either by criticism, complicity or resistance.

The distinctly classed sensibility expressed by the filmmakers in the production of their cultural products may account for the vituperative criticism of the ideal femininity depicted by Bollywood. The respondents, mostly from working-class origins, express the imposition of another sensibility and this may explain the force of their protest. There is of course contradiction incorporated in these protests because the filmmakers are adapting their products to express diasporic values and aesthetics and sometimes specifically a British Asian style. However, the mismatch could be because the filmmakers have failed to understand the racialised contexts of the British Asian audience. The integral threading of race, class, gender,

religion and nation produces a different subjectivity to that of the filmmakers. The British Asian subjects are not globally mobile and certainly not as west aspiring as the Indian urban yuppies. They are living in the belly of the Imperial beast and their anti-racist and decolonizing imaginary is what maintains the boundary of their identity even as it plays with its Western and Asian subjectivities, disavowing and authorizing one for another depending on the situation and the context.

# CHAPTER 7

## VAMPS AND COURTESANS: SEXUAL EXPRESSION AND TRANSGRESSION

### Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to show respondents' pleasure in regard to the female heroine and her singing and dancing. The ritual repetition of the female body as a sexual spectacle and as a form of soft pornography is narrated in terms of desire, fascination, disgust and frivolity by British South Asian subjects. I explore the discourse of sexual dancing and display of the female heroine and the proliferation of pleasure and consumption regimes that she releases. The earlier cinematic convention of the splitting of sexuality into the westernized Vamp and the virtuous traditional heroine has changed and the contemporary heroine combines both these aspects in her character and performance. I argue that the sexual objectification of women as a style is produced through a number of discourses. I propose that state prohibitions, technological developments and artist's interpretations produce a specific history of sexual objectification of the female form.

The pleasure of the female heroine creates a pleasure of looking (scopophilia), a sexual pleasure, and an erotic pleasure, amongst others. I argue that the female respondents' expression of pleasures can only be understood with reference to a complex model, which includes a continuum of homoeroticism, voyeurism, and lesbian desires. I argue that the excess affective pleasures of the female heroine and the song and dance sequences generates multiple consumption practices, which include miming, impersonation and parody in private and public spaces.

### Section 1: The Pleasures of a Female Icon: Madhuri

Most respondents felt that sexuality was conflated with the female heroine's body. However, five of my respondents, Asha, Samira, Suneeta, Shabnam and Charan argued that Madhuri Dixit's (the female sexual icon of the eighties and nineties) dance performance in this scene was empowering for them because of her performance of sexual assertiveness. They found the excess of feminine sexuality expressed pleasure in complex and multiple ways. Shabnam (draws a breath and) describes the representation of women's bodies and its conflation with sexuality in response to a question on the 'choli ke peechay' scene from the film *Khalnayak*:

The 'Choli Kee Peechay' scene was really sexually provocative and the idea of sexual pleasure as attached to women's bodies...

Some also found it difficult not to criticize the scene for the sexual objectification of women. Charan explains her contradictory feelings:

It was amazing, sexually assertive and provocative but at the same time whose fantasy was being played out – it was definitely male fantasy. A part of me thought it was really cool, so provocative, so upfront, so sexy. On another level I felt it fed into all the other images which objectify women and how that impacts on me as an Indian women, how I am seen, objectified treated. I would like to see women making films for women and women's sexuality portrayed as women find it pleasurable.

Charan expresses pleasure in viewing this sexually explicit scene but also feels that the scene represents a male fantasy. However, most male respondent criticized the over-sexualised female body in the song and dance scenes. This could be because they were talking to a female interviewer and therefore felt too uncomfortable in expressing their sexual pleasure or that they felt the sexual objectification of women was not pleasurable to them. If this is the case, their interpretation can be understood as transgression from the perspective of the coded meaning of the producers, whose aim is to attract a male audience. Most key informants, such as scriptwriter Anjum Rajabali and film journalists such as Indu Mirani and Deepti Kapur from India felt this was a commercial strategy and without it, the films don't do as well. Most films will have one or more sexy song and dance scenes. Charan explains that because of her identification with the heroine she feels she is being sexually objectified as a woman. She expresses anger (like Sonali and Neela in the preceding chapter) and challenges these portrayals to be replaced by films expressing her pleasures; she demands a more respectful and realistic representation of herself. There were several layers intertwined in the respondent's pleasure and disapproval. The sexual assertiveness exhibited in this scene signaled a change.

Most respondents complained that the sexual objectification of women was ethically wrong because it dehumanized women and also because of cultural prohibitions on the public display of the body and sexuality. However, a few women expressed their pleasure of looking and of sexual objectification and saw it as one pleasure amongst others. A few others expressed the pleasures of being objectified in their practices of dressing-up, dancing and drag. Many women expressed homoeroticism and sexual desire for women stars but none of them saw themselves as Lesbian, whereas only one man who identified as a gay cross-dresser, expressed sexual desire for some of the male stars. He expressed fascination for the actresses in terms of his drag practices, where he impersonated certain actresses (Karisma Kapoor) and certain characters, such as sexy vamp figures. Many women admitted to imitating aspects of their favourite heroine and impersonating her clothes, gestures and dances etc. Only one male respondent expressed sexual desire towards women stars (saying 'I like the ladies').



The complexity that several of the respondents were expressing (such as Suneeta, Samira and Charan) in relation to this scene was that though Madhuri (the actress who danced in this scene) obviously danced for an audience, she seemed to also be enjoying her own sexuality. Madhuri's performance of sexual assertiveness invoked discourses of Radha's rebellion and combined it with the Vamp's sexual autonomy. The transgression noticed by women respondents about Madhuri's dance was that, even as she was sexually objectified as a film star, the way she seized control was through her performative labour, which involved a way of dancing which conveyed an expression of enjoyment, control and a professionalism in her work. As Samira commented, it was very difficult to explain, but the femininity that Madhuri Dixit presented was not a girlish one (in comparison with countless other Indian actresses) but a womanly one, in that she seemed to be in control and not passive. She played both the vamp and the courtesan. She was sexually assertive and at the same time she could perform the erotic. She seemed to be playing with the idea of being sexual and enjoying it. In a few extremely popular scenes (*Lazza*, *Devdas* and in *Khalnayak*) she danced with other women stars, where the two women seemed to be enjoying each other's erotic dancing.

Madhuri has had as many accolades amongst women as men and by different generations, as they enjoyed watching her energy and her perfected dance techniques. She had made sexual dancing acceptable because of her unique style. This style includes her ebullient energy, her smile, her capacity as a dancer, her eye and facial movements and her bodily expressions. In this way, Madhuri Dixit carved out a space for herself and for women in the male world of the Indian film industry. Madhuri, by parodying an excess of feminine sexuality and therefore her own objectification in song and dance scenes such as created a space for women to enjoy their own sexuality. Madhuri Dixit deploys the female icon of the fifties, Madhubala's style of verbal assertiveness and perhaps combines it with Madonna's sexual assertiveness. Madonna could well have been an influence in Madhuri's choice of performative repertoire as a feminine icon of Euro-American popular culture. Madhuri's village costume, and her teasing and provoking of the criminal/gangster hero can be seen to simulate some of the Radha/Krishna mythological folk stories. Madhuri's performance in the 'choli kee peechay' scene can be seen as a hybrid female impersonation, which combined aspects of the familiar traditional (religious) discourses of Radha, (she dresses in a traditional village costume) but danced with the sexual assertiveness of a Vamp figure.

The excess of femininity displayed by female stars through explicit sexualisation in dance performances and spectacle not only denaturalises the category of 'woman', but also produces new consumption desires related to the masquerade and the impersonation of feminine 'ideals.' This destabilization of the category of 'woman' challenges its naturalization as practiced in hegemonic heterosexual structures. Butler (1990) has argued that a parody of femininity destabilizes heterosexual norms, as there is no original woman, only a copy of a

copy. However, this is not to say that the explicit sexualization and objectification is always understood in transgressive terms. In fact, most respondents understood it as a dehumanizing gesture, part of the film industry's subservience to a commercial desire. In a similar but different way, the hypermasculine representation of male characters and stars is understood as ridiculous, comic but signalling the performative construction of masculinity.

Madhuri's performance can also be understood by using the notion of masquerade developed by Doane (1982). Feminine masquerade is represented in two forms in the diegetic world of the film. First, the female protagonist in the diegesis can appropriate the gaze, as Shabnam, Samira and Shakira do; or she can masquerade as the controller of the look and hence threaten the conventional system of looking in which the gaze is usually aligned with masculinity. Second, the female protagonist, in the case of the femme fatale can masquerade the feminine by presenting it in excess. The female spectator in the cinema hall who sees through the masquerade understands that femininity can be a performance, and is better able to stand back from the image, and adopt a critical attitude, as Charan does.

The excess intensity of the sexual display in the song and dance sequences produces multiple pleasures and meanings. The affective shock of the images and sounds on the body is experienced as pleasurable as the respondent's body is immersed in the cinema experience. Respondents feel the sensation, which produces mimicry, criticism, expression, creativity, and fulfillment simultaneously.

### **1.1 The Vamp's transformation into the Contemporary Heroine**

The gradual change in sexual norms was represented in films. Some respondents voiced that women were portrayed as victims in old cinema, but there has been a gradual change and that 'they were not crying as much and having 'more fun' in today's films' (Sunita, Samira, Sonali). The trend now was to have women characters looking sexy and wearing very revealing clothes. This may appear to be the same as dressing like the Vamps of older films but she still resorts to traditional values of sacrifice for her sons, husbands, and father (as in the new film *Mohabatein*, 2001). This shift is an interesting one to note in relation to rapid changes taking place in Indian society and culture due to the processes of globalisation. In earlier films, 'vamps' were seen as the 'other' of the heroine in that they represented the sexuality that the heroines were not supposed to have. This depiction was the result of a melodramatic register in which the innocence, purity and virtue of the passive heroine was contrasted with the overt sexuality and scheming corrupt behaviour of the 'vamp.' Aman comments on this:

I think that there is a relationship of Hinduism and its moral and social values and how that positions female and male characters and what kinds of sexual values it espouses, e.g corrupt men and sexy women.

The desire to be a 'vamp' for the heroine is a reflection of the significant changes taking place in Indian culture. This is equivalent of 'femme fatale' in Hollywood noir films, where danger and sexuality were inscribed onto female bodies. Being 'Indian' becomes conflated with signifiers of sexual inhibition and the traditional prohibition for female characters.

However, in the 1970s, there was a significant change in this depiction due to new sexually assertive female stars (in performance of song and dance scenes only) coming into the industry. Actresses like Zeenat Aman, Parvin Baby, and Reena Roy became sexy pin-up women and replaced the cabaret dancer vamp. These heroines wore skimpy clothes and performed sexy dance numbers unlike the previous heroines. Karishma Kapoor, Urmila Matondkar and Raveena Tandan followed these trends in contemporary cinema. The contemporary heroines are seductive melodramatic vamps who embody a sexuality that is supposed to be liberated in appearance but is ultimately sacrificed to the altar of tradition or profit. The imaginary power they represent is further articulated in their ironic, camp sensibility, which tends to downplay any 'serious' emotional complexity or engagement and privileges an aesthetic of spectacle and theatricality. They are first and foremost an appearance, a surface for the aesthetic and sexual pleasure for the masses. However, I argue that a lack of complexity in the characters might represent less of a burden on the sign of the 'woman'. For example the female heroine of the film *Mother India* carried the whole nation on her shoulders compared to the new heroine, who just has to look pretty and dance and carry much less pain. The superficiality and the glamour of the female heroine arguably represent a change in what is expected of women, culturally: they are expected to carry 'less pain' and have more time for their sexual and beauty practices. If this were the case, it would signify a change in women's condition for the better. However, from what Charan and Sunita explained earlier, it is more likely the case that the cultural and social expectations include not only traditional but also modern and postmodern ones. The female ideal then has to be a combination of Mother India, Miss Universe, the Vamp and the courtesan, all in one woman: a considerable and intense pressures on ordinary women. However, the expressions of the contradictions in the new feminine ideal generated definite pleasures regarding her sexual assertiveness when, rarely, that was part of her performance.

## **1.2 The Vamp and the Courtesans: Sexual Expression and Transgressions**

In this section, I contrast the female character of the vamp with that of the courtesan to explore the dialectic of tradition and modernity embodied in Bombay cinema's sexual expression since its birth. I propose that the courtesan, not the Vamp fulfils the demands of the sexual cultural norms of femininity. Vamps of earlier films signified an excess sexuality in their embodiment and camp performance. Vamp's performance was of an exhibition of her sexuality in contrast to the heroine's lack of sexuality. In earlier films, the Vamp is attributed

an excess or deviant sexuality in order to present the heroine as pure, innocent and virtuous. Female characters in earlier cinema were split into a dual oppositional structure whereby the qualities of the 'traditional' Indian woman were opposed to those of the 'modern' Westernised woman. The oppositional structure was a product of post-Independence nationalism in its bid to construct an Indian identity in opposition to criticisms by Colonial rulers of the position of women in India. The nationalist movement constructed a national identity based on the sacredness of women in India's glorious past in which women were 'pure'. The films reflected these ideologies and constructed the Vamp character as sexually corrupt because of her liberated sexuality and her association with western cultural values, ones opposed to Hindu moral values of the 'traditional heroine.'

The vamp was either a cabaret dancer, a stripper at a nightclub, a crude village dancer or sometimes even unrefined courtesan. Usually the vamp was situated in a public space (such as nightclubs) that provided the space for forbidden sexual pleasures that were repressed in other aspects of cultural life. Dancing and levels of nudity were integral parts of her performance. The representation of women in western clothes was often an overt expression of sexuality and was usually associated with Western immorality. The Vamp was a western signifier associated with decadence - signified through a range of 'western' clothes and props. This included, for example, revealing clothes, an English accent, sometimes hair length (length of hair was a very important signifier in old films, as short and blonde hair signified Westernised and corrupt women), movements and many indirect references to her sexual freedom and habits. The revealing clothes included western influences such as trousers and skirts, which allowed for legs to be revealed. The Vamp's goal in life was to entertain men: the hero and the villain. The other fear associated with the Vamps was of her status as a single woman who represented a threat to the sanctity of the family. Vamps were seen as rebellious, modern anti-traditional women who did not fit into the family and did not obey the family rules. She was not the ideal wife, did not obey her husband, did not serve her in-laws, and she certainly was not the ideal mother. These are the roles the heroine was supposed to fulfill and achieve as a woman. The Vamp was often the other woman (mistress) to a wife and was responsible for breaking up families. In some films, she was depicted as a daughter-in-law who broke up extended joint families through her scheming nature. If she was the daughter-in-law, she was responsible for breaking up the family by creating misunderstandings between brothers and forcing her husband to abandon the family. This was considered one of the most evil things a woman can do – to break up a home.

The Courtesan's sexuality was considered acceptable because it was seen as integral to her classical and traditional dance performance. In addition, her association with Urdu poetry and eroticism also made her sexual display acceptable. In this way a hierarchical dichotomy of traditional and Western is set up, where the courtesan as a dancer is equated with traditional

and Indian sexuality. The courtesan film *Umraw Jaan* was set within the nawabi culture of upper-class nineteenth-century Lucknow. The courtesans were poor working-class women who were forced to become a kind of a prostitute. They were seen as a variation on the prostitute because of their training in Urdu poetry and classical dance. In Urdu, they were known as tawaifs<sup>50</sup>. They were depicted by many writers as cultural and language mediators. However, their work was to entertain rich high society men, artistically or sexually. In the famous courtesan film, *Pakeezah (The Pure Soul)*,<sup>51</sup> the contradiction of her impure sexual work was resolved by highlighting her pain and the purity of her soul.

The courtesan films often invoked Radha mythology. The courtesan songs express the poetry of pain of not finding love, which draws from the feminine aesthetic of Radha mythology. In mythology of Radha evokes discourses of female sexual pleasure and rebellion. She is ascribed a sexuality which transgresses many sexual taboos of Indian culture. Firstly, in one interpretation she is a married woman who falls in love with Krishna who is younger than

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<sup>50</sup> Historically, a tawaif was a courtesan similar to a prostitute who entertained the Muslim nobility of South Asia, particularly during the Mughal era. They were skilled singers (North Indian classical music), dancers (usually kathak), and poets (Urdu poetry). They were generally highly educated and refined. The tawaif is celebrated in the films *Pakeezah (Pure Heart, 1972, Kamal Amrohi)*, *Umraw Jaan (1981, Muzaffer Ali)*, and *Devdas (2002, Sanjay Leela Bansali)*. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

<sup>51</sup> *Pakeezah* is a cult film about a familiar story of the prostitute with the heart of gold. Perhaps Meena Kumari best known film, the film had been planned by her and husband Amrohi since 1958. When the two of them separated in 1964, filming came to a halt. After some years by which time Meena Kumari was suffering from alcoholism, she decided to complete the film before she died in 1972. Meena Kumari excelled at tragedy and she became personified as the archetypal good suffering Hindu wife through many roles. However, She was one of few actress who could sell a film on the strength of her name alone. She was also an accomplished Urdu writer and had several poems published by the poet, lyric and scriptwriter, Gulzar after her death. She battled alcoholism and loneliness and finally died, alone, in 1972. *Pakeezah* is the story of a courtesan Shahibjaan (Meena Kumari) whose mother was also a dancer and courtesan Nargis (played by Meena Kumari). Her mother's dreams of escaping her dishonourable life failed when her husband Shahabuddin's (Ashok Kumar) family rejected her. Shahibjaan's is prevented from seeing her father by her mother's sister who has brought her up. Shahibjaan falls in love with a mysterious stranger who turns out to be her father's nephew, Salim (Raaj Kumar). Salim's father forbids the marriage. Shahibjaan dances at Salim's arranged wedding where Shahabuddin discovers her identity and claims her as his child. Finally, her desires are fulfilled and she marries Salim, leaving her past behind. <http://www.upperstall.com/films/pakeezah.html>

her. Secondly the explicit poetry of her erotic and sensual obsession expresses a feminine sexuality, which transgresses many cultural codes. In this way, the figure of Radha is often evoked to signify feminine sexual rebellion. The Radha/Krishna discourse deconstructs mainstream religious and cultural hegemony by not focusing on the cultural ideals of wifely duty but transgressing those norms through a feminine aesthetic of devotion. The courtesan, who is also a figure of yearning and also deploys an erotic sensibility and devotion, is another signifier of cultural ideals of femininity.

### **1.3 The Production of Female sexual objectification**

The depiction of the sexualised female form has been an integral part of classical Indian art. The sexual objectification of women in Bombay cinema has been historically produced through a number of discourses. There are four moments in the production of the present sexual excess of the female sexual forms. The first is the antecedence of traditional female eroticism in Indian sculpture and art, assigned to goddesses and temple dancers. A colonial (Victorian) criticism of these sexualized erotic images was counteracted by the post-Independence justification that focused on their aesthetic and divine value. The spiritual meaning of these figures was emphasized. The second discourse is the way traditional painting aesthetics deployed feminine sexuality to define female identity. Dwyer and Patel (2002) argue that the hybrid paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, who combined the colonial technology of printing with traditional mythical erotic figures of goddesses in painting styles, highlighted the sexuality of the female form by emphasizing female physicality. The mass reproduction of his work led to distortions resulted in a vulgarity of crudely suggestive female figures in calendar art (Dwyer and Patel, 2002). This style was transferred to popular cinematic imagery. It is because of this, sexual objectification becomes the defining characteristic within these images.

The third discourse is the way cinema producers developed strategies to circumvent national censorship laws (around the 1950s) introduced by the state to create an ideal citizen and civic society. The censorship laws prohibited any sexual contact between the male and female protagonists by concentrating on sexualising the female body. The final discourse in the production of feminine sexual objectification is the influence of Hollywood and an MTV aesthetic, combined with further technological innovations in filming and editing styles. The practice of the female body as a fragmented sexual spectacle may have gained popularity due to the success of MTV videos.

### **1.4 Female Sexual autonomy: A new sensibility**

It is rare in Bombay cinema for female characters to express sexual desire and pleasure. However, this has been changing as, many women respondents expressed when articulating

their response to the 'Choli kee pee-chay' scene and a number of other films. Samira recounts coming across a song advertisement and describes her surprise at the sexual assertiveness of the female protagonist :

I have mentioned this scene before in "Babydoll song" which you have not seen. This woman is just really really 'giving it' and enjoying it. And it does not look like she is doing this dance for men it's just she is really having a good time and she is hiding this magazine that she has been looking at which is male pornographic book of men, naked men. She just looks in that and then she is hiding it. It's not a film it's a song. Its like just the sense of women I find I am more able to say now she looks sexy and she is really good and sort of maybe freedom for women to be not necessarily just be for the camera or be for men but just be for themselves and also be for other women I think. And that could be in terms of role models or in terms of women-women relationships or could be a bridge onto sexuality between women.

Samira's excitement and pleasure in narrating this advert is because of a new feminine sexual autonomy being expressed, which she feels is 'not for men', and not for the camera. She feels there is a new sexual sensibility, which breaks cultural norms as women exercise their voice in expressing sexual pleasure. She has seen so many images where women are performing 'sexy' for men. She wants to reclaim this for herself where this woman seems to be communicating a control over her sexuality and enjoyment of her sexual autonomy. This is rare in Bombay cinema and therefore she stands out as a sexual role model for Samira. Samira feels this representation could open up other instances where women are shown to be having relationships with each other, including lesbian relationships. In the 'choli kee pee-chay' scene there were two women singing with each other but it was performed for the pleasure of the hero. The two women dancing together generated pleasure, as this is a rare occurrence. Sunita expresses that there is a change in the portrayal of women's relationship to other women on screen:

Yeah , yeah and I think that more and more women are dancing together. Even in *Devdas* there was Madhuri and this other woman dancing together.

In *Devdas* Madhuri plays a courtesan who dances with the other heroine, the wife of a rich landlord. They dance together for a collective audience celebrating a festival for the mother Goddess Durga. Goddess Durga is signified as a protector and a warrior by carrying weapons in her numerous hands, sitting on a lion. She is depicted as a tranquil warrior as opposed to the goddess Kali, who is depicted as an angry goddess on a rampage. The dancing in this case could be said to be for the gaze of the mother goddess Durga, a celebration both of her and their assertive femininity. Samira responds to a question on women's relationship with other women in Bombay cinema:

[The]....places I have seen two women dancing together is in *Pakeezah*, the courtesans and they were dancing for men. But there is something about women enjoying other women, whichever way you look at it.

Sunita and Samira express pleasure in seeing female camaraderie. The transgressive potential of the scenes of women dancing for and with each other were huge because in the sixty years of Indian cinema, women almost exclusively dance for a male audience and are not shown dancing with and for other women. (Though friendship between women is often explored through notions of Sakhi in Indian literature and in films). The female heroines often have a group of friends that they giggle and go out with, a kind of sister clutch. The friends act as chaperones or as confidants. But often these friends are not given much significance and are discarded in the film narrative for heterosexual romance and the family<sup>52</sup>. In this representation, women are portrayed as nameless collective that only allows for one or two female figures to emerge as individuals in comparison to men.

### 1.5 Homoerotic and Lesbian Desires

The female star's sexuality was a key component of their performance. Many women respondents expressed sexual attraction for the female stars and for their performance of the vamp, the courtesan and the mother amongst other characters. In the Vamp character, sexuality was staged as excess whereas in the courtesan character, it is staged in its suppression. The women respondents expressed strong emotional and sexual identifications with some of these actresses/stars. It was quite common to hear stories of love: total infatuation, adoration and sexual attraction for women participants towards female stars<sup>53</sup>. The female sexual pleasure of the female star is common but not usually expressed sexually for fear of heterosexual repercussions. Asha expresses her feelings:

I find many of the film actresses extremely sexually attractive. Parveen Baby was so so sexy. And what about Madhuri Dixit when she does that dance?

Asha draws a breath when referring to the infamous 'Cholee Ke Peechay' scene. Parveen Baby is one of two heroines regarded as modern and sexy who replaced the Vamps in Indian cinema. Asha expresses her sexual pleasure, whilst Shakira's infatuation may be more complex. Shakira remembers the first time she saw Rekha in the film, *Umrao Jaan*<sup>54</sup>, in which she plays a courtesan:

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<sup>52</sup> An exception to this is the Deepa Mehta's film 'Fire' made in 1996, which depicted a lesbian love story.

<sup>53</sup> See also Jackie Stacey 'Stargazing' 1994 for similar findings.

<sup>54</sup> *Umrao Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali) is based on the Urdu novel *Umrao Jaan Ada*, written by Mirza Mohammed Hadi Ruswa. Based on the 19th century Lucknow Nawab culture, this is the story of a courtesan who goes through the different stages of her life and finally makes a futile search for her parents. She grows up to



I was infatuated with Rekha, I was age of 4, 5, 6 can't remember, watched with my mum.

Shakira's infatuation originates when she was a young girl and is associated with practices of watching with her mother. Shakira's infatuation may carry an affective charge of her relation with her mother, or it may be homoerotic desire for a feminine ideal of beauty, or it may be a sexual obsession. It is difficult to decipher and may be better understood as an amalgamation of multiple desires and identifications. In exploration of the relationship between star and respondents, the latter often talked about the star's performance in terms of her body, beauty and sexuality. Shakira talked about Rekha's duskiness and her very different beauty. The stars used these components to perform and exude their glamour. This also included the use of clothes, jewellery and hairstyles, which were endlessly mimicked in a bid to reach an ideal of femininity. Her face, her eyes, her smile, and her hair were surveyed, admired and desired for the spectator self. Sunita fetishized Nargis's unusual face and her smile. The star's performance was a combination of all these components. Shabnam expresses her the voyeuristic and sexual pleasures of viewing the female heroines but proposes that her gaze different from a male gaze.

I certainly enjoy looking at women's bodies, I am really into looking at women's bodies and very much see them in a sexual way, so in one way I can understand film makers masculine gaze but I suppose I have a different gaze, different sensuality. I would think women directors or some women directors would have a different sensual gaze.

These three respondents express desires that are complex and do not have boundaries and names: as Shabnam explains, it is a different gaze and a different sensuality. Within Feminist film criticism there have been many who were unhappy with the masculinization of the female spectator; as postulated by Mulvey(1975), and forwarded the notion of a female gaze in relation to woman's erotic desires and relationships with other women. Mulvey's (1975) theories did not account for the popularity of films with a female audience or for a woman viewer like Shabnam, who enjoys looking at women sexually. Shabnam explains her sexual

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love and admire the power she possesses to control men's hearts with her beautiful voice and her dances. The film is famous for its Urdu poetry, classical dance, rich costume design, and for the star quality of Rekha, the lead actress. The story is set in the year 1840, two young girls are kidnapped from their family and sold to two different households, one to a woman who trains courtesans (tawaif). Umrao is introduced to the world of classical dance and music. She becomes a successful courtesan, writing her own poems and attracting many wealthy admirers due to her skills as a poet, singer and dancer. She falls in love with a wealthy Nawab Sultan (Farooque Sheikh) but the Nawab is not permitted to marry a courtesan. Umrao tries to leave her profession by hoping to marry her bandit lover but he is killed by the local police and she is forced to return to her old life. The British attack the city of Lucknow and Umrao is forced to leave the city. On her journey she stops in a small village near Lucknow where she performs as a courtesan. Umrao realizes that this is her birthplace. Her excitement of reuniting with her family are hampered by her brother who does not want the family name dishonoured by her profession. Umrao is once again alone in the world, left only with her profession and her poetry.

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

pleasure in looking at women's bodies and identifies with the masculine erotic gaze but at the same time signals to the complexity of her viewing pleasures. In a response to a question on the scene from *Khalnayak*, Samira also expresses a different pleasure to that of Shabnam's. Shabnam had expressed amongst others a voyeuristic and a sexual pleasure and had voiced that she liked looking at women's bodies. Samira expresses pleasure in the different and layered meanings of the language and in the contradictions between the visual and the oral. She points to the significance of language in sexual pleasure. Samira elucidates on her pleasures of playful language in this scene:

I quite enjoy, I mean first thing is that Madhuri Dixit is really good, I think she is very beautiful. The way I saw it was that just the words of the song were quite interesting, Choli kee peechay kya hai and then a man must be thinking breasts and then she is saying 'Mera Dil hai', that my heart, that is I am behind my choli (blouse). It just symbolises how everything that song symbolises motherhood symbolises sexuality symbolises you know. She is saying a lot. And the way she dances to that 'cause she keeps moving her hips so it's sexual and then she keeps saying Mera dil hai. And dil is really something its almost like you know in metaphorical language within the Asian world you know dil [heart] is everything. Your dil [heart] is everything. Its quite a powerful statement to make...

The complexity of pleasure, identification and desire become evident here. Samira's expression of the complexity of her desires is an implicit critique of the usual patriarchal and heterosexual definitions of sexual pleasure (voyeuristic as theorized by Mulvey). Samira expresses desire for the actress but also for the poetry and her movements. She identifies with the emotional content of the language and how it is performed. Some women respondents claimed that their relationship to sex is through sharing of an evocative language, focused on poetry, enunciation and orality. I explored this in the previous chapter, where some respondents felt sex was deferred to romance. This may have been to circumvent censorship laws. However, a genre had developed within the films where erotic poetry conveys the sexual charge. A dichotomy was set up where romance and eroticism was viewed as pure love whereas sex was seen as sin and therefore impure and contaminating. The discourse of the prohibition on sexuality may have originated in Victorian influences on the Indian imaginary. The erotic poetry infused with pain was the aesthetic convention of the Courtesan films a way of purifying the sexual work.

## **1.6 The Pleasures of Looking**

A few of the respondents felt that the diasporic film 'Fire' (1996, Deepa Mehta) was exemplary in representing their pleasures of looking and opened up a window for female desire. Shabnam explores her lesbian pleasures through the cross-dressing scene and expresses the dearth of images of lesbian sexual expression:

In 'Fire' there was a big departure from 'normal' portrayal of sex by representing sexual scene between two women in contrast to heterosexual set up in most films. Sexuality is very much based on heterosexuality though in one love scene woman dressed as man is flirting with the heroine and it's quite a lesbian erotic scene but its not the norm in comparison to the rest of the world. There is a reclaiming of lesbian and gay erotic scene by the Lesbian and Gay community, as a re-reading of classical images, also quite often people change clothes and this changes sex of the person and the personality of the character.

Shabnam expresses her pleasures in looking at a lesbian erotic scene, which is rare in cinema and criticizes the heterosexual hegemony. Stacey (1994) in an article 'Desperately seeking difference' takes up the question of spectatorship in relation to female homoeroticism. She points out that psychoanalytical theories of identification, which are based on binary opposites, tend to masculinize the homosexual woman. This is true for Shabnam. Samira points out the importance of the diasporic film *Fire* (1996) in opening up a space for lesbian relationships on the screen. Similarly, Samira points to the film as visibilising lesbians in the South Asian context and expanding the continuum of female sexual pleasure and autonomy:

Samira: Like I said I don't know how big the window is but its there and for something like *Fire* to be able to hit the screens. I think its not going to introduce something new to the world but make visible what has been invisible for a long time but its nice to see.

Apart from *Fire* (1996) and *Mandi* (1983) (not Bollywood films), no films have shown a woman's sexual desire for another woman. Though there are marginal scenes in a few films that allude to a lesbian sexuality. One such film was *Rajia Sultan* (played by Hema Malini) is the story of a queen who married a slave. One scene showed the queen's sexual pining for her male (of course!) lover being satisfied by her female (Parvin Baby) maid. The actual kiss between the two women was (of course) hidden by a feather umbrella and was shown as erotic rather than sexual. Nonetheless a lesbian relationship of some sort was hinted at.

### **1.7 A Complex Model of Feminine Pleasures**

The sexualized feminine image becomes a space of critique and affect. The narratives articulate not only the criticisms and intense contestations but also the sublime pleasure of connection, intimacy and eroticism of these images. Ideal femininity is defined by physical appearance, sexual attractiveness, and ability to dance, and being youthful. The identification between the female respondents and the star is based on sameness and difference. The yearning for an imaginary or real loss, or for ambitions for the future is explored through this relationship. A desire for recognition and validation underpins these identifications. Mary Ann Doane (1982) theorizes the positions available to female spectators in psychoanalytical terms where she uses the notion of masquerade to explore female spectatorship. In order to establish a more complex model of spectatorship, Stacey argues (1994) that sexuality and

gender should be seen as separate categories. In order to explore the pleasures on offer for the female spectator, Stacey suggests a number of possible pleasures of spectatorship for the female viewer: representation of woman's desire for another woman which constitutes a re-enactment of an experience of childhood with the mother; representation of woman's desire to identify with a female ideal; representation of woman as the active bearer of the look. Stacey concludes that existing theories of difference which separate out desire from identification fail to provide an adequate understanding of the pleasures offered to the female spectator in many films where one woman's obsession with another woman expresses desire and identification as interwoven. Stacey (1994) also rejects other authors' (Mulvey 1975, 1981, Doane 1982, 1987) dismissals of relations between women and their female stars as only those of 'self-love' or 'narcissisms' and instead formulates a theory of multiple homoerotic pleasures embedded in intimate relationships with female stars. From the analysis of the respondents here, I would propose that this space between the spectator and her feminine ideal has multiple pleasures, which can be explained by homoerotic intimacies, but narcissism and self-love are also part of these pleasures. Identifications and desires are enmeshed, as this is a space of fantasy. These identifications are based on an understanding of self, which has certain qualities but lacks certain other qualities in comparison to the ideal. Both these are explored in the spectator's relationship with her ideal, in a bid to affirm herself, to reject herself and to push herself towards a process of an imaginary self in the future. The struggles of the feminine ideal/idol are a key point of identification, which signifies that the female spectators value the ordinariness of these icons as this gives them understanding of their pain. This comprehension may also give them a sense of mastery or a sense of knowing over the star's life. One of the pleasures is the actual process of having a relationship with a feminine star even if it is an imaginary one. The knowledge of her struggles adds affect to the imaginary relationship in the belief that the star may share the viewer's ordinariness in her own struggles. The self and the ideal relation require identifications.

The imaginative play with different selves is an escape from the daily drudgery of structured work. This is a space of leisure. The spectator and star relationship necessarily involves cinematic fantasies. It also involves an escape to a different time and space. The relationship to a future self as that of the ideal is also part of this equation. The desire for becoming someone else or imbibing a star quality either by mimicking clothes, jewellery, hair style, make-up are all part of cinematic experience.

## Section 2: The Pleasures of Feminine Self-transformations

### 2.1 Transformation through Impersonation: Young girls/boys at Home

In this section, I explore the practice of masquerade by respondents in relation to cultural ideals of femininity. The central role of the body in actively creating a new space of pleasure through performance of the impersonation of the female heroine is outlined in this section. Neela, who is an overseas Mauritian university student aged twenty-two describes her 'dressing up' practices:

I started watching it in Egypt, when I was very young, because the culture is totally different from ours and we were cut off from our culture. My dad used to buy videocassettes from Saudi Arabia. The language was so different; to watch Hindi movies was to feel at home. Everyday, we used to watch, we watched *Silsila*, *Mr India* etc. My sister and I loved Indian movies, we were crazy, and we knew the dialogues off by heart. As a child I used to like the songs, the Indian outfit, grow my hair long. My sister and I used to pretend to dress up like Rekha and dance, as in *Umraw Jaan*.

Neela describes how when she was growing up, she used to dress up with her sister and use fake hairpieces, and her mothers' expensive clothes and jewellery to pretend to be her favourite female star, Rekha. Her father was a diplomat in Egypt and they felt culturally isolated. She explained that they used to watch Indian cinema videos almost every day with their mother. Their mother missed her home in India and the sounds and images of the cinema kept her sane. Neela and her family were from Mauritius and she explained how national television often had dance competitions based on cinematic songs and dances. The impersonation of feminine icons and glamour practices are used by Neela and her family as a cultural memory device. These rituals of embodied practice allow specific cultural ideals of femininity to be reproduced. By participating in these practices the songs and dance performances are also remembered and transmitted from generation to generation.

Young girls and boys often dressed up and impersonated the song and dance sequences from Indian cinema. The affective intensity of engagement in terms of practices of watching and dressing up, mimicry and impersonation was more common for younger generations. Younger women who had restricted freedom and lived at home were more likely to utilize Bollywood as a space of leisure. Two young women respondents, Ruji and Kiran, both told me that they love Aishwarai Rai and love the glamour attached to their feminine ideal. They often engage in impersonating the female stars (also the male star) when they are going to a wedding, by mimicking the style of clothes, fake contact lenses, make-up and jewellery. The embodied practices of impersonation through dressing up allows for momentary transformation to take place in this instance, and in many other narratives of respondents. Young girls and boys often perform in public spaces of family networks, weddings or

community events. Usually, this has an age limit. After a certain age, it is not seen appropriate for girls and boys to participate due to cultural sexual norms of femininity and masculinity. In cases of cultural and personal isolation, this is a strategy to transcend the ordinary everyday routine by becoming someone else, someone who is glamorous, beautiful, and someone who is seen as extraordinary. These extraordinary beings are stars or celebrities who are constructed as having the desired but excessive masculinity and femininity. For young girls and boys, the excessive style is magical, magnetic and thrilling.

The affect of excess of the female body on the cinema screen produces multiple embodied desires, which individualizes the spectator and produces different consumption practices. This involves imitation, impersonation and performance of glamour and drag at home and in public spaces. The pleasure of self-transformation is the motivating device in glamour practices, which convert the person into her ideal femininity and allows for an escape to an imaginary identity. The cinematic female stars such as Madhuri Dixit or the iconic Vamp, Helen or Rekha as the courtesan in the film *Umraw Jaan* or Karishma Kapoor in her infamous song, 'I am too sexy for my body' (which the Hindu nationalists banned for a short time) often provide the role models for drag performances. This can be staged at home, in weddings, at community dance performances, in nightclubs or on television shows. Impersonation and glamour practices are leisure activities that transcend daily drudgery. The pleasure of imagination and creativity in converting external and bodily appearance into different and ideal selves is a pleasurable embodied practice. To play with one's identity in this physical and material realm is an exciting and energising activity. The song and dance scenes are appropriated, redesigned, mimed and reproduced for a different audience. The female heroines masquerade different femininities, some endorsed by cultural norms, others produced as prohibitions. The respondents copy these impersonations and produce parodies of masculinities and femininities.

The creation of self as a glamorous subject is necessarily a device that crosses the private and public interface. Bollywood continues to hold the fascination of otherness for British South Asian subjects; simultaneously being familiar and yet still distantly comprehended. The validation of Bollywood glamour comes after years of feeling not valued or that bodies like ours cannot be fashionable. As Naseema pointed out (in an earlier chapter), mainstream British popular culture negated, invisibilised and excluded her body, whereas she had felt validated by Bombay cinema. However, newer norms of body and beauty in Bombay cinema had left her feeling demoralized. The richly textured and decorative designs of Indian clothes, make-up and hair accessories, borrowed and mimicked from the newly emergent, and globally legitimated 'Indian Miss Universe' beauty industry; and validated by the mainstream British culture as exotic, disperse their authority to British Asian subjects. Indian glamour has a fascination because mainstream Western society validates it as exotic and successful. The

exotic style creates a fascination for the younger generation due to feelings that this is part of their culture. A discourse of pride emerges which may be associated with discourses of exoticism. The affect of exoticism is appropriated and racist Orientalist politics is disavowed and overlooked. The desire for origin, purity and a yearning for affirmation may be a reason for the appropriation of self-exoticism as a space of belonging for some respondents. The visibilizing of the shamed and the concealed Asian body as an exotic spectacle may act as a similar strategy to the visibilising of the sexual female body in order to claim a public space. There is also a nostalgic currency attached to this due to the feelings of not belonging for so long as some respondents voiced. The intensity of attachment to the idea of an authentic identity and a reverence of origins could be due to feelings of uncertainty and confusion, when remembering the pain of not belonging, of being alienation and isolation.

## **2.2 Drag Practices: Private/Public Feminine impersonation**

Salim who is a British Bangladesi gay man from East London, aged twenty-four, (works long hours in a restaurant as a waiter) explained to me that his drag practices originated at home when he was young and his mum used to dress him as a girl (because she did not have a daughter but had sons) and as he got older he used to help his younger sisters dress-up and imitate specific heroines by doing their make up and hair. Once Salim moved out from his parent's home, he decided to start dressing up with his friends. The feminine and intimate space of home is where boys and girls' desire for impersonation and masquerade is expressed (as described by Neela, Kiran and Ruji, Samira, Irfan and Salim). Cinema experiences were remembered with yearning for a lost idealised childhood, a space of celebration of femininity, intimacy and nurturance. The practices of imitation of the female heroine may act as a substitute ritual for loss of a past self which had participated in feminine intimacies. The affect of the heroine and her performance creates intensity and an energy which may initiate desires for self-transformation through the glamour practices of dressing up and imitating, to transcend the ordinary self and to fulfill the desire to become and inhabit imaginary selves. The repetition and excess attached to the Vamp objectifies and therefore allows an excess of sexual desire to be conveyed to the viewer. The embodied imitations include the heroine's appearance, songs and dances. The impersonation practices reenact excessive sexuality, otherwise a cultural taboo. The consumption of the female heroine by the respondents includes pleasures of excess. Repetition, masquerade and exhibitionism (based on antecedents from Indian theatre and painting) are modes of address that achieve this hysterical sexualised feminine performance. The affect of the sexual feminine performance creates practices of masquerades, parody and mimicry. The role of music and dance in creating the feminine is crucial. Salim explains his interest in drag as an extension of his relationship to his sisters and mother:

Well, my sister...from a very young age they have known I like make up and dressing up. My mum when I was young used to dress me up in women's clothes....When I was born, I did not have a sister and my mum used to dress me up in girls' clothes: frocks and sari...so this became a habit for me. My two sisters came after me. Sometimes I do make up for my sister or comb their hair and so my interest increases. So, I have looked after my two sisters, wherever I go, I will bring make up, earrings, rings, sari, ...so whenever I have money I buy these things for them. Now that I earn and they are both married, I buy these things for them – my interest increases. Since I was young I have had this hobby of doing make up and everyone in my family knows this. When first time I did drag, I told my sister that I was going in drag to a party for fun. She told me, its ok once, but don't do it again. I wore her jewellery.... I have befriended lots of gay friends in club Kali, so my interest in drag has increased.

Salim loves the elaborate costumes, jewellery, the make-up and the hairstyles. He also loves dances and learns the bodily postures and facial gestures of the dances by watching and practicing cinema at home with his sisters. The practices of glamour and feminine impersonation are common drag performances. Salim's pleasurable practices of creating a feminine self through could be due to cultural prohibitions on expressions of his feminine self. Salim re-enacts the dance movements learnt at home in front of friends. He says:

I learn dances from films. You know, *Devdas* 'dola re dola,' I watched even yesterday to learn that dance but its not easy, very difficult. I can do a little but can't do it exactly. I love to learn the film dances and songs.

Salim learns the dance moves with a group of friends, when they have private dance and drag parties and go to a South Asian lesbian and gay club, Club Kali. The ritual repetition of cross-dressing expresses Salim's feminine self and provides him with a community of friends who have similar pleasures and desires.

We all sit down together and ask one person to dance to a particular song. Sometimes we give parties too, where we have a video camera and there is dancing. We dress up in drag and go to Kali, twice a month.

Salim explains his apprehensions and fears of being found out and isolated by family and friends for dancing in drag in a public space as well as a gradual acceptance of his drag practice.

Kali I like a lot. I used to feel very scared before but now I don't feel so scared. I used to feel scared in case somebody recognized me. One time I went there I bumped into somebody I know. What can I do, this is what I enjoy. Now I even take the bus when I am in drag, I don't care.



Club Kali<sup>55</sup> permitted Salim a supportive space free from cultural injunctions against homosexuality and the pleasures of cross-dressing by taking away the heterosexual imperative that if you have a male body, you cannot express a feminine self. He explained that dancing and meeting gay men from different backgrounds, Asian, White and Black allowed him to accept his sexuality and his pleasures in practices of drag. He also pointed out that one of his enjoyments was Club Kali's cultural heterogeneity compared to the exclusive Asian spaces he was used to. Club Kali plays a range of Bollywood mixes, Asian underground and Black British music. Bollywood's song and dance sequences, the melodramatic style and the spectacular costumes are impersonated, celebrated and parodied. Bombay cinema is appropriated and reclaimed by South Asian lesbian, gay and transsexual communities to create a space free from homophobic prejudices. In the past, London's cosmopolitan dance scene had excluded and delegitimised the Asian culture from being fashionable or of significance in terms of glamour. However now, Bollywood's much despised, crass, and crude excesses of masculinity, femininity and sexual spectacle are harnessed and masqueraded to provide multiple pleasures for diverse groups of people. Men dressing in drag and impersonating femininity are mocked and marginalized in the mainstream cultures of White, Black and Asian communities. as Salim explained. He fears being found out are a consequence of the humiliation attached to cross-dressing and being gay in South Asian communities. These pleasures that are despised in mainstream spaces are validated and normalized in Club Kali and a new public sphere comes into existence.

### **2.3 Public Song Miming and Dance Impersonation**

Some respondents found the practices of miming songs pleasurable and routinely participated in these practices. The repetitive ritual practices of singing, watching the song scenes with family members, miming the facial and bodily gestures of the song and dance, hearing it in cars, at home and listening to it individually or with loved others gives these associations an intimate place in the respondent's memory. The bodily practices and rituals retain the memory which if articulated may invite negative evaluation. One of the main reasons for the popularity of Bombay films is its music, songs and dances. Shahid elaborates on two reasons why Bombay cinema is popular in Britain for young men: for listening to music; and for ogling at images of beautiful women:

I think its because of the music and and and I can say from the boys or the male side its because of the what women are like, they try to bring in the best looking woman into the film and I think

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<sup>55</sup> Club Kali – I visited Club Kali several times over the years 1999-2005, mostly for dancing but also for observation between 2003 to 2004 2004 for observations and to target interviewees.

it's just to see that and I don't think many people are interested in the story, the young group I don't think.

The repetitive rituals and performances of song and dance competitions are practices of nostalgia and also of cultural memory and learning. Aman, a British Indian Guyanese university student, aged thirty-three who lives in London, describes dance competitions on Guyanese television:

Well, I can guarantee that Indians in Guyana watch it as a cultural resource. They have dance competitions on TV where they mimic the songs they like the best, they have kids dress up in their favourite actresses, they have weddings where they model them on the weddings of the film. They sing in Hindi.

He describes these practices as a cultural resource for Indo-Guyanese<sup>56</sup>. The female heroine and her performance of song and dance acts as a mediator of memory and is very popular. Aman conveys his surprise:

And I was really pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed it. Because I went in with quite I would not say negative expectation but everybody in England always, oh ya! Bollywood, song and dance. They love to sing, so I went there with my friend and I said we will stay there for an hour and we ended up staying for the whole three hours....

Viewing the song and dance scenes was one of the most popular activities amongst the majority of the respondents. Nowadays, there are countless television song programmes that cater for this activity on satellite television. In fact, some channels such as Channel V and MTV India only show film song and dance videos. The aesthetic of Bombay cinema is constructed on its excesses and adds to this 'extraordinary' affect. The key features of star, song, spectacle relies on the strategies of excessive affect. The song and dance sequences borrow and mix from a number of sources. The exhibitionist or presentational mode of address of Bombay cinema has developed due to its heterogeneous genealogy and its reliance on the economy of the market. The rural carnivalesque festival scenes are combined with the cabaret and club scenes and MTV style is added to the camera work to create the new song and dance sequences. The heterogeneous modes of production create intertextual and multiple sites of signification, meanings and affect. The intertextual signification chains leave the spectator with the affect of excess. They undergo affective engulfment. Vamsee Juluri's

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<sup>56</sup> See Narmala Halstead's work "Belonging and respect notions vis-à-vis modern East Indians: Hindi movies in the Guyanese East Indian Diaspora" in Raminder Kaur and Ajay Sinha (eds.) *Bollyworld: Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*. 2005.

(2003) research on Indian music television explores this phenomenon with an Indian audience. Film songs are re-mixed as part of Bhangra and Afro-Caribbean music, for instance by Apache Indian, so that they can be part of a club scene which attracts younger viewers. This forms part of the global music flow. Recently a newer marketing strategy has targeted mobile phone users by providing film song tunes. Ravi Vasudevan, a cinema and cultural theorist, sees this as an 'autonomisation of culture.'

You can't get away from cinema. Music is big business as part of the film industry- as a launching pad – but after that, it has a life of its own, though there has been a downturn in the music industry due to piracy or there is an anxiety about the downturn. Interview, October 2004, Delhi.

He discusses the deployment of songs scenes by different filmmakers to express different desires. He points out that the new trend in contemporary Bollywood is to articulate neo-traditional rituals and desires through the staging of weddings and religious rituals through songs and dance:

Songs are critical to film as a business and are central in producing the cinematic world. Songs play very different roles in different filmmaker's film. For example in David Dhawan's film, which showcase Govinda as a star, his singing and dancing destabilizes the public space of the street. Another example is when songs are used to express festivals or rituals of weddings. There is an expression of ritual forms in Films like DWDLJ where a neo-tradition expression of desire is articulated by songs of festivity (Karva Chauth) and weddings. Other filmmakers such as Varma separate out the song and use it as a music video which we can call the Hollywoodisation of Bollywood. Interview October 2004, Delhi.

#### **2.4 Consumption and Pleasure of 'Dressing up' and Glamour at Weddings**

Weddings have been marketed by the Bollywood industries as a benign space of celebration of the family (effacing the history of dowry). Sonali pointed out that there was a new trend in British Asian or American Indian films that feature wedding scenes as celebratory social events. Sonali claims:

I think that's become a new phenomena and I think that's more about people who live outside of Asia like Gurinder Chada or Mira Nair and I think that's very very recent thing, in the last five years. That's only because those people only have or able to kind of re-enact any cultural thing through a wedding because that's the only time that you are able to dress up. You have music and you have the odd fights and a lot of emotions come out at weddings too which was very prevalent in Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*.

Weddings are constructed as social gatherings, which generate a carnival like atmosphere, of celebration, music and the breaking down of everyday rules. Many respondents like Salim, Sonali, Kiran Samira, became excited when talking about weddings in Bombay cinema,

whilst others expressed cynicism and made fun of its presumed importance, though recognizing that weddings are a significant South Asian cultural marker. Weddings have always been spaces of glamour, dressing up, catwalk, celebration, chaos and carnival in ordinary South Asian lives. Due to their crucial cultural importance in South Asian lives, many permit themselves to overspend on the preparation for this event. In the recent genre of Bollywood films targeting a diasporic audience, weddings are staged as a neo-traditional desire for authentic rituals. Marriages and weddings are staged as central song and dance events in many Bombay films. They have become a crucial component of the 'masala film formula', which previously used to prioritise star, songs and spectacle. The film weddings are staged and framed as grand spectacles for community celebration and also function as a key site of consumption. Every aspect of the cinematic wedding is fetishized: the bride and groom's dress, the wedding stage, the songs, the group dance, the bindis, the jewellery, the henna patterns, and the hairstyle. Every aspect is mimicked by an increasingly eager and desiring South Asian consumer audience. In fact some respondents commented on how Bollywood weddings have changed the set up of ordinary weddings in people's lives. They have become a staging for a glamorous event. The notion of Asian glamour has been an impossible ideal in the austere lives of British South Asians up until the late eighties where the perception was that Asians only worked hard and did not participate in leisure activities. Sunita asserts:

South Asians don't go out to eat or the theatre, cinema watching is one of the few leisure activities they take part in.

Since the 1990s, there has been a change in British South Asians participation in leisure activities as evident from changing consumption patterns involving eating out, shopping and going on holidays. The increase in large weddings is also a trend in this pattern of increased consumption. Weddings are life events, which families begin planning for when their children are born. As Suneeta, Salim and Maninder told me, Asian families typically spend £25,000 or more on its preparation and staging (both Salim and Maninder planned their sister's weddings). The gossip circulating in the community networks on how much such and such a family spent on their children's wedding is a routine part of the conversation of the first generation and sometimes the second generation too. Weddings and marriages were one of the few places and spaces of glamour. Salim expresses his enjoyment of weddings in a film in terms of clothes and jewellery and dressing up:

I love the clothes and jewellery in *Surya* film, I want to become like that, in the film the actresses wear so much jewellery and short dress. I want to become like that, dress like that. My favourite actress is Karishma Kapoor – she is good actress, she does it with her heart.

For some respondents this event allowed them to invest in very expensive clothes and jewellery, equivalent to their female screen idols. Ordinary girls, boys, men and women appropriate the glamour attributed to screen heroines for themselves. The richness of clothes and jewellery can be paraded for others; it can be on show just like their idols. The performativity involved in 'being looked at' is impersonated from the screen, though, of course, there is a lot of 'looking at others' and 'admiring or comparing', which is also a component of this 'being on show.' The 'looked-at-ness' and the 'looking at others' is part of the discourse of femininity, appearance and physical and sexual attractiveness. Femininity is practiced by being looked at, by being on display and by looking at others in a staged event, such as the wedding.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the topic of sexual expression in Bombay cinema. Sexuality on the cinema screen is relayed through the oversexualisation of the female body, usually through a sexual performance of the Vamp in earlier film and the modern 'sexy' heroine in contemporary films. The contemporary female star's performative enjoyment of self-pleasure is seen by some respondents as a transgression and as a much-needed change from the denial of sexual self-pleasure in older films. The respondent's contradictory interpretation of sex to gender relations signals a complex and contingent relationship based on the interplay of fear, desire, prohibition and agency. The respondents' contradictory narratives criticized the excess of the sexual display of the heroine and simultaneously validated aspects of her sexual performance as sexually assertive in her expression of self-pleasure and sexual autonomy. Many second-generation female respondents also expressed a pleasure in that sexuality, simultaneously accepting that these images can be used to code negative cultural and religious values to regulate women's sexuality. Traditional self-negation, modern sexual objectification and the postmodern significance of a self-fashioned display of the body, are criticized with the same fervor

The female heroine often masquerades multiple identities, with the two extremes being the sexually uninhibited dancing of the Vamp and the inhibited virtuous heroine. The cultural taboos and discomfort with sexuality is projected onto the bodies of women characters, such as the deviant sexuality iconised by Vamps or the restrained and pathos-filled sexuality of the Courtesan. However, respondents enjoy the Vamp's forbidden performance both secretly and openly. The hypocrisy of Asian cultural norms splits the subject in not validating the Vamp even as the high-class Courtesan (who is also a prostitute) is reified for her restrained sexuality, her poetic sensibility and her overall victim psyche. The Vamp on the other hand is a creation of modern times and is therefore a modern female hero who does not operate within a victim mentality. She is often punished for her sexual and material autonomy. The Vamp is

not waiting like the Courtesan to be rescued from her condition into heterosexuality. Though both Courtesan and Vamp are financially independent, they earn a living through the work of their body and sexuality; the Vamp is aware that femininity is a performance whereas the Courtesan character is over-identified with her femininity. In fact, pain defines her femininity. The pleasures of eroticism are conveyed through notions of pain and connection to poetry and spirituality and are authorized over sexual pleasures. The purity and contamination dichotomy (an influence of Victorian values on the Indian imaginary) is concealed in authorizing subtle over overt sexuality. The public/private divide of sexuality produces a contradiction and a dichotomy of passive/active sexuality: – dance like a Vamp but be a Sita at home. It could be argued that that courtesan is forced, whilst vamp chooses, that is an individual moral choice, so that being forced into prostitution is ‘morally better’ than being a modern individualist, like the vamp.

I argue that a complex model of feminine pleasure accounts for the respondent’s articulation. These include the affect of familiarity and identification, sensuality, sexuality, the pleasure of looking, dressing up, mimicry, impersonation and masquerade. The affect of these pleasures crosses private and public spaces, as in the case of performances at dance competitions, parties, weddings and nightclubs. The pleasure of the excess, melodramatic, and camp sexual performance of the heroine are key features of song and dance sequences. The excess of the female heroine’s performance denaturalizes her femininity and makes it a parody, in a way that creates pleasure for the viewers. The respondents when imitating the femininity of the heroine also add their own ideas to create multiple copies of difference. The cultural differences ascribed in these imitations are exaggerated and visibilized to exoticise the newer versions. The value attributed to exotic femininity is appropriated to gain recognition.

I propose that respondents also see these imitations as a memory device. The mourning of familial and cultural loss is reenacted through embodied ritual practices. The self that imitated the female heroine in the past was nostalgically reified in the present and often recalled past family and feminine intimate relations. The glamour in these imitation practices challenged the earlier mainstream racialized negation of British Asian bodies as unfashionable. The mainstream reception of Bollywood as exotic was appropriated and staged in these practices as spaces of recognition and validation. The reinforcement of cultural difference in Bollywood films is depicted by a revival of neo-traditional rituals such as Hindu weddings and religious rituals. The weddings are staged as utopian spaces of colour, glamour and carnival where filmic resolution happens and the family is unified after misunderstandings are resolved.

In the earlier chapter, following my respondents, I argued that on one level, an excess display of embodied sexuality is a coercive device in the normative conventions and

disciplinary regimes of body (Foucault, 1984) that are produced in the beauty industries. However, in this chapter, I have shown that the feminine sexualized body also becomes a space of criticism and the questioning of the traditional norms, and therefore also becomes a space of enjoyment of different expressions of sexuality and their various pleasures and displeasures.

The recurrence of the sexualised female symbols in public spaces may desensitize its objectifying impact and may allow for a more sexually permissible public space. This opening up of public space would impact the private space by relaxing some of the traditional outdated rules (such as what not to wear and the sexual purity regulations), which control and regulate women's sexual practices and autonomy. The sexually permissive messages of these images may also shift the boundaries of what is culturally permissible. The freedom of sexual extroversion depicted in these scenes was not permitted to most South Asian women without serious negative consequences. I argue that this sexualized sign changes the configuration of the public and private nexus by centralizing the individual through objectifying the body as the center of regulatory power, but also as the subject of consuming machinery.

I would argue that an expression of self through sexuality opens public spaces for further sexual practices. Sexuality becomes an important site for expressing individuality and autonomy in contemporary cinema in much the same way that romance became a site of conflict and struggle over authority between the different generations. However, this does not mean that the representation of women in the private realm is not dominated by discourses of chastity, purity and sexual and personal restrictions. In most films, the sexually aggressive expression of the female protagonist in the song and dance sequences is neutralized by her conformity to the traditional family roles of wife, mother and daughter-in-law. In addition, the sexual fetishization of the female body is not a progressive practice in that it objectifies and disempowers women by conflating the sign of woman with sex. But my argument is that despite its extremely negative impact of regulating women and inhibiting their freedom; the time and space that has been created through the pleasure and affect of engaging allows for a more sexually permissive public and private space. Thus a range of feminist criticisms of these images arises in opposition to capitalist consumer commodification and patriarchal dominance. However a feminist analysis of consumption and femininity signals an increased access to public spaces and changes its relation to the private space. Sexual autonomy and assertiveness becomes a space to claim a Western cosmopolitan subjectivity of choice and freedom for British Asian respondents.

## CHAPTER 8

# SONGS, PAIN, AND THE COURTESAN

### **Introduction**

Many film songs express pain and suffering and operate as a language of pain through visual and aural signs. In this chapter I explore the respondents' love of painful film songs. Film songs are unique in generating the most diverse of emotions and affects. The pleasure of songs opens up multiple and intertextually related sensations, emotions and comprehensions. Songs mirror and evoke pain and loss in respondents' lives. Many respondents liked old sad songs. This is not to say they did not like some newer songs, but they expressed more intense feelings when talking about older songs. Some of the most emotional scenes were those of female heroines singing and dancing painful songs that expressed suffering and challenged gender and economic injustices. In this chapter I argue that the recurrence of the female heroine's body in pain and, singing songs of pain, such as that of the courtesan genre, articulates an Asian imaginary where pleasure is experienced as a simulacra of the pain experience in cinema. The respondents' interactions with songs articulate their loss through displacement and the claiming and reconfiguring of space and subjectivity in Britain.

The film songs create an affective melancholic economy where pain is expressed, produced and circulated as cultural knowledge. Some respondents have familiarity with song signs through their cultural and historical knowledge. The journey of Bombay cinema from its early nationalist form highlighted themes of a romantic sentimentalist ethics of the pain of injustice, the poetry of loss and the trauma of partition. It then moved in contemporary cinema towards an obsessive focus on melodramatic family crisis and on the appearances of stars, glamorous sets, spectacles and exotic song scenery. The old cinema often mediated a narrative of migration and displacement of rural people to urban space. I propose that the affect aroused and mobilised by sad songs in the viewer is due to the viewer's emotional engagement with her/his memory and own feelings of loss. The respondents felt sad when moved by the song's lyrical poetry or visual markers of embodied pain, which conveyed a character's emotional pain or aroused anger at the injustices suffered by the characters. The feelings of sadness are elicited by connection to one's own memory of loss and pain. The openness of emotion allows connection as well as a space to shape it with different meanings as elaborated by my respondents. The mourning and melancholia imbued in this everyday practice can be best understood as a diasporic process of reconfiguration of new spaces, places and identities. I understand melancholia as an enabling process (rather than pathological), which allows for the cultural reproduction and remembering of historical struggles. The melodramatic mode of address adopted by film song scenes produce multiple



sensorial affects with intertextual resonances. In the second section of this chapter, I explore respondent's identifications with the figure of courtesans, which combines the issues of nostalgia, melodrama and an excess of affect that is produced in the viewing process. I explore the eroticism attached to the figure of the victim or the body in pain. Often this is a woman's body but not always. The suffering of the woman's body raises issues of sacrifice, endurance, punishment and heroism. In cinematic iconography, women's bodies are often the conductors of pain and I argue that women's bodily pain becomes a metonymic marker, which acknowledges and displaces the inexpressible realities of respondents' experiences.

## **Section 1: The Melancholic Pleasures of Songs: Mourning, Compulsion and Nostalgia**

### **1.1 The Pleasure of Sad Songs**

In this section I argue that many film songs express pain and suffering through a language of visual and aural signs. Respondents have familiarity with this language through their (varying) familial and cultural knowledge and have created an enduring relationship with these songs. Many respondents felt sad and wept when moved by a song's lyrical poetry or by visual markers of embodied pain that conveyed a character's emotional pain. Naseema explains:

Watching a sad Bollywood film, you can just let tears run down your face (laughing) and it's good because you don't even know why you are crying and it's usually something personal not what is on the screen but something you can associate with.

Naseema says that film songs stimulate feelings of sadness that she associates with past pain, but she does not always understand why she is crying. The sensation of pain is deeply affected by memories and respondents often reflected on their own pain whilst watching a painful song as they were reminded of past trauma. They often reflected upon and compared a familiar pain to the pain of the character on the screen. In responding to a question on what emotions are felt by him whilst watching song scenes, Mr Prashar, who is seventy-four, articulates similar views to Naseema, who is twenty-four. He explains how he feels touched by some songs and how they connect to a memory. Even though he does not see himself as someone who is musically minded or emotional, Mr Prashar cannot help himself being affected:

I am not that musical minded. Songs are more or less the same. Music brings the charm in the films. If the film has no music or song that's tasteless. Some of the songs explain the whole feeling but which cannot be expressed in words but very well expressed by singing.....I think sometimes when I see a movie, it touches you because it reminds you that this happened to you. And I... I get emotionally...and the ...sometime tears come out.

Naseema and Mr Prashar explain their tears as a complex involuntary response to suffering expressed in songs. I would argue that the excess affect and the intensity of sad songs are difficult to represent due to a diffuse sensation, which is difficult to categorise and fix in language. It leaves Naseema's and Mr Prashar's bodies with a sensation or a shock depending on the level of intensity. As Massumi (1995) has argued, affect is a meaningless sensation up until it is inserted in the viewer's memory, history and language to make sense of their embodied emotional response of weeping. The excess energy and the intensity of musical experience can be understood in terms of meaninglessness and non-representation. The feelings of sadness are elicited by connection to one's own memory of loss and pain. The openness of this emotion permits a reconfiguration of this feeling to shape it with different meanings. Elaine Scarry's (1985:5) argument that "Pain is not only a bodily trauma, it also resists or even 'shatters' language and communication" reinforces Mr Prashar's understanding of the un-representability of pain and the difficulty in talking about the experience of pain. Both Naseema and Mr Prashar's accounts articulate weeping and tears as an almost involuntary connection to a previous memory of pain based on a release/catharsis model. In response to a question about which songs she connects to most, Sangeeta explains:

Yeah, like I love, I love sad songs; God I must be a bit depressed or something.

Sunita, like Naseema, likes to watch specific sad songs and explained to me that she has a good cry by herself when watching them. She also told me that, in fact, some times when she is feeling low, she puts the songs on so that she could weep with the songs. Song scenes that incorporate melodramatic sentimental lyrics and picturisation communicate an excess of pain. This acts as a cathartic device for some, while for others it invokes pain that is difficult to represent.

## **1.2 The Nostalgia for the Old Songs**

In this section I explore the respondents' love of old sad songs. Palika explains her affinity to older films because of their music:

I like the music. I go down to Tooting Video shop, Samras, I get Hindi films, can't get Telugu. I like Indian cinema of 1940s and Tamil cinema from old days, M R Subralakshmi. Cinema was like music recital, used to have forty-four songs, raga based songs, some of these old films, the Travincor sisters who were three dancing sisters in the old films, in early Tamil movies, M L Basantkumari. I love the songs. Hindi movies now production value is so much better but the music is no good.

Palika expresses her passion for old film songs and the music recitals. In the interview Palika expressed an idealization of these old films, which she cannot find in the video shops of Tooting. The significance given to the 'old cinema' by the respondents is an indication of

nostalgia at the same time as an appreciation of the mastery of artistic achievement of the filmmakers of that time. The new cinema's MTV song and dance aesthetic permits the fragmentation and proliferation of similar images to occupy multiple satellite channels. When prompted on how she feels when she watches these songs, she describes one particular song scene, which has a hold on her. The sound aroused a specific sadness in her because it was about a daughter remembering her childhood in her parent's house. She explains:

I think well if it's a film like *Bandini*, I sob a bit if it's really sad... Asha Bhonsle's song of the prisoners.... two that she sang were just wonderful...they say when Asha Bhosle was recording this song she was breaking into tears. It was an absolutely wonderful song. There was one song that about a bird which she also did which was very good. Its basically...she was remembering 'when she was a child in her fathers' house' and 'she is saying she has not heard from them' The two songs are absolutely wonderful. There are bits in 'Bandini' I did not like but I..uh...I...but there were bits that were absolutely wonderful.

The song scene brought up many painful memories for Palika. She is fifty-five and came to Britain more than thirty years ago to get married according to her parent's wishes. She divorced a few years later as her marriage did not work for her. Palika's passion for old songs flourishes in her expertise on forties film music in Hindi and Tamil cinema. As a daughter she felt betrayed and abandoned by her parents and this song, in which the bird signifies freedom as the female heroine remembers her father's house when she was 'young and free', brought up many emotions for Palika. There are countless tragic film songs for when daughters are married and sent to their husband's house, one full of unfamiliar and sometimes hostile people and practices. The daughters have to drastically adapt and negotiate and they are forced to grow up very quickly because of the responsibilities heaped on their shoulders by the husband's family. In contrast to Palika, Sunita is thirty-six and born and brought up in Britain, but she has a similar passion and knowledge of old film songs from the fifties. She describes her pleasures in listening to them:

I love I love sad songs and I love the old Lata Mangeshkar I do love something about not seeing them as victims I don't know but just maybe admiring their beauty.

Sunita similarly loves the songs but this passion is also attached to older heroines and an admiration of their beauty. She qualifies that she likes their beauty rather than their suffering. She elaborates:

The old black and white 1950s films with the woman you know they really did concentrate on her face for long shots and just seeing her pining for her lover. I am thinking of Nimmi, Madhubala, Nargis not so much Meena Kumari uhhh the songs were just, the quality of music then because you had all the amazing music directors like Madan Mohan and S D Burman and I just love them.

For Sunita old song scenes were much better because of the poetry of the Urdu lyrics and the beautiful female heroines who were full of yearning and pathos whilst singing these songs. Urdu, the language of the upper literate classes was appropriated as the language of film songs because of its association with ghazals<sup>57</sup>, poetry and lyricism. Urdu ghazals usually have romantic themes of broken hearts. Sunita describes beauty in terms of black and white film, nostalgia, and the close ups of faces, eyes and gestures. Sunita's objectification of the female heroines she admired is communicated in terms of a multi-layered affect of the image style and the songs. The affect aroused and mobilised by sad songs in the viewer is due to the viewer's emotional engagement with her/his memory, and an imaginative reconstruction of that memory. This remembering of a feeling of sadness is enjoyed. In some instances sadness is articulated as involuntary and in other instances specific songs are repetitively engaged with to create feelings of sadness.

Many critics, filmmakers and academics have viewed the 'Golden Era of 1950s' as the era that produced the best Bombay films. Manuel (1993) has argued that Bombay cinema's romantic style was derived from Urdu poetry's romantic philosophy, and some of the key scriptwriters and lyricists in earlier films were Urdu speaking Muslims or Hindus. Through the early decades of the twentieth century, Urdu had been the primary literary language of North India. Gargi Sen, who is a filmmaker who teaches in 'Jamia Millia Islamia' (translated to *The National University of Islam*), a Delhi film school, explains the fascination of old Hindi songs:

In the 1950s when many believe that best film songs were written, the lyricist and songwriters were poets like Shahir Ludhianwi. They were outsiders, migrants, brought in an element of suffering into the songs into the cinema through the songs and suffering is often located in songs. Songs have brought suffering to screen in a brilliant way because pain is one of the most difficult emotion to express pain at collective level is even more difficult to work with and to use pain and get people to respond to the pain 'Yee Tazo Yee Takho...' [An old Guru Dutt song which criticises materialist and status seeking Indian society] these kinds of expressions only songs could have done it, I don't think there is any other device, if Bombay films did not have songs.... they

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<sup>57</sup> Ghazal is a form of Urdu poetry almost always about incomplete and unattainable love influenced by Islamic Mysticism (Sufism) and is seen as binging about spiritual fulfilment by uniting with the Beloved (a metaphor for God and spiritual master) to become whole. All ghazal poets were either avowed Sufis themselves (like Runo or Hafiz), or were sympathizers of Sufi ideas.

would have been extinct but they work with suffering, that is very good its not an easy text to read. (Interview, Gargi Sen, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2004, Delhi)

As Gargi Sen points out, the songs of suffering and anger were developed as part of a particular genre of songs just after the Partition of India, by lyricists who had been displaced. This was a time when the level of pain was unrepresentable in mere words due to the traumatic genocide of the Partition and the large-scale displacement of people. The level of violence, trauma and pain numbed people and shattered their collective psyche. The pain was too raw to be represented directly so it was often expressed in poetic form and through romance. The filmmaker's pain was translated and mediated to the audience through their poetry and filmmaking. The romantic tragedy reproduced the affect of collective loss and pain that Indian society was undergoing.

### **1.3 'Virah' or the Trauma of Romance**

Sonali points out:

It's just much more romance in Indian cinema than it is in Western film and that's what a lot to do with escapism as well. Romance is about escaping and you know about idea of something and you know the trauma of how to get it, not being able to get it and spending all your life trying to get it. It's a very romantic notion is not it?

Similarly, Sunita explains the changes in romance from the old to the new films:

It's lost a lot of romance now. I think romance is more, it was done in a more beautiful way in the past but now I think it's a lot of the song sequences I mean they are romantic but they can just be a bit OTT, the romance gets, I know the song sequences are supposed to represent romance but I think you can do romance quite subtly I think Asian films have forgotten how to do that now.

As Sonali points out, the trauma of romance is conveyed through the painful rendering of songs of separation. Yearning and tragedy were certainly part of the aesthetic of the films of the 1950s. Romance in Indian cinema is narrated in either an erotic or tragic milieu. The erotic milieu of romance focuses on the eroticism of communicating between the lovers through poetry of longing, temporary separations and on the evocation of sensual pleasures of temporary pain. 'Virah' means separation from a lover and has been conceptualised to mean the yearning and loss associated with separation. This separation is of a limited time, so that there is always hope of uniting with the lover. This concept of 'virah' has been eroticised through Radha's longing for Krishna. This affect of 'virah' is a pleasurable pain because the anticipation of seeing, hearing and touching the lover is intensified to compensate for the separation. The carnality of the feelings are often maximised through erotic language, so the

sexual union is not the pleasurable aspect but the actual process of imaginary unions. The tragic milieu follows a melodramatic mode, which illuminates an excess of embodied intensity through renunciation and self-negation combined with mystical spirituality.

Sudhir Kakar and John M. Ross (1986) propose that the Indian psyche is greatly affected by two love stories, the Radha-Krishna and Laila-Majnu love traditions. Radha and Krishna are the divine lovers in human form in Hindu mythology, and Laila and Majnu are passionate but tragic lovers in Arabic and Persian folklore and literature. The Radha-Krishna mythology is a sensual tradition where the eroticism of poetry and the senses are illuminated and validated. The passion and yearning that Radha embodies is articulated in poetry and paintings. She is considered the ultimate devotee. The Radha and Krishna tradition is about separation and waiting on a day-to-day level. In Bhakti movements<sup>58</sup>, Radha is the ideal devotee that all worshippers mimic in their desire for union with the divine. In the story of Laila-Majnu romantic sexual love is raised to a spiritual level due to the tragic affect of separation that lovers compensate for by uniting in death. These traditions greatly influenced many if not all films to some extent, in their depiction of romance. The 1950s cinema transformed the collective feelings of pain and sorrow into something beautiful through its imaginative mechanisms of song, music, facial close-ups and fade-outs. In Bombay cinema an aesthetic strategy of melodramatic sentimentalism is prioritised over realistic representation. The pleasure of romance is supplemented with a sentimental pathos of the hero (as in *Devdas*, and other films of this time until the early 1970s) who renounces love for a friend, for country, or just for the sake of renunciation. Mishra (2002) calls this the 'becara complex' of the hero and posits an analysis that a celebration of sentimentalism is elevated in Indian cinema. 1950s cinema elevated the representation of an excess of emotional pain through its visual, oral and aural language. Mishra's (2002:118) analysis of Guru Dutt as a key auteur of the cinema of romantic sentimentalism claims:

When Guru Dutt committed suicide on October 10, 1964, it seemed as if *Kaagaz Ke Phool* was a poor prelude to a real drama about which no film could be made. In one of the songs in this film, the lyrics convey the despondent sentimentality, 'I've seen the loves of this world, one by one everything passes by.' There is no confirmation here, only a loss, an absence, a nostalgia.

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58 Bhakti is a Sanskrit word meaning devotion and also the path of devotion. The Oxford dictionary defines it as 'devotional worship directed to a supreme deity'. The Bhakti Movement was started in South India and later spread to the North during the late medieval period. The notion of 'Bhakti' is translated as devotional love to God. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhakti>

The aesthetic creates the feelings. The feelings created in viewing practice do not necessarily exist in real life; instead the feelings are aestheticized. The nostalgia for old film songs created sadness and loss of the past for the respondents. Respondents who loved sad songs also articulated that they loved old songs and definitely not the new songs. The old songs of the 1950s and 1960s films were valued as much better than the songs after that era. The nostalgia attached to the old songs was connected to the loss of poetic Urdu language and the feudal Muslim culture, which patronised it. The romantic sentimentalism imbued in the old songs of the 1950s songs was a characteristic that appealed to many respondents. On the other hand the social and political messages of the films of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were also very much admired and compared favourably to the individualism of contemporary film songs, which often have hedonistic messages. The younger generations of under twenty-five year old respondents were more interested in newer films and followed gossip, glamour and fusion music, whereas those in their early thirties and above were mainly interested in old cinema. First, second and many third generation respondents, expressed anxieties in terms of a comparison between old and new cinematic stars, narratives, and aesthetic styles. The 'old' often (though not always) was revered for complex reasons in comparison to the new. Some of the reasons expressed were: the anxiety about contemporary changes; the loss of lyrical and poetic language; a fall in standards of performance; a replacement of collective values by commercial material ambitions; and the displacement of representations of the collective struggles with individual and family based romance. The absence and the loss of the old is mourned and reconciled in narratives of exile and struggle and produces pleasures related to sentimental nostalgia. The discourse of 'old/new' is a desire for the original/authentic self. Narratives of fear and anxiety recur related to the loss of tradition and an authentic self. However, even as the respondents' voices desire this authentic original space they shift their positions continually to express both criticism and pleasure regarding past and present aesthetics. As Sunita explains:

But then you know Indian music has been excellent in the fifties, sixties and seventies and had a blip in the eighties and did come back with a vengeance in the nineties. Actually it never really, sometimes it gets better better but there is no match for the fifties, sixties and the seventies.

Sunita here also points to the coming back of 'good songs and music' in the fusion of old and new music of the 1990s and so even when she loves old songs, she feels the new songs also have credibility. Peter Manuel (1993) reinforces Sunita's understanding of the changes and explains that the films from the 1970s onwards targeted working class men who preferred action films and did not relate to high-flown romantic Urdu language. In addition the advent of video allowed the middle classes to watch films at home and avoid the crude and backward working-class men inhabiting the cinema halls of their imagination. Manuel argues that the demise of Urdu was due to its replacement by Hindi as a national language. The Indian State

promoted policies to erase the teaching of Urdu in education, and in radio and television. All these changes promoted the demise of Urdu romantic lyrics in film songs by the 1970s. However, there is a commonly held belief amongst filmmakers and fans that the old cinema (1950s and even 1960s) has never been surpassed: though it's mimicked and appropriated, the lyrics and visuals of pain that were expressed were never to be matched. The pleasure of sad songs for respondents in this study arises out of the repetition of a habitual practice and the affect of nostalgia. This is created by mourning the real loss of the Urdu language in the India psyche.

#### **1.4 'Grasping something', 'Holding on': Loss, Mourning and Compulsion**

The interview questions probed present and past memories of cinema viewing and stimulated respondents to narrate their reactions and the meanings attached to those memories. In a response to a question on her first memory of Bombay cinema, Samira recounts:

First memory, I think its 'Naseeb' and Amitabh singing 'John, Johnny Janardan..' where he is a waiter at some sort of restaurant. I remember that and I remember *Namakhala*, which is again an Amitabh film.

MJ: how old were you?

S:I was about 10. Ya, and I just remember as a little girl him being really nice but I remember the music and I remember getting really upset at the end where Pran who is the father is reunited with his three sons who show him the three rings (smiling) and I mean its really sleazy but I was like crying my eyes out because he had met these three sons that he had lost. These three children, which he had lost and then found. Thinking about what I just said in last three minutes it is about losing and finding.

MJ: Loss is big in Indian cinema, is not it?

S: And I suppose in drawing a parallel with what I said not knowing who in terms of identity find something to grasp and in terms of Bollywood, it's such a nice thing to be able to grasp. You know it's more powerful than picking up a photograph of a house back in Pakistan or picking up a picture of the Kaaba or you know it speaks to you in many senses. It is auditory, visual, it's colourful.

Samira's yearning to grasp something from back home is made accessible by cinema. Her desire to grasp Bollywood is due to its embodiment of visual, auditory and colourful cultural memories. Samira's words are echoed in Laura Marks (2000) formulation of 'habit', which she defines as offering a profound example of tactile knowing. She argues that cinema experiences trigger an embodied mimetic connection. This connection to one's body and mind is simultaneous. Loss is often not recovered in real life but cinema makes that fantasy real and the imagined feelings associated with the recovery of loss can be experienced. The 'loss and recovery' narrative is an economy of truth. The loss is 'the real' in the cinema and



simulates emotional connections. However, cinema simulates her fantasies of finding that which she has lost. Samira's sense of loss is reconciled by the repetitive practice of watching cinema, which illuminates a desire to experience some aspect of that loss, to create simulacra of loss, a kind of melancholia. Another respondent, Sunita's account revealed that her habits of viewing created a familiarity which she associates with feelings of 'going home.' She discussed how her emotional affiliations due to associations with parents, the music, colour and melodrama is reinforced by repetition, which in turn generates familiarity and more emotional connection. Sunita revealed an aestheticized version of home in her viewing practice, in her discussion. In contrast to Samira and Sunita, who are both in their early thirties and who connect Bombay cinema songs and images with a nostalgia for an imaginary home, Sabar Jaan, who is fifty, associates songs with painful memories of the real home that she left. She explains:

I can't watch films that are sad, about separation, it reminds me of my family... miss my brothers and sisters, our country is poor we had to leave. I will be lonely once all my children leave. Now I like comedy. When I watch sad scenes my health is not good, painful song, but yes in reality, I like painful songs. I don't like new films. I like Noor Jehan, Rafi, Lata, Mehdi Hasan.

Sabar Jaan is flooded with memories when she watches specific songs and her grief can be overwhelming. She would like to avoid this, but she also does not want to forget those feelings. She is caught in-between a desire to feel the pleasure of pain and the resulting actual pain of separation from her brothers and sisters, a pain she finds unbearable. This then explains her compulsive desire to watch and to try not to watch film songs, which cause her intense pain. Similarly, Mrs P explains the contradiction and adaptation of her loss.

I would like if I compare India and England. Overall, England is a lovely country too but maybe as a woman where your heart where your home is sort of thing. Going to India is always like the heart and mind is there, no doubt about it. Let's not hide the feeling, and let's not make it I am saying it but I don't mean it. But last few years I am not keeping good health, a lot of bad times, depression and you miss that life you had knowing you are not going to be what you had been so what's the point of cursing. You accept it, what's there for you now, I do find it very hard. You never forget your past. I don't know what the future will be for me but it's sort of very fast world.

The loss of home, family, and the familiar can be said to initiate a condition of mourning for Sabar Jaan and Mrs Prashar and many first generation South Asian migrants. The only thing remaining of this migratory loss is the memory. Sabar Jaan expresses two intertwining desires here; one to detach from the pain and the other to actually feel the pain of loss and separation and this conflict almost becomes a compulsion to repeat the practice. Similar to Sabar Jaan's

feelings of compulsion, Sonali explains her father's compulsion for repetitive viewing of old films songs. She explains:

Oh! my dad has loads, *Aanpadh* ehhhh what's that one with the song *Aandhi* uhhm. He knows all the old films. There was this film on the other night when I went home, it's really old uhhmm Shammi Kapoor film and it's called uhhmm something really silly like *Butler Babbu* or something like that and it still amazes me that he just carries this database of you know of films and there is something else on TV and somebody said *Papeeha* and I said what does that mean and he goes oh it's a bird and he named this song that must be like 50 years old, you know. You know he still has a real kind of passion for it.

MJ: So is there something around emotion for him with these films?

SM: I think it takes him back to India and that's where his heart belongs and if he can go to India every other month he would do it. And he did when we were younger, you know he was constantly going back and I think the whole idea of showing the films was holding on to, you know because he would often say and he still does, "I have been there and I have been there and that's such and such gardens and or that's such and such place", you know. So it's definitely it's a kind of home coming for him, you know going to see these films.

MJ: It's kind of loss and it keeps kind of...

SM: Ya, the fact that he can bring it you know into his own home where you can revisit it in a cinema hall. It is quite an important thing for him.

Sonali's father holds on to the film songs as a living aspect of his loss of India. His passionate desire is to articulate the loss of his home, which is very much alive in his emotional reality. He mourns the absence and represents that loss through repeated viewing of particular scenes, and passes on his passion for the songs and the familiar feelings of home to his children. There is almost a compulsion to resolve the pain of loss by repetitive rituals of viewing and feeling. Sonali's father, Sabar Jaan and Mrs P express painful feelings of loss, displacement and alienation in a new environment by an engagement with Hindi film songs. For them, the songs give voice to the absence of people, places and one's own self in the past. The past is recalled repetitively into the present and recreated to fulfil what is understood as missing - that which is desired in the present or for a future. Songs become the site, not only of revisiting the memory of the past, but also for making new memories of that past. The compulsion to experience these feelings permits one to feel attached to a place one has abandoned. This connects to trauma and may fulfil an absence created through loss of home and family members due to migration, (though this migration was for economic reasons and not forced like that caused by Partition). This interaction with film songs creates nostalgia for what has been lost, though crucially, often these lost times never existed in the first place but were created in and through the practices of viewing and listening. This is evident in some of the respondent's articulations.

## 1.5 Cultural Transmission through Miming Cultural Signs

In this section I explore the ways in which the pain of loss generates cultural affiliations and reproduction through cinematic practices. The pain associated with cultural loss is shared and passed by parents to their children through participating in this viewing habit. Different aspects of cultural knowledge can be transmitted or passed down, or translated to their children, as Asha explains:

My younger sister grew up watching Indian cinema, and learnt a lot of cultural stuff dancing, music, religion...we did not have that mix...

Asha who is in her mid-thirties expresses a loss that her younger sister in her twenties has not had to go through because of the emergence of Bollywood in the 1990s. Similarly, Shahid pointed out to me that he was really surprised to see so many young people, both men and women, at the Manchester Evening News Arena where there was a Bollywood star performance. That had not been part of his youth. He understood this public affiliation as a way of cultural learning about 'back home'. The film songs, of course, can also be a site of cultural transmission of sensory feelings, rituals and knowledge. Sonali teaches herself to sing film songs. This could be due to her father's attachment to Bombay cinema and its songs. But it could well be for other reasons such as an affective connection or for learning Hindi. This could well be a way for Sonali of 'taking in' her father's loss. She describes this as his 'holding on.' Samira similarly described how grasping on to Bollywood conveys the emotions of loss in their multidimensional aspects. In a similar way, Shakira describes her first memory of watching Bombay cinema:

Rekha comes to mind when my mum and I used to watch older film. In 1950s in Pakistan, mum used to go and see Hollywood films. She began to watch Indian films more so when she came here, twice a week to the Tooting Video, to get, *geetmala* (song) compilation. She would argue with men about the goof copy and bad copy and extracts from old films *Anarkali* and Guru Dutt films, when I miss my mum I watch Indian films by myself.

Shakira's point is that her mum did not watch the films until after she came here. Her mother's displacement and maybe her loss of home propelled her engagement in Bombay cinematic practices. Shakira's cinema practice is associated with a loss of the feelings attached to watching with her mum. She recreates some of those feelings by watching it alone. The respondents feel the pain of losing something or someone intimate, and they return to the memory of the person, place or time. The first generation respondents do this through their engagement with film songs. The idea of what has been lost becomes precious in their imagination. They recreate that lost object within their imagination, within themselves. The younger generations mime and embody the attributes and assimilate them. This can be described as melancholia, a pleasure of nostalgia as the return to cinema generates the affect

of loss. In this way, the second-generation respondents can share in the memories, the histories and experiences of their parents through their affiliation to Bombay cinema viewing. Songs are the medium through which the excess affective charge is communicated and respondent's narratives express loss and mourning. The mourning and melancholia imbued in this everyday practice can be best understood as a diasporic process of reconfiguring new spaces, places and identities. As I have argued in the chapter on sexual expression, miming and embodied practices preserve the memory of old rituals, feelings and cultural ideals. The collective sharing and digesting of Bombay cinematic substance and its passing on to the younger generation ensures the reproduction of cultural knowledge.

### **1.6 Asian Diasporic Melancholia**

I argue that cinema practices can produce a melancholic affect, which can be enabling if it transmits historical and cultural knowledge. The discourses of mourning and the pain of loss erupt in the respondents' narratives. For the first generation, this is in connection to those they left behind whereas for the succeeding generation, it is narrated in the loss of home. Like Sunita and Samira, Shahid, Asha, Irfan and Neela express the loss of language, culture and identities in their interviews. The nostalgia attached to sad songs, specifically from the 1950s films, give voice to the memory of loss and absence. An engagement with these songs is utilized to express painful feelings of loss and displacement related to migration.

I suggest this is a form of melancholia. In this instance, I understand melancholia as a continuing affect, which requires movement towards recognition and visibility so that the subject does not too feel isolated and alienated. Most respondents renegotiate the meaning of their loss. Shahid told me that unlike his father, 'we don't want to go back', but watches films and learns songs in order to learn culture. He refuses to let go, but at the same time renegotiates, resignifies and generates new signs alongside some of the old ones. Many respondents keep the past alive in the present by refusing to let go of their loss. The remembering of pain allows the struggles associated with it to be remembered and allow it new meanings and possibilities in the present. Cinema provides visuals and sounds of familiarity and high intensity to counter isolation, alienation and boredom. The diasporic experience of sadness (as opposed to just feelings of sadness) falls into nostalgia because the abandoned home, nation and relations are idealised. Cinema creates and adds to this nostalgia. This notion of melancholia is useful in explaining the repetitive return to a site of traumatic affect. The collective melancholia associated with displacement and migration generates a shared nostalgia.

Cinema viewing creates emotional literacy by providing language, scripts, and an emotional vocabulary, as many respondents pointed out during their interviews. The feelings are generated in the relations with the song. Songs write a specific affective script and make

available an emotional vocabulary through which certain identifications are created. The idea of home is created in engagement with this vocabulary. Film songs create emotional identifications with the ideas of nation and culture. For the respondents the unravelling of this feeling of melancholia sometimes unravels the embodied pain of social history. The intensity of the affect of the film song creates a particular economy of emotion. The transaction with songs not only gives emotional and sensual pleasures but also increases cultural knowledge. The intensity of the viewing experience also creates an affect of melancholia and mobilises this affect. The interaction with cinema creates a specific melancholic experience. The old Bombay cinema deployed an aesthetic where the collective loss of Partition was mourned, healed and reconciled through the representation of pain and suffering, through messages of sacrifice to the collective ethos. Cinematic communities were created through their interaction with cinema, which developed specific cultural feelings of a melancholic aesthetic.

## **Section 2: The Pleasure of Melodrama and the Affect of the excess of Pain**

In this section I explore respondents' engagements with songs and their experiences of melodrama, excess, affect, nostalgia and empowerment. The figure of the courtesan was a central trope in many of their narratives. The melodramatic imagination authorises expression rather than realism and an excess of expressions is conveyed through the hysterical body. While realist genres value explanation and seek truth and coherence, melodrama genres seek expressions of loss and pain due to social change, of a lost past or loss related anxieties, fears and trauma. I explore respondents' identification with the figure of the courtesans. This figure combines the issues of nostalgia and melodrama with an excess of affect produced in the viewing process. When asked what she thinks is imaginative in Bombay cinema, Samira explains:

Definitely music, the music and I think sometimes the exaggeration is quite creative. I think that's nice, you know the exaggerated emotion that we might say oh god! That is really cheesy, but that's how it is. It shows happy people very very sort of really on a high and then it will show when there is a sad emotion, people wailing and I think people can really relate to that. If you look at a lot of... I mean how can I describe this.... you can identify with the scream or the wail or the crying. It's almost like quite heart and open, quite open. I suppose I think Bollywood expresses a lot of feelings openly to the point that's almost exaggerated.

The respondents understood melodrama as an exaggeration of emotions where the respondents felt they were taken to 'a high and then low', in Samira's words 'like a drug.' Samira expresses a polarity of emotion and a lack of texture of emotions, which is characteristic of a melodramatic aesthetic. Melodramatic narrative polarises the characters into good against evil. Samira finds the expression of emotional highs and lows of this binary creative and imaginative. The exaggeration of pain and pleasure is part of the melodramatic

mode, which is achieved by the respondents identifying with the song. Even though she parodies the excess emotional expressions by calling it 'cheesy', at the same time she explains the seriousness with which most people can relate to these emotions as aspects of how gender and generational conflicts are expressed. She validates the excessive expression by describing it as 'quite heart and quite open.' She explains that even though Bombay cinema is melodramatic, people watch it because it allows expression of their own repressed feelings, ones that they may not feel comfortable expressing.

Ya but I think people like that and I say ooh I don't like it but I go back for more so I must like it. Maybe I can watch what I actually want to do. I cant do that but I can watch it because I know I felt like that you know felt like wanting to break things or felt like wanting to punch out or felt like screaming and wailing or felt like dancing around a tree because I was so happy. I can't do that but I can watch it.

Samira explains her compulsion to repeated viewing. The exaggerated emotions allow a space of connection and catharsis. Aman, similarly expresses his enjoyment of the emotion and also expresses confusion at crying and involuntary feelings generated in him. He explains:

What I find interesting is when I tell people I actually enjoy the films, and I am not lying. I enjoy them. I have cried so many times, the emotion. I think when I am emotionally attached, I am constantly questioning afterwards because I am doing this PhD why is it I am crying about, which relationships get me and why did even when I know I have watched three hours of some meaningless interaction because the way they portray these love relationships with death and it happens so quickly and all of a sudden they manage to wrap it up in a minute sequence where everything that's passed is solidified in that moment.

However, unlike Naseema who liked the catharsis of crying, he felt that somehow the emotions have been pulled out of him and that he had been manipulated. Mr Prashar had also expressed that he could not help weeping in his interaction with some sad songs scenes. In comparison, Asha seems to revel in the intensity of feelings. She explains that amongst other aspects such as the story, the colour, and the action she particularly loves the melodrama:

I like the love, the family stuff I like the revenge stuff. Uhhmm I think I like the melodrama because it, drains me makes me emotional. And I think it gives me an interaction, a relationship with cinema with what's going on. I think that's one of the things... I like being engaged.

Asha explains that she likes being engaged and likes the emotional excess of the melodramatic aesthetic (focusing on family conflicts). She had criticised Western cinema viewing because it did not allow her that kind of total absorption. The melodramatic song scenes destabilize a mode of watching which relies on distant engagement. Asha explains her anger and pain in involvement with different scenes:

I do relate to pain in *Pakeezah* because the melodrama in Indian cinema is incredible. I think they are able to make you feel in tune with the heroine more so than the hero, But when

Amitabh Bachchan was around you could relate to him directly what he was common man, everyone wanted to be him whether you were male or female. You feel anger at the injustice of what was going on, cultural prescription that all the religions have in common...lot of anger and pain...

Asha's anger connects with that of Sonali in expressing the injustice of cultural regulation imposed on female characters and the pleasure of solidarity when female heroines challenge male power. However, Asha also connects her pleasures to her working-class solidarities with Amitabh Bachchan's portrayals of a 'common man' fighting the humiliations heaped onto him by a callous society. Samira had also expressed her admiration of Amitabh Bachchan. Irfan, who is ten years younger than Asha and Samira, had expressed his intense dislike of Amitabh Bachchan as a patriarchal figure as in the films of the 1990s such as *Mohabatein* and *Kabhi Khush Kabhi Gham*. The relationship that respondents create with stars depends on the characters they associate them with. Asha, Sonali and Irfan had expressed in the interview that the melodramatic mode permitted a total absorption (engagement) in comparison to English films, which did not engage them on the same level. The anger against injustice and the power structures was part of this intense involvement. The respondents' level of engagement is because his or her conflicts are illuminated in cinema viewing. Emotional engagement with the cinema viewing was given a different significance by women as compared to men I interviewed. This is not to say that men did not engage with cinema emotionally but that most men felt they should not be emotional whilst watching Bombay films, as it was 'only' entertainment. In contrast to Asha's pleasure of melodrama, Shahid expresses a distant engagement. In a response to a question on his emotional reactions to a well-known courtesan film *Pakeezah*, Shahid explained that he understood Bollywood just as entertainment and one was not to be affected by it. Shahid made fun of emotional films. His parody assumed a distant position from emotional films and expressed a non-engagement. Other respondents enjoyed these scenes. However, they all expressed contradictory and ambivalent feelings at the same time. The affect of the films can be understood in terms of intertextuality. According to Massumi (1995) affect is produced in the viewer as an unstructured intensity. The confusion at crying for Aman, 'feeling drained' for Asha, and the avoidance of emotional scenes for Shahid all point to a key ambivalence due to this unstructured aspect of intensity of sensations. The intensity of engagement with songs and dances produces enthusiasm, specific energy, and a resonance in the respondents but it takes a while to fix the sensation into a language within personal historical. Hence, Aman's confusion at crying, Asha's enjoyment of feeling drained and Sonali's clear meaning making are examples of different ways of creating comprehension.

## 2.1 'The Bird in a Cage': The Courtesan's Poetry of Freedom

Most female and a few male respondents loved the courtesan films. *Pakeezah* (*Pure Heart*, 1971, Kamal Amrohi), *Mughal-e-Azam* (*The Great Mughal Story*, 1960, K.Asif), and *Umraw Jaan* (1981, Muzaffar Ali) *Devdas* (2002, Sanjay Leela Bansali) and in *Khalnaayk* (*The Villain*, 1993, Subhash Ghai), catapulted the heroines Meena Kumari, Madhubala, Rekha and Madhuri to lifelong iconic status for their performances. Courtesans were signifiers of unfulfilled desires and seen as outsiders. Sonali explains one of her reasons for loving these films:

I loved the courtesan films, in *Pakeezah* my favourite bit in that film was not so much the dancing which I mean I loved all of the film but its when she is talking about herself as being a bird in a cage and there is a bird in a cage and its just the picturisation of that whole expression.

The bird in a cage expresses the heroine's emotional state of being imprisoned and highlights her yearning to be free. The 'bird in a gold cage' metaphor describes the situation of women in feudal and traditional culture, which often amounted to imprisonment. It gives vent to repressed feelings and to a discourse of tragedy associated with being a victim and a prisoner that the courtesans expressed through their embodiment and performance. Sonali identifies with the heroine's desire to be free from society and cultural restrictions. These restrictions imprison women more than men in a patriarchal world. This figure then opens up an identification of pleasure through the pathos of gendered cultural restrictions and a desire to be free. The viewer also creates identification with her artistic skills in Urdu poetry, singing and dancing. She was also a connection to a time, which valued literature and poetry and prioritised the aesthetic as the goal of spiritual fulfilment. There is an upper middle class (and many filmmakers came from that class sensibility) male romance aesthetic identified with Moghul courts and their poetic signification in the South Asian artistic imagination.

The character of the courtesan is idealized and fetishized by filmmakers and by the female audience, but for different reasons. Feminist theories of representation of woman as a desirable object are very apt for the courtesan character where the beautiful and sexually restrained performances offer insight into men, masculinity and society. A critique of society that allows women to go into prostitution is expressed at the same time as the voyeuristic pleasures of her painful performance are represented. Women are portrayed as 'not real' but always aestheticized and unknowable, only as an image. Feminists such Doane (1984) have explored the victimization of the women in melodramatic stories as masochistic identifications with female characters. The narrative invites the spectator to assume a melodramatic subjection, where the positionality of victimhood and powerlessness bind the spectator to the film's vision. Family is a vital category in melodrama for this reason, as a space where social changes first and foremost affect the private spheres of the family. Soap



operas are popular amongst women viewers because they allow for working through the feelings of family conflicts and forbidden desires. The melodramatic genre externalises the inner conflicts of families and individuals and in this way, the psychic enters the public. Women's cultural discourses are given significance in this genre and this explains women respondent's recognition of and identifications with these narratives, as contemporary issues are debated through changes in ideas of the family. Mrs Prashar, one of my first generation respondents, defended the difficult positions of women as courtesans in cinema and related it to her struggles of working outside the home. The respondents understand and theorise about the social through personal family relationships. Hence, the melodramatic genre is seen as a compensatory pleasure for the marginalized position available to women. Feminist articulation of the 'personal is political', the private issues of family, and the inner psychic conflicts of individuals are made public, thus subverting the ideas of inner/private and outer/public as mediated symbolically through the character and through star power.

## **2.2 The Courtesan Character**

The courtesan (tawaif) is a signifier of unfulfillment and yearning and this incompleteness may explain the intense affiliations of most female respondents to this symbol. The sexual and romantic contradiction embodied by her generated affiliations from male and female respondents as she was seen as an embodiment of beauty. First I will explore the construction of the filmic courtesan. She represents the crucial role of pain in creating an idealised notion of erotic beauty. She achieves this by being an Urdu poet and a performer who sings Ghazals and dances. Her beauty is created by her pain (relayed by poetry) and by her mystique of unavailability. The unavailability is due to her occupying a position of being an 'in-between' creature of two worlds; a poor working-class woman living in the world of upper-class nobility. In addition, her sexual work marginalizes her from both of these communities and makes her a forbidden creature. She desires the intimacy of her family that she cannot have as a prostitute and she desires the security of heterosexual marriage that she is not allowed. She has to erase her poverty stricken past and family dishonour and she has no future for she will not be included in the elite family. As Mr Prashar told me when explaining that in his youth (in the 1950s) he was deterred from watching films because it was seen as disrespectful. He remembers:

I used to see the films mostly to see a good dance it was always a kind of those people are not respectable people. They happen to be a cheap class, that's why they are dancing and gathering and that is not respectable life.

The film actresses were seen as courtesans. As Mrs Prashar explains, courtesans were forced to sing and dance in the public, which was seen as disrespectful. She explains how women were treated in those days:

Why a girl was made or forced to earn the money [she is talking about courtesans/actresses], she is forced to sing in the public she has to be but in reality she is given a chance by doing this kind of work. She will tell you being weaker sex women were moulded and reminded that women were made for only one thing. But these days you will find that's not true. They too have very sad story. If they wanted to come out the life they were forced into, it is a sad story. It's the people...who won't let you if you wanted to get married and live with your husband and children and respectable life, well that is possible these days. You see olden days women had no voice. It's always she is made to say yes and the ruling person has to be a man who will dominate her.

Mrs Prashar describes how the courtesans were viewed. The courtesan character is usually a dancing girl who is also a professional Ghazal<sup>59</sup> singer, and her profession is to entertain the upper class (usually married men) and fill their empty time. She was seen as refined and educated in music and a companion, which wives could not be, as they were often not allowed to study or leave the private realm. Their roles were strictly prescribed. Secondly, as Mrs Prashar hints at, the courtesan is also usually a prostitute and there is a narrative of victimhood and powerlessness associated with her because she is forced into selling her body as a poor woman, as this is the only capital she has. This character reflects aspects of many women's situation in a patriarchal society due to gender oppression and restrictions. Thirdly, the courtesan character is aestheticised in Bombay cinema (probably due to the 1950s romantic sentimentalism of the script writers) by signifying the pain of unfulfilled desire and longing that is expressed through her poetic renditions of Ghazal singing and dancing. Fourthly, this character also expresses non-belonging, either caught between two different worlds, as a working-class woman in an upper class milieu and also a woman (if she is to be respected sexually, her place is the private realm) in a public space. Sonali, Samira, Sunita expressed identifications with her marginality. She is thus marginal to both those worlds and to the society she lives in. The final aspect of this character is that she is the embodiment of the nostalgia of a lost time of Muslim literary influence, as articulated by these filmmakers. This is a loss of Urdu poetry of rich and feudal Moghul Nawabs and a loss of a time, which allegedly prioritised beauty in art, literature, poetry and architecture.

The courtesan films express a pleasure of pain, poetry, suppressed sexuality and nostalgia. The pleasures of romantic sentimentalism are validated in this genre. The courtesan was a symbolic space of melancholia. The definition of beauty of the courtesan also represents a desire for freedom. But many of these films used discourses of victimhood and social reform to legitimate this character. The disavowal of courtesan's sexual work was resolved by a cleansing, reaffirming romance with a moral conclusion. In the film, *Pakeezah*,

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<sup>59</sup> Ghazal is primarily a form of Urdu poetry which has been influenced by the poetry of many languages. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghazal>

the sexual impurity of the courtesan's work is defended by the purity of her soul highlighting the underlying contradiction. Pain reconciles her sexual impurity as in *Pakeezah* (which translates as 'pure soul').

Within the filmic narrative, there were many opportunities for pleasure and identification with this figure. Melodramatic identification for respondents arises out of pathos internalised in this character. Pathos is the denial of fulfilment through notions of deferral, difficulty and fantasy. The women respondents identified with this notion of incompleteness. Many women respondents identified with the heterosexual romance of this genre. The modern reforming male hero rescued the powerless victim. The scriptwriters were the real rescuers at a time when the ideology of gender reform was prevalent in opposition to feudalism and in defence against Victorian English morality and attack on gender oppression. However, it is an interesting patriarchal fantasy that the courtesan who was an independent woman, (who earned her own money and owned property) was educated and had considerable artistic and cultural knowledge due to her occupying a public space, only wished to be a 'proper woman' by being brought into the bliss of heterosexual domesticity.

### **2.3 The Affect of the Courtesan and the Female Star Icons**

The affect attached to the courtesans' characters catapulted many actresses to the status of feminine icons. Some of the most iconic female heroines achieved that status by enacting and embodying courtesan characters. Meena Kumari was remembered as a tragic actress who initiated the courtesan as a character in Indian cinema. She is still seen as an icon of pain and suffering. She was famous for her painful rendition of a courtesan in *Pakeezah* with a pure heart. Her performance of an ephemeral courtesan character has not been equalled to this day. There was a merging of the character and the star's iconicity as the discourses around Meena Kumari's life were also constructed in tragic terms for she was known to have had three failed marriages and died prematurely and in pain due to her alcoholism. She was known to be a poet and like her characters, she was evoked as a marginal, pathos-ridden figure.

Madhubala was another star iconised for her role as a beautiful Ghazal/Quwalli singer and dancer in the famous Muslim social, *Mughal-e- Azam* (1960). Whilst I was doing research in India in October 2004, a new coloured version of this film was released and instantaneously became a blockbuster. Madhubala was liked for her sensuality, beauty and mystery and she was remembered for a specific scene in *Mughal-e Aazam*, where she challenged the Moghul ruler Akbar (who was known as Shahensha ke Shahenshah, the King of Kings), in a song sequence. The film was a historical romance, which was famous for its beautiful poetic Urdu dialogue and songs. One song, famous for its challenge to the Moghul emperor and which has humanist overtones, contains lines such as, "I have no need to be fearful because I am in love. I am in love; I have not committed any crime. I am not

concealing my love from God, why should I conceal it from kings who are humans?" Her rebellion against a powerful king was seen as an amazing feat for a woman who was also a courtesan. Her challenge to the king was relayed through romance. Only through the discourses of love can a woman be equal to a King, as a subject of God. Akbar who valued justice above all, was shown to be unjust in this film because he obstructed the romance between his son Salim, the heir to the throne and the courtesan. He could not allow a courtesan to become the next queen of Hindustan. In the end, she sacrificed her love for her lover's future. The feminine challenge to feudal patriarchy was performed through romance.

There is an idealisation of the victimhood of female heroines in these films of the 1950s and 1960s. The contrast between the female the male icons is that the latter, such as Dilip Kumar, Rajendra Kumar, Guru Dutt and Rajesh Khanna, play conflicted sentimental melancholic romantic roles. As romantic heroes, they were not interested in pragmatic gain and often defer their pleasures in order to gain spiritual value. This is through their renunciation or rejection of worldly pleasures for spiritual knowledge. This act illuminates the superficial pleasures of material and status based power structures, which are condemned as hypocritical. The imprisoned powerless woman victim required a rescuer. The male hero is the rescuer who fights against injustice, claims marginality, and has a disdain for worldly pleasures. His soul is in pain of melancholia.

#### **2.4 The Pleasure of Endurance of the Female hero: Dancing on Broken Glass**

As I explored earlier the victimhood of the female character and her endurance was a recurrent theme in Indian cinema. Sonali expresses her fascination with one of these scenes:

And then that song "Jab thak hai jaan" (until I have a drop of life left in me, I will dance), so much was going on in that song you know about it's about love and loss and dancing for this man, trying to keep the lover alive and.... she almost dances for the whole village and she had something to prove and the power dynamic as well and to get one over this dacoit [the bandit, the villain]. He was trying to get one over her by making her dance. That is one of my favourite scenes.

Hema Malini, a famous female icon of that time, dances on broken glass in a bid to prevent her lover's death in the film *Sholay* (1975). The popular song scene from the film *Pakeezah* (1971) in which the female icon Meena Kumari as a courtesan dances on broken glass was mimicked in this film. I argue that both these dance scenes were seen as an endurance test, to prove something through a performance of suffering. In a response to a question on their favourite scenes, many women chose scenes with one of their favourite female stars or songs. Generally both the songs and the corresponding scenes were of women in pain. The synthesis of the feminine body and the song of pain often produced strong identifications. For Sonali, the melodrama and affect arise out of the determination of this character, who has very little

power, in opposition to the bandit Gabbar Singh and yet has the sympathy and support of the spectator to succeed in this contest. The representation of the woman's body in excessive pain, such as dancing on glass, is part of the melodramatic and affective modes of address. This dance scene can be seen as an endurance test appropriated from Indian mythology. The intertextual reference is to one of the most popular religious stories, the Ramayana. The villain in *Sholay*, Gabbar Singh, a bandit, is compared to the villain of the Ramayana, the demon Ravana who had kidnapped Sita, in the same way the female character is kidnapped in this film. Within Hindu discourse, the power of women lies in their purity and in their wifely duty. The character here is undergoing an endurance test to save her husband-to-be from an evil villain. However the endurance of pain and torture is not simply passivity because it slowly generates a skill or an art of endurance. In Sonali's analysis, the heroine's endurance and determination 'got one over' the power of the villain.

MJ: How does it make you feel to watch her dancing and bleeding and suffering?

S: It makes you feel angry and you know kind of definitely form an opinion about men and you know the whole kind of power dynamics, what you are prepared to and what you are not. It makes you question if you would do that for a lover or whether you would put yourself in that position.

Sonali feels angry at the injustice of the female character's suffering but at the same time the performance challenges her value system, if she would do the same for her lover. This is similar to Asha's comments about women in earlier films, who were strong and had to struggle a lot. She was glad she did not have to do that in her life and was also angry at religious and cultural prescription and injustice. During the watching of song scenes, where the character endures suffering due to unjust rules, an affective solidarity can be aroused which provides a simulacrum for and repetition of respondent's own traumatic experiences. In the dancing on broken glass scene, the female character undergoes an experience of the unbearable, a kind of masochism. Melodrama invites the audience to endure the extremes of pain and anguish. The familial structure that melodrama so often exploits contributes to the experience of excruciation. Like the characters, the audience can experience the intensity of sensations. A bond of solidarity with the character's pain and struggle can allow a journey of pleasurable emotions of empowerment, when the character overcomes her suffering, or as Sonali puts it, 'gets one over the bandit.' Resolution happens when the character overcomes her helplessness, finds recognition and fulfils her desires.

## **2.5 The Pleasure of Masochism, Melodrama or Open Memory**

The woman's body in pain generates multiple responses in viewers. The viewer feels admiration for the determination of her suffering, or anger and disgust at the injustice of her

treatment, or even produces fear so as to follow the cultural norms or be punished like her. It can also produce humour or parody through a repetition of viewing which distances the viewer into a cynical mode of viewing. This distancing (and disdain) is in contrast to the over-identification with the character that produces the pleasures of masochism. In theorizing the female gaze, Doane (1984) suggests another pleasure in the screen-spectator relationship in which one avenue open to the female spectator is to identify so closely with the image that she is unable to step back, and adopt a critical distance. The above accounts of the Sonali's pleasure in identifying with a heroine in pain can be explained by her adoption of a masochistic position of over-identification. However, Ien Ang (1985, 1999) argues that women viewers' identification with powerless and victim heroines does not necessarily mean that they are masochistic and that they like the victim position of these characters. She counters that this is not necessarily anti-feminist. She reasons that this is because these are emotional identifications with a fictional character, which may express powerless feelings in a patriarchal world and provide realism about how it feels to be in this space. This is also one of many imaginary subject positions where the viewer has the fantasy of choosing and identifying with one of many identities. Ang proposes that the fundamental gap between desire and reality, which forms the deepest 'truth' of the melodramatic imagination, may be an eternal aspect of female experience. How that gap is bridged symbolically and in practice is historically variable. She argues that the meaning of melodramatic excess may be better interpreted for its arousal of emotional impact rather than the clichéd reality it depicts. She counters that the role of excess is metaphorical and what matters is the stimulation of intense feelings. An excess of events and intensity of emotions are inextricably intertwined in the melodramatic imagination. Spectators experience the melodramatic aesthetic by subverting the repression of emotions that they have been normalized into. For example, my respondent Samira's desire to dance around trees to express joy would not be viewed as favourable but she can watch it on screen and apparently feel the same feelings. In this way, the cinematic representations of bodies become vital in expressing community conflicts and contemporary crises.

In contrast to Doane's (1984) theories of the pleasure of masochism, Stacey (1994) has argued that women return to soap opera because of the deferral of pain. This is because women enjoy the process of the story (mediation) rather than the linear narrative with a resolution. The idea of the deferral of pain relates to women's real conditions of living in patriarchy and results in the deferral of their unhappiness and pain. Modelski (1988), Gledhill (1987) and Stacey (1994) have also used Cixous's idea of open memory (based on the concept of castration). Cixous argues that due to male fears of castration, men withdraw from pain whereas women (not having castration anxiety) stay open to the pain of loss and continually revisit the memory of that pain. Men understand loss as a lack of investment and

withdraw from these feelings. In this way, it may seem that women viewers are masochistic but in effect it is their different understanding of pain (not as an investment, not utilitarian, not material but spiritual) that allows them to stay open to the pain of mourning. This may explain why more female viewers affiliate to the excessive pathos of the melodramatic mode, as it becomes a space of expression and sharing and does not constitute a real threat.

## **2.6 The Marginality Aesthetic: The Eroticism of Powerlessness**

The abjection and suffering of the heroine produces a highly affective site for an embodied response. As I have outlined above, the pain and melodrama of song scenes are key sites of identifications for many respondents. Nazma explained that when she sees suffering heroines, she has multiple responses. She feels better for not being in that position and yet identifies with some of the heroine's emotions. The pleasures of melodramatic intimacies can challenge the victimhood and the construction of the heroine as the abject. There is a partial identification with the deprivation and suffering of the heroine and also an eroticism of the victim as innocent. Female heroines represent the female experience and condition as marginal figures who are imprisoned by villainous societal norms and restrictions. The distance between the female character's desire and their reality is a cause of suffering and also a space of identification. As we have seen, the courtesans are constructed as abject beings, but they are also sources of desire and fascination due to their complex characterisations.

It is interesting to explore the 'Hindu' cultural nationalist reading of the 'Muslim' courtesan, which is complex because the courtesan is seen as a site of pollution due to her sexual work and as a signifier of contamination by the Moghul culture. However, at the same time the Hindu desires to rescue her from her Muslim oppressors to show the barbarism of that religion. The Hindu attacks the Muslim culture using the same tools that the Colonial rulers did against the Independence movement when they used gender oppression propaganda as an indicator of Indians being backward and barbaric. In both the colonial and the Hindu nationalist readings women are depicted as powerless creatures to be rescued. Žižek has theorised the enjoyment of the nation's other as 'other's excess enjoyment' (1991:2). In this formulation, others are seen as ones with more enjoyment because of their differences and the charge associated with their differences, is interpreted as unknowable. Sara Ahmed (2004: 162) proposes that suffering has a similar charge in that the others are what we would not like to be but these 'others can be envied for their lack of enjoyment, for the authenticity of their suffering, their vulnerability, and their pain.' She proposes that this excess of suffering allows the Western subject the pleasures of being charitable. In taking this idea further, she also proposes that suffering and marginality evokes discourses of speaking for the other. It allows the speaking subject a purpose and power to speak for the other. For example, she highlights:

[In the work of the] The Subaltern Studies group, there also seems to be an investment in the pain and struggle of the proletariat or peasant. Here the investment allows the project of speaking for the other, whose silence is read as an injury (Spivak 1988). In other words, the other becomes an investment by providing the normative subject with a vision of what is lacking, whether that lack is a form of suffering or deprivation (poverty, pain), or excess (pleasure, enjoyment). The other is attributed with affect (as being in pain, or having pleasure) as a means of subject constitution.

The courtesan is a subaltern figure who generates similar discourses of pain and suffering. This allows some respondents a space to constitute aspects of their subjectivity in relation to her erotic and painful marginality.

## **2.7 Courtesan Nostalgia: The Yearning for an Ideal Identity**

Samira expresses her longing for an imaginary self in the past:

I think films like *Pakeezah* and *Umraw Jaan*, I suppose for me it's something I have yearned for because it sort of connects me with not necessarily with my roots but some-where along the way some roots of Mughal empire. With *Umraw Jaan* something about time gone and an era which was rich and people knew who they were or maybe that's the perception I have of those people that they knew who they were and they were comfortable with who they were. ...maybe its something about me myself having an image of me, I don't know about being in a fairy land as a child and that's fantasy and you can get lost in it and that's part of the fairytale and the fantasy part of Bollywood being lost in that world.

Samira expresses her yearnings for the roots of an allegedly authentic Muslim self paradoxically through courtesan films. Her fantasy of the life of a courtesan and the Mughal culture is represented in the 'Muslim socials' - Bombay films of the 1950s and 1960s. Samira desires another identity because there is an absence or loss, a confusion that something is missing as a British Pakistani living in England. The courtesans were associated with erotic Urdu poetry and exoticised as beautiful but unavailable women. They signified yearning, loss and mourning. Samira's identification with the courtesan figure is through her feelings of loss and yearning for an ideal aestheticised cultural identity. The figure of the courtesan represents a past of Moghul nobility that has been highly eroticised in Indian literature, art and cinema. Respondents who were of Pakistani origin had a complex relationship to Bombay cinema. All Pakistani respondents saw Bombay cinema as very much part of their everyday life and part of their cultural resource. Many respondents articulated their identification through the Muslim stars, through the language, Urdu, and through the 'Muslim socials' such as the courtesan films. However, the same respondents also felt very hurt and attacked by many anti-Pakistani and Islamophobic narratives of Bombay films of the 1980s. Some respondents were



selective in not choosing to watch certain films if they heard on the grapevine that they communicated anti-Pakistani messages.

The depiction of the 'Moghul' feudal Urdu culture was based in nostalgia. The film courtesan character was derived from Lucknow Tawaif culture. Songs were inscribed with a pathos afflicted Urdu poetry sung by the Courtesan to sensual Kathak dancing. Visual and aural spectacles incorporated ornate costume and jewellery of the Moghul era. For examples, the dancing bells worn mainly by dancers were associated with the dancing prostitutes. The jingling sounds of silver anklets were used to intensify and highlight the entrance of the Tawaif's dance, as in the film *Pakeezah*. The song and dance scenes were usually pictured with a background of the visual splendour of Moghul architecture. All these different aspects of Courtesan song and dance impacted the viewer in multiple ways. Samira loves the Urdu lyricism of the courtesan films. She elaborated on her affinity to this cinematic genre in its ability to invoke these fantastical imaginary selves, which satiates her desires for an idealised identity.

Ien Ang's (1985, 1999) analysis of melodramatic imagination is useful in explaining Samira's nostalgic identification. Samira's emotional identifications with the courtesan's fictional character may express powerless feelings of confusion about her identity in Britain. The courtesan provides a realism of how it feels to be in the space of 'Moghul' culture, somewhere where Samira's Muslim identity is not degraded, in fact it is eroticised and idealised. The 'Muslim Socials' exoticised the courtesan as an ideal object of beauty. Its reification permitted an escape from reality into a fantasy of eroticism. This is only one of many fantasized subject positions that Samira has the choice in her fantasy of choosing. Ang (1999) argues that the meaning of melodramatic excess may be better interpreted for its arousal of emotional impact rather than the clichéd reality they depict. In Samira's desires to express her poetic sensibility through this fantasy, what matters is the stimulation of intense feelings rather than the reality of the situation. In this way an excess of events and intensity of emotions are inextricably intertwined in the melodramatic imagination.

However, the aim of the filmmakers of the 'Muslim socials' may have been to counter criticisms of Muslim history and its rulers as aggressive and unjust by the Hindu backlash after the Partition. In addition their aim was to modernise and reform Muslim communities in tune with other secular filmmakers of that time. They made films with humanist and secular messages and posed challenges to patriarchal structures through narratives of romance that challenged gender and class oppression. Another aim may have been to highlight the significance of the Urdu language to the Indian imaginary as the Indian government began to replace Urdu with Hindi as the national language and instituted national anti-Urdu policies in radio and television. One way of countering this loss could be to exoticise the Urdu language by focusing on its romantic eminence and turn it into a 'classical language.'

## Conclusion

I set out to explore the respondents' engagement with melodramatic and painful songs. Songs communicate the unrepresentability of pain through the excess intensity of melodramatic form. The pleasures of old songs were attributed to the value of the collective ethos and not the individual hedonism in the newer films and their songs. The films from the 1950s onwards mourned the purging and collective loss of Urdu and the Muslim culture in the Indian psyche. The film songs generate multiple and interconnected emotions. The pleasures of exaggeration, the familiar highs and lows, ambivalence, meaninglessness, confusion, 'feeling drained', anger, masochism, powerlessness, heroism and empowerment can be enjoyed. The non-representative multiple affects that they create surpass definition and therefore permit commonality on a broad basis. Many felt affiliations to songs formed a process of cultural transmission between the generations. The aurality of songs initiated sites of memory creation and an excavation of historicity attached to these sounds. The cultural intimacies and familiarity of sharing songs and associated emotions produced a site of solidarity and intimacy. The connection to one's own past pain or a connection to another's pain was the mechanism of connecting with the film character's pain. The feminine embodiment of pain in songs was a recurrent device. The courtesan is a master signifier of this practice, as a martyr. It is no coincidence that most famous female heroines generated their popularity by playing courtesans of various sorts.

The aesthetic of Bombay cinema is constructed on its excesses. In old films there was an excess of metaphorical language whereas in the new cinema there is an excess of the visual. The cinema of the 1950s focused on creating an eroticism of poetry in songs and in dialogue. Contemporary cinema is adept at creating visual spectacle. An excess of affect or emotions destabilises so that you laugh as you cry, or either or both, in comparison with realistic genres. Engagement and detachment are two positions to relate to excess in the cinema. The pleasure of excessive affect in melodrama was a key feature of this viewing practice. The exaggerated emotions deployed through the melodramatic mechanisms of family crisis, the polarity between the good and the bad and the discovery, rescue and recognition of the innocent self produced multiple pleasures. Melodrama is based on emotional release, whereas affect is based on the excess intensity, which energizes the subject to make meanings. The affect theorists formulate cinema experience as embodied in that the body is immersed in the experience rather than outside the experience, in contrast to other conceptions of melodrama. The definition of pleasure and beauty in the Asian (psyche) imaginary is constituted by the pleasures of pain. The recurring pain of the intensity of suffering of the feminine body recalls the pain of displacement and loss of home and community. Beauty is defined by referring to women's pain aesthetically in their dance and poetry; an eroticisation of pain occurs as in the figure of the courtesan. The compulsion to

return to the site of loss and pain through the song scenes expresses a melancholic nostalgia to experience the loss repetitively and to not forget the struggles of displacement and marginality.

Respondents' pleasure with sad songs generated melancholic pleasures of loss, longing and nostalgia. Old film songs were revered for their lyrical poetry and the affects of self-negation and sentimental renunciations. The sentimental romantic era of the 1950s and 1960s valued an excess of emotions (sentimentalism), prioritized the collective struggle and challenged the materialism of modern capitalism. There is a desire for sensual, erotic, sexual pleasure as well as a desire for the comprehension and mastery of the cultural knowledge of the parent's world. Respondents' narratives of interaction with sad songs create subjectivities that voice 'incompleteness', 'something missing', a desire for unified identity, and a desire for other identities from the past. Respondents desire to participate in the trauma of their parent's migration and mourning is mediated by song experiences. Songs give voice to memories of loss and absence. If memory is dependent on sensation, emotion, imagination and language, and if language and imagination are dependent on the body's sense making capacities, then the body's experiences create specific languages and memories. Songs act as cultural transmitters of aural, visual, tactile and sensual practices and experience.

The historical influence of the Bhakti and Sufi aesthetic that combines the Radha-Krishna mythology with Urdu poetry in ghazals and qawwali in post-Independence cinema spills out through respondents' emotional engagement. The Radha sensibility was a state of immersion in the pangs of longing and frustrations, voiced verbally in poetry and imitated bodily. For the upper class listeners, a renunciatory ethics was cultivated. Through the Urdu poetic imagination (Bhakti and Sufi poetry) a renunciation ethic formed the archetype of a lover surrendering oneself to beloved human or divine. The melancholic ethics of self-indulgence and self-abnegation was integral to the courtesan archetype. The appropriation of Urdu poetic sensibility conjoined with Radha's devotional sensibility and the melodramatic aesthetic produces the Golden Era of 1950s songs, which are considered 'the best' by many involved in the film producing and viewing circuits. There is nostalgia for this time in the respondents' expressions and desires. I argue that a feminine aesthetic is what describes the respondents' emotional engagement. The concept of devotion is derived from Hindu and Muslim religious musical traditions. The feminine aesthetic as embodied in the female devotion is understood as the ultimate spiritual state to achieve by embodied immersion. This is also the state of separation and yearning and overwhelming desire to unite with the divine form. The development of the 'tawaif' (courtesan) as a figure of yearning also internalises the devotional feminine aesthetic. Her devotion is through her music and dance and her 'virah' which is the pain of desire and separation that Radha felt and wrote erotic poetry about.

Devotion is the desire for the beloved, human or divine. The intensity or affect of devotion is fervour, intoxication, and a loss of self into this affect in yearning to unite with the other. Devotion can be understood as an embodied affect that involves dancing, chanting, and singing. It is oral, vocal; its language is simple and accessible and requires a group for its expression. It is a sensory-based emotional relationship. It incorporates a suffering, yearning and an aesthetic of the expression of pain. The desire is to transcend suffering but simultaneously to feel the pain of yearning. This is a contradictory but nuanced understanding of pain reproduced from respondents' understanding of their lives. The significance of spiritual, erotic, intoxicating affect, which overcomes boundaries, is often the subject of devotional singing. The journey across the land is a recurring trope of devotional stories. It signifies a journey, which involves living with loss of one's home and identity and the renunciation of material pleasures in the valued pursuit for spiritual transcendence. The need and desire to create an emotional community for subordinate and marginal groups in a society to survive hostile conditions is a much repeated strategy for different diasporic migrant groups. There is an imagined intimacy related to cultural and religious connections and also due to the sharing of similar conflicts and pain. Collective reconciliation through the sharing of loss and abjection associated with feelings of powerlessness is a mechanism of empowerment. The shared pleasures of melancholia, marginality, sensuality and solidarity create spaces and relations of intersubjectivity. This can form communities of emotions and intimate connections. The desire to connect is due to having certain experiences that are kept hidden and private. Therefore a sense of isolation and alienation is expressed and a claim to marginal status is voiced. But it is also validated in different circuits as cultural knowledge, which makes one visible. Recognition of a disavowed self as not shameful anymore generates a specific energy, which may be turned towards nostalgic ideals; these are arguably a central aspect of diasporic identity creation.

# CHAPTER 9

## THE BRITISH ASIAN, BECOMING AND BELONGING

### Introduction

The film songs created the strongest identifications and often were one of the most desired and the most memorable aspect of the cinema. Respondents were encouraged to narrate their emotions, sensations, and the attached meanings. I interpret the respondent's song experiences as embodied multiple sensory pleasures. I argue that the commonality of enjoyment of music and songs transcends many differences. The accessibility of songs allows a heterogeneous audience identification, which crosses class, language, religion, region and other boundaries. I forward an analysis that the multi-sensorial pleasures that permitted self-enjoyment also open up a space of interconnection with cultural collective others in the past and in the present. I highlight the ways in which songs generate emotions. I propose that in these enunciations of song experiences, songs become a bodily surface (an imaginative skin to stimulate emotions and senses) created by the respondent's imagination to express emotions; often sadness in old films but also warmth and eroticism attached to intimacy, romance and family closeness. The experiences of seeing, hearing, listening, feeling and 'making sense' produce knowledges and diverse experiences of being. The knowledge acquired can be utilized to gain validation in different milieus.

In the first section I explore the affect of belonging through respondents' interactions with cinema's utopian aesthetic. I focus on respondents' constructions of home by deploying the cinema's aesthetic of songs, family closeness, colour, dancing and food. I explore the intergenerational differences in viewing practices. I explore the younger generations relationship to the sounds and music of cinema. I explore respondents' embodied pleasures. I focus on the fantasy and romantic pleasures of the song scenes. I also explore the different embodied engagement with the song scenes in order to propose that a feminine aesthetic describes these pleasures. This feminine aesthetic<sup>60</sup> I argue, has traces in Bhakti and Sufi

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<sup>60</sup> I highlight one respondent's Samira's emotional interaction with a particular song scene where she feels she loses the boundary between her body and the scene. A few others like Sonali had also described this state of being with specific song scenes. I have theorised it as a 'Feminine aesthetic' appropriating ideas from Bhakti-Sufi devotional practices where the devotee refers to himself as herself in feminine form.

devotional practices<sup>61</sup> and is enjoyed by male and female respondents and by different generations alike.

In the second section I highlight the conflicts respondents face when interacting with Bombay cinema in relation to their religion. I argue that song identification is key to negotiations by diverse groups of Asians in Britain to see ‘glimpses of themselves’ in the cinema aesthetic. This does not mean that other aspects (stars, the female heroine and the fantasy) are not as important, but that due to their unifying nature, related to their antecedents in religious music and lack of boundaries, songs create spaces of freedom. This generates loyalty to the Bombay cinema aesthetic. Even when aspects of Bombay cinema remind respondents of racism in its bid for exotic representations, it still fulfils a desire and yearning to see aspects of self. The contestations have a real basis in social, economic and psychic factors but are mediated temporarily through the pleasures of the songs, romance, fantasy and eroticism. The fiction of singular Asian identity created in the viewing practice is able to transcend the conflicts of the multiple differences temporally. I therefore prioritize songs as the key space of hope amongst the realities of conflicts based on differences. My key argument is that an inter-subjective sensibility is displayed as respondents explore issues of home, comfort, romance, eroticism, communalism, fears of deculturation, and express the desires for a decolonisation of Bombay cinema in their bid to for cultural and community formation.

### **Background to Film songs and Orality**

Music has played an integral part in Indian cinema since the advent of the sound film. *Alam Ara*, was the first film with sound in 1931. It employed a Muslim devotional qawwali<sup>62</sup> sung

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<sup>61</sup> Bhakti and Sufi devotional practices came about as a synthesis of the Bhakti spiritual movement of the Hindu traditions (sixth and seventh century began in the South with the devotional cults of the Tamil saints) with Sufi mysticism of the 10th-17th century (the era of Mughal Empire and Islam) in Northern India. The Bhakti-Sufi tradition is understood as a spiritual relationship of an individual's intimate relationship with the ideal that is God, as a means of seeking moral and spiritual enlightenment in life through ecstatic devotion. Its also been interpreted as a popular protest against caste and gender hierarchy by challenging religious fanaticism. This popular synthesis of specific aspects of Hindu and Muslim religions in Bhakti-Sufi Movement was seen as a space of communal harmony. Some of the key religious rituals and practices associated with the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs religious worship of the Indian subcontinent was brought about due to this mixing. ‘Kirtan’ (religious singing) at a Hindu temple, Qawwali at a Muslim Dargah (shrine), and singing of Gurbani at a Gurdwara (Sikh temple) are all derived from the Bhakti –Sufi syncretic practices.

by a street Sufi wanderer to comment on the film situation. It established the use of music and song as the foundation for Indian cinema. Most commercial films have been musicals and the different genres of Indian film all have songs; films without songs are often unsuccessful at the box-office. The popularity of songs is one of the key reasons why Bombay cinema has survived competition from Hollywood. The music is released before the film and box office success depends to a large extent on this. The genre of songs can be divided into romantic songs (by far the majority), the item number (a sexy song and dance routine) and a pathos ridden melancholic song, which convey emotions of loss of a lover or family. MTV song and dance music videos are extremely popular amongst the younger generations. The wedding songs as ritual festivity or celebration of family are also recent developments. There are approximately eight hundred films produced every year and each film has at least four to five songs, so there are approximately four thousand film songs created every year to express different situations, emotions and moods. Of course, most songs hardly express any emotion and are hardly impressive but out of this diverse range of songs originate some gems.

Walter Ong (1982, 2003) has argued for the importance of orality to postcolonial societies and Peter Manuel (1993) for Indian culture. Singing at life rituals of birth, growth, marriage, or when daughters leave the parental home after marriage, religious festivals and death is a common feature of South Asian Indian culture. Many of these rituals are translated into songs. Due to high levels of illiteracy in India, cinema has appropriated and adapted religious and mythological stories that form part of the common knowledge of the masses. These stories were often narrated or enacted in musical oral forms by the theatrical traditions of Nautanki and Parsi theatre; this was seen as an acceptable form of emotional representation. Cinema adapted these antecedents to reach a broad audience. The orality of folk and religious rituals can be traced back to Indian storytelling traditions, such as the oral performance of religious epic poetry from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Bhakti and Sufi devotional music and mythical stories of Radha and Krishna also influenced the oral aesthetic. In villages even now people go to watch all night recitations of the Mahabharat. Oral traditions have therefore flourished over many centuries. The familiarity with songs connects spectators to memories of back home, with folk traditions and their ritual

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<sup>62</sup> Qawwali is devotional and spiritual music performed by a group of eight to nine musicians clapping and singing at Sufi Shrines throughout India and Pakistan. The central themes of qawwali are love, devotion and longing of human being for the Divine. Qawwalis tend to begin gently and build steadily to a very high energy level in order to induce hypnotic states both among the musicians and within the audience. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qawwali>

participation. Film songs can be a moral comment on the filmic situation or the characters, or they could forward the story, or go into reflexivity, or they could question or challenge the status quo. The lyric of the song is interwoven with the film's story with the music expressing the mood and scenic landscape that characterizes Bombay cinema's aesthetic. Many songs generate spiritual connections. They also stimulate fantasy due to their effects of transporting the listener to a different space. Fantasy is crucial to the Bombay cinematic medium and is crucial for identification and sympathy with the characters. The cinematic narrative is therefore layered and polysemic since it allows for the development of diverse audience identifications. The song often represents romantic scenes where lovers sing and dance in stupendous landscapes or scenic parks. South Asians across the globe identify with the songs due to their familiar sounds, orality and rhythmic patterns. Songs are links to historical knowledge through their style of vocality, rhythm and orality. Song styles also produce new cultural trends and induce new consumption practices. Songs mediate intimate feelings of local biographies in the public imaginary. They create spaces of freedom by inducing a sensual and embodied engagement. The loss of body, or the dissolution of boundaries and binaries of body and mind produce discourses of freedom.

## **Section 1: The Utopia of Belonging and Unity**

### **1.1 The Home, Songs and Familiarity**

Sunita describes her notions of belonging when asked what she likes best about cinema watching:

Basically for me it's like going home, it's bit of a nostalgia trip.....there is a lot of meaning there and I mentioned the music, the stories, colourful and very melodramatic and I would not be able to pinpoint one thing it's it's more than just sort of cinema.

Sunita elaborates on the multiple sites of embodied sensations associated with this experience. This includes the imagery of home, metaphors of food and an excess of feelings associated with cinematic experience. The similarities between many of the respondents in their identifications are music, colour, sensuality and emotions. Shabnam eloquently expresses a forged commonality of identity amongst South Asians amidst the multiplicity of differences, reinforced by her interpretation of the Bollywood collective aesthetic:

The strongest points of identifications are the songs, dances, over-romanticization, fashion, and the crazy families.

Samira expands:



Something very very...it's almost 'like a comfort zone' something very cosy, non-threatening, familiar, easy on the eye. It's a sensual feast for all senses, for the eyes, its just something really lovely.

The utopian affect can be described as 'a sensual feast,' remembered in nostalgic tones. It serves to aestheticise the memory of family. Most respondents recounted very positive memories and cinema experiences in Britain when they were younger. Sareena recounts her first memory of identifications with Bombay cinema as a childhood habit, when she used to go to Wilmslow Road in Rusholme, an Asian area of Manchester, eating Asian food and buying Asian music:

We would go to Wilmslow road and we would buy Indian cassettes and we would check out the new kind of the latest Indian film cassettes and buy samosas from Ambala and kebabs. So that was like the highlight of the trip every Sunday...

Respondents articulated a range of symbols and codes that signified 'Asian' to them whilst talking about their past and present cinema practices. Some of the ones mentioned were music, food, clothes, colours, sounds, bodies, language, idioms of speech, tones, and moral philosophies as forming a range of signifiers in voicing their South Asian sensibility. Irfan confirms this potent combination of cinema, food and music when watching at home but adds that it's the 'watching together' that generated the affect of cinema for him:

I never watch it by myself I would feel dirty. I would feel selfish actually because Bollywood film is like a five course film and you can't be greedy and eat by yourself. You have to share it. It's not something at all you can watch by yourself. ...You have had so much colour and so much stuff coming at you. You have got to give yourself a break. And that's how most people watch Bollywood films in stops and starts but they never watch it by themselves.

All respondents felt that the motif of family was central to Bombay cinematic experience. One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was an emotional connection with the family through cinema watching. Asha explains her childhood rituals of cinema going in Leicester.

Natraj [the cinema hall] was that was the biggest one. In fact it's opened up again. Uhhmm in those days it was really you know the place to go with your family and it was a real family thing. You used to go and the films would be three hours and then there would be intervals in the middle then dad would get you some ice cream and that was always really good fun. And it was where I saw Amitabh Bachchan as well, which is one of my best memories. It was a small Asian community and he had to come to Leicester because it was one of the biggest Asian communities.... and that was real treat for everyone and for my parents. And it was really sad because once the video came out and you could hire videos player, the cinema lost a lot of customers but now its back, and it seems to my parents don't go very often. They have a DVD player but before they used to go very often and it was cheap in those days...

Asha also expresses the changes in cinema practices in Britain. The significance of the role of identity and family in respondent's viewing practices became apparent when the interviews were collated and the general trends of similarities and differences were explored. For many of the British born respondents the discourse of Bombay cinema provided an emotional connection to the parents' cultural and community values and life philosophies. This included generational conflicts, the fantasy of romance and success, weddings and the resolution of family problems into happy endings. The watching of cinema at home with the family was often narrated in celebratory tones. There was a romanticization of self and family attached to this practice, and the affect of the memory often generated connections to the newer Bombay cinema, resurrected in the 1990s. Similarly, public viewing in a cinema hall was often described as a social event and generated multiple discourses of memory and childhood. The memory of cinema was key to the formation of Asian childhood. Many second-generation respondents expressed that Bombay cinema experience was different in that it included food, family and emotions as a prerequisite more so than it would in watching western films and to them it signified an 'Asian' practice. Samira's familiarity included being surrounded by other brown bodies (in Oldham), familiar music and being able to share film gossip. Irfan also described a similar familiarity of being in the East End, in Asian shops, where he felt enclosed in a familiar Asian space. Shabnam and Kamar also described encountering the Asian familiarity of cinema going practices of the 1970s in Leeds when they were children.

## **1.2 Generational Consumption**

Sabar Jaan, a first generation respondent, said:

When I go to the Trafford Centre, it feels like being back in Pakistan, so many of us there, we feel we are so many.

The Trafford Centre is where Bombay films are shown in the greater Manchester area and families from all over the ten districts of Manchester (and from other towns) converge there to see the latest films. The tickets are usually sold out over the weekends for new releases. Sabar Jaan expresses a longing to feel part of a community, which might be fulfilled through other means, but is also accomplished through cinema viewing practices. Asha explains the reasons for the popularity of Bombay cinema for her parent's generation:

Initially I think for lot in the Asian community, it reminds them of home. It's a medium they can relate to, for my mum's generation they don't have English as a first language, or even as second but as a third language, it's an entertainment that they can relate to. I also think that Hindi films are a pure form of escapism because it's so glamorous, because it so far fetched because everything happens on the screen for three hours so that you forget about everything. I think you know the way English films are not because they are trying to be too deep and tackle a

subject. Hindi films don't really tackle beyond good and evil, so I think it's an entertainment value.

She outlines the reasons as related to exclusion in terms of language and cultural frameworks as well as good entertainment. All first generation respondents and five of the second and third generation participants had daily access to satellite channels. If younger, under-twenty year-old, respondents lived with parents, they had daily access to these channels. Very few of the second-generation respondents (aged 23-35) had satellite channels because most had left the communities they were born in and lived away from their parents' community. They would most likely watch these films when they went to visit their parents, or at home on videos, or in cinema halls with friends. The frequency of viewing would therefore be much less. Three second-generation respondents lived very near their parents and within a South Asian community and therefore cinema was more part of their daily activity compared to the ones who had moved away. Sareena, who had left home more than twelve years ago, describes her parent's viewing habits:

I think its become part of their lives, they watch Hindi movies. I don't think they go a week without watching one, you know. Its just an intrinsic part of the way that they live you know. They go to work they come home and they cook food they watch Hindi movies that's what they do.

The need for South Asians to see themselves mirrored is fulfilled by Bombay cinema. With the first generation respondents the films often evoked memories of the past. Mrs Prasar who is a first generation respondent explains:

I prefer when they show a bit of social life and a family life, which is very much related to our social life in the past. And at the moment another thing I do like very much what social life they had before twenty or thirty years ago.... And also life style has changed so joint families are literally breaking but we have a chance as the modern time is much more improved socially, culturally and ethically. We do have a chance to enjoy a lot more. In the modern age we are much more educated, we are lot more improved in our social life.

Bombay cinema or Bollywood is entertainment, escapism and pleasurable experience but it also provides familiarity and reassurance. The ideology of strong family values and success validates South Asians by connecting them to these values. Respondents find a language through the dialogue, songs and images, which can be appropriated in everyday interaction and conversation. Bombay cinematic discourse provides a language and gives it public recognition. The transformation of Indian cinema into its newest genre, Bollywood, articulates survival. This is identified with as an aspect of cultural survival of self and community. Shahid, a second-generation respondent and Mr Prashar, a first-generation respondent had both felt admiration for Bollywood's achievements in the global market. Mr Prashar explains:

In India they are very talented people, they are very good whether male or female, and there is sort of competition with other country also. And film industry in India is not behind comparing with the rest of the world. It is very very fast, very likable, and all the young people they can watch it. And there is always something to learn...

### 1.3 Consumption and Youth Cultural Trends

Naseema explains the reason for the popularity of Bollywood in Britain:

I think firstly because of the language, they can associate with, they can understand. Obviously with English music they can't. Quite a few Bollywood movies they can actually sit with family and watch it. And it's just like a trend thing. There is culture in it, it's sort of trend; everyone has a Zee TV and it is entertainment.

Naseema is right in saying that watching Bollywood is a trend. The proliferation of satellite channels has made watching Bollywood song and dance scenes even more of an established trend. But not everyone can understand the language being spoken in Bombay cinema, especially if they are not from Hindi/Urdu speaking communities. Even if they are from those communities, the younger generations often do not speak, or only partially speak, the language. Their connection is more through the multiple resonance of the songs and not necessarily always through the spoken words. Shahid feels that there have been changes in the music style in Bombay cinema in order to attract the younger generation.

It's the type of music they are bringing in, before in 'Mohammed Rafi' time it was too slow (it was alright for that time) but then they have modernized the music and brought in a different type of tune to it, like Bhangra style and lot of young group are interested in that and that's what they are trying to go and listen and it's becoming more you know the CDs are coming out before the actual films are coming out. So people have the chance to listen to the music and deciding whether ...some people purely go because the songs are good and they don't know the story and what is happening...

Nowadays, there are countless television programmes, which cater for this activity on satellite television. In fact, some channels such as Channel V and MTV India only show film song videos. Bombay cinema has survived by modernizing and targeting different youth audiences. This is certainly what Ravi Vasudevan (in an interview with me in October 2004) and Juluri (2004) believe that Indian music is an independent globally expanding business. Shahid describes a music event, he attended, in which Bombay film stars were brought over, and song scenes are staged for a live audience:

I went to one of these shows and where the actors are there... in Manchester Evening News Arena and I saw a lot of young people and I thought they would not be interested in Bollywood music and ...they were there.

Shahid claims that the attraction of Bombay cinema for the younger generation is to 'get' a bit of culture.

I mean you would see a lot of Indian music in cars before you know it's good to see that there is bit of a culture, our culture, when you are living in a Western environment ehmm everything has been just English English English to you! and you still adapt you know some of that culture just listening to the music and I sometimes think it's good for the people or the youngsters in England because they actually do put forward what kinds of life style are in Pakistan or in India, you know.

Amongst the second and third generation respondents there was a narration of connection with family members through the viewing of Bombay cinema and some expressed nostalgia in terms of 'what life could have been like' if their parents had not migrated. Shahid asserts that an engagement with songs can impart cultural knowledge and educate the younger generation about their home culture.

Because before you are age of ten...and go to Pakistan, it makes it easier....is this what it's like you have got some interaction with your home.

Asha told me how her sister has learnt about Indian culture by engaging with the songs and dances. The routine mimesis of song and dance sequences and associated ritualised dressing up and masquerading styles were usual Asian youth cultural practices in social gatherings. Many second and third generation respondents recounted stories which mocked and parodied Bombay cinematic address, (for example old sad songs or hypermasculinity) and at the same time also parodied South Asian cultural values. This could be seen as a shared language of respectful parody or insider parody. This was a typical way of connecting with other South Asians. The commonality of enjoyment of music and songs transcend many differences. The accessibility of songs allow for identifications with a heterogeneous audience, which crosses class, language, religion, region and other boundaries. Film songs were the most identified with and were a common ground of social discourse and articulation of emotions. The affects and sensations articulated in relationships to songs and music strengthened cultural understanding and created a commonality amongst the differences. Respondents voiced multiple identifications with song scenes. These were the non-representative pleasures of the music and the sound of the song, and the representative aspects of words, lyrics and poetry all of which produced multiple sensory affects and an emotional engagement.

#### **1.4 Asian Sounds: Aurality and Asian-ness**

Irfan, who is a second generation Bangladeshi and therefore speaks Bengali and not Hindi, explained that that he liked cinema songs based on their sounds, but did not really understand what was being said.

D: Ya, I really like songs from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* and *Mohabateen* that's a bit sad (in an embarrassed voice).

MJ: Why?

D: I like 'leza leza,' I have the CD. I don't actually know what they are saying. I don't understand any Hindi at all, whatsoever.

MJ: What do you like?

D: I like the sound and that's an odd thing to say to someone.

MJ: I like music by its sound.

D: Exactly but I think to a white person I think it's an odd thing to say because they are not used to listening to sounds what they do this is the problem with the charts, like Gareth Gates and Will Young, you know the whole pop star stuff and they are buying on the looks and they are buying on if the person talking about love and I am just gonna buy it because of the whole branding thing and part of the life style and all that but I think I am buying it because of the sound even when I don't know the language but I don't think I could persuade a white person to buy a Japanese song because it sounds nice.

Irfan voices his Asian difference from his white friends through their musical practices. The songs are a space of assertion of an Asian difference by identification with the sound against the ridiculed view of that sound in the past. In Irfan's interpretation, it is a way of claiming recognition for an activity, which he was probably shamed for in the past. This is his Asian difference, which he evaluates as better because they (his white friends) have been manipulated by marketing strategy and peer pressure, whereas he makes his own authentic choice. That is, in Irfan's terms, Asian-ness could mean a different (better) way of listening that relies on the pleasure of sound rather than peer pressure and lifestyle choice. Through his identification with a specific way of relating to film songs, Irfan validates not only his choice but also Asian-ness, his chosen identity in relationship to whiteness, which excludes him. In Irfan's understanding, 'Asian-ness' is understood as having fewer boundaries in its listening and musical experience. This understanding allows him more freedom. Therefore being Asian allows him a way out of the white norms of his friends. The songs are signs of emotional states that are appropriated to express a language and culture that has been difficult to claim in contemporary Britain. Songs are signs of difference, a cultural difference and a very different sound to English (western) sound and music.

Peter Manuel (1993) has argued that the film songs have crossed multiple linguistic barriers in India where many regional languages are spoken and engage many of the states. Film song and music style is diverse because it is a synthesis of traditional folk songs, regional language variations, classical ragas and western musical influences adapted and woven into the image. Western influences include contemporary trends, so Latin American,

African and Arabic world music is integrated into Bombay film music because of its popularity in the West. The heterogeneity of the music reflects the popular modern mass appeal of this cinema as it tries to attract a heterogeneous audience.

The respondents learnt to listen to music through their social and cultural background, through family, school and peer groups and pressure. In this respect music is a live object and the spaces of music and songs are appropriated as spaces of survival. Singing and music practices have been used as ways of surviving and suffering through passionate interaction, as in the Bhakti and Sufi traditions. Most second or subsequent generation respondents did not speak their mother tongue and therefore find that the accessibility of film songs and language provides a space of discovery and recognition. The accessibility of language allows a hesitant communication through these songs. Though Hindi/Urdu was not most respondents' mother tongue, there was general discomfort or even shame for not comprehending this language because it was seen as restricting access to one's 'own' culture. Irfan's account above is a good example of this. Obviously, English was the common language but there was a perception of English as 'not ours.' This was because most second-generation respondents' parents or other family members did not claim English as their first language. The mother language for most respondents was another language such as Punjabi, Gujarati, Bangla, Urdu, Pashto, Hindi or Tamil. This was a contradiction in which the recognition of language as one's 'own' created conflict in one's comprehension of one's subjectivity. Vijay Mishra (1996) has argued that the disjunction between the raced and ethnic diasporic body and the English language creates a contradiction. The relationship of language and body in the context of diasporic experience creates mourning, which is difficult to resolve.

Irfan expresses embarrassment for not understanding the language but affiliates to the sensuality of the sound to reclaim a space of difference. The sensuality of sound has a very specific meaning in this context in that songs become a trigger for connection with intergenerational and communal sentiment. Songs therefore represent not only the traces of affect that they produce and allow expression of, but also the affect of interconnections with others (parents, national space, cultural others).

### **1.5 The Embodied Eroticism of Song Experiences**

For many respondents, the sensual pleasure of cultural sounds was a crucial feature of a specifically cultural identification. Shakira describes:

The colour the visual aspect no... at the same time visual and the musical aspect.

Samira describes embodied pleasure when she talks about being surrounded by music:

I enjoy the music and I think that's always echoing in my car or in the house or even going out to people's houses or to a restaurant, you know. I think I am surrounded a lot by the music and so I really like that. It is always there.

Song scenes create a unique blend of sound, music and song, which access different layers of interiority and exteriority. The sonic or aural affect of film songs often rescue bad films by touching the audience in particular ways. Walter Ong, (1982: 71) exploring the relationship of sound and interiority, proposes that sounds create an auditory world where sound pours into the listener/hearer, therefore producing feelings of immersion in the sound of the music and the song. This, Ong, claims, is a unifying sense compared to the dissecting, defining sense of vision. Ong claims that sound allow a space of harmony and participation whereas vision creates a distance and objectivity, which allows for a sense of individuation. The problem with Ong's formulation is that it creates a hierarchy between vision and hearing. Though this subverts the western philosophical hierarchy, which legitimates vision over all other senses, it still does not go far enough to understand fully the affects of listening and hearing music and songs. It is true that listeners feel that they are immersed in musical sounds but it is not necessarily only experienced as interiority. Samira describes this quality of immersion when she describes herself as being inside this soundscape. Similarly, Sonali expresses her pleasure of aurality:

Oh just what I like best? Okay I think for me it was the sound, and how it was dressed up, the songs for me were like really important because they captured the emotions. But I think the initial thing always for me was the music and the sound of films you know the dishuum dishuum and then you know the melodrama and the violins you know all that association I had with it really

The interaction between sound and our bodies is a part of learned responses, of personal and cultural dispositions. The respondent's experiences of listening and dancing to music are culturally coded and depend on cultural history. The memories that are sparked by songs can generate different affects. The vocal style and the timbre of film songs exhibit the development of a specifically Indian characteristics. For example, the distinctive girlish voice has become one of the most characteristic features of Indian popular music and film culture. Sanjay Shrivastava (2004) proposes that Lata Mangeshkar's girlish voice was developed in a bid to produce a virginal innocent femininity in post Independence India, by the filmmakers and the middle class bourgeoisie, in reaction to fears of liberal western sexual ideology and its impact on Indian women. One of the first generation respondents, Palika, expressed her intense dislike of Lata's shrill feminine voice:

I really find it unpleasant, it sets my teeth on edge listening to her...I preferred Asha's voice because I like slightly deeper voice slightly more resonant voice, ...



Lata Mangeshkar was an idealized icon for most other respondents. Her singing represented 'Indianness' because of the number of songs she had sung and the emotions associated with rites of passage that she had expressed; she was beyond criticism for most respondents. Peter Manuel (1993) has argued that the heterogeneity of vocal styles in North India has been replaced by the homogeneity of the film vocal style. The commercial aspiration of cinema standardizes the heterogeneity of traditional cultural vocality. The resonance of sound waves flow throughout the body and have a visceral quality for any vocal style. The tactile force of the sound of the songs can provide sensual and kinetic pleasure. Sonali expresses confusion and ambivalence in her comprehension of the pleasures of embodied immersion in cinema experience:

You feel like you are in this dream world, you just don't believe the things around you are real anymore because you've just had three hours of like singing, dancing, dishuum dishuum uhh you know like music that moves you so you've got the tragedy, the melodrama the whatever. Then you come out and it's just a whole different world and for me it takes a long time to kind of assimilate back into you know into my actual real world.

In addition there is an antecedent of oral performance, which generates desires that surpass the boundaries of the real through passionate engagement with the communal singing of South Asian oral cultures. The song's visual experience was also often narrated in ambiguous and confused terms, because of the lack of a definition of the pleasures of sonorous sensuality in music. Respondents often voiced their pleasurable experiences of cinema viewing in passive tones such as 'being moved and touched.' Sonali's confusion about the reality of her body immersed in this viewing experience is expressed as being in a dream world. This is because Sonali experiences sensual feelings in her body as she watches a sensual scene on the screen. Sonali is not being touched or caressed to feel the tactile and sensual pleasures directly, but through imagining what it would feel like to be in the scene. Music is experienced as both physical and mental as it is an embodied response. The energy and movement created by the affect of music problematizes the distinction between physical and mental experience (though the way we respond to sound is culturally coded). The ability of sounds to create movement (the physical gestures or sounds from us in mimesis) is due to their tactile force. Sochack argues that:

...we see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by our history and knowledge of our sensorium. (2000:17)

Laura Marks's (1999) conception of 'haptic visuality' and Sobchack's 'cinesthetic subject' are useful here, in that vision is embodied and informed by the knowledge of the other senses that work in cooperation and exchange with other senses of the body and their access to the world. The confusion between the imagination of a sensation and the actual experience of the sensation is understood in non-hierarchical way by the body, and Sobchack's (and Merleau

Ponty's) conceptualisation of a 'lived body' does not permit one meaning to be prioritised over other meanings. Therefore it is difficult to differentiate between reality and dream. Sobchack and Marks both use the body as a space where sensory and mental perceptions work together in cooperation to comprehend image, language, experience and imagination to create meaning. The tactile embodied pleasures of orality and aurality can be understood in this context.

### 1.6 The Utopian Aesthetic: Hope, Romance and Fantasy

Asha and Sunita when asked about the fantasies in Bombay cinema, explain:

Asha: It's one of the beauties of Bollywood that you do get the happy ending people's lives are so shit in India and people do aspire that and yes it is unrealistic and every now and then you do want a bit of realism then you watch something like 'Earth' and it is what makes people watch it?

Sunita: uhmm almost majority have happy endings so it's almost like don't worry you know trust and dream and it will all be alright in the end. You will get the girl; you will become rich and lot of hope in Indian films.

The predictability of the happy ending signifies hope and safety, which constructs a utopian aesthetic. Most respondents expressed that Bollywood was pure escapism from their own lives. It provided a distance from their day-to-day ordinary life. The transcendence of the ordinary was a common motivation for engaging with cinema's fantasy. The healing aspects of predictable and hopeful endings, beautiful scenery and imaginary choices of selves are all aspects of a utopian aesthetic, which generate affiliations for the respondents. The healing affect of beauty, however defined, is a crucial issue to comprehend in the pleasures of everyday entertainment. Bombay cinema partially provides a space of beauty and healing but at the same time also produces and releases the spectator's insatiable desires.

Richard Dyer (1977) has argued that the entertainment industry expresses (and satisfies) its audiences' need for utopian desires. He believes this is done by 'non-representational means' through the affect of music and colour amongst other techniques. The respondents report that they watch Bombay cinema with a 'suspension of disbelief' due to its lack of realism and its melodramatic mode of address. This was in contrast with others who felt that they did not want realism. When this predictable utopian ending is challenged, as in some art and experimental films, it is either applauded for its realistic sensibility or condemned for producing affects of hopelessness for those who are caught in dystopian realities. Naseema expresses intense anger when describing a film called *Chandni Bar* that (won many awards for its realistic portrayal of a Bombay bar girl) had a sad ending. The realistic representation of the failed romance of the woman protagonist who had struggled all her life left Naseema feeling trapped:

Like *Chandni Bar* it was such a nice film but the ending was so....she never escaped from it! I think that is sort of I think that is a bit degrading for women. If someone in difficult position was watching that what would they think I am going to end up like that, there is no way I am getting out of that, are not I?

Her identification with the character leaves her in a hopeless emotional space; hence she reacts against the film. Samira explains the intricacies of desire for fantasy:

I think sometimes it's like some films like that what they do is they break the pattern of fantasy you know that escapism. You know you watch a film like that and you think ouuu you know that it's too real you know it's too too real... because people go to escape and that's too close to home in your face. It's too close, its like more than reality, you are there yourself and then you are seeing other people's realities as well and it can be too much...I think when you have got a film that is very moving like *Fiza* then the pain and anguish and the helplessness in film overrides the pleasure you might get from one song in that film or two really really good songs or something like that in that film.

The role of the utopian aesthetic in embalming mental anxieties and permitting hope to flourish is evident here. Many respondents spoke of a release of tension and anxieties in their viewing practice. The imaginative aspects of fantasy, songs, music, colour, and scenery can alleviate and have a healing role in mental health issues. The 'song and dance' mode of expression produces a fantasy of romance and permits an escape into a dream world. The staging of romance in beautiful scenic locations caters for touristy desires of voyeurism and escape. It also creates a fantasy of heterosexuality as the cultural and social ideal. The relationship of song, scenery and romance has antecedence in folk and religious culture and especially in Radha Krishna mythology. In following on from these traditions, the portrayal of landscape in Indian painting was theorized as representing emotional space rather than a realistic mode. In a response to a question on the kinds of fantasy Bombay cinema represents, Samira focuses on the beauty of the scenic landscape.

I think that it's so scenic as well you know so much of it like for a moment or for a day or for a week or for a lifetime I would like to be there.

Samira names one of the key mechanisms of Bollywood fantasy. The romantic song and dance 'mise-en-scene' is mainly in scenic natural parks, with beautiful green hills, or snow-capped mountains or with waterfalls in the background. In this context, the respondents in these interviews are being transported to touristy places in India, the UK, Switzerland, the USA, or imaginatively to a past (such as feudal aristocratic Moghul courts). The spectacle created by Bollywood adds to the melodramatic staging of the narratives and a 'beyond ordinary' experience. The theatricality of performance and the spectacular setting permits the performance of the spectator's fantasy. The staging of one's own fantasy may allow relief from struggles and pain.

## 1. 7 The Fantasy of Romance

In responding to a question on what she likes in the films, Mrs Prashar explains:

The films I like should have a bit of romance, a bit of love affection, bit of respect for elderly people so that atmosphere culturally and make you more easy to understand each other.

In responding to what scenes Asha remembers the most, she explains:

I think romantic scenes from like *Dil Wali Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and I remember some of the old songs from Amitabh Bachchan and Parvin Baby you know as a couple that was really nice, I think you tend to remember the songs more than the scenes.

Many respondents pointed out that one of the main reasons of Indian cinema's popularity was due to the escapism of romance. The character on screen reproduces Asha's desire for an ideal romance. The vast majority of songs deal with love and romance and the fantasy of romance is a central theme in most films, therefore most respondent's memory of cinema was through the enunciation of romantic song scenes. The relationship of romance, fantasy, songs and scenic visuals (usually landscapes of nature) is an integral part of the Bombay cinematic aesthetic developed through the appropriation and resignification of syncretic folk, traditional and modern popular cultural practices. The role of romance, songs and fantasy in creating a specific affective mode to engage and create spectator's amatory desires and by normalizing heterosexual coupling as the social and cultural ideal reassures the audience. However, romantic stories often became the space to challenge patriarchal cultural norms that control female autonomy and sexuality. The intergenerational conflicts in reality often occur through romance narratives. Samira explains the relationship of fantasy to reality:

Yet it's not so much a fantasy you know ...the modern Bollywood is quite near to yourself particularly in the constant theme of boy meets girl. And parents are against them, the day-to-day kind of stories that are happening to your neighbours, or it's going to happen to you or it's going to happen to somebody somewhere is going through it. I think even if I identify with it...and even in marriage, there is always some generational conflict happening you know, could be about what you wear or the fact that you want to do drama rather than medicine. Those themes are stereotypical but maybe there is some reality to it.

However escapist Bombay cinema is, traces of the story touch very real issues. The struggles of modern romance focus on the younger generation and their struggles for autonomy against traditional family norms. Prasad (1996) has argued that the struggle and trauma of romance in the earlier Indian films represented collective changes taking place from a feudal, traditional society to a capitalist modern society where heterosexual couples replace the family patriarch or matriarch of the joint family and new drives are released. The respondents relate to the struggles and conflicts of romance because most families experience these changes in their daily life in Britain. Shahid expressed how he feels about resolving relationship problems by

watching intricate webs of sexual, family and community relationships. He expressed how it made him feel less isolated identifying with the problems of the characters. Many respondents learn and see how fictional characters cope with having similar problems, anxieties, and relationships. The cathartic aspect of Bombay cinema can be understood as a fantasy of real problems being resolved or reconciled in some way. Real problems in life such as low pay, bad housing, and bad marriage are more complicated and difficult to resolve. The cinematic resolution allows a fantasy of control. It is fictional, but the respondents are more interested in the emotional promise and the future options for solving their problems. The unification and resolution strategies of romance are utilized to reconcile tensions between different generations, classes, and religions and offer a unified imaginary space. The collective sharing of problem allows some satisfaction and reassurance due to the pleasure of commonality of this experience. The familiarity and predictability allows respondents to overcome feelings of alienation and marginality. However Asha also expressed ambivalence around issues of fantasy, romance and glamour within these films.

I think my parents don't like the new films either. Ehmm its too love orientated for them. They have got Sony uhhmm on cable and a couple of others and now they watch soaps more than the films....

Asha criticizes the obsession with a different kind of sanitized romance in the new films, which excludes her parents and herself. She voices that 'there is just too much love' in these new films for her parents. She explains the difference between old and new films in their depiction of romance:

I think in the old days the story was more of a rounded story about community struggle, class struggle, race struggle which ultimately was about good and evil which I think is a Hindu thing, certainly growing up as a Hindu you do learn about Good and Evil. Ehhh mmm and that sort of stuff has gone and now it's more about love story and twentieth century modern fast cars and loose.... not loose woman but independent loose women, not exactly independent women.

The love and romance stories of the older films were often about ordeals and tribulations and represented different social conflicts, as Asha explains above. The level of conflict in the newer films is focused on individuals and not on social conflicts. This alienates Asha because her struggles as a working-class Black (as she defined herself) woman are not always expressed in the new romance films.

### **1.8 The Feminine Aesthetic**

In this section I deploy one respondents' articulation of spiritual affect arising in a mundane everyday interaction with cinema. I propose that her multi-sensorial embodied engagement with cinema illuminates a feminine aesthetic derived from the religious devotional aesthetic of

the earlier cinema. Her expression of the loss of her body in sensuality, depicting the loss of boundaries against transgressing cultural norms of being, evokes similar expressions to the feminine devotional aesthetic. Both expressions desire freedom through prioritizing embodiment as a space creativity and imagination. Samira's language creates an emotional space beyond that of 'the ordinary' to a higher spiritual affect.

I think that if something touches you it's like sometimes there will be a moment in a film where I remember I was watching ehmmmm I can't remember there was a film with uhmm there was a song I think you would know the film, 'Tujhe pyaar se chahne wala tujhe dil main basane wala, eek dil hai eek dil hai' ([to desire you with love and to place you in my heart, this is only my heart]) and I was just and it was not anything particularly moving about the two actors, they were just ordinary Karishma Kapoor and somebody else and just acting out this romantic song but it was not romantic to me.

Samira is listening to and watching this song scene and experiencing sensual and tactile pleasure, but she can't find any particular aspect to attach her feelings to. She voices that her identification is not with the stars or the characters but with the different substances of the song and the visual as a whole. She sees, hears and feels the live world in the song scene and is touched and moved by it in her living room. The interconnection of her senses initiates a trigger to a memory as the image and sound is translated into a bodily response. Sobchack (2000) proposes that due to the intercommunication of the senses, there are no boundaries between language and senses. There is an oscillation between things being perceived and previous knowledge relating to that and making sense all happening simultaneously. Samira continues:

It was... just said something about what I have done with my heart and you know and then it also reminded me of my mum you know it took me somewhere else and but I think the song is about a lot of things. I think sometimes when anything touches... for me anything that touches my heart is spiritual or touches my soul. And I think sadly Bollywood touches my soul (starts laughing at the ridiculousness of her comment).

She expresses that she does not find the song romantic, but it connects with how she understands her heart and it reminds her of her mother. Samira's 'lived body' enacts a communication between her sensations, feelings and knowledge through the symbols of heart and mother. Her heart is connected to her mother. This connection is a connection with a memory of sensation and that triggers a feeling. This memory of sensorial identification she has felt before, she categorizes through language as that associated with her heart. The concept of heart, or 'dil' is a recurrent theme in Persian/Urdu/Hindi poetry and ghazals and in Bhakti and Sufi religious and devotional movements. This concept is usually attached to the ideas of the beloved and to ideas of mystical expansiveness and to freedom from ordinary restrictions and norms. In a chain of signification, Samira associates the word 'dil' and 'pyar'

with the metaphor of heart. The resonance of the word 'dil' touches the idea of her heart, which she associates with her mother. The sensation of her heart being touched she associates with an idea of her soul, which she understands as spiritual. Samira's usage of sensual language is due to the experiential and visceral nature of language articulation. Samira feels herself feeling and the language she generates appropriates the language of Urdu erotic poetry in the concept of 'heart', 'soul' and 'mother'. She is enhancing and generating intensity through the creation of a language, based, in her experience of the sensual pleasure of the song scene. When asked to explain further, Samira continues:

hmmm, like almost like a human interaction. Well I would use the word interface you know almost something like I think when something touches you I call it spiritual you might think I am going somewhere really really weird by using the word spirituality and Bollywood together. (MJ laughing with Samira). Quite sad aren't I, I am really sad... (both giggling together).

Samira is interacting with this song scene as if it was live and human. The sign of romance she attaches to the sign of 'dil' that is then combined with 'song (Bollywood) touches her soul' and then subverted onto the figure of her mother. The feeling of viewing practice is shaped by contact with the memory of these complex emotional circuits. She then defines this as a spiritual affect. The combined value of the sensations generated through these connections is defined as spiritual emotion. She defines sensations of being mothered or mothering as the space of sensual spiritual connection. The ordinary boring romantic scene has been transcended to a mystical connection to her soul in her daily viewing practice of Bombay cinema. The space where this happens for her is when she is watching (she had explained earlier that she often leaves the satellite channel on in the background and often does not have the time to sit and watch any one program continuously) this song. She is self-deprecating about associating spirituality with her viewing of Bollywood because Bollywood is considered a low genre due to its melodramatic mode. In Samira's account language is crucial to the generation of emotion. The traces of feelings generated by specific words that conjure specific affect and emotions are connected to personal experiences, knowledge and reflexivity. The respondent's chose which feelings were presented and which were concealed and silenced in conversations with me.

## **Section 2: British Asian Differences and Dystopia**

### **2.1 Bollywood and Islamophobia**

Many Pakistani respondents expressed their anger at the stereotypical and inflammatory representations of Muslims. Samira explains:

I think it's definitely for the worst rather than for the better because like I said it's violent and it's not before... I think it was quite implicit you know like there were undertones but like now

it's downright open. You know "Chir ke rakh dengai" ([we will tear you into pieces]) you know quite... you know that...that sort of language and that sort of very very violent and very very macho....

Samira talked at length about the problematic representations of Pakistanis Muslims in Bombay cinema and how as a British Pakistani Muslim she feels attacked by its representation. She feels that the new films generate division with their violent anti-Muslim and macho rhetoric. Naseema explains her anger:

Indian films promote hatred and this causes more divides in our communities. Some of these films portray Pakistan as a Terrorist state. This makes me so angry. But I would find out from before if a film is worth watching.

Shakira feels that Muslim representation has always been marginalized in Indian films:

In many films it is always present, and it organises the whole film like the absent father, the main protagonist are often Hindu. Whenever there are Muslims on the scenes they are terrorist. Whenever there is a Muslim character it's about religious conflict. Why are Hindus more human and they experience all of life.

The discourses of the Muslim as the aggressor, the terrorist or as 'only religious' are some of the strategies that Bombay cinema has adopted. I have explored this earlier. In Bombay cinema there is a conflation of the Muslim with discourses of backwardness, which fix the symbol in tradition and prevent its movement towards modernity. The Hindu characters retain religion as an aspect of their identity but are modern and not backward. In this way the Muslim is coded as masculine, aggressive and unchanging whereas the Hindu is coded as tolerant, adapting and effeminate. The projection of religion onto the Muslim figure visibilises and fixes that figure and takes away any nuances of human subjectivity. In other words, it dehumanises by its Islamophobic force. Samira describes the kinds of conflicts this causes in everyday public interactions:

There is enough conflict between people already and if people watching that in a cinema hall where there are Indians and uhhmm Indians who are Muslims and Non-Muslims or Pakistanis and Indians which can happen if people are coming from Blackburn or I mean I would hate to see what it's like in Birmingham. You know where there is a large Sikh community and a large Pakistani community and if they are in one cinema hall with that going on.

Shakira, who was caught in exactly the kind of scenario, but in a cinema hall in Delhi, describes her terror:

In *Bombay*, which I saw in a cinema in Delhi, and there is a moment where a man is praying, the father is praying, a Muslim father and the response of the audience to that scene frightened me and I was really hoping that no one would say my name out loud.



She expresses her vulnerability and terror of being found out whilst watching the film and in her fear and vulnerability at the audiences' aggressive response to this scene. There was a police presence outside to prevent sectarian violence. The film *Bombay* was seen as secular film by the filmmaker and the mainstream Indian media but generated a huge controversy and was received by Muslim and civil rights groups as biased against Muslims. Shakira explains:

And I remember even before the audience response...vulnerable and that sense of how, I used to feel when I was a kid amongst white people that why did you do that like almost blaming the filmmaker, attacking the filmmaker for provoking the audience, it's a place of anger.

Samira articulates the anger of a mostly Pakistani crowd at a musical event organized by one of the first Indian satellite channels, Zee Television, in Blackburn:

I mean I remember recently going to Asok ([a music venue]), it was only last year and it was some sort of uhhmm musical show and it was Pakistani stars, singers mainly, and it was sponsored by Zee TV. And as soon as that was announced like there was a lots of booing. And its almost like Zee TV is seen as the not the Indian channel but as the Hindu channel.

The 'booing' was a protest against Zee Television's anti-Muslim representations. Zee TV entered many South Asian homes in the late 1980s and early 1990s as one of the first Asian satellite channels to broadcast in the UK. The anger directed at this cable channel was exactly for the reason that it had become a household name before competition from other companies displaced its dominance. Shakira compares the representation of the 'Muslim' in Indian films with that of 'Black' representations in Britain.

Similar to Britain the way Black people are represented ...whole life is about racism, and you see the same in Bombay cinema Muslim characters are portrayed only in terms of their persecution.

Shakira, similarly to Naseema and Shahid, adopts an oppositional and selective positioning in her consumption practices and explains that:

I am selective about what I would watch. I am less likely to watch Hindu family romance, not much of a place for Muslims in India; also differences within Indians are more than between Indian and others.

The national and religious affiliations were crucial markers in viewing positions. All British Pakistani respondents felt Bombay cinema did not represent Pakistani identity in a positive light and furthermore the representations of Indian Muslims was extremely ambivalent – and either represented terrorists or fetishized and idealized historical figures. The respondents who had religious identities of Hindu, Sikh or who 'did not practice a religion' did not notice that Bollywood was becoming more and more anti-Pakistani or that even in the past the representations of Muslim characters was deeply problematic. Samira explains the negotiations adopted by British Pakistani Muslims:

...the news certainly on Zee TV feels very much like watching CNN. Its quite biased and I only have realized that because I also have access to Prime TV ([a Pakistani satellite channel]) and obviously to the rest of the news on mainstream television.

She describes the contemporary changes and the range of views that British Pakistanis have to negotiate with:

So, I think there are like you know the Muslim clerics who will say you know by feeding Zee TV you are feeding you know ammunition to you know don't buy it basically, don't buy that channel. But it's very difficult 'cause in one household like there will be one person saying no... we should not do this and the other people are saying oh! Sod the politics we just enjoy Bollywood movies and that's what we wanna watch. We are not into the politics so they will disregard the news and the messages in some of the dramas and actually just want to experience the film.

Samira expresses the different positions and negotiations and articulates that Bombay cinema has represented two ways of managing religious discourses that she has really liked in the past and in the present. The first is when it explores a character's relationship to god in a spiritual or devotional way through musical unity. The second representation is that of a secular unity of different religions to overcome the Colonial empire in contrast to the divisive and sectarian messages in the newer films. She explains:

I think I mean my first powerful experience of religion was you know just films like *Coolie* where you know there is this glamourised you know this Amitabh Bachchan dying scene 'La illah il allah' (there is no God but God) ...it was like quite romantic relationship that this man had with god ...Previously I think a lot of films were about... turn to god and god will give you what you want type of thing, or suffer and you will get what you want which is not necessarily a good thing. There are other times I am feeling spiritually high and enlightened and I can identify with with ... with somebody turning to god whichever you know whether that's within the Hindu framework if it's presented well, then I can really identify with that. That can be quite enchanting just listening to whatever is being recited and the songs that are melodious but in a religious context and it can be really catchy and you can really want to listen...

Samira expresses her identification with spiritual aspects of the cinematic portrayal of religion. A turn to spirituality, which unifies rather than segregates, was a common strategy of earlier films mediated through songs after Independence. Film songs often incorporate devotional songs through Bhakti singers such as Bauls and Sufi street singers who wander from town to town. The singing of 'bhajans' (religious hymns) and dancing formed an important part of Bhakti worship, which tended to be intensely emotional. The chanting and singing of hymns were seen as the way to spiritual enlightenment. The films often utilized this song genre to comment on the situation in the film as a critical voice (against materiality) or as metaphysical spiritual messengers to broaden the understanding of the characters and the audience. They often mediated the pain of separation and loss by their painful vocality. In this

way, they are utilized to intensify the sentiment of the film. Films appropriated the stories of Sufi-Bhakti saints, usually from lower castes or female devotees who overcame their own pain and suffering through practices of transcendence through religious and devotional ecstasy. The emotions were often described as 'intoxicating madness,' and an abandonment of material and bodily pleasures for spiritual endurance and an achievement of a higher state of being.

However, it is important to point out that not all Bhakti following is about unity. The contemporary Hindu resurgence also follows practices of Bhakti but does not seem to be about unifying across differences. However, the mythology of this movement survives as the movement of the common people (a popularization of religion) against the power of religious institutions. The post-Independence film aesthetic invoked this mythology often as a way out of struggles of poverty, the divisions of Partition and the ensuing collective trauma. In a response to the film *Amar Akbar Anthony*, which had a secular message, Palika, who is a first generation Hindu, expresses her anger at the secular message:

Songs were bad, it's complete and utter nonsense, secular! I am all in favour of it...but it's always Hindus who are supposed to be 'I am so tolerant we must be secular we must tolerant. Oh! we have had what a thousand years of lack of tolerance by Christian and Muslims. Let them be tolerant than we will...

The general Hindu stereotypes of Muslims in India are that the Muslims are aggressive (masculine) and that the Hindus are tolerant (effeminate). Palika and Mr and Mrs Prashar, who are all first generation Hindus, told me that all Muslims in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were Hindus who were forcibly converted by the Moguls. Palika also told me that the Christian missionaries also converted Hindus by promising money and property and homes. The Hindu Right parties have developed and deployed these sentiments to mobilise the Hindu majority in India since the 1990s. By coding the Muslims as the masculine aggressors, the Hindu can be represented as effeminate, tolerant and as victims. **This strategy is used in justifying the genocide of Muslims in the Gujarat riots.** Though the violent messages of the new films scare her, Samira explains that there are other films that counterbalance this and have a message of secular unity:

The last film that I thought was very powerful about watan ([country and patriotism]) was *Kranti* (The Revolution: 2002). *Kranti* was really really nice film and it was about the British Raj ([Colonialism]) and how people you know and there was this unity that show always you know four men that had become brothers and one was Sikh, one was Muslim, one was Essai ([Christian]) and you know like that and they would get together and they would all end up in prison together and then they would come out and fight for their country or they would fight against the British Raj. And those sort of films previously but now it's more about rather than focusing on the togetherness it's focusing on the divide and very very violent way.

The secular unity and the (humanist) message of brotherhood of men (it did not often include women) of different religions, was used as anti-colonial propaganda by the nationalist Independence movement to counter Colonial ideological power. Samira and Irfan identified with this message of secular unity. Samira points out that she feels very threatened by Bollywood film's Islamophobic messages because it is not a long way away anymore but very much impacts and threatens her in Oldham, in Britain:

I think it's not just about the politics in in...for me it's not just about the politics in India and the politics about Kashmir but it's about Islamophobia right now. And you know September the 11<sup>th</sup> and I am just thinking next they are going to do something around some tower in India being blown (laughs) up or .. I just think its really really bad. It's becoming almost like form of ammunition or part of psychological warfare... It's really big and really big.

Shakira also expresses anger at the conflicts and the differences within the identity of 'Asian'. She mocks the commonality of the category 'Asians':

It makes me laugh that Asian are more about Phenotypes.... Islam is not Indian anymore! There are conditions on your inclusion as Muslim in Bollywood films.

Shakira's point is that Islam has existed in India for more than 1000 years, and yet is pushed out by these representations and discourses as alien to Indian national identity. Many Pakistani respondents voiced their anger but explained their selective viewing to exclude these films. Shahid for example, felt he did not like the representations but would not waste his energy getting angry about it. Many Pakistani respondents I interviewed had developed a relationship with Indian cinema since childhood because of its language, Muslim stars, or Hindu stars who had played Muslim characters, or the songs and music, the centrality of family or many other aspects. The Bangladeshi respondent's identifications with Bollywood seemed to be more of a recent practice even though they had also grown up watching Indian cinema, although not to the same extent. I did not interview any first generation Bangladeshi respondents, only four younger generation ones. They had a different relationship because their national identity was not constructed as the Other in Bollywood films. It was interesting to note that the Bangladeshi 'Muslim' was not threatening to Bollywood's imaginary, though it's also true to say there are hardly any representations of Bangladeshi Muslims. However Bangladeshi respondent's identification was also based on familiarity with the stars, and with family and romance stories, as part of a youth cultural trend and an affiliation to the identity of 'Asian.' For example they identified with actors and actresses who were Bengali or Muslim. They also pointed out that language, religious and cultural difference obstructed their understanding of the filmic discourse. Irfan explains his identification with Bollywood:

It makes me feel part of a global community not necessarily in Britain even though I am not Indian, I don't speak Hindi, and I don't sing and dance ....and most films Hindu based...So even when I am not applicable to any of that stuff, I do feel actually I look like them and they

look like me and we have stuff in common, we have shared history in common like Aishwarai Rai she is from Calcutta. Rani Mukherjee, Kajol, they are from Bengal but from Hindu side.

In response to a question about whether there are religious conflicts for him as a Bangladeshi viewer of Bombay cinema, Irfan explains that there are certain negotiations, which prioritise Asian identity over religious norms and restrictions:

I am thinking in terms of video covers and like you know Aishwarai Rai's leg sitting next to the Koran, in terms of I am not sure that's as same as like Hindu scriptures, ....you know the whole polluting...there is like a naked woman next to the Koran, it's acceptable, it's fine! It's more than acceptable, it's there. It exists. I wonder what that means...It's polluting in terms of Koran and stuff like that but because it's us, this is our identity it's almost acceptable. But I bet if a religious purist returned who has just arrived from a madrasa in Bradford was to walk in, he would be disgusted.

## 2.2 'Seeing Glimpses of Ourselves'

Many respondents expressed their affinity to Bombay cinema as a negotiation with its different elements as Samira asserts:

Ya, ya I suppose Bollywood is going out to escape but if I really really wanted to escape from struggle then I would go and watch something that's really alien to me. I do enjoy Hollywood films but there is something 'aapna' [ours] about 'aapni films'.

Samira explains her feeling of belonging with words 'aapna' meaning 'ours' and 'aapni film' meaning 'our films.' Samira's interaction with Bollywood discourse reveals negotiations of different positions before coming to an understanding and decision that she can relate to the conflicts of Bollywood more than Hollywood because it reflects some of the problems she faces. This permits her to negate the lack of realism of Bollywood. Similarly, Shabnam claims:

Racism and alienation drove us to claim Bombay cinema as ours because in the 1980's we developed a consciousness that it was ours. The Bombay cinema songs mirror the pain related our families which English songs cannot convey. English songs cannot convey our pain of romance.

Michel de Certeau (1984) has argued that the everyday life of people is where the contradictory interests of capitalist societies are continually negotiated and contested. De Certeau focuses on the practices of everyday life such as work, family, transport, and leisure. In de Certeau's analysis the political dimension of everyday life is where the weak evade the powers of the strong and use strategies and tactics for everyday living. The practice of watching Bombay cinema, it could be argued, is one such tactic. Bollywood films offer the Asian community the pleasures of defining an alternative cultural space, and a site of resistance to the devaluing and subordinating features of cultural hostility and racism in

British society. They provide a means of escape from everyday realities of isolation, loss of home and the drudgery of work. Though powerful discourses of religion, tradition, and modernity are translated into people's lives through this medium, there is space for the negotiation of meaning and interpretation. This multiple positioning and negotiated meaning is also evident in an answer by Sonali when asked if Bombay cinema makes her feel part of a community:

The fact that you can come together on the common language and that as I am getting older and I am living away from any cohesive community. For me, it's about understanding implicit things the way the people move or talk or you know and that kind of makes me feel very comfortable and belonged.... Listening to songs or talking about songs that makes you feel kind of quite like you are having quite a unique experience in a collective. It's like a cocoon and it's very comfortable.

Sonali illuminates multiple identifications, such as commonalities of language, the way people move or talk and the songs. The references to 'our' and 'belongingness' and metaphors of safety and comfort and warmth all go towards constructing what Benedict Anderson (1991) has called "an imagined community." Irfan explains why he started to take an interest in Bollywood.

...the reason why it's so entangled within being British or in Diaspora and stuff is because this is the only representation for a very long time that we had of us on TV on this box and now this box called the television it was almost like acceptability for whatever you are and whatever you are if you saw on this box....

Samira explains her negotiations with Bollywood:

I think maybe what keeps me with Bollywood is that sometimes there is sort of empathy I have with Bollywood and an empathy Bollywood has with me. (She is laughing). It's not all alright and all comfortable and all great but you know glimpses of it is like glimpses of myself. Yes, I think it is you know what moves us, and I think whether we are conscious or not conscious but we find parts of ourselves in the film.

Most respondents said that Bollywood provided a space where they could see 'glimpses of themselves'. Irfan describes the process where the media as a public arena becomes a site of acceptability and legitimation:

It's like, oh wow! Other people know we exist you know we are accepted! And all that stuff so for a very long time on the mainstream box it did not happen like that. Asian people were not on TV other than on these little tapes ([he means video tapes]). My family used to buy from local shops and put them in and then you see lots of people like us and then I do feel very comfortable with that.

The contestation and negotiations of multiple positions are elaborated in Irfan's account. Irfan comes to a position of affiliation to Bollywood only when he understands that it's one of very

few places that he can see a representation of himself due to marginalisation and racism in the mainstream media. Also, the general popularity of Bollywood in Britain and its coverage by the mainstream media allows a space of acceptability for Irfan. He says, “we exist.” Irfan understands that the public visibility granted by the Channel Four showing of Bollywood films allows mainstream legitimation and the granting of cultural authority to a practice that his family pursue at home. Irfan connects to Bollywood as a cultural signifier of his identity of British Asian. He explains:

I think Bollywood is so entangled with being British and Asian that uhm every British Asian person has something to say about it I mean not just British Asian but British people and the Asian people in diaspora are so entangled with Bollywood that they all have something to say about it because like Canadian Asian or American Asians will have very similar views to me uhh but growing up, it was on TV, my parents were watching it and my family were watching it but I never actually took any interest in it whatsoever but my sisters loved it uhhh but I did not and my brothers actually did not.

For him Bollywood opens up a space to connect with other Asians in the diaspora. He explains his and his brothers’ gendered rejection of Bollywood as they were growing up. His cultural engagement begins with an understanding that this practice could offer him cultural knowledge to connect to a global community. This allows him cultural mobility through the consumption of Bollywood. Thus his local identity permits mobility due to affiliation to a transnational cultural product. He explains the choices he has as a second generation Asian:

We have that relationship as a consumer we are in a pivotal position and we take in whatever we want. But for our parent’s generation that’s completely different. They are seeing themselves. I am contradicting myself with Bollywood we have this entangled relationship even more than we do with Hollywood.

Irfan explains the choices he has as a consumer, which his parents did not have as they are over-identified with the cinema. The first generation respondents often looked at the younger generations’ desire to be British with scepticism, as Sabar Jaan remarked:

They think because they are brought up here, they are British!

She brought up the issues of the Oldham riots in explaining her belief that there were many obstructions for the younger generations to be accepted as British. Both Sabar Jaan and Mr Prashar, first generations respondents, expressed a notion of a fixed national identity. Mr Prashar speaking for himself and his wife, explains:

I think although we are British both of us but ehhe we can’t be British because you know no bones about it in our own hearts we were brought up in a our culture and in our hearts we ... our son was born here but although he has so many British contacts in his heart he always feels Indian.

However, in another part of the interview, Mr Prashar who is an Indian Kenyan Punjabi man, aged seventy-six <sup>63</sup>, explains how the idea of home is no longer a fixed place for him:

Tell you one thing though, my grandfather he lived in a small village in Punjab. My father was a first person who left home to go to Kenya, this was the year 1926. He married my mother there. What I am trying to say you know from there from a small village in Punjab my grandfather's grandchildren are all over the world. This is how time has changed India, Canada, Germany, scattered everywhere. So it's not a home now anymore. And your home is where your parents are. I have got no parents you know so I lost my home. She lost her parents so she has no home. So the only home is going to see brother and sister. If my parents were live, Kenya would be my home. So the world has changed a lot you know. It must be same in your family, same thing. It's unthinkable you know my grandfather did not think his...grandson and great grandson ...

Irfan feels that the advantages of his identity of British Asian, which allows him a distance from Bollywood and his parents singular and fixed national identity. He feels he can choose identifications with multiple locations. Irfan recounts that his childhood rejection of Bollywood was due to his desire to be 'as good as the next white person' so that he could be accepted in the mainstream. He explains:

Because I thought you know I am from Britain I can feel just as comfortable watching Eastenders with a bunch of white people as watching a brown movie. So I sort of like went the opposite way I completely rejected Bollywood and only later on plus also studying anthropology being different is actually good. Why should we be looked down upon! We are just as good if not better and than what traditional white mainstream culture has to offer.

Irfan's conflictual desire to fit in with his white friends, and for a hybrid identity that is British/English as well as Asian, forced him to reject Bollywood and therefore his Asian-ness. In his life time Bollywood had become popular but still retained its 'not cool' status to some extent. The generation growing up in the 1990s was probably influenced by representations of Bollywood in the media, specifically its popularisation on Channel Four. Irfan connects the practice of viewing Bombay cinema to the South Asian diaspora based in other parts of the world. Irfan expresses a gendered identification with Bollywood in that he connects watching Bollywood with a private realm of home watching by his parents and his sisters, thus stating the cross generation and cross-gendered differences in viewing habits. Irfan's interest only begins when it becomes validated by the mainstream through media and academia. He starts to take an interest when it was needed as research for his work as a media journalist and as an anthropology student. It is interesting to note that most male respondents felt they needed justification when identifying with Bollywood, in terms of work or social practices. Stuart Hall (1992:221) argues that:

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<sup>63</sup> Also see Parminder Bhachu (1985) 'Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain.'



...instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

Hall’s words are useful in explaining the different, contradictory and ambivalent positions that many of the respondents negotiate when coming to a position of British Asian identity. Samira’s identification with Bollywood began very early on as a child; she is now thirty years old. Samira has a different relationship because like many Pakistani respondents who could speak Urdu, she engaged in this practice regularly for a long time. Irfan came to Bollywood through his identity of British Asian, whereas for Samira and Sonali and Sunita and many others, this was not the case. Their identity of British Asian is strengthened but their loyalty to Bombay cinema was already present.

### **2.3 Bollywood Exotica as a Fad**

Though most respondents talked about the positive aspects of recognition and visibility, they also expressed deep ambivalence about Bombay cinema’s exotic image in the media. Shakira explains:

...what it used to be like when I was very young in terms of the white British public’s attitudes towards Indian-ness and the shame (silence), I think perhaps talking more about that would illuminate, shed a different kind of light on the later stuff because that’s why I can’t get excited why *Devdas* is so beautiful why I feel ambivalent about that.

Shakira expresses anger at the validation afforded to Bollywood in the mainstream nowadays, recalling a time when she suffered shame and exclusion in her peer group if she admitted to any knowledge of Bombay cinema. Earlier, Irfan had articulated his rejection of Bollywood as a choice but Shakira understands that the institutional invisibility of the Asian cultural markers were due to shame and racialized mockery. Sonali expands on Shakira’s ideas about the recent Bollywood fad and it’s legitimation in the mainstream also made her angry:

Especially now and I think I have a very kind of strange relationship with this whole kind of celebrating Bollywood as a fad because to me you know, Bollywood was something that I grew up with and it was the only thing that kind of kept us rooted apart from food, ....it kind of in the context that you see it now is almost like when people describe Bollywood it’s described as something that is quite tacky.

Similarly to Irfan, some second and third generation respondents expressed anger at the exotic representations of Bollywood in the mainstream media. Sonali perceives Bollywood as a marker of South Asian culture and she is uncomfortable with the transitory nature of fads. The consumption of Bollywood is directly linked to its marketing strategy of being sold as Asian exotica. However for Sonali it has a deeper meaning, because she has a history with it and she

has grown up with it. She explains that it has symbolism and deeper meanings. Therefore she feels affronted when it's ridiculed. Sonali continues:

Tacky and you know even I feel like you know some of the Asians that are out and about are visible in the mainstream media take the piss out of it.... 'Asians never kiss on screen' and 'oh! You hide behind trees' and 'you have to change your costume like you know twenty times in one song' and you know all of that kind of thing.

Many young Asians such as Irfan absorbed the ridicule expressed by the mainstream and rejected the practices of viewing so as not to be associated with aspects of Bollywood that express a 'backward' cultural status. Sonali criticizes their self-parody and expresses her long-term relationship with Bombay cinema:

And, I just having grown up with it there was actually a lot of meaning attached to it and it had a lot of symbolism and nobody cares to break it down in that way in the mainstream media because they play into that whole kind of we want you to take the piss out of yourselves so we will pay you to do it.

Sareena expresses that there has been self-deprecation involved in accepting Bollywood as a cultural marker of British Asian identity as Irfan and Shakira had also expressed. Shakira points out that the acceptability of Bollywood in Britain or in the West is due to its difference and exoticism. This is part of the marketing strategy adopted in selling Bollywood.

There is a Ms Dynamite song called 'now you want my love' and just the title of that song makes me think the sentiment in the title of that song which is 'ya suddenly you want my love.' Suddenly we are allowed to be included because suddenly our so called culture is beautiful or exotic. But I remember when it was not and I know that my inclusion depends on someone else's exclusion. You are doing to them what you used to do to us. Not that I see myself as separate for them actually.

Shakira is articulating the hegemony of Western (Euro-American) capitalism in granting acceptability to some groups for a short time and not to others through new fashions. The mainstream fashions validate and therefore form certain cultural norms of what is beautiful and what is not. Her point is that 'Asian' is being sold as 'beautiful and exotic' as the special identity for a short time as a fad and she cannot forget when that was not in fashion. She remembers experiences of invisibility and exclusion in the past from mainstream representation. Sonali accepts that Bollywood is another fad in the global cosmopolitan circuits. However, even when accepting this she explains her loyalty:

I mean I am not writing it off as another fad because I feel Asians in Britain and the diverse range of Asians in Britain are also more visible and I think certainly the second generation second to third generation people are.

But in her understanding, there is a connection with this fad and the visibility of second and third generation Asians. The process of struggle to come to a singular identity involves discourses of internalised racialisation in forms of self-parody, ridicule and self-deprecation as well as negotiations with disempowering racist representations.

#### 2.4 Decolonizing<sup>64</sup> desire

The identity of 'Asian' was constantly under threat by the differences that constituted it. Asha explains:

Ehmm I think in the context of this country, although where I am still first generation Asian I think as the Asian community progresses there are ties that bind them become less and less and you become more mainstreamed and and if you like become more English or more Britishized.... I can think of people who I know who have become quite middle-class who for example have big parties and drink you know very western which does not happen in my family or in any family that I know. You know when you have 40<sup>th</sup> birthday surprise parties when did that happen?

Asha criticises the notion of becoming more English/British by becoming more middle-class. In Asha's account there is a struggle over the meaning of 'Asian.' Asha's fears of deculturation<sup>65</sup> have a real basis, if culture is associated with signs of tradition and fixity. She feels that there is a threat to the Asian identity by it becoming more and more middle-class. The traditional values have changed, as people became more middle-class and prosperous. This resulted in Asian people adopting more and more Western habits. She explains:

...so I think Hindi film is one of the few remaining ties that makes us different uhhmm from English people and something that we can relate to and you know for many of us who I think it kind of straddles Asian and British community and try to be part of both, I would say we were quite disparate members. That what links us together, the art, music and the Hindi cinema and songs link us and also ties us to some of the traditional stuff to be back home, to be Asian.

Asha, like other respondents, feels that meanings about being 'Asian' are formulated in interaction with popular culture such as Bombay cinema. The negotiation of the Asian/western dichotomy was a continual thread in respondents' stories. The fear and the desire for the one or the other provided a dialectical dynamism. She feels cinema can keep

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<sup>64</sup> I use the term 'Decolonising desire' to interpret many of my respondents fears of loss (and a subsumption) of their culture due to colonisation by western culture and values. Their experiences of the history of colonialism and racism was significant in forming this desire.

<sup>65</sup> Deculturation, I define, as a fear of assimilation of own (marginal and migrant) culture into the dominant culture (national) by being transformed through capitalist consumption and class ascendancy.

Asian communities rooted to 'our' culture. Irfan's fears of sliding into 'backwardness' or tradition is countered by his desire for fitting into white norms, even as his desire for Asian-ness permitted him the pleasures of Asian cultural sounds and made him very different from his white friends. Many respondents complained about the hypocrisy of Indian cinematic character's desire to be 'English' or 'American' while at the same time espousing Indian traditional values. Irfan also expresses feelings on negotiations between Asian and Western discourses when he explains that one of the films he liked was *Lagaan* because it refused to be Western. He explains:

The reason I did not like Bollywood in the beginning is because it did not assert itself it was fake copy of Hollywood the name itself – fake copy a bad copy and watching it Bollywood is representative of me – it's not really.

While it was a common complaint that Bollywood mimicked Hollywood, many respondents also utilized it to counter the hegemony of Hollywood and the West. Irfan continues:

Bollywood does not give a shit about diaspora in Britain except for its money and it does not give a shit about its culture and you know its politics and stuff. Uhh but for people in Britain and in America this is how we are seen and I really wanted it to speak up for itself against Hollywood.

Many second and third generation respondents felt angry at the representations of 'British Asians' by Bombay cinema. Although the representation of British Asians has been gradually changing in recent Bollywood film, earlier it had relied on fixed stereotypes. The 'British Asians' were caricatured and the stereotypes relied on traditional/modern or Asian/Western dichotomies. In earlier films the characters living in the West were represented as sexually and morally corrupt. The newer films directed at the Diasporic audience often deployed characters living abroad as central protagonists. These characters were developed by Indian scriptwriters who may not understand the complexities of British Asian lives and even if they did, Bollywood characters do not represent complexity. Though many respondents felt, Bombay cinema was one of the sites where they could see glimpses of themselves, they were very aware that it was only a glimpse. Their identification was based on social, political and psychic factors. Irfan explains:

And not just speak up for itself by actually assimilating but also actually saying look we can do something very similar but this is how we are going to do it and this is how he did it, he put his songs in and he made it twenty hours long and he had an all Indian cast in Hindi.

Irfan here is referring to the film *Lagaan*, which under the guise of anti-British and anti-colonial sentiments tries to unite a diverse group of Indians. This was a common device in pre and post Independent India as a decolonising gesture. This strategy has a strong resonance in post-colonial Britain. For Irfan this film becomes a signifier of resistance against the

hegemony of the West in his daily life. Sonali explains the change in the complexity of Asian identity:

You know we just don't hide away in our homes and we will wear our clothes out and the thing we've become more celebratory as well about stuff, its complex....

Sonali explains the visibility and vocality of the second and third generations through the changes in their affiliation to dress, music, and language and in demanding political citizenship, in the processes of becoming British Asian:

They are not demanding but they are out there they are out there in their salwar kameez and you know things are spilling out on the streets. You know grocery shops and music and it's hard not to notice and if you don't know an Asian person in Britain then you live a very sheltered life, you know, whereas when I was growing up if you saw an Asian person it was almost like you know there is an alien, you know. They are like really strange people but I think we've we have definitely become part and parcel of society and we are vocal about it.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the affect of sharing songs and romance in family viewing experiences creates feelings of belonging, and attaches the songs to the affect of intimacy and belonging. British Asian respondents weave stories of their pleasures and represent themselves as having multiple sensibilities. They have a stake in cosmopolitan ethics<sup>66</sup> but reclaim traditional aesthetics.

The songs are signifiers of pleasure and emotions. The song scenes and their heterogeneous mode of address create multiple pleasures for diverse groups of people. The multiple focus of the cultural product generates multiple sensations. They mediate different sensations and feelings such as romance, sensuality, eroticism and pain. They intensify the element of fantasy through music and spectacle. The fervour and intensity of the songs induce a practice of repetition. Moreover the songs mediate feelings of sharing and memory. For the first generation, specific songs represented their direct loss and evoked memories of displacement. The younger (second to fourth) generation respondents connected to their parents or to the first generation through developing an understanding of emotional states through an engagement with songs. An alternative knowledge is gleaned through the song's emotional aesthetic. These songs express a balance of poetry, melody, rhythm and nuances of moods and emotions that listeners are moved to describe as sublime<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> I deploy the term cosmopolitan ethics to explain respondents' desires for plurality, globality and syncretism.

<sup>67</sup> I interpreted the respondents' articulations of a state of being which was incomparable, meditative and indescribable in that a loss of self and body was experienced as sublime.

Songs prioritise the pleasure of hearing and listening. The idealization of songs in these quotes generates songs as a figure that mediates freedom, utopia and expression. The loss of the body, as discussed by some of the respondents, indicates the dissolution of boundaries and identities. This has antecedents in the South Asian devotional aesthetic. I argue that the biography of Bombay cinema songs allows it to be deployed in such a way. The respondents come to the songs yearning for their identity and find an imaginative space that allows them freedom. Most respondents felt that songs were a sign of emotional expression and therefore one of the crucial features of Bombay cinema. This emotional expression often allowed identification with a character, which permitted the spectators to express or 'release' emotions. Film songs were identified either by being extracted out of the film and related to respondent's own emotional states, or enjoyed as identification in the narrative circuit of the films' song scenes. An analysis of the interviews reveals that the film song is a space of multiple sensory identifications in the viewing experience of the respondents.

The experience of embodied cultural immersion (affect) in songs creates a familiar language. This has the potential to create communities of intimacy for those who engage repeatedly with this medium. Film songs are part of the South Asian collective psyche and are used as expressions of everyday emotions and situations. Songs occupy a ubiquitous space in the Indian environment. The sonic landscape of Indian streets and homes resonates with sonorous songs and music, for some, whilst others complain of the cacophony of sounds and songs. This has also been a characteristic that has been used (for example, by Sonali, Samira and Irfan) to describe the spatiality of diasporic Asian shopping streets. Peter Manuel (1993) has argued that the division between religious and secular music in Indian culture is often absent. He proposes that traditional Hindu and Muslim poetry, song, and dance often cross the multiple boundaries between romantic, erotic, sexual, devotional and religious affects. In addition, the concept of the spiritually divine is often invoked in romantic, erotic and sexual poetry and songs. The process of attainment of any knowledge, including that of music, is often considered as a practice of meditation. Musical learning practices are understood as devotional meditation. However, even when film songs have been seen as of a crude and low genre, appropriate film songs such as bhazans (religious hymns) are still sung in many temple jagrans (all night worship) in India. Asha talked about her memory of childhood in Leicester. Within a Gujarati community in Leicester, the all night religious jagrans were often accompanied by film video watching. For example, Samira, while listening to music, moves from feelings of boredom and the mundane to the sacred and the spiritual.

The non-representational aspects of music and the aurality of the songs produce different affects and pleasures compared to those of the pleasures of language, lyric and metaphor. Different sensations and affects produce different meanings and knowledge circuits. The non-representational, non-verbal communication and expression of music relies

on the indescribable, and the unstructured form that creates affects without boundaries or names. Though this aspect of indeterminacy and relativism weakens its defining power, the empty space allows multiple definitions to arise. This permits freedom, choice and for some the power to reach mystical and higher spirituality. Sonali, Irfan and Samira's articulation of their song experiences express this. They assign value and meanings to culturally familiar domestic ritual song experiences. A different way of making sense and making meaning emerges which values sentimentality, pain, sensuality and sexuality. Song engagement becomes not only a space for individual reflection but also a space of collective enjoyment. For the respondents, song becomes a space of experiencing one's own emotions and understanding oneself as well as sharing in emotional collectivities with others. This sharing of emotion through song experiences creates a inter-subjectivity (a collective feeling of enjoyment where the boundary between self and collective dissolves temporarily) which is relational and which is 'beyond subjects or identity'. This is an experience of interdependence and the production of pleasure due to sharing it with others and with a collective, (such as communities, or nation).

Though most respondents complained about Bombay cinema's reactionary politics in relation to gender, religion, class and race, they still felt a loyalty to it because of their history and because of its heterogeneity. As a cultural object, Bollywood is the newest genre (Rajadhyakha, 2003) of Bombay cinema and is often reactionary, very rarely revolutionary, but because of its changing biography and heterogeneous address it is appropriated by the respondents to express local and global subjectivities. Respondents talk of their identities and identification by acknowledging the multiple differences and discontinuities that constitute Asian-ness. The representation of religion was the most contested issue after gender amongst the respondents. Furthermore, gender and class differences were crucial factors in influencing the respondent's positioning. The Indian respondents were unaware of Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents' negotiation with the cinema's encompassing Indian and Hindu framework. The Hindu and Sikh respondents were oblivious to the Muslim respondents' articulations of symbolic violence that the cinema screen created. The Hindu philosophies of the cinematic texts were normalized as 'Asian' philosophy and values. The articulation of cinematic cultural experience and practice is often a contradictory and contested site. Fictions of self and community are created in this practice. The meanings of a racialized identity are negotiated on a cultural terrain. There is a continual dynamism in the creation and recreation of these subjectivities as multiple locations of class, gender, religion, language and generation are illuminated, even as they fade in and out of significance depending on the context. This is also part of a process of understanding one's own subjectivity.

Some respondents expressed their past experiences of shame when Bollywood was only a site of racialized mockery spoken about in epithets of 'backward culture' and

‘unfashionable tastes.’ For the younger generations, this was very much compartmentalized and a distinct separation existed between private and public identities, with serious psychological repercussions, as articulated in many narratives here. The opening up of public spaces through consumption practices has allowed for a public expression of Asian-ness and a claiming of a diasporic identity across differences of nations, regions, languages and cultures. Bombay cinema provides a space to form diasporic connections beyond national religious and ethnic boundaries. In fact, it allows for a new notion of home to be formed away from parental fantasies of ‘return’, which often prioritized a frozen static idea of home, which was where ‘traditional’ ideas and ‘origin’ were intact. The younger generations have new ideas of home, based on imagination, travel and a local cosmopolitan identity. This then allows for new meanings to emerge, thereby forming new fictions of British Asian subjectivity.

I have argued that respondents, by creating the fictions of their different identities, exercise their voice to create an Asian imaginary. As Sonali asserts they are ‘out there’, that is British Asians are visible and are demanding opportunities for ‘voicing’ their rights to a cultural and political citizenship. Through their visibility in their salwar kameez and through their different embodiments, they are staking a claim to the public sphere. Moreover, they are actually producing new Asian public spheres by enacting their hybrid cultural aesthetic. The process of coming to this situation of demanding has been built on racial and cultural silencing, shaming and exclusion. The intimate experience and practices of engaging with cinematic popular culture have been mobilized to form a public British Asian imaginary. This is a social, economic, psychic and political formation. An intimately shared space of home and culture is transformed and visibilised, made public in an effort to Asianize the British imaginary. The politics of engagement with the cultural signs of Bombay cinema produces a number of discourses on the local and the global, but the boundaries are not clear-cut. For example, Samira and Shakira’s story about the angry reception of Islamophobic images of cinema happens both in Blackburn and Delhi. The anger at these divisive tactics produces a notion of entitlement, which is then mobilized in the agency of selective consumption. The context of the event mobilizes the sign in different ways and the context changes the meaning of the sign. Discourses of racism and exploitation are concealed in exotic Bollywood images and marketing styles as they mimic the Oriental gaze of Western discourses and the imperial practices of Hollywood. It then sells the cultural product to the transnational South Asian market by highlighting the traditional rituals as cultural difference, by intensifying the colour and depictions of the female heroine as the exotic Eastern promise, that is the forbidden sexuality of the veiled Princess. The National Geographic magazine has competition.

In this thesis, I wanted to understand how respondents use cinema to make sense of themselves and their worlds. New Bombay cinema prioritizes consumption, not education like its predecessor. Bollywood as the new cultural brand of Bombay cinema unleashes a series of



cultural signs, symbols and codes in transnational circuits of pleasure and imagination. A flow of sensations and emotions are evoked through the aural and visual iconography in its circuit of culture. However, respondents desire an impossible decolonized subjectivity. They projected a reflection of their own struggles onto Bombay cinematic discourse in order to negotiate those tensions and contradictions in their daily lives. The process of copying and mimicry was devalued yet embodied mimicry was also productive of new possibilities. Copying through repetition became a novel site of new cultural formations.

One of the key fears was that of deculturation which initiated cultural practices of long distance diasporic engagement and yet Indian culture as a site of authenticity was imbued with Western desires and aspirations. The romanticization of the Asian identity can be explained by the notion of loss and recovery, in that many respondents felt they had to recover an aspect of their self, which had been humiliated and marginalized and therefore concealed. Hence negative aspects of Bombay cinema were overlooked and it was recovered as a cultural resource in an assertion of an Asian identity. The knowledge created through imagination, pleasure and struggle is used as a cultural resource to negotiate everyday hegemonic discourses. Bombay cinema practice is a popular cultural space where different experiences of 'learning Asian culture' took place. This was a space which reproduced Asian cultural norms, but at the same time challenged and transgressed these norms. This is where Asian subjects interacted, engaged and resisted with cinema to produce stories and knowledge about themselves, about Asian culture and about their relationship to mainstream British culture. This was a space of learning, education, vociferous criticism, mimicry, 'decolonizing practices' and most of all of emotional and intimate connections. It was recognised that Bollywood discourse played a vital part in some respondents' lives and less so in others. Nonetheless it acted as a symbolic medium to fulfil the desire for connection with parents, family members and the imaginary Asian community in most respondents' narratives. This symbolic space I call intersubjectivity.

## **CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION**

### **The Politics of Emotions**

I define "feminist politics of emotion" as the explicit analysis, and resulting individual or collective actions that challenge the historical and cultural emotional rules, which serve to maintain capitalism and patriarchal hierarchy, particularly with respect to the arbitrary gendered

division of public and private spheres...Like women's bodies and sexuality, women's emotions are a war zone. Megan Boler<sup>68</sup>

...Since feminism has redefined 'the political' (for example, 'the personal is political') – that we have come to recognise that there is a 'politics of the family'. And this is a matter of meaning – the political has a cultural dimension. Stuart Hall,<sup>69</sup>

The politics of the personal has been the main focus of this thesis. A feminist cultural analysis of the politics of emotions, as Megan Boler and Stuart Hall indicate, disrupts the easy distinctions between public, private, culture and politics. I set out to investigate the relation of cinema practice to the domain of Asian life and the formation of women and men. The primary finding of this thesis has been the identification and analysis of Bombay cinema practice as formative and expressive of British Asian social and cultural life. British Asian subjects articulate their emotional and embodied engagement with Bombay cinema, visibilising glimpses of their social life and the transformation of their public and private spaces. This thesis scrutinizes Bombay cinema experience through an empirical and ethnographic analysis of semi-structured interviews undertaken in London, Manchester, Oldham and Bombay. The key argument is that Bombay cinema discourse offers the symbolic emotional intermediary, or the textual, sonic and visual context, through which ideas about the politics of the personal and the social (gendered, sexual, national and religious identities) are explored and sometimes challenged. The circuit of culture methodology deployed emphasizes the dynamic communication between a media form and its audience. The ambiguous and ambivalent, but clear polarities that define the respondents' relations with the cinema, articulate a dialectical dynamism of affect and criticism. Some respondents were reflexive about their complicity in the dominant ideologies and the holding together of the contradictions enabled discussion and debates<sup>70</sup>. The desire for 'glimpses of ourselves' is full of contradictions in a neo-liberal global culture. Bombay cinema practice becomes a site for the postcolonial diasporic imagining of identity where displacement and migration are central to such negotiations. I argue that the contradictory identifications in Bombay cinema

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68. Megan Boler explains the significance of emotion for feminist pedagogic practices in her article "Towards A Politics of Emotion: Bridging the Chasm Between Theory and Practice" Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy Volume 98, 1998.

69. Stuart Hall writing on the cultural turn in 'The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolution of Our time' Stuart Hall in *Media and Cultural Regulation*, edited by Kenneth Thompson. 1997 p226.

70 A good example of this was the discussion of fantasy of romance in Bombay cinema by Naseema, Asha, Shabnam and Samira. They felt that the cinematic fantasy of romance touched traces of their reality, of intergenerational conflicts and reproduced 'Asian' reality but at the same time they were also critical of the overemphasis on romance and fantasy of the new films (see Chapter 9).

experiences are reconfigured to desire a decolonised subjectivity and a valuing of an 'Asian' inter-subjective sensibility by prioritising emotional connections, relationality and community, situated in opposition to homogenous ideas of the Western. This, I propose, is their critique of dominant Western liberal notions of 'individual subject formation' and of capitalism.

Respondents deployed language as a medium of comparisons and analogies and articulated the debates on sentimental versus rational, Asian versus Western, orality versus literacy, real versus imaginary (fictional) in their engagement. However, Bombay cinema experience also produces intense affective charge that transcends language and generates intimate embodied connections to memories, fantasies, imagination, images, and songs. I have argued that Bombay cinema experience is inter-subjective experience, in that respondents produce their 'Asian' selves in a dialogic relationship - a space of agreement, sharing, intimacy and celebration but also of angry confrontations, contestation and competition. An inter-subjective formation of self authorises not the separation of an entity but the reciprocal and relational nature of subjectivity. Cinema's melodramatic mode of address, its heterogeneity and its long history in the South Asian imagination facilitates this. Cinema engagement produces a politics of popular cultural representation comprising of respondents' fears, desires, aspirations, fantasy and memory, contesting invisibility in the dominant national imaginary. Bollywood discourse is theorised as a tool of communication to produce and convey cultural ideas of the body, beauty, sexuality, morality, aurality and spirituality. British Asian subjects articulate their cinema practice as a cultural struggle for racialised recognition as well as a symbolic vehicle of connection with parents' history and culture. I argue that affective and inter-subjective connections arising in cinematic practice reinforce imagination of communal solidarity.

For the theoretical framework I deployed models from post structuralism and deconstructive theories to interpret a range of themes generated in the research. I have an eclectic and provisional approach to theory because I did not want my work to be contained within one paradigm to analyse multiple research sites. I used theories that helped me to interpret respondents' accounts and opened up a vocabulary to describe these accounts. Vocabularies from certain theoretical traditions energised my thesis and provided a range of influences. These were: feminist cultural studies; media audience theories; feminist epistemologies; postcolonial theories; race, diaspora and transnational culture theories; embodiment and cinema theorists; melodrama theories; and Indian cinema theories.

The research questions that I have addressed include notions of body, memory, identity and community in Bombay cinematic representations. In chapter eight and nine the research problem I answered was the ways in which cinema engagement permits respondents to express desires for origin ('back-home' discourses) and at the same time nourishes their struggles for recognition in contemporary Britain. The cross-generation differences in viewing

were elaborated by many respondents such as Asha, Sonali, Naseema, Neela, Irfan, Shahid and others in chapter five, six, eight and nine. They felt that for second generations 'Asians' like them, cinema was a trend but for their parents who watched it everyday, it was more a way of life and the only form of leisure available. On the whole, the respondents who could speak and understand Hindi/Hindustani and Urdu enjoyed the songs and dialogues and were more involved with the cinematic discourse and usually gave interviews that were much longer and in-depth. Shakira, Naseema, Samira and Palika (see chapter nine) expressed the cross-religious differences. The surprising thing here was that level of Islamophobia expressed by many Bollywood films was only noticed by British Pakistani Muslim respondents and not by Hindu and Sikh respondents.

For many respondents, the bodies of actors and actresses were contested sites conveying disciplinary, normalising and also transgressive ideologies. Bollywood weddings were mimicked in private lives and generated fashion and brand precedents. Religious rituals were being changed to accept new styles of consumption, as in the example of Bangladeshi weddings. Gossip about and an adoration of different stars were also spaces for connection and communication with other Asians. There were many contradictions in respondents' descriptions regarding cinematic representations of gender and sexuality. The most notable gendered difference was found in the women's articulation of emotional aspects of the cinema in chapter five, six and seven. Although many of the male respondents expressed that they felt emotional when watching these films, the way they articulated these were in either surprised tones and or in negative tones. The male respondents identified more with male actors even whilst making fun of the characters they played. Women respondents generally had favourite actresses and did not seem to have as strong a feeling towards the male actors. They expressed strong emotional and sexual identifications with these actresses. Songs were the strongest identifications for most women but not for men. More men than women expressed fascination with action films. The rituals of and participation in publicly visible cultural events, such as going to Trafford Centre to see films for Oldham and Manchester respondents had created ritualised leisure spaces not available before. The first generation (Shahib Jaan who is fifty) and younger women (Kiran and Ruji who were sixteen and eighteen) respondents who were restricted to home, these spaces had not been available. For Salim, Bombay cinema engagement allowed a space of cross-dressing and maybe an expression of femininity that was not allowed anywhere else. His practices of dressing up and performing dance at home also opened up a public space to allow an expression and development of his gay identity.

Bombay cinema practices in Britain have transformed the processes of its production in Bombay. My interviews with producers, scriptwriters, film journalists and academics illuminated the drastic changes taking place in the Bombay film industry to target diasporic

audiences in the UK and in the USA. In particular, Anjum Rajabali claimed that the neo-liberalisation of the industry has meant that the spaces won for 'critical' or experimental films have been erased as commercialism and marketing takes precedence. As I have explored in chapter eight, the respondents have criticisms of these films too. This is not to say that their criticisms necessarily meant that they would stop watching these films. The filmmakers rely on the box office records to implement their formula – stars, song and dance and grand spectacles and melodramatic family conflicts. The multi-directional cultural flows do allow for new meanings to emerge. Some respondents articulated their desires for decolonisation of Bombay cinema and a desire to see films like *Lagaan* (Land Tax, 2002, Ashutosh Gowariker), which convey not only the entertainment aesthetic but also political sentiments. Many of the key informants in Bombay also admired this new kind of aesthetics. The recent adoption of Bollywood discourse by the three main Asian radio stations (Sunrise, Kismet and Club Asia) in Britain reveals the widespread popularity of Bollywood because of its crucial role in communication, consumption and community building.

### **Limitations of the research**

This thesis raised a number of issues that point the way towards future research. A more representative sample of the first generation respondents could have revealed more about the cross-generational difference in meaning about Asian culture. Another study could exclusively focus on this group. I was unable to get the male respondents to talk about their sexual and emotional pleasures in depth, unlike the female respondents. This was most likely due to my gendered interaction with them. Therefore gender matching of interviewers and respondents may produce a more balanced gendered response. Bombay cinema was a contradictory site for male respondents, because of its association with melodrama and the home and due to it being a female genre. However, many of the male respondents also interpreted their practice as a way of entry into learning Asian culture. The formation of Asian masculinity in the disavowal of cinema as a feminine genre and a turn to rational or action genres illuminated negotiations of social pressures of gender, race and class for Asian male respondents. In a circuit of culture methodology, it is difficult to analyse each site of the circuit in depth, due to time constraints. One of my main regrets was the lack of time I allowed to my analysis of Indian key informants. A more in-depth analysis of film production and representation in Bombay may have illuminated multifaceted understanding of the transnational circuit of cultural meaning formation. One of the limitations of chapter four was that the film analysis did not cover films from the late 1990s and early 2000 due to PhD time constraints. This prevented an analysis of a typical film targeting the diaspora in the late 1990s. This would have revealed the transnational circuit of consumption that has been reinforced due to the stabilisation of economic liberalization in India. I may have been able to

examine the significance of diaspora in the Indian society and the film industry by illuminating the production of the NRI (Non-resident Indian) figure in these films. Nonetheless my analysis of the film *Bombay*, (1992, Ratnam) did examine the crisis of national secular and the neo-liberalisation of the state and the ways in which this has influenced the new filmmakers targeting the diaspora. *Bombay* did not follow a typical Bollywood genre; rather it combined a Bollywood aesthetic with realism and had a strong secular political message. In addition, my focus on the films from the 1950s to the 1970s illuminated the key social and political debates and the crisis of the postcolonial nation.

### **Contribution: The Trans-national circuit of everyday 'Asian' Life**

This research fills a gap in sociological and cultural studies epistemology about the politics of pleasure of an everyday 'Asian' media and cinema practice. By deploying a plural methodological framework relying on a cross-disciplinary theoretical formulation, I was able to analyse a transnational circuit of complex and dynamic conjectural power relations forming cultural meanings. This thesis points to the crucial role of Bombay cinematic discourse in shaping British Asian Diasporic identity. There has not been any research carried out on the politics of pleasure of British South Asian communities, or any empirical research on the politics of popular culture of British Asian communities. Moreover, cinema theory has not taken any accounts of cinema experiences of marginal communities, such as this one. I traced the transnational circuit of culture in reverse to trace the discourses and power relations shaping cinema meanings. There is a gap in film theory in not investigating the role of embodied experiences of cinema viewing in forming cultural collectives. Feminist film theory and film theory in general has focused on vision and visual address as the dominant way of understanding cinema meanings. My thesis challenges this by foregrounding the role of emotion and sensory perception. Respondents' accounts validated the emotional as a space of knowledge creation and of community and self-formation. I have shown that cinema engagement is not vision-centric but embodied and emotional and the notion of body and individuality produced in this thesis point to a relational and dialogic meaning making process for subject formation. My thesis brings a theoretical sophistication by keeping a continual conversation between empirical research and theoretical developments and ethnographic insights by utilising grounded theory. For example, I decided to employ Deleuzian affect theories in addition to literary theories of melodrama and feminist theorising of women's genre and soaps because this unusual but plural theoretical combination had the potential to interpret respondents' contradictory accounts. My research originated in the race and cultural politics of representation, to create an alternative epistemology and knowledge base to get away from dominant racialised representations. Hence, I utilised cultural studies debates on race, ethnicity and diaspora to conceptualise respondents' historical background in Britain.

My engagement with cutting edge theoretical debates and its imbrications in empirical research contributes to a multifaceted knowledge of the quality of life and illuminates people's actual conditions.

This study legitimates respondents' interpretative discourse that sanctions an oppositional space to counter dominant understandings of the daily lives of Asian subjects. Therefore the research to some extent visibilises the significance of the cinema practice of British Asians and provides legitimisation and symbolic capital to this alternative set of knowledge. This thesis makes a space to challenge and create stereotypes or appropriate them as a space of agency (for example in chapter six respondents deploy self-exoticism as a space of temporary agency in their embodied mimicry at home and in public community events) by the creation of alternate knowledge. The issues relevant to British Asian life get debated; commonalities are created and differences voiced. In this way, the study contributes towards theory and epistemology of marginal subject and community formation by illuminating agency and complicity of popular cultural engagements that illustrate the everyday contradictions of human life. The contradictions found in cinema practices can become a source of knowledge that can be utilised by thinking subjects to reconstruct their positions and enable a proactive relationship with dominant discourses. A good example of this was the reproduction of gender roles through engagement with this practice. In this process many dominant discourses (oppositional, complicit, hegemonic) espousing normality are shifted to adapt to a new local situation within the larger context of social, historical and cultural frameworks. A shift in thinking effected by discursive strategies can transform future values and ideas, which for a marginal group opens up space and time for affirmation. Even though this research is produced for academic purposes, it can also be a resource for other South Asian subjects to contribute and understand their own identity and their relationship to 'Asian-ness' and to the ideas of 'Asian diaspora' and 'Asian community'. Furthermore, this study can be used to comprehend migration experiences and processes of settlements of marginal groups and their spaces of affirmation. It may also enhance some of the ways in which communities and individuals negotiate and transgress social restrictions and adapt to hostile, contradictory environments.

Chapter one outlined the introduction to the thesis elaborating on key theoretical influences and research questions that initiated the research. This thesis was instigated whilst working with a group of homeworkers in Oldham, with an insight into the significance of 'cinema talk' in forming ephemeral communities. I set out to research the significance of 'cinema talk' in British South 'Asian' life.

Chapter two situated the 'circuit of culture' methodological framework to decipher meaning at multiple sites of cinema production, representation in textual analysis and in audience reception by employing the 'circuit of culture model' (Johnson, 1986, du Gay et al.

1997). This explored the relations between the key processes, which form the circuit: representation; identity; production; consumption and regulation in the diasporic circulation of Bombay cinema. This research produced a multi-layered interpretation to get away from reductionism of the 'textual determination' or 'resistant viewer' by situating the interpretations as contingent and travelling between these sites. The meanings associated with cinematic discourses articulated by Bombay producers, images and British Asian viewers may not coincide, and contradictory meanings articulated are a way of understanding the power dynamics of the circuit of cultural reproduction. As a researcher using discourse analysis my task was to be aware of naturalized assumptions and, essentialist interpretations and assess what the significance of diverse audience interpretations might be, not simply to mark their existence. The meanings created in the circuit of culture methodology do not follow a simple relation of determinism, as different moments have different histories. Emotional meanings in cinema practice are not static and do not form a simple snapshot of relations between production and reception but permit a historical depth to emerge. I adopted a feminist critical reflexive approach to reveal the power relation between a researcher and her respondents and examined the responsibility of the researcher in representing her research subjects. I argued that the experiences I was analysing were not necessarily representative of the wider South Asian population. However, I also argued that my findings are not confined to my respondents only and that my analysis and thesis goes beyond my respondents, in that it transcends the particular and the local. In this chapter I elaborated on the accountability and transparency of the research by using a plural and critically reflexive methodological approach. In addition, using grounded theory, ethnographic 'thick description' and the evaluative mechanism of accountability and plausibility, I have produced a rich and dense map of cultural meanings. I have represented a range of different realities in my study and my research adds to a complex comprehension of cinema experience in general and in particular a 'sophisticated' understanding of the British Asian cinema experience.

The first section of chapter three set out the historical context and the development of Indian cinema from the 1930s to the 1990s focusing on socio-political changes shaping the India nation and the film industry. The configuration of national identity in the Indian imaginary is shaped by cinematic popular culture that prioritises a melodramatic and emotional mode of address. The main finding of this chapter was that the democratic potential of cinematic popular culture has been deployed by the state in its nation building efforts after Independence. Cinema practice becomes the space to debate, resolve or express emotions for a national public. The debates on fantasy versus realism, tradition versus modern, individual versus community, inclusion versus expulsion, pluralism versus assimilation, has ensued in its filmic texts and surprisingly also formed the focus for British Asian respondents' themes in later analytical chapters. This chapter contributed to the thesis in providing a complex map of



meaning by revealing the production of discourses shaping popular cinematic debates. I examined in detail the three key debates shaping cinematic texts: the representation of gender using tropes in a 'traditional' and 'modern' binary; the class conflict created through the 'high' and 'low' culture; and the representation of religion through the erasure and silencing of cultural difference in discourses of national secular unity. The debate on high and low culture is based on a taste distinction in that the lower classes are assumed to prefer melodrama as opposed to the middle and upper classes' affinity for realism. In a section on cinema's mode of address I evaluated melodrama and affect theories and argued that the concepts of family and emotion have been crucial in feminist politics of culture and alterity. This chapter provided a key node in the transnational circuit of culture methodology for exploring the interplay between the historical development of cinema's emotional aesthetic, its' representational discourses and the creation of postcolonial national identity. The second section set out an ethnographic account of interviews with, cinema professionals, film journalists and cultural academics in India. The interviews with key informants added depth and complexity to the analysis by situating it in the contemporary Bombay film industry. An analysis of these empirical and ethnographic interviews highlighted the continual negotiations between commercial goals and political desires. The interviews provided an embodied understanding of the aspiring filmmakers' or actor's struggles to 'make it.' Ganti's work (2000, 2004) was useful in contextualising my own ethnographic experiences of the Bombay film industry. However, a stay of a month and half could not build trust and set up relationships to comprehend the complexities of film production and representation. The contribution to thesis was however significant because I chose to talk to filmmakers who had been 'around in the industry' for some time and who also represented a marginal but critical group. Their insights were key to an understanding of Indian cinema and of the 'up and coming' filmmakers who specifically target the Non Resident Indian audiences abroad.

Chapter four set out a textual cinematic analysis of three sets of films made over four decades. I contrast *Mother India* (1957, Mehboob Khan) with *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975, Ramesh Sharma), *Deewar* (1975, Yash Chopra) with *Sholay* (1975, Ramesh Sippy), *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977, Manmohan Desai) with *Bombay* (1995, Mani Ratnam). The textual and discourse analysis of films contributed significantly to my methodology of the transnational circuit of the culture of meaning production. The key finding of this chapter was that the dominant national discourses on gender relations and sexuality, class and religion reflected in this analysis were reproduced in later chapters exploring thematic analysis of respondents' interviews. The chapter also detailed cinematic modes of address and revealed a range of subjectivities available for the spectator. The commercial popularity of these films indicates their successful cinematic address in achieving audience participation. The three crises that take place in these cinema texts are those of gender, class and religion. For the

earlier filmmakers, having been born in the times of the struggle for Independence, the crucial crisis was the survival of the collective (nation) not the individual. The deployment of devotional discourses to unite people despite their suffering was a key mechanism. I argued that the concept of sacrifice is key to an understanding of uniting conflicts of gender, class and religion in the formation of national identity. Sacrifice, death or martyrdom all point to emotions of loss. I interpreted respondents' preference of films depicting loss and pain as a way of reconciling their own real or imagined loss. I argued that the icon of the 'mother' is a crucial signifier of traditional moral order, which is utilized as a repetitive narrative strategy to counter colonial criticisms of Indian culture's traditional gender injustice. The cinema analysis underlines the deployment of disciplinary discourses of ideal femininity to represent the crisis of nationalism by the conflation of ideal woman with motherhood and asexuality. In the respondents' interviews in the later chapters, the tropes of gender and sexuality aroused intensely emotional debates.

The key finding of chapter five was that the crisis of family and gender roles evoked angry and critical debates on cultural gendered regulation by the respondents. The symbol of woman was a key site of contradiction because the negotiation of opposing discourses by filmmakers often produced confused representations of women – in that it either fetishized them in self-negating roles or objectified them in sexual ones. I explored cinematic production of the category 'woman' through distinct discourses (and stereotypes) of the 'mother' the 'vamp' the 'courtesan' and the 'Miss Universe' in the next three chapters. Respondents elaborated on the stereotype of the cinematic 'Mother' who is parodied but also represents renunciation and morality in this chapter. The first section of chapter five reported on the ways in which respondents often formed provisional identifications with cinema, displaying ambivalence and contradiction. The circuit of culture model of meaning making was evident in the interview accounts in that historical discourses were often evoked to talk about a relationship with cinema. In this way, the historical analysis of the socio-cultural context of cinema and the textual analysis of the content and thematic analysis of the interviewees could contribute a contingent transnational circuit of meaning. Cinema practice was often seen as an intimate aspect of mother (and her space of home) in respondents' childhood memories. The expression of matriarchal culture at home was a fairly common experience, in that the control of mothers over her daughters and sons was common. The power of the real mother was countered by parodying the filmic mother, simultaneously remembering the intimacy shared with her. Her cultural teaching of gendered renunciation provoked anger for regulating the girls' sexuality, body and ways of being. The performance of suffering and renunciation, however, was also seen as 'strong performance' and catapulted many female stars to iconicity due to standing up to injustice and also due to their powers of endurance. Many female respondents criticised the policing and disciplining of young girls into future subservience as

the ideal daughter-in-law as 'backward' and traditional. The crisis of the South Asian family was blamed on weak Asian men and directly challenged the filmic narrative, which blames either the mother-in-law or the daughter-in-law characters. Female pleasures of melodrama can be explained because of their legitimation of emotion, intimacy and nurturance. This can explain the absence of male engagement with Bombay cinema viewing. The female respondents in these accounts take centre stage and create themselves as the norm and relegate men to passivity. In their accounts, they are the ones in control, creating a female community.

Chapter six highlighted key themes of the female body, sexual display and consumption. The main finding of this chapter was the discomfort and criticism of the excessive sexual display of the female body in cinema, and the disciplinary pressures felt by the female respondents in their cinematic interaction with ideal representations of the slim body symbolised by the Miss Universe figure. This trend was seen as a loss of 'Asian' bodies with increased westernisation due to economic liberalisation. The central role of gendered sexualised bodies in the neo-liberalised circuit of culture and consumption is vociferously criticised. Respondents' critique of 'westernization' points to a decolonising consciousness and also a critique of capitalism. However, their desire for cultural identity ensures complicity with and affiliation to Western and Asian cultural norms even as many transgressions are enacted within and between these limits. This chapter contributed to the thesis in underscoring the influence of Bombay cinema in selling notions of ideal femininity to British Asian respondents. I also discussed the politics of class and race in the trans-national power dynamics between the filmmakers and their audience. The discussion from this chapter also reflected a circuit of culture model of meaning making in that the symbol of the sexualised female body revealed historical and political discourses in her embodiment. The discourses of modesty and cultural body conventions expected of Asian women were discussed. Some respondents proposed a subtle sexuality as the preferred Asian sexuality over a westernised overt sexuality. The appropriation of the Black MTV style hip-hop music videos in the song and dance scenes by the filmmakers, in order to sell an urban style that attracts transnational youth audiences, was criticised by some respondents. This was analysed as an indicator of the urban middle-classes' aspirations to a diasporic hybrid and cosmopolitan subjectivity. Consumption was seen as a sign of material success and 'Westernisation' and the female star's body symbolises success as an elite consumer citizen who has the material freedom to dress in western designer clothes and be beautiful. The body emerges as the key site of criticism symbolised by the Miss Universe figure, which negated respondents' racialised and classed bodies. I argued that the self-fashioning ethics created by these images permit or enforce a specific use of time and individualize the female body, which earlier gendered representations of self-negation did not validate.

Chapter seven explored the respondent's pleasure of the female heroine and her camp sexualised practices of singing and dancing validating modern and post-modern over traditional discourses. The main finding of the thesis was that respondents' contradictory accounts criticised the rituals of excessive sexual display and simultaneously validated heroine expression of self-pleasure and sexual autonomy. This chapter contributed to the central theme of the thesis in that Bombay cinematic practice provides an emotional space to debate the discourses constituting the terrain and boundaries of Asian sexual pleasure and individual formation. It explored consumption practices associated with different aspects of cinema to constitute self and ideas of sexual acceptability and transgressions. Sexuality becomes an important site for expressing individuality and autonomy in contemporary cinema in much the same way that romance is a site of conflict and struggle over authority between different generations. The invisibility of first generation respondents' voices in this chapter also pointed to the traditional silencing of sexual expression. The expression of sexual pleasure within Asian culture was full of contradictions because an expression of sexuality was reduced to and conflated with notions of Western ways of being in dominant discourses. The Indian state's censorship and regulation of sexual expression in cinema reflected this viewpoint and was also reproduced by the respondents. The transmission of and reinforcement of dominant ideologies by the transnational circuit of cultural meaning is evident. However, this circuit also opens up a space of participation for marginal groups in consumption and in class ascendancy. A feminist analysis of consumption and femininity signals an increased access to public spaces due to participation in consumption circuits of leisure and self-formation. The second section argued that the embodied practices of glamour and self-display was a key site of individual formation. Sexual autonomy and assertiveness becomes a space to validate a modern and post-modern sensibility and express Western hybrid cosmopolitan competency of choice and freedom for British Asian respondents. The respondents perform in their stories as members of an audience to express hybrid competency in sexualised consumption practices. In the second section of chapter seven, I argued that the mourning of familial and cultural loss was re-enacted through ritual practices of embodied imitations. The glamour in these imitation practices challenged the earlier mainstream racialized negation of British Asian bodies as unfashionable and 'backward'. The mainstream reception of Bollywood as exotic was appropriated and staged in these practices as spaces of recognition and validation. The reinforcement of cultural difference in Bollywood films is depicted by a revival of neo-traditional rituals such as Hindu weddings and religious rituals. Respondents appropriate the objectification of religious and other differences in their sexual and glamorous display to gain recognition in national public space. The desire for cultural authenticity can manifest itself in the consumption of religious symbols that speak of capitalist appropriation of traditional discourses. I argue that the freedom of sexual extroversion and

consumption allows a space and time to women to focus on their bodies, leisure and sexuality away from self-negation to self-indulgence. This I argue can be construed as a site of agency. However, the appropriation of religious and neo-traditional discourses may explain the resurgence of neo-conservative politics.

Chapter eight considered the respondents' pleasure of pain in cinema songs and in the figure of the courtesan. The main finding of this chapter was that the mourning and melancholia imbued in this everyday practice could best be understood as a diasporic process of reconfigurations of new space, place and identities. I argued that due to the significance of song practices in South Asian life (in folk, religious and classical musical traditions) song identification was the key to Bombay cinema popularity. The influence of popular religious devotional movements such as the Bhakti and Sufi (and associated Radha-Krishna mythology) on song emotion formation was foregrounded. This chapter was a key node in interpreting the transnational circuit of emotional connection. The intensity of song attachments due to their melodramatic representation of excess pain emphasized an embodied sharing of intensity. I have argued that it is this kind of intensity that evokes emotional meaning making and intimate connection with Bombay cinema. The pleasure of shared pain and conflicts creates commonalities and an inter-subjective connection amongst the differences of British Asians. In the first section, I analysed the melancholic pleasures of sad songs for first and second-generation respondents to express their loss and struggle. I argued that the concept of devotion, which is an integral aspect of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious musical traditions is utilised by respondents in their song experiences. The devotional engagement can be understood as an embodied aesthetic that incorporates yearning and an expression of pain in the feminine aesthetic articulated by the cinematic figure of the 'tawaif' (courtesan). The definition of beauty in the Asian imaginary is constituted by the pleasures of pain - an eroticisation of pain occurs in the figure of the courtesan. I argued that the pain and pleasure nexus articulated in song identification represented melancholia as enabling and not pathological and allowed for cultural reproduction and the remembering of historical struggles. This melancholia was mediated by song experiences and was a desire to participate in the pain of trauma of their parent's migration and mourning.

The main finding of chapter nine was that the commonality of enjoyment of music and the songs transcends many differences and the respondents created subjectivities where an inter-subjective sensibility is valued. I proposed that these pleasures are viewed as aspects of utopian aesthetics. Film songs are part of the South Asian collective psyche and mediated feelings of sharing and memory. In the first section of this chapter, I explore the younger generations' relationship to the sounds and music of cinema. The fervour and intensity of the songs induce a practice of repetition. The embodied repetitive engagement with the song scenes constitutes a feminine aesthetic (see Sonali, Irfan and Samira accounts in chapter

nine), which has antecedence in South Asian Bhakti and Sufi devotional practice. The accessibility of songs allows a heterogeneous audience identification, which crosses class, language, religion, region and other boundaries and has democratic potential. In the second section, I highlight the sectarian conflicts respondents face when interacting with Bombay cinema. The dystopic elements of cinema address, Islamophobia, racism, exoticism is also debated here. British Pakistani Muslim respondents negotiate a selective viewing position to counter Bollywood's Islamophobic attack on their sensibility. The different contestations of religion, race and class are mediated temporarily through cinema's utopian aesthetic.

### **Inter-subjectivity**

In this thesis I have argued that the authority or legitimation of cinema experiences by British Asian respondents is hinged on an inter-subjective ethics. This is the ethics of prioritising the social and cultural collectivity against individualism. The notion of inter-subjectivity articulated in this thesis challenges the traditional notions of becoming an individual self and instead defines the self through dialectical and inter-dependent relations with family, community, collective history and imagination. The desire for interdependence, sharing and for intimacy forms the key to the subjectivity communicated in this thesis.

A desire for home, connection and identity is negotiated by this practice. In many ways the viewing relationship evokes and strengthens the desire for origin. A romanticised version of 'home' or 'origin' is created. This may allow one to escape day-to-day drudgery and hostile representations of oneself in Britain and it also simultaneously opens up some cultural spaces to strengthen inter-generational communication and understanding. The return to 'origin' also has the danger of essentialising Asian identity and may define community as a bounded term. Memory is an integral constituent of the inter-subjective relations in that the re-enactment of the past in the present evokes a notion of collective community identity. It is recognition of more than self, of interconnectedness, respect and responsibility in relation to others. This desire and struggle for recognition is institutionally resolved in full citizenship and political visibility. This research explores the ways in which subjects appropriate the cinematic discourse of Bombay cinema to produce some of their differences and construct an identity of "Asian-ness." The formation of cultural identity is based on boundary maintenance of differences of 'Asian' and 'Western'. The fears of cultural assimilation expressed in chapter six and nine (as a critique of Bombay cinema's practices of imitating Hollywood and that of an elite class sensibility) is fear of assimilation into the western individualised ethics and the demise of the South Asian extended family and its cultural values. Family conflicts are central to the melodramatic mode and the emotional conflicts of family crisis are worked out in cinema practice. The romance of family and its importance in the Asian imaginary is evident from these interviews. The family is a site of love and strength for Asian women and

men, as well as being the site of trauma and regulation for them. The pleasure of the intimacy of family and the pain of rejection constitutes the cinema experience.

British Asian subjects deploy discourses of cosmopolitan syncretism (in chapter six on sexual pleasure of the female heroine and her autonomy) even as they validate the purity and authenticity of an essential identity (in chapter five on subtle sexuality as 'Asian sexuality') in opposition to Western hegemonies. The binaries of Asian/Western, traditional/modern, old/new, excessive/subtle, freedom/inhibition, sentimental/rational created in their engagement were productive and enabled new meanings to emerge. Thus the fashioning of individual self and autonomy occurs against the structures of the family and Western hegemony. The desire for syncretism combined with an ambivalent desire for purity and authenticity, reflects the tension inherent in any fixing of an identity. The incongruity between the ideologies of syncretic identity that are validated in liberal Cosmopolitan circuits and the discourses of authenticity, purity and origin validated by traditional ideology highlight the conflicts produced in these narratives. The discourse of 'old/new' is a desire for the original/authentic self; the old self as the original and the authentic. The narratives of fear and anxiety are recurrent due to the apprehension of a loss of an authentic self. However, even as the respondent's voice desires this authentic original space, they shift their positions continually to express criticism and pleasure. The decentring of self creates contingent subjectivities that express and exhibit multiple aspects of identities, the different locations of class, gender, sexuality, nation, religion and regions from which they see, feel, think, and create contradictory and ambivalent meanings.

I propose that Bombay cinematic experience is a dynamic, unstable, conflictual and contested process of engagement, which permits 'Asian' subjects to imaginatively create regional, national and transnational selves in the past or in the future. For the respondents, the pleasure of creating multiple selves is seen as choice and freedom. The consuming marketing gaze of Bollywood touches all aspects of lifestyle and offers a celebration of the Asian subjects' entry into neo-liberalised consumption. A discourse of Western progress is carefully manipulated by Bollywood marketing to sell its product. For many younger South Asians, media audience participation and consumption opens up a global transnational and diasporic imaginary. In this way, the 'global', the 'trans-national' and the 'diasporic' are reconfigured through the everyday rituals of watching Bombay cinema. The diasporic space created in this practice blurs the distinction between private and public. It combines the private and global and a new construction of public and local comes into being.

The discourse of British Asian identity is an imaginary space where respondents' subjective experiences of the social, the psychic and the political come together to form powerful fictions. The creation of a singular identity is produced and is a strategy to cope with the complexity of reality. The British Asian identity brings together opposing and multiple

differences of the Asian and the British experience. Asha, when expressing a working-class identity, fears the demise of the 'Asian' due to desires for 'middle-class life' and through the westernization of her culture (as in chapter nine). Asha's fears stem from real issues of the homogenization of cultures, as many nations have had to embrace global capitalism out of necessity. The seduction and allure of recognition is contradicted and managed with the difficulties of belonging. The empowerment of cinema experience is a contradictory space. The respondents have articulated it as the making of one's self-identity through the practices of cinema engagement. This produces spaces of empowerment even as it produces self-knowledge of complicity in a hegemonic oppressive neo-liberal mirage. Seduction and oppression go side by side in the micro-politics of Bombay cinema.

Bombay cinema discourse interpreted in this thesis is a yearning for an affective communal space that is as desired as it is troubled. Empowerment through the consumption of Bollywood is contradictory in that it remains ephemeral and elusive in the face of other hegemonic and racialized social and economic structures such as employment, education, housing and health, none of which have significantly changed. My interviews with respondents who were homeworkers<sup>71</sup> and the case of the 'Gate Gourmet'<sup>72</sup> Asian women workers in Southhall are a good example of this. Most of the Asian workers probably watched Bollywood as part of their daily routine but that did not empower them in their lack of trade union rights, acceptance of low pay and abominable work practices imposed by multinational corporations that operate in the neo-liberalized global economy. However, I am arguing that the commonality of the emotional experiences of engaging with cinematic popular culture by homeworkers, university students, restaurant workers, poets, mental health counsellors, journalists, local authority workers and doctors (some of the jobs of my respondents) has the democratic potential to be empowering when it is mobilized to form a public British Asian imaginary. The latter counters earlier racialised representations and the production of cultural invisibility. The cultural and personal politics of Bombay cinema experience has the potential to re-organise the 'Asian' and the 'British' social, economic, psychic and political formations. The notion of inter-subjectivity articulated in this thesis is a critique of traditional Western liberal notions of 'becoming an individual'. Instead the songs, images, stories and various

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71 Homeworkers are women working from home paid on piece rate basis, who are not entitled to 'employee status' and their rates of pay are abominable. Small firms save on overhead costs by temporarily employing homeworkers. Usually the smaller firms are part of global chains of production. I worked with a groups of homeworkers in Oldham between 1991-1993, advising on employments rights. Most homeworkers were of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in Oldham and most watched Bombay cinema on videos or satellite channels.

72 Gate Gourmet, a flight meals supply company to British Airways sacked 800 staff when they went on an unofficial strike opposing the restructuring of the company in August 2005. The workers were mainly Asian women (Punjabi) catering workers from Southall and Hounslow. All British Airways flights from Heathrow were suspended after some British Airways staff (baggage handlers, loaders and bus drivers) walked out in sympathy with the catering workers. There was trade union support from the Transport and General Worker's Union (T.G.W.U) for the workers.



other components of the cinematic aesthetic are engaged and imbibed to create narratives of self, others and community. An aesthetic of connection and inter-dependence is deployed to validate this practice. The articulations prioritize the processes of 'the intimate', 'the familiar' and 'the relational' as valued and as modes of comprehending these experiences.

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# APPENDIX I

## TOPIC GUIDELINE AND INTERVIEW PROMPTS

### 1. Introduction: About myself, confidentiality.

1.1 My name is Meeta Rani Jha. I am a second year PhD student in the Sociology Department. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by me.

Confidentiality: Anything you say will be confidential between us. I will discuss the interviews with my supervisors. Would you like your name to be changed?

Aim of My PhD: To explore the why Bombay cinema or Bollywood is popular in British Asian communities. I want to understand what kinds of emotions are created when watching.

1.2 Ask about the Interviewee: Name, Sex, Age. Not too many questions, leave it for the end, when more comfortable.

What regional affiliations do you have here in UK and in South Asia?

Which language/s are you comfortable with?

### 2. Bombay cinema: Aim of question in this section is to elicit general likes and dislikes.

What do you like the best about viewing Bombay cinema / Bollywood?

What is your first memory of watching Bombay cinema? Since what age have you been watching Bombay cinema?

How often do you watch Bombay films? Do you watch them at home or in a cinema hall?

Which scene/s are your favourites?

What sort of world does it create?

What is the worst thing about Bombay cinema, for you - which scenes?

Why do you think Bombay cinema is so popular here in the UK?

Why do you think Bombay cinema is popular in South Asia?

### 3. Emotional aspects

Talk about Film scenes: Respondents' favourites or suggest e.g

Pakeezah, Dil Se Taal

What kinds of emotions does Bombay cinema make you feel?

How do you feel when you see the lavish clothes and houses?

How do you feel when you see pain? (Explore further). Ask about the film *Do Bigha Zameen*:

How do you feel when you see poverty and hunger in films?

Fantasy – Film Clip: What kinds of fantasy are represented in Bombay cinema? What do you find creative about Bombay cinema?

#### **4. Gender**

Ask about favourite heroine and least liked. Ask about film scens: Mother India, Andaaaz, Pakeezah, Bobby, Aarth, Khalnayak, Chandni Bar

How are women represented in Bombay cinema?

Cholee ke peechay scene (film: Khalnayak): what do you think about this scene? How are men represented in Bombay cinema? Film clips – Dev Das, Amar Prem, Sholay, Dil Walli Dulhaniya Lee Jayenge

#### **5. Private/Public**

Family viewing: How often would you watch cinema by yourself? How often do you watch with your family at home?

Public viewing: How often would you watch cinema in cinema halls? Alone or with others, family or friends? Is the experience very different?

How is family represented in Bombay cinema?

Who are portrayed as the outsiders to the film family? How are they portrayed?

How does film represent different communities?

What role does Bombay cinema play in making you feel part of a community?

#### **6. Religion**

What did you think of the film *Bombay Fiza*, *Amar*, *Akbar and Anthony*?

How is religion portrayed in Bombay cinema?

#### **7. Change**

How are things challenged in Bombay cinema?

How are rights and wrongs represented/shown?

How is any kind of change portrayed?

How are ideas of traditions represented? What values are attached to these ideas of traditions?

#### **8. Closing comments:**

Would you like to add anything? Ask at the end.

What do you see as your nationality?

What are your regional ties in South Asia, if any?

How would you describe your sexual orientation? Gay, bisexual or straight?

Do you practice a religion, if so which one?

How would you describe your ethnic background?

How would you describe your or your family's class background?

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## APPENDIX II: KEY INFORMANTS IN INDIA

Name	Occupation	City
<b>Anjum Rajabali</b>	ScriptWriter, Ghulam	Bombay
<b>Shyam Benegal</b>	Director, Mandi	Bombay
<b>Prakash Jha</b>	Director, Mritudhand	Bombay
<b>Manoj Bajpai</b>	Actor, Satya, Zubeida	Bombay
<b>Sorabh Narang</b>	Director, Vaastu Shastra	Bombay
<b>Indu Mirani</b>	Editor, BoxOffice, Film trade magazine	Bombay
<b>Deepti Kapoor</b>	Journalist, The Week	Bombay
<b>Nandini Ramanath</b>	Journalist, Mid-day	Bombay
<b>Deepa Gahlot</b>	Journalist, Cinema of India	Bombay
<b>Ravi Vasudevan</b>	Academic at Sarai	Delhi
<b>Ravi Sundaram</b>	Academic, Sarai	Delhi
<b>Ashish Rajadhyaksha</b>	CSCS, Attended lectures, not interviewed	Banglore
<b>Gargi Sen</b>	Academic/Filmmaker	Delhi
<b>Shohini Ghosh</b>	Academic/Filmmaker	Delhi
<b>Sanjay Jha</b>	Director, Strings	Bombay
<b>Susmita DasGupta</b>	Academic	Delhi
<b>Ranjani Majumdar</b>	Academic	Delhi
<b>Saba and Ashish</b>	Documentary Filmmakers	Delhi
<b>Ashish Bhatnagar</b>	"I" Dreams, Managing Director	Bombay
<b>Patricia Oberoi</b>	Academic	Delhi
<b>Tigamanshu Dhulia</b>	Director, Charas	Bombay
<b>Rahul Shrivastava</b>	Academic, Pukar	Bombay