CHAPTER - III

MASCULINITY AND POPULAR HINDI CINEMA:

AN INTERPRETATIVE EXPLORATION
Viewing a film has been compared to dreaming. It is a social and psychological happening. Society has a need for fantasy, for identification with larger-than-life characters, for heroes and gods and powerful forces of good and evil, who dramatize for us the great virtues and vices which are rarely experienced directly in our individual lives...

(Prabhu, 2001, 2-3)

Perhaps the desire for a sense of unity with the external world, like that unity established in our earliest experiences as dreamers, explains the motive for the birth of cinema...Watching the screen revives the viewer's infant experience of seeing the dream images that appeared on a "dream screen" comprised of the mother's breast, or a surrogate for it, and the ego...

Each experience of film provides a kind of "birth" into a new world. Instead of causing a loss of unity, this birth leads to a "sleep" which returns us to something like the perceptual world we inhabit before birth and as children. In this sleep of film, as in our dreams, we escape the dichotomy between subject and object which has haunted philosophy since the seventeenth century. In film and dream, we are at one with our perceptions...Dreams and films elude us when we try to reconstruct them, in part because of the way they were presented to us as we experienced them. Films and dreams offer us a momentary triumph over our isolation from the world. But re-entry into reality after we awake from the dream or conclude our viewing of the film plunges us back into our alienation from our perceptions. André Bazin argues that the motive for the development of cinema was the desire for "integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image."

(Eberlein, 1984, 11-21)

I begin this chapter by what I ended my last chapter with, that is, by establishing the argument that the various forms of masculinity or rather masculinities in the Indian context are often represented in popular culture, particularly cinema, namely popular Hindi cinema. Before I start discussing the issue of masculinity and popular Hindi cinema in great detail, let me enumerate the framework of this chapter. I start with a brief history of Hindi cinema. Then, I discuss the rules of grammar and the normative codes which perhaps guide the popular Hindi cinema. Next, I focus on the concept that Hindi cinema is a male-dominated medium. Thereafter I reflect on the notion of 'hero' in popular Hindi cinema. Later I look at cinema as popular aspiration, that is, how the popular media see the construction of masculinity in cinema. Popular media include film magazines, gossip columns, popular press, and folklores on Hindi cinema. I end this chapter by discussing how the insiders themselves see the construction of masculinity in cinema based on my interviews with them.
Brief History Of Hindi Cinema

The history of films begin, by general consensus, on 28 December 1895 when the first Paris screen shows by the Lumiere brothers were held in the presence of about thirty-five spectators. This was followed in 1896 by the first screenings of films made by Georges Melies.\(^1\)

The story of the Indian film probably begins on 7 July 1896, when two remarkable events took place in the city of Bombay. One was the screening of French films made by the Lumiere brothers: *Arrival of a Train, Sea Bathers, London Girl Dancers, Watering the Garden*, etc. The effect was almost electric. It is said that Indian audiences panicked when they 'saw' a train rushing at them on the screen. It was the vividness of the visual image that was most captivating. These were short films of approximately ten minutes' duration each, but they managed to cast a magical spell on the viewers.

The second equally important event was the purchase of a movie camera by Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatvadekar and his shooting of a wrestling match in 1897. It was a simple recording, without any camera movements, of a match that took place in Bombay's Hanging Gardens, but the fallout was significant: for Jamsetji Framji Madan entered the film business in Calcutta in 1902, and Abdullaly Esoopally screened films, in 1908, to an audience of a thousand. These events indicate that the art of the moving picture had come to India, although in a rudimentary form; the camera, filmstock and projection facilities were locally available, though the processing of a film called for a visit to London.

But the most momentous event had yet to take place. Dhuniraj Govind Phalke, better known as Dadasaheb Phalke (1870-1944) was thrilled by the film, *Life of Christ*, which he saw in 1910. He returned from England in 1912 with film equipment and with an ardent desire to produce a fully Indian film. He did: *Raja Harishchandra*, roughly 3,700 feet (1,130m. approx.) in length, was presented in Bombay in 1913. It proved to be enormously successful, setting in motion forces that saw the development of Indian cinema.\(^2\)
The importance of Phalke lies in the fact that he used purely Indian themes in his films, looking for material in traditional mythology and folklore, and in themes that had an immediate religious and emotional meaning for his audiences. It is interesting to compare the genesis of the Indian film with the European, where the earliest subjects tended to be secular and commonplace. By using photographic techniques, Phalke provided an experience which was far removed from that of the stage. He set the tone of the Indian film, a tone visible in the fact that the greatest appeal of the film for Indian audiences lay for a long time in a sense of wonder and in religious sentiment.

In many ways the mythological story seemed quite appropriate to the early silent film. The stories were sufficiently known and the absence of sound hardly made any difference. They captivated audiences not only by their religious meaning, but also by the scope for miraculous and spectacular elements. The impact of Phalke's subsequent Lanka Dahan was overwhelming. Audiences literally prostrated themselves when Rama appeared on the screen.

Besides the mythological, two other kinds of films made their appearance. These were the historicals and the stunt films. The historical film is associated with the name of Baburao Painter, who made a film in 1923, on the life of Shivaji, the Maratha warrior. It was a spectacular film with mammoth crowds in gory war scenes. This was followed by J.J. Madan's Nurjehan, a historical on the Mughal period. The stunt film was born with the Imperial Film Co., when Ardeshir Irani made a thriller called Wild Cats of Bombay in 1928. The actress, Sulochana, played the key role in this film, of a kind of female Robin Hood.

In fact, even before the release of Raja Harischandra, there had already come into existence a small film-loving audience. This consisted of Britishers and English-speaking Indians. This audience had virtually ignored Phalke's film and indeed Phalke did not care to advertise his film in the English press. It is interesting to note that Phalke's film appealed to a different 'native' audience. The position of the Hindi film largely remains the same today. While it is looked upon with disdain by the educated Indians who still prefer to see American movies, it finds a place in the heart
of the masses. The trend towards a purely Indian kind of film was reinforced by the new nationalistic spirit that appeared in the 'revivalist' movements of that time. This trend could be seen in cinema as well.

Debaki Bose, who was inspired by Gandhi's non-violent movement and refused to take his B.A. examination at the University of Calcutta, ended up instead, making the film *Flames of Flesh*, a historical tale about Rani Padmini, full of nationalistic fervour.

With the advent of sound, the film in India altered significantly in size and dimension, although its broad appeal and content did not substantially change. A 'talking' film had to encounter problems arising out of the linguistic diversity. Either the film had to remain within an encysted, regional, socio-cultural system or it had to evolve a suitable idiom in which to communicate to a large mass of people separated by language and customs.

Initially, two solutions were adopted in the first full-length feature film *Alam Ara*, released in 1931. One was the use of songs, a strategy that proved extremely popular. This development was in keeping with the Indian tradition of opera, a theatrical device that combines music with drama.

The second solution was the evolution of a simple Hindustani, (language of cinema) a mixture of Hindi and Urdu, something that *Alam Ara* used successfully. This practically laid the foundations of the all-India film, culminating in the creation of a distinct style of spoken Hindi that has come to be identified for its somewhat artificial expressiveness – a dialogue-oriented film language.

There was a time when filmic Hindi had a somewhat more 'literary' flavour. This was the time of New Theatres, a time when sound had just begun to be used, and a time which some have called the golden age of Indian cinema. Although New Theatres was established in 1930, roughly the time when sound in film came to India, and although the talkie *Chandidas* made by Debaki Bose had been released, it was P.C. Barua's *Devdas*, released in 1935, that completely changed the face of Indian cinema.
While New Theatres produced memorable films such as *Vidyapati* by Debaki Bose, *Muktí* by P.C. Barua and *Street Singer* by Phani Mazumdar, the scene gradually shifted to Bombay with the focus on filmmakers like V. Shantaram, Mehboob Khan, Sohrab Mody and others. What is noteworthy is the advent of V. Shantaram, whose *Shakuntala* (1943) and *Dr Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946) continued the trend towards a kind of new-found ‘traditionalism’, and a revivalism that belonged to the new nationalistic spirit of the times. The difference lay in the preference for loudness, in terms of gaudy costumes, flighty and capricious music and covert sex. Scenic art, used in the composition of the image, became more kitsch and the emphasis on female breasts – as in poster art – became noticeable. *Shakuntala* proved an ideal subject from that point of view. Shantaram’s art came to fruition in *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje* which brought the trend towards an Indian ‘traditionalism’ to a head.

Films of some social relevance came from Bombay Talkies (which was founded in 1934 by Himansu Rai and Devika Rani). It had on its rolls men like Ashok Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, K.A. Abbas and others. One of the most significant films to come from Bombay Talkies was *Achhut Kanya* (1936), featuring Ashok Kumar and Devika Rani.

The film scene at this point becomes rather complex. Following Independence, there was a trend towards an urban sophistication. This was epitomised in *Andaz* made by Mehboob in 1949. *Andaz* did several things at once: it immortalised the love triangle and focused attention on youth. Indeed, *Andaz* became a norm for a long time.

The fifties mainly belong to Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand. Raj Kapoor’s *Awara* set the tone for the Hindi film with its socialistic message, a more casual attitude to love and an emphasis on personal tragedy. Dev Anand reflected the buoyancy of youth and a simple city world in which the hero could indulge in petty crime and get away with it. With *Baazi*, there emerged an urban hero who could regard women as objects of casual interest, and even use them to pave his way to fortune.\(^8\)

The popular film continued to widen its mass market, by its growing reliance on sex, violence and action. Shammi Kapoor, who emerged as an actor in the sixties,
indicated the triumph of the urban over the rural. By this time, the popular film had become truly escapist and had almost given up its social pretensions. It was now mass fare, unmindful of the social reality around.

Cinema became big business and attracted a good deal of talent. In the seventies, Rajesh Khanna rose to be a charismatic actor, grooming himself in the romantic image of a new tragic hero.9 Amitabh Bachchan stole the show from Rajesh Khanna by opting for the radical image of the screen hero. He created a new hero – intelligent, efficient and rebellious. He projected a sense of power and a clarity of mind that captured the urban youth. The Hindi film now truly became a mass film. The earnings were fabulous, leading to the emergence of the multistarrer. The latter trend was epitomised in Sholay that, based on American spaghetti westerns, became an extraordinary blockbuster.

In the popular film, there also continued a middle-of-the-road kind of film which was largely a legacy of Bimal Roy and also reflected the impact of the serious cinema. This was exemplified in the films of Tarachand Barjatya (Dulhan Wohi Jo Piya Man Bhaaye), Basu Chatterjee (Rajnigandha), Basu Bhattacharya (Anubhav), and Sai Paranjpye (Chashme Buddoor). An attempt was made to be satirical, poetic and perceptive within the bounds of popular filmic conventions, an interesting development that tried to evolve a more personal way of making films, and that seemed to grow out of a more disciplined film culture (Valicha, 1988, 121-128).

During the 1980s the Hindi commercial cinema produced mostly films derived from the 'aesthetic of mobilisation', where violence was the major attraction. While having roots in wider political and social trends of the 1970s, this phenomenon is also connected to changes in the composition of the cinema audience caused by the introduction of colour television in 1982, followed by the increasing availability of the VCR. Thus the middle-class audience began watching the new television soaps and viewing films on video at home, while the cinema halls became run down and regarded as suitable only for lower-class men.

Despite the advent of cable and satellite television in India in 1991, the middle class returned to the cinema halls during this decade, largely as the result of improved
marketing and the vastly improved cinema facilities. Middle-class audiences will pay Rs. 100 to see a film in a fully equipped luxurious cinema, compared to the Rs. 10 in the cinemas in lower-class districts. Commercial cinema caters knowingly to different audiences, screening different genres in different theatres in different parts of the country. These include the action film, which is screened in the cheaper movie halls, and the comedy, largely a one-man genre centred on Govinda, who is very popular among the lower classes, but whose talents have recently found a growing audience among the middle classes. The main hits of the 1990s, which have broken most previous box office records, are the big budget, plushy, romantic films, which, I argue, mark the dominance of the values of the new middle classes and uphold them to the pleasure of a socially mixed audience both in India and overseas. These films revive a form of feudal family romance in a new, stylish, yet unmistakably Hindu, patriarchal structure, which is connected to the largely indirect part they play in the resurgence of Hindutva politics in the 1980s and 1990s.

Southern Indian cinema had a huge impact on the Hindi cinema in the early to mid-1990s as the films of Mani Ratnam and other directors, dubbed in Hindi, became great successes. Several Tamil films were also remade in Hindi. Their indirect influence, by introducing the music of A.R. Rahman and improved technical standards, has been greater than their own box-office performance.

To any open-minded spectator, the popular Hindi film may well appear as the twentieth-century Asian descendant of what Richard Wagner, with reference to his own operas, called the Gesamtkunstwerk (lit. 'total work of art') (Lutze, 1985, 3-14).

At heart, the Hindi film is a morality fable entertainingly told through the vicissitudes of stereotyped characters. These characters are cut from basic templates and given their particular inflections by a star's style. This all-inclusive narrative has inherited the conventions of classical Sanskrit drama, crossbred with the high-flown rhetoric of Edwardian Parsee theatre (itself imitative of Victorian proscenium melodrama) and energised by the robust vulgarity of folk forms. Song, dance, and
musical accompaniment are also part of this seamless evolution so that without having heard of Brecht, an Indian audience has no problem accepting stylised departures from “realistic” storytelling. What Indian audiences expect from realism is not authentic mise-en-scene or psychological complexity, but “enriched” emotion, artificially heightened by rhetorical dialogue, all delivered through what Pauline Kael once called “actorly” acting (Rao, 2002, 38).

In a way, Hindi movies are a fact of the Indian way of life. This hybrid outgrowth of commerce and art, reflects the syncretic nature of Indian civilisation: its visual and performing arts, its underlying world view, the evolution of its aesthetics. It is another manifestation of our paradox, in which centuries coexist with each other in “functioning anarchy”. Classical art forms and calendar kitsch clamour for equal critical attention here. Obscene opulence and unspeakable poverty, devout Gandhians and nuclear saber-rattlers, a tradition of tolerance and savage religious hatred – they all have their space under the Indian sun. One is tempted to see the all-encompassing Hindi film as an encapsulation of these contradictions rooted in native sensibility yet greedy to absorb influences from everywhere, a vindication of cultural osmosis as an ongoing process. At its beguiling best, the Hindi movie is the holistic antidote to the anxieties of a modernising society pulled apart by the centrifugal forces of language, religious fundamentalism, and ethnicity. Bitterly divided, but addiction to the manifold joys of the Hindi film makes junkies of us all. 11

But before delving into the formulations, let me consider and ponder over the viewpoints of four very important and influential insiders of Bombay Film Industry on the basics governing the popular Hindi film genre. Javed Akhtar, believes that over the years Hindi cinema has developed a stylised form that operates outside the restrictions of reality (Kabir, 2001, 2).

Shah Rukh Khan notes:

The Hindi film is like *Titanic*, everything is told to you. Everything is explained, you don't have to think too hard, just enjoy the moments. Films are very basic and 'talk' like you would to a child. You follow the story, you enjoy it, it's full of emotion and whenever you get a little bogged down, a song will come. A Hindi film is a complete variety
entertainment show and you don't have to worry about whether you'll understand the film or not. In Hindi films, everything is nice, crystal clear, simple, straight forward. They are not pretentious. Sometimes I feel it's very difficult to make simple things and I think that's the uniqueness of Indian cinema. It has so much in it, there are songs, dances, emotions and fights and yet the format is very simple. I think that's the winning feature of good Hindi films (Kabir, 2001, 20-21).

Karan Johar notes:

If you have to name five basic ingredients that your Bollywood film must have, I'd say: glamour, emotion, great interval point, a hard-hitting climax and every kind of entertainment you can put into the film. I think these are the key elements. You have to have the right emotions, a completely glamorous look, great songs, and your interval point has to be fantastic. And everything has to round up very well in your climax. That's what I look for when I start writing. That's what you need for a commercial Hindi film. It should have all these elements. Only then will you make it successful – that's if you are aiming at the market in its entirety (Kabir, 2001, 22-23).

Hindi cinema's most successful filmmakers have mastered the Bollywood mixture of music, love, family values, comedy, fantasy and a staggeringly adventurous choice of film locations (which increasingly have no relation whatsoever to the narrative). Audiences know that films are not real life, but rather allegories for a perfect world, where troubles and difficulties are all sorted out. It's more than just offering happy endings – the stories are full of hope, showing that good inevitably triumphs: the poor man defeats the exploiter; the rich heroine is ultimately able to marry below her class and continue to enjoy an opulent lifestyle; the faithless husband always returns home to his wife and children; people live modern, westernised lives and still respect traditional Indian values; the hero always vanquishes the villain and the dark side of life is banished forever. Perhaps the most famous of all Indian film stars, Amitabh Bachchan, sums it all up:

Hindi films provide poetic justice in just three hours – a feat that none of us can achieve in a lifetime, or in several lifetimes (Kabir, 2001, 24).
Now let me specify the probable rules of grammar and the normative codes (Nandy, 1980, 89-96) which guide the story line and expressive style of popular Hindi films. First, the popular Hindi film is a spectacle, not an artistic endeavour. The use of the word ‘spectacle’ is partly in the sense in which Roland Barthes (1973) uses it to describe the mythology of freestyle wrestling. In a spectacle, black is black and white is white – emotionally, motivationally and morally; all shades of grey must be scrupulously avoided. Not because greys do not exist in the world but because they detract from the logic and charm of a spectacle. Thus, in the popular Hindi film, when somebody has a change of heart, the change is dramatic and total. Such a person cannot be allowed to linger in a normative limbo, and the clues to such a change must be clear and well defined. Moreover, a spectacle has to be an overstatement. Overstatement-and melodrama – is a crucial stylisation in the Bombay film. No one takes the content of such stylisation seriously; it is the form of overstatement, which is important. The popular film tries to be convincing as a spectacle by exaggeration. It does not even try to be a direct reflection of everyday reality. The exaggeration is only statistical. In terms of the overall logic of such films it makes perfect sense.

Understandably, the popular Hindi film is not concerned with the inner life of the characters on screen; it is concerned with the inner life of the viewer, and that, too, inadvertently. The characters do not develop through situations in these films; rather, the situations develop through the characters. The story is told through a series of incidents which are interwoven through ‘artificial’ means such as coincidences, accidents and when the scriptwriter runs out of ideas, through songs or dances. Thus, judged by the logic of their structure, such films are anti-psychological. Such anti-psychology follows directly from the nature of the Bombay film as a spectacle. Spectacles have to be anti-psychological in their content; they can only be psychological in their impact.

Second, the Bombay film-story does not generally have an unexpected conclusion; it only has a predictable climax. It bases its appeal not on the linear development of a story line but on the special configuration which the film presents of many known elements or themes derived from other movies, or, from familiar
traditional tales. The viewer is actually expected to know these elements by heart and to experience in the films a feeling of déjà vu.

The issue of plagiarism in such films has been wrongly posed. The story-writer and the director of the popular Hindi film operate within a consensual system, which rejects the idea that the elements of a story are a form of personal property or individual creation. Somewhat like the Ram Lila or Krishna Lila, a Bombay film aims at presenting a not-so-unique combination of themes that have been witnessed hundreds of times before. The question of plagiarism does not arise in such a context. The successful film is different from the unsuccessful film in that it presents a more popular or efficient combination of themes, arrived at by design or sheer luck. This explains why even though eighty percent of Bombay's films flop financially, they go on producing films of the same kind, hoping that the next one will be a success. The difference between successful and unsuccessful films is small and not clearly identifiable. It is a matter of how far a film makes sense to the audience as a captivating new version of films, which they have seen in the past.

Third, the story line in such movies has to be synchronic and ahistorical. This, of course, follows from the previous proposition. Because the climax is always present in the beginning and because they are modeled partly on timeless tales, the stress is not on a linear unfolding of the story. There is only a diachronic façade that is designed to be pierced by the viewer. At each moment, a character is judged by what he has been, what he is, and what he will become.

Thus, there is an ineluctable continuity between the past, the present and the future, and each of these temporalities get telescoped into the other. The crucial logic behind all type-casting in such films is evident. The viewer cannot be left guessing as to who will later turn out to be the hero and who the villain. There are various forms of empiricism in art, and the popular Hindi filmmaker has opted albeit unwittingly, for a form which makes its empirical statement by abstracting itself from at least some of the particulars of space and time. Thus, the locale of the story might shift without warning from one scene to another, the heroine might magically change her sari between cuts in a dance routine, the seasons might pass while she is singing, and the hero, in spite of his emphasised poverty may dress like a prince and sing like a well-
trained professional. To the casual observer these are all instances of irrationality but they can also be seen as the products of an alternate form of logic, having a different set of co-ordinates. Certainly, the films do succeed in obfuscating the particular historical realities of the myriad sub national, regional and sub cultural groupings in India, and they do eliminate from the storyline anything that might help the viewer to pin down the story to a specific social context. Deep identification with the characters in a story is allowed only to the extent that they are ‘types’. Any identification based on realistic depiction of a person, one that relates him or her to a particular historical time and cultural place, is seen as not merely useless but as detracting from the culture-free appeal of the heroes and the heroines.

As a corollary, social particulars enter the popular film solely as gross stereotypical details. Defying modern modes of cultural expression, the more stereotyped a character in such a movie, the more socially embedded he or she is. The angry, conservative, loud-mouthed father of the heroine may have an upper-caste name like *Mr. Verma* or *Thakursahib*, the local drunk may speak with an identifiably Bengali or Tamilian accent, and the night-club manager may have a typical Goan Christian name like *Mr. Pinto*, but the hero will simply be *Mr. Rakesh* or *Mr. Raj* or *Mr. Ashok* or just *Vijay* or *Rahul* – surname less and, thus, regionless, casteless, ethnically non-identifiable and ultimately ahistorical. He is in this sense an archetype, a representation of cultural concerns, which, if given a specific historical setting, would become less forceful, less black-and-white, and thus less communicative.

There is one other important reason why the hero and the heroine have to be abstracted from everyday social reality. Unlike modern literature and the modern cinema, the average Hindi movie does not choose for detailed treatment a few cultural themes or personality-types from a universe of themes and types. Instead, it seeks to provide, like a Puranic epic, an alternative universe. Within that alternative, all subsidiary characters are representatives of specific themes and types, chiefly the ones, which are particularly negative or particularly positive. Only the dyad of the hero and the heroine are kept from being identifiable with any one cultural or psychological theme or type: they constitute the residual category in the universe of the myth. Obviously in their case specificity would be a handicap and a contradiction in terms: it would break the self-sufficiency of the myth.
There is one restraint on this rule, a restraint that probably derives from the role and prominence given to ‘evil’ in Indian traditions. Even moderately negative traits, which may negate the essential goodness of the hero or heroine, have to be split off as separate characters. They cannot be put into the residuals. However, they can be kept close to the hero or the heroine if the need arises, as in the case of the charming heroine whose father turns out to be an undetected criminal who tries to secretly bump off the virginal hero; or the case of the urbane hero whose brother has become a notorious, dialect-speaking, bandit chief.

The rationale of considering popular Hindi film as a collective fantasy containing unconscious material and the hidden wishes of a vast number of people is not overly complex. Its main premise is that the creators of these films – the producers, directors, script writers, music-directors and so on – are strongly motivated by the very reasonable goal of making a lot of money. The prospect of financial gain does wonderful things for increasing the perception of the needs and desires of those who hold the key to these gratifications, which ensures that the filmmakers develop a daydream, which is not idiosyncratic. They must intuitively appeal to those concerns of the audience, which are shared; if they do not, the film’s appeal is bound to be disastrously limited. As with pornography, the filmmakers have to create a work, which is singular enough to fascinate and excite, and general enough to excite many. Thus films, like folklore and popular myths, give the psychoanalytic investigator a method of studying psychodynamics on a large scale (Kakar, 1980, 12-13).

[III]

Popular Hindi Cinema: Male Dominated Medium

A look at the history of popular Hindi cinema (which I have very briefly undertaken in the beginning of this Chapter) suggests quite clearly that right from its inception, it has had always been a heavily male-dominated and regulated medium. It can be noted that cinema is basically a medium or product which is co-authored by many, that is, it is a multi-authored creative endeavour. In case of the popular Hindi cinema, from its very birth till this day, all the authors, starting from the producer, director, script-writer, co-producer, assistant directors, lyricist, music director, music
composer, choreographer, make-up artists, cameraman, spot-helpers, technicians, assistants, distributors, publicists, poster-makers, etc. (with rare exceptions the sometimes ceremonially much-publicised token presence of women) have been men. This male-domination can be seen in terms of the gender identity of the directors and producers of these films as well as the primacy of the male characters or heroes. The marginalisation of feminine voices for the reduction of women into either symbols of maternity or mere ornaments providing support to the dominant male character is very clearly evident.

One cannot deny the fact that everything revolves around the issue of pleasure, and it is here that patriarchal repression has been most negative (Kaplan, 1983, 205-206). For patriarchal structures have been designed to make us forget the mutual, pleasurable bonding that we all (males and females) enjoyed with our mothers. The extremity of patriarchal domination of female sexuality may be a reaction to helplessness in the face of the threat that Motherhood represents. Patriarchal domination is prevalent in most of the six films, which I have selected for my research. This domination has both covert and overt ramifications. It's not always that the protagonist of these films, namely, the heroes are the forces behind this gendered domination, rather the action is situated in parts in the vicissitudes of the main characters. In a way, women are presented to be the sole reservoirs of family prestige and status. In a way patriarchal domination is sought to be established in all the films one has chosen for this specific research purpose. What is interesting and important is the range of masculinity constructs, which come out while textually interpreting these films as texts (which I will be undertaking in the course of the next chapter).

The notion of 'identity' itself is neither stable, nor permanent. It is a continuous process of construction and reconstruction which functions as a warning to any critic who tries to establish final and achieved models of representation. For example, there is no perfect film. Nor is there any film, which offers the ideal portrayal of a woman or a man. This is a global truth, which can never be contradicted because of the very nature of cinema's fluidity and artistic scope. The very notion of 'process' suggests flux, discontinuities, digressions, progressions, rather than fixed and rigid positions. It suggests that a range of positions of identification may exist within any text; and that, within the social situation of their viewing, audiences may shift subject –
positions as they interact with the filmic text. One can experience this more with reference to the same film seen again after some time then with the 'social situation' of the viewing. Considerable source of textual negotiation in many mainstream film genres, lie in their use of melodramatic and realistic modes. This dual constitution enables a film-text to function both on a symbolic, 'imagery' level, internal to feature film productions, and on a 'realist' level, referring to the socio-historical world outside the text (Chatterji, 1998, 17-18).

Popular culture draws on a melodramatic framework to provide archetypal symbolic enactments. This is natural because the focus of melodrama is a moral order constructed out of the conflict of polar opposites – a struggle between good and evil, personified in the conflicts of the hero, the heroine and the villain. Such conflicts have power only on the premise of a recognizable, socially constructed world. The pressure towards realism and contemporaneity means that a popular text must also conform to an ever-shifting criteria of relevance and credibility.

Gender representation is at the heart of such cultural negotiation. Central to such negotiation is the figure of Woman, which has long served as a powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbol, heavily over determined as an expression of the male psyche. But while film theory suggests how narrative, visual and melodramatic pleasures are organised around this symbol, feminist cultural history points out that the figure of woman cannot be fixed in her function as patriarchal value.

The 'image of woman' has also been a site of gendered discourse, drawn from the specific, socio-cultural experiences of women and shared by women, which negotiates a space within, and sometimes resists patriarchal domination. On the other hand, new definitions of gender and sexuality articulated by the women's movement contest the value and meaning of the female and male images, struggling for, female recognition and identification (Doane, 1987, 201).

In popular Hindi cinema, the following can be noted:
- By and large, Indian mainstream cinema reaffirms and reinforces social definitions of women.
This underlines the fact that women are constantly defined in relation to men, different from, or complementary to them.

Men, masculinity and male behaviour are always the reference points for women.

Women are defined in familial terms as carers and nurturers.

Women’s identity and status derive from their relation to the explicitly gendered categories of mothers, daughters, and wives.

Therefore, women are defined not only in relation to men, but also as dependent on men and subordinate to them.

Men, on the other hand, are never defined in relation to women, or, even in purely familial terms, but, in relation to a larger ‘public world in which they function as workers, colleagues, citizens. “Women are precisely defined, never as general representatives of humanity, but as specifically feminine, and frequently sexual categories...Being a man is an entitlement not to masculine attributes but to non-gendered subjectivity.” (Black and Coward, 1991, 83).

Men’s specific gender is thus ignored. They represent the universal and the human to which women are “other”. This perception of women as “the other” has been taken for granted in most social and political thought as well as in everyday life. That cinema in general and popular Hindi cinema in particular, should reflect identical attitudes towards women, should not be a surprise, much less, a shock. Therefore, popular cinema keeps on spouting stereotypes in solid Blacks and Whites. Women represent what men are not; thus, reason and emotion are understood to be incompatible, home is presented as the domain of women, the public world of politics as the domain of men, and so on.

“Men act, women appear. Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at.” (quoted in Nair, 2002, 52). This quote suggests very succinctly the position of women in the realm of the ‘look’, including within the mainstream popular Hindi cinema. In popular Hindi cinema, women have been relegated to the passive position in film after film, as “bearer, not the maker of meaning”, merely an appendage to the man, the wielder of power (Mulvey, 1999, 834). “What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes
him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance” (Mulvey, 1999, 837).

The stories played out on the screen are the men’s – their conflicts, their dreams, their aspirations, their tragedies, their revenge, their desires and their heroism. The women exist only in relation to the men, as their mothers, their wives, and especially their lovers. It is hard to find even one story revolving around a single unattached woman. And of course, there is the worship of youth and ‘beauty’. We rarely ever see a woman act independently, make her own decisions, question authority or even be a working woman unless her mother is on her death bed, or the father crippled, and definitely never once she gets married! Traditionally, women have been reduced to being a mere spectacle in the movies, pretty faces commodified for their beauty, with hardly any dividing line between beauty contests and acting in films (Nair, 2002, 52-53).

Women’s specially constituted role as spectacle, as the subject of the Look, is especially evident in the song and dance numbers which are such an important part of the publicity and the selling of a film. In fact there is an entire genre of songs, called ‘item numbers’ in industry parlance, which generally have a showgirl or dancer performing, and a predominantly male audience watching, that are deliberately inserted into the film, often without any direct connection with the rest of the film, to attract audiences. 15

All these add up in objectifying and sexualising the body of the woman for the benefit of the (male) viewer. One can differentiate the kinds of gazes in the following ways:

- The gaze of the male character towards the female character and the gaze of the female character towards the male character within the narrative. The male gaze is always more predominant and importantly placed in the films. The moment the male first sees the woman is very well fore grounded through the use of action (removing the sunglasses and looking at the woman from head to toe or whistling) dialogue (Kya dikhti hai), background music etc.

- The gaze of the audience towards the characters, the reverse, i.e. the gaze of the characters towards the audience rarely ever exists, since that would break the
carefully constructed verisimilitude of the screen story as something taking place on its own volition, and not something especially arranged for the eye of the viewer. But when one considers the gaze of the audience, it is definitely not homogenous, men and women have different responses to the stories of desire being played out on the screen. But how different are they really, considering that patriarchy is so well entrenched even in our own psyches! (Nair, 2002, 54-55).

Male visual pleasure is the controlling pleasure in cinema. Therefore, it seems logical that rape in mainstream Indian cinema follows this ideology within its own cultural context. Rape in the commercial mainstream is used mainly as a technologically skilled manipulation of male visual pleasure created with imagination, for purely commercial purposes. Rape is a statement of fact translated into action in a patriarchal society. Therefore, it offers abundant scope to a mainstream film maker to be used as a political strategy to provoke audience voyeurism.16

In an address to male spectators, the body of woman is constructed as a spectacle and the **mise en scène** of representations of women’s bodies coded in various ways as both to be looked at by the spectator and, in the same process, to provoke sexual arousal in him. These codes include the way in which the body is posed and lit, the overall composition of the image – including props, gesture, clothes and accessories – and the nature and direction of the gaze of the model. This is what ‘objectification’ of certain representations of the female body implies. Every rape scene therefore, by constructing certain representations of women codes woman in a general way as sign, as an object of the male gaze.17

Using psychoanalysis to demonstrate the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form, taking Freud and Lacan as a basis, I wish to note that the popular Hindi film is largely made for the pleasure of the male spectator alone, who seeks to control and “indirectly” possess the female figure through narcissistic identification with the main male protagonist, who controls the gaze and the events on the screen, thus giving the male spectator a reassuring sense of omnipotence. The gaze also provides another kind of pleasure – the voyeuristic one. The viewing conditions – dark, anonymous, the brilliance and the rapidly changing light patterns on the screen, and the narrative norms of constructing verisimilitude, of never
returning the gaze of the audience, all add in giving the spectator an illusion of looking into a private world.

But since the woman also signifies a lack, her image is also a source of anxiety (the castration complex), so the male seeks to nullify it by fetishism or over valuation. Therefore according to Mulvey (1999), this ambivalence, where the woman is seen as a lure (object of desire) and a threat (woman seen as lack and therefore signifying the castration anxiety), impels men to worship and fetishise woman on the one hand (the mother goddess), e.g., Ghatak’s women characters, or to devalue, punish and save her, the guilty object (the whore/vamp), as in Guru Dutt’s *Pyaasa* on the other.

While contesting Mulvey’s phallocentric assumptions in corroborating Freud’s signification of woman as ‘lack of a penis’, one cannot but agree that for man, woman is the Other. As Roland Barthes suggests: the Other is that which bourgeois (patriarchal) ideology cannot recognise or accept, but must deal with in either of two ways – either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself.

I wish to end this section by discussing about images of male sexuality in the popular Hindi cinema. We live in a world saturated with images, drenched in sexuality. Male sexuality is a bit like air – you breathe it in all the time, but you are not aware of it much. Until quite recently, what was talked about was the mysterious topic of female sexuality, or else the subject of deviant male sexual practices. Ordinary male sexuality was simply sexuality, and everybody knew what it was. We look at the world through ideas of male sexuality. Even when not looking at male sexuality, we are looking at the world within its terms of reference (Dyer, 1993, 89-98).

Perhaps the most insistent and relentless representation of male sexuality is not how men are represented at all, but rather in the way that women are looked at by the camera eye. The very basic methods that films have developed for telling stories imply a particular sense of what male sexuality is. Many have argued that the devices used, the way the camera places us as voyeur, the way editing puts us into the position of the male, the way the narrative encourages us to identify with the man, compose
the very basic storytelling grammar of mainstream film. The argument can be taken further to suggest that virtually all narratives, regardless of what medium they are in, reproduce the way male sexuality is organised, to the extent that it is hard to tell whether narrative structure is based on how we think of male sexuality or whether our conception of male sexuality is derived from the pleasures of male dominance within narratives.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{[IV]}

\textbf{Notion Of The ‘Hero’ In Popular Hindi Cinema}

Heroes. Everybody needs one.\textsuperscript{20} One can dream and play make-believe and can temporarily transcend one’s gutless, uneventful drift through routine and reality. The masses are drawn towards the popular arts for three basic reasons. For distraction, relocation and entertainment. And yet, “why is it distracting, relaxing and entertaining to lose oneself in someone else’s’ life and problems?” Fischer furnished the answers by enunciating the ‘Dionysian’ concept of art whereby an individual ‘loses’ himself in the characters of a novel, a play or a film in order to be a ‘whole’ man (Kazmi, 1998, 63-64).

The Indian people are essentially ‘iconophiles’ (who like sculpture, painting, images, animated or otherwise), and the cult of hero-worship naturally transposed itself to actors of popular Hindi cinema. The public transferred its aspirations and nostalgia to the stars who, in their eyes, were the worthy objects of admiration and imitation. What is true for the whole world as far as popular ‘idols’ (song, sports, cinema, politics) are concerned, takes on infinitely deeper dimension due to the heritage of ‘hero-worship’ mentioned above which is very much alive even today. The cinema industry certainly does not stop itself from going as far as possible to prop up the star system (Thoraval, 2000, 52).

The definition of a screen hero and the persona of the star who brings him to life are closely linked in popular Hindi cinema.\textsuperscript{21} Amitabh Bachchan outlines what is required of a Hindi film hero:

I believe leading men in Hindi cinema are indeed modern manifestations of mythical heroes from our two great epics, the
Mahabharat and the Ramayan. They're always invincible and they always win in the end. Leading men, or heroes as we call them, are required to do a bit of everything. A bit of comedy, a bit of action, a bit of singing, a bit of emotion. Almost like having Marlon Brando, John Wayne, Bruce Willis, John Travolta and Gene Kelly all rolled into one (Kabir, 2001, 2).

Since the end of the studio era in the early 1950s, stars, and particularly male stars, have dominated every aspect of the Indian film industry on- and off-screen and more so in recent years. Most producers and directors, no matter how important they are in their own right, are dependent on Bollywood's A-list to get films financed and sold. Once the producer has signed a director, a star and music composer, he then sells the package to distributors and exhibitors in India, and to film exporters who control the world market. Advances received from buyers provide the cash flow for the production of most Hindi films – in fact, this is basically the way films have been produced in India since the 1950s.

Let me explore the phenomenon: - what it is about the hero that makes him so omnipotent: There are many mythological stories from the Mahabharat and the Ramayan that come together and are condensed into a hero. The hero is seen as vulnerable but powerful, like the Arjun model. Or you can have a physically powerful hero, like Bhim, or the eternal lover, like Krishna. Or you combine all the characteristics associated with the Gods or demons into one and then you find the hero and the villain. The hero must be good-looking, tall, slim, have a voice that arouses sexuality and sensuousness and have a bit of mystery about him. Simultaneously, heroes evoke stories from childhood that concern strength, attention, and willingness to learn. The hero is nearly always invincible. He has a way out, he has a method to deal with any situation. These are all the stuff of fantasies. We have a group culture and that begins with the family. The family is distinguished by language, food and customs, we practise rituals that are different from other groups or clans. The Hindi film picks common patterns from this group culture and portrays stereo-typical heroes.
It has always been a moral crusade for the popular film hero, where he is always fighting for God, country or family. Roland Barthes likens the popular sport of wrestling to a great spectacle of suffering, defeat and justice. According to him, "what wrestling is above all meant to portray is a purely moral concept: that of Justice. The idea of 'paying' is essential to wrestling and the crowd's 'Give it to him' means above all else 'Make him pay'. This is, therefore, needless to say, an immanent justice. The baser the action of the 'bastard', the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return. In the ring, the wrestlers remain Gods because momentarily, they are the key which open Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil and unveils the form of a justice which is at last intelligible.

The screen is essentially no different from the ring. And heroes, like wrestlers, are quasi-divine agents locked in combat against the embodied evil. Be it Bond or Bachchan, the aim is always to make the 'bastard' pay. And even as the hero clobbers the ignoble soul and draws his pound of flesh, there is a vicarious amelioration of individual affliction. Momentarily at least, after the cathartic purge on screen, the viewer believes that God is in his heaven and all's right with the world. He walks out from the dark into the light with a faint smile playing on his lips; vindicated, satiated and somewhat content (Kazmi, 1998,65).

Popular Hindi cinema down the ages has essentially been a hero-dominated discourse where the narrative has always unfolded through a closed conflict between oppositional forces of good and evil. Although the conflict has remained timeless, the psychological make-up of the good (hero) and the bad (villain) forces has, by and large, mirrored the times. So much so, that post-Independence cinema has had a separate avatar for each passing decade of growth and decay. And the temperament and mood of the hero has corresponded with the tenor of the times.

Javed Akhtar notes:

If we look back at the forties, fifties and sixties, the hero was the...
will feel like a slave. The halo over this submission is sacrifice, and sacrifice becomes a virtue in a society where exploitation is rampant. So you have a hero like Devdas in the 1930s, whose impact lasted into the 1950s. But gradually, with industrialisation and a capitalist system, we emerged from feudal values – and winning became a virtue and the hero changed. So in the 1960s, we see a more positive hero, like Shammi Kapoor. We were optimistic; affluence was around the corner and better things were going to happen in the next month or the next year. But they didn’t. And that dream got shattered and created a kind of cynicism and anger. This led to a lack of trust in institutions, in systems, in law and order. And the image of the angry young man was a natural, logical result.

Costume designer Akbar Shahpurwalla notes:

A hero cannot look like an ordinary man. He has to be larger than life and wear clothes that no average person would.  

Mainstream popular Hindi films have by virtue of being hero-dominated, also produced unidimensional, quickly-rendered-submissive heroines. The various heroes who scaled the star ladder with the male mystique as their constant, were quickly slotted with a particular image: Rajesh Khanna, the eternal romantic. Jeetendra, the dancing wonder; Amitabh Bachchan, the angry young man; Anil Kapoor, angry young man II. And Aamir Khan, lover boy once again. The elixir of maschismo was, however, the clue to the making of a cult figure.

The fantastical tones notwithstanding, Hindi films largely maintain the status quo even as they seem to be providing the blue print for attaining the unattainable. The finale is a vicarious victory, a catharsis. Thus when you have working class heroes – taxi drivers, coolies, dock-workers, chauffeurs or street tough protagonists, they are but the placebo personae that humour the crowds, tantalise them and get them hooked. In the prologue and the epilogue of the films, the status quo is frequently reflected – either through the lost-and-found formula or through the love stories which ensure a pedigree status or marriage into wealth (Sen, 1991, 9-11).
Perhaps it is this element of male invincibility that disturbs the stock filmgoer when the hero turns out to be a mere mortal. The viewer is mercilessly unforgiving. The film star is, to an extent, held ransom by the viewer. And the patriarchal pattern of society makes amends to the male protagonists by allowing them to continue as larger than life figures long after their female counterparts have gone into a decline. Moreover, male actors are also given the chance to lead vicarious, titillating lives on the screen. The male mystique is further strengthened when age refuses to wither the heroes. This virility is carefully prompted offscreen, too. This issue will be deliberated in detail in the next section of this chapter. Movie glossies and video magazines vicariously approve of the celebrations of the macho hero and inform on second wives, affairs and liaisons. Heroines are expectedly more circumspect. Their \textit{affaires de coeur} are conducted either when they are single, separated or divorced.

The conceived male supremacy as prompted by the film industry is also responsible for setting up heroines as role models rather than cult figures. There is too little evidence of their on-screen appearance to leave an effective impression. The heroine’s character is almost always projected outwards, with introspection being nil. She exists for the hero, and by extension, for the male audience. The rapport between the hero and his audience does not find the same quality of equation with the heroine.

The heroine is either appealing as the girl-next-door or as a wife/sister/daughter/bhabhi. When the vamp’s role was usurped by the heroine, she provided the glamour but herein too, the Westernised stereotype reverted to the demure sari clad \textit{bharatiya nari} the moment the relationship coalesced.

Hampered by the ‘pretty face’ roles and the hero-dominated films, it is not surprising that actresses are remembered nostalgically but fail to command a corresponding fan-club following. Heroes are simply the more endurable icons. Given the prevalence of the father figure in all other spheres, to young women viewers even the ageing romantic hero is not jarring. In ‘double’ and ‘triple’ roles heroes will therefore continue to outlast the heroines.
Off-Screen Image Contributing To The Masculinity Construct In Popular Hindi Cinema

Stars are, and have always been, the base, the foundation, and the ultimate box-office pull in the popular film genre. The essence of the star can be summed as: She is everything to everybody. To old women, she is the remembrance of lost youth. To old men, she is the memory of first love. To beautiful young women, she is not merely Beauty – she is Achievement as well. To ugly women she is the beauty of their inner selves. To young men, she is the Dream Girl, perfection itself. And to all, she is the unattainable. She is Stardom (Reuben, 1993).

The contribution of the press in creating images of the stars and keeping them in the news cannot be denied. A negative story about a star planted in a magazine can cause terrible harm to a star’s reputation and standing in the industry. It is very difficult to fight rumours and repair the damage. On the other hand, magazines keep promoting their favourites and keep them in the public eye when their careers are down (Gehlot, 1995, 233).

Dyer (1986) enumerates a theoretical approach to the theory of the phenomenon of stars and uses this theory to inform empirical investigation of it. Within film studies, reasons for studying the stars have largely come from two rather different concerns, that may broadly be characterised as the sociological and the semiotic. The former centres on the stars as a remarkable, and probably influential or symptomatic, social phenomenon, as well as being an aspect of film’s ‘industrial’ nature. In this perspective, films are only of significance in so far as they have stars in them. The semiotic concern reverses this. Here, stars are only of significance because they are in films and therefore are part of the way films signify. Both concerns are mutually interdependent. That is to say, on the one hand the sociological concern can only make headway when informed by a proper engagement with the semiotics of stars, that is, their specific signification as realised in media texts (including films, but also newspaper stories, television programmes, advertisements, etc.). This is because, sociologically speaking, stars do not exist outside of such texts; therefore it is these that have to be studied, and they can only be studied with due
regard to the specificity of what they are, namely, significations. Equally, on the other hand, the semiotic concern has to be informed by the sociological, partly because stars are, like all significations, also and always social facts, but also because it is only on the basis of a proper theorisation of one’s object of study that one is able to pose questions of it.

In popular Hindi cinema the star text is created within the films themselves, mostly melodramas that are vehicles for star performances rather than realistic dramas. The film draws on images of the star in other films and in other media to give them roles as national icons of beauty and desire, presenting them as Utopian beings. This is also encouraged by viewing practices in India, where repeat viewing is the norm and the audience has an incredibly detailed knowledge of the life of the star and other personnel involved in the film. Wider social practices concerning the creation of the star manifest more localised practices. The star needs other media not only to maintain visibility beyond the brief moment of performance but also to allow the creation of a star persona. Indian television is an ideal medium for this: this is done by screening the star’s earlier films, video clips of film songs and interviews with the star. The other major area of circulation of the star’s image is in the film and lifestyle magazines that talk of their off-screen exploits. Dating back to the early days of cinema, film magazines remain the key place to find out about the stars’ off-screen personae, although unofficial gossip has always circulated. A radical change in the 1970s saw the appearance of gossip film magazines, the central concern of which was the creation of a readership tied together by the circulation of gossip, largely of a sexual nature. Here, the star’s story is told in a way that provides an arena for debates around sexuality, in particular female sexuality. These magazines are closely bound with the emergence in India in the 1970s of new social groups and the availability of wider consumer pleasures and lifestyles, and have continued as such until the present (Dwyer and Patel, 2002, 32-33).

In this context, I wish to point out that the masculinity construction of a star especially those who act as male leads in the popular Hindi films does not only depend on the on-screen image projection. The off-screen deliberation, based mostly on everything that gets published in film magazines, gossip columns, popular press matter equally. In a way, the masculinity construction of a star and its representation
is heavily dependent on his off-screen projections which appear in the press in the form of interviews, reports, gossips, comments, rumours, scandals, sometimes fuelled by what can be termed as ‘yellow journalistic mechanisms’. Any study in popular culture in the domain of cultural studies with a distinct gender studies perspective and framework cannot be complete without focus on the off-screen dimension and disposition through media projection of the stars.

With this intent in mind, I have collected and compiled a huge collection of reportage, about all the six leading male stars, who essay the main leads in the six films selected for this research purpose, with my own effort and also courtesy National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune and Film And Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune. The stars included are Raj Kapoor, Shammi Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan, Aamir Khan and Shah Rukh Khan. Each of them had been and have been and still are superstars and legends in their own right and in their own unique inimitable ways. It should be noted that the list of the superstars are not exhaustive in any way and the analysis and comments about the reports, and even about the selection of the reportage is not personal but the focus is to highlight those that point to the masculinity construction dimension of their representations on screen and their resultant impact on the broader psyche of the masses. Sometimes some portion of the report will be quoted and then analysed. On other occasions a little may be deconstructed to focus on the representation of masculinity constructions. There is no order as such being followed in terms of the dates of publication, etc. The commentary which would follow after this paragraph would be about the off-screen role playing and performance of the stars as well as the reception and subsequent colourful, juicy presentations by the press including film magazines, gossip columns, popular press.

The star system started getting formalised in the early fifties, and later in the decade the immortal trio of Raj Kapoor – Dilip Kumar – Dev Anand dominated the industry. A Filmfare April 26, 1957 article is titled “Idiosyncrasies of the Stars” which has the following about each of the three stars:

_Raj Kapoor: his black suit and red tie are a familiar sight at functions. A man of many idiosyncrasies. Raj says: “My biggest fad is being myself.”_
Dev Anand: lives in a shell from which he emerges only to meet people he likes. He has a penchant for coloured sports shirts and a passion for Chinese food.

Dilip Kumar: hates hair-cuts, but, contrary to all that's said, does comb his hair! He goes (almost) everywhere in white cotton shirt and trousers, and chappals.

From the above report, it is evidently clear how the film magazines project what can be called a personality cult phenomenon which adds fuel to the masculinity construction of each star in its own unique way. If one places the projections in the media with the respective star's on-screen persona, then interestingly they match to give a combined imagery which sums up their individual star personalities.

Focusing on Raj, one can point out several reports. One very interesting piece is a self-written article by Raj about himself titled “As I see Myself:” published in the First Anniversary Issue of Filmfare, Mar 6, 1953. One is not sure whether one can term the article as an exercise in narcissism because it can in many senses give some important insights into the private persona of the showman. Raj writes that he is a very “self-centred person.” He says his is “the old story of the artist on the eternal quest for perfection”. Another interesting sentence: “Among Raj Kapoor's many weaknesses is an unconscious tendency to act even off the sets....He has acquired a second self to deal with the rest of the world....Today Raj Kapoor is not what he really is. This often makes him miserable.....He is a man with a hundred faces but one soul, a hundred activities but one aim, a million fans and acquaintances but a few friends.” The aspect of acute sense of inner loneliness that creeps in the writing has much to comment on the masculinity construct that perhaps provoked the showman to make Mera Naam Joker.

The August 15, 1982 issue of India Today devoted its cover story to Raj Kapoor and his family titled “The Kapoors: Filmdom's First Family”. The article clearly pinpoints to the patriarchal dimension of the masculinity construct.

Another article published in Filmfare October 2, 1964 titled “Raj Kapoor: Man of Surprises” is also indicative of the many dimensions of his persona and
legendary showmanship which got highlighted over and over again in the film magazines and gossip columns.

Khalid Mohamed’s article published on June 12, 1988 on occasion of one hundred and fifty years of The Times of India is titled “The King of Heart” on Raj Kapoor is interesting. Some excerpts: Raj Kapoor had cinema in him like a bird has wings. He talked in a voice you listened to as much for its cadences as for its meaning. There was no bitterness of an artiste who had passed his prime; there was only magnanimity and an appetite for joy.”

The sixties saw the genesis of the ills that plague the industry today. The director started accepting a lower position than the star. The system of multi-starrers and multiple shifts started then, causing a complete turnaround in the working of the film industry. Shammi Kapoor became the reigning star with the film Junglee which became a trend-setter. In a 1985 review in the Times of India about Junglee point out Junglee is possibly the most entertaining breezy romance of the ‘60s. A trend-setter, its success sent other producers to lush holiday locales like Kashmir.

Bunny Reuben in a series of articles on “The Fabulous Kapoors – 4” published in The Illustrated Weekly of India, May 9, 1971 devoted it to Shammi and Sashi Kapoor, the two Kapoor borthers other than Raj. Bunny writes: “Shammi Kapoor, of course, is the Don Juan of the Kapoor clan. Wherever and whenever people discuss him, accounts of his amorous escapades, his braggadocio and his derring-do, gain prominence.” All these point to the wild masculinity persona of Shammi Kapoor.

An editorial published in The Hindu (21 September, 1990) titled “The Singing, Swinging Romantic” is based on Shammi Kapoor. It says “Shammi Kapoor was the first truly aggressive romantic of Hindi cinema. But he had to struggle for five agonising years before he could emerge as the Jumping Jack of the Indian screen.” What is significant is the coinage of ‘aggressive romantic’ and ‘Jumping Jack’ which point to the unique dimension in terms of the masculinity construct of the persona of Shammi Kapoor.
The early seventies were to see the birth of a phenomenon called the superstar in the form of an ordinary-looking, minimally talented Rajesh Khanna. After his reign was over, people could not believe that he could have won such a massive fan-following. In a special 25 year celebration issue of Stardust published in 1997 with a special feature on the great Autobiography, an article with the title “Rajesh Khanna – The Most Unforgettable Star” is significant. It says “Amitabh could generate public craze but Khanna was different. He was worshipped. He created mass hysteria. Young girls got married to his photograph. People fought for the grains of sand on which his car had left its tyre marks. People growled with him in the theatre when he punished evil. He was a phenomenon. There was none like him. There will be none like him.” The words are significant because it points precisely to the masculinity construct which Rajesh Khanna wished to project his image on and off screen.

In a special feature titled “The Man Who Would be King” published in Filmfare January 1-15, 1985, Rajesh Khanna still believes that he is the Phenomenon. That no one has replaced him, no one ever can. He also believes that with the return of romance, the audience will yell for him again. The king will rule his kingdom, all over again.” The words point to the romantic angle of the masculinity construct which Rajesh wishes to harp on the audience. Moreover he seems to reassure and is over-confident in crowning himself ‘the King’.

Another article published in The Illustrated Weekly of India, April 9, 1972 is significantly titled “Best Actor Rajesh Khanna” where it is written “No star since Dilip Kumar has commanded the following Rajesh Khanna does today.”

The build-up to the romantic, soft masculinity construct of Rajesh Khanna comes alive in the following quotes published in 1984 issues of Cine Blitz and Star & Style: “Anju was never unfaithful to me; I’m not against a working woman, I’m against a working mother”; “Other men had mistresses. I was the first one to live openly with my girlfriend under the same roof”; “I waited outside brothels and paid for my friends”; “I knew I’d floor them with my talent and style”; “The girl had to take the initiative.”
By then the biggest star the industry had ever seen – Amitabh Bachchan – had made his appearance. According to Javed Akhtar, what propelled Bachchan to the “number one” position, the entry of the criminally-inclined, angry young man or anti-hero, coincided with the complete breakdown of a traditional lifestyle, legal system and society as it had been until then. His films mirrored the rage and disillusionment of the youth in the seventies. They saw themselves in his rough hewn screen persona, and fantasised about the power they never had.

So much has been written on Bachchan that it is really difficult to choose some from them. But one wished to place some of them which in some sense point to the multi-dimensional masculinity construct of the persona of Bachchan and its projection. In an article titled “Bachchan Factor in Hindi Cinema” which Girija Rajendran published in Sunday Herald of Oct 3, 1982 points to the fact that he “is different from all our previous superstars in a very distinct manner.” Kishore Valicha’s article on “How Amitabh Changed Commercial Cinema” is also significant which basically is an excerpt from his Orient Longman published book titled “The Moving Image”.

Interestingly in one of the interviews, Amitabh claimed that “I play it from the heart”. The ‘heart’ factor is important inspite of his angry man persona.

In an article titled “Amitabh Bachchan And the Mechanics of Anger”, published in Filmfare, Nov 16-30, 1978, Shekhar Hattangadi points out that “there must surely be a limit to which a handful of writers can raid the theme of personal vendetta and permutate script – situations glibly tailored to suit an actor’s personality”. The masculinity construct is pampered with the factor of anger and its manifestation and repercussions.

In an interview published in The Illustrated Weekly of India, May 18, 1975, Bachchan narrates “How I Came to play Haji Mastaan.”

A very interesting feature is provided by Taroon Coomar Bhaduri, Amitabh’s father-in-law published in The Statesman titled “Nearly Everyone Seems to Know Him, Yes – But Does Anyone?
There have been doubts expressed in articles pointing to the fact whether "Does he glamorise violence". Iqbal Masud points out that the turbulent affair between Bachchan and his audience and his critics reflects the dreams and neuroses of Indian life. In another interesting article pointing to his romantic side as well published in 1977 titled "A Man And His Women" with photographs of both Jaya and Rekha.

About Aamir Khan, the special issue of Stardust, on The Great Autobiography points out that: "A handle-with-care chocolate prince who is a terrific reading material when he starts talking about such fairy-tale things like romance, 'I've written in blood to Reema...' he once said"

Reviewing Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, the Statesman writes that Aamir Khan is "slender, shy-looking" and plays Romeo. In a way, a new dimension is added to the masculinity construct by the persona of Aamir Khan.

The Sunday Observer of 15 May, 1988 points out that "Aamir is probably the youngest to ever get a central role in a popular Hindi film". "There was this group of school girls sitting in the row behind me, who squealed in delight each time Aamir Khan came on screen".

The Illustrated Weekly of India of June 20-26, 1992 featured Aamir Khan with a title "Breakthrough". In the Teen Herald of June 23, 1991, the feature is about Aamir catering to teens. The India Today cover story on Aamir Khan published on May 25, 1998 featured: "Unlike the other Khans – flashy Shah Rukh and boy toy Salman – the Aamir appeal is about an actor assiduously honing his craft to perfection. It's about a committed professional with an inbred understanding of cinema. Above all, it's about the decent bloke next door".

Two decades later after the arrival of the Bachchan phenomenon, the creation of a more evil and vicious anti-hero, personified by Shah Rukh Khan in Bazigar, Darr and Anjaam, caught the imagination of the public, because the intervening years had seen a deterioration of values and a shift in moral attitudes that made society and film glorify criminals and gangsters. But along with this specific genre came also the ideal extended family film which became super duper hits. 

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Interestingly an article published in *Blitz, 6 June, 1999*, points out that: “Shah Rukh is the man of the moment, the star who is the darling of the youth. His movies are run-away hits and appreciated by the whole family not just the youngsters. He is the Star No. 1 and his films are box office successes. His film rake in more moolah.” What is significant about the above report is that it points to the fact that he caters not only to the young audience. It is very significant in terms of his timeless evergreen appeal to the characteristic masculinity construct as a hero of the 90s needs to appeal to the old and young as he is coming to the living room of every household every now and then due to invasion of cable T.V.

*India Today* even informs about the perfume named after Shah Rukh Khan being launched provocatively titled the news item as “Shah Rukh Khan Perfume: Scent of A Man”. In fact the news is accompanied by another news: “Meanwhile news has just wafted in of Pop diva Madonna and daughter Lourdes visiting Khan backstage after one of his shows in the US. This report and the one before in a way catapulted Shah Rukh to the rank of a superstar. *India Today* of March 23, 1998, comes up with a cover story on Shah Rukh Khan. Khan is quoted as: “Theek hai, usko bolo Shah Rukh bola, India’s biggest star”.

Another interesting feature is published in *Blitz of 6 June, 1999*, pointing to: “Will the three Khans endorsing the brands, are the cola rivals using their on-screen rivalry to their advantage?” About Shah Rukh the report says: “Shah Rukh has a perfect Pepsi personality, young, fun loving and exuberant. For the present, he seems content doing the same feel-good family value film.” This points to the projected masculinity construct of the persona of Shah Rukh Khan.

There is a saying in the film industry that a star must be good to people on his way up, because he will meet the same people on the way down. After paying a tough price for success, failure is all the more traumatic. The stars are like children pulling out the wings from butterflies. They want to live several lives in one day. Because, for them, there may be no tomorrow.
This Section is based on interviews of the insiders, that is, the people connected with the film industry. Basically, the idea is to study and analyse the insiders' point of view regarding themselves. In fact, it is the relationship, interface of the producer and the product/the creator and the creation/ the artist and the art, with all its complexities, ambiguities and tensions that has enabled me to examine the representation of masculinity in popular Hindi cinema. My purpose is to examine the complex relationship between popular Hindi cinema as a mass cultural product and the social and cultural practices prevalent in our society. A study of the insiders' viewpoints has helped me to understand the complex and dynamic relationship between their identities as professionals and cultural beliefs and practices particularly in reference to gender questions which I believe perhaps have shaped their professional engagement. In other words, it would be a study of the sociology of the producers/creators/artists (i.e. script writers, directors, actors, actresses, character artists, even film critics, etc.)

It can be noted that in this section, I am not including the exhaustive list of all the interviews (both in-person, that is, face-to-face interviews and over the phone interviews) and my field-work experiences based in Pune and Mumbai, which I have already enumerated in Chapter I. Here I only focus on those interviews which highlight the broad contours of the insiders' perspective on the gender question, especially views on their perception of the images of masculinity in popular Hindi film genre. With this focus in mind, I present here excerpts of some of the interviews. Rather than putting words into their mouths, the excerpts are in original verbatim. Through this I wish to capture what these people really meant about the culture of Hindi popular cinema with special reference to the masculinity question. I wish to end this section with an analytical commentary on the following interviews:

Javed Akhtar:

...Deewar became an identity in itself despite its strong similarity with the main story line of Ganga Jamuna and Mother India as it is
placed in the urban milieu. There is Hollywood influence as well. The sensibility of Deewaar is very urban and contemporary.

...In terms of characterisation, while writing the dialogue, the final nuances come into force. One keeps censoring while writing the dialogues. Characters develop their own vocabulary and come alive on their own and then dictate the script writer.

...Raw material to fantasise become the reality for the script writer. The writer’s sense and sensibility which are real ultimately come alive in the scenes.

...Asking someone to psychoanalyse himself is difficult and almost impossible.

...Both Salim and I lost our mothers at a very early age. It can be one of the reasons for depiction of the strong mother figure in Deewaar. We had ego and self-respect and with these we entered and made our careers, and also imposed ourselves in the film industry. We deserve credit for our creativity. How we placed ourselves, be in the banner or in the name casting, the same kind of assertion and aggression in the characters of Deewaar was visible.

...Mumbai is not just a location but also a sensibility and attitude. It offers a tempo to life which is different from smaller towns. There is no frills/formalities to life and somehow you are direct to life and life is direct to you. Life says what it means to you and you say what life means to you. This kind of business-like attitude/matter of fact attitude between life and the individual is very much Bombay and perhaps New York or any other industrialised, highly commercialised city and which we see in Deewaar.

...When we were writing, we were not sure who is going to play which role.

...Bachchan was at that time playing softer roles of all sorts. The films which followed Deewar created the image of the ‘angry young man’ for Bachchan. Critics used the term the ‘angry young man’ for him. Perhaps it was Divyani Chawla in Stardust who coined the term for the first time.
...When Zanjeer or Deewaar or Sholay were written, we had no idea for whom we were writing. Later we were conscious that Amitabh would be the hero and while writing, we would keep him in mind.

...Half way the character and the star meet.

...The visualisation differs from script writer to film-maker. In a way, film-making is a chain of disappointments. The fantasy breaks somewhere. Things keep changing from the original script. A chain of people are involved in the film-making. They together make a film.

Not possible to remain on square A. It is instinctive like a batsman in the game of cricket who decides to make a stroke in a split second.

Same happens in mass communication. Afterwards you intellectualise and think about it, but we are not writing with that reason in mind.

...Film is a very young medium. Time has come when good screenplays should be taken more seriously. They can be considered as part of literature.

...Every trend or every persona or every philosophy or every religion ultimately becomes its own cartoon and caricature because usually people who follow or take it up are concerned with the obvious image in front of them. They fail to see the subconscious. They make the character one dimensional. That happens with fashion or trends or religions. The character/persona becomes a cartoon of himself, a caricature. In cartoon, you take anything or any one and you exaggerate it. The concept of the ‘angry young man’ or seething anger becomes some kind of megalomaniac. In films which follow in dozens, he becomes some kind of megalomaniac, egocentric, aggressive, uncouth person. This was the caricature of that ‘angry young man’ who was angry but determined. He had a lot of hurt in him – a kind of pain. Inside that hard crust was a soft nature and that is why he was so hurt. But that goes away and the crust remains.

...For someone like Bachchan, people are interested in the star and not the story which can act as a constraint on the star to be himself or whatever he is known for or what eventually people want to see. So
you provide a chain of sequences to the actor to show his powers and antics and items.

...Vijay or Ravi – they are foils to each other

Shyam Benegal:

...If you look at Indian Cinema, the Hindi and Bengali cinema are somewhat different both in their origin and eventual development from Tamil or Telugu cinema or Kanada cinema. These reflect the sociological character of these states. Especially in case of Hindi Cinema, the sociological character of the city of Mumbai itself is important. For Bengali cinema, the sociological character of the city of Calcutta is important. Even in case of the early Hindi cinema during the 30s, Calcutta was important as they were mostly being made from that city rather than Mumbai.

...Cinema creates archetypes, stereotypes. In a way, stereotypes are based on archetypes. Now what is the archetype when it comes to the male figure as against the feminine figures in the cinema? Now, you know, one that captured everybody’s imagination as a character was Devdas. Devdas became an archetype in the romantic genre of Indian films. Devdas has had many, many versions. Devdas is a romantic hero. It caught the imagination of urban India that there was something else other than mythological characters. We all know that the novel was written by a very young Sarat Chandra. His creation was of an adolescent sensibility which has the element of self-denial. It is very self-indulgent with thoughts of suicide. It caught the imagination of both young and old people. But it was very much the imagination of a romantic hero that urban India took to its bosom and it remained so. If you look at Hindi films whether at the time of Ashok Kumar or a decade later with Dilip Kumar and even a decade and half later, we find other heroes like Rajesh Khanna essaying roles modelled on the Devdas archetype. The break came with the coming of Amitabh Bachchan. Until coming of Amitabh, we were playing with clones of the Devdas character. Even Raj Kapoor’s character was not too
different. There was a kind of simplicity and a certain kind of trusting, that is, innate trust of human beings, in the characters which Raj Kapoor created on screen. Not naïve but trusting. It goes back to Gandhi’s thinking. Gandhi’s famous words: “Even if your enemy betrays your trust many times, you cannot loose trust. It depends on your moral conviction to transform your enemy.” This was essentially Gandhi. This got mixed up in the characters on a popular level which somebody like Raj Kapoor took it up. But that is not the major image which was that of Devdas. Now let us look at Devdas. He is in love with someone. But he is not able to articulate and communicate that love. He is unable to reject the authority which forces him to do otherwise. The authority is tradition in the form of his father. It pits individualism against tradition. So, in some sense, it is modernity against tradition. He cannot go against tradition. So he goes through a process of self-destruction. For him, it is martyrdom to be achieved. It is a peculiar kind of selflessness which is also a severe kind of selfishness. The Krishna model is different from the Devdas archetype. Krishna is, what one might call, a kind of leela. Devdas is a modern image and not a classical image of India at all of the male configuration. This is a mixture of many cultures. Romance as such is not very much a part of Hindu tradition. Romantic tradition comes from Muslims. And that is part of the compositeness of Indian character. It is also a Bhakti and Sufi yearning. David Lean once remarked that the most marvellous love stories consist of those that do not have consumation at the end. Shammi Kapoor is seminal in terms of transition to Amitabh Bachchan. Raj Kapoor is seen more as a filmmaker than a hero who created a character who one might call as a ‘everyman’. And that everyman character was given shape by Charlie Chaplin in world cinema. Raj Kapoor bought a peculiarly Indian character to it which is why I mentioned Gandhi.

...When you say masculinity, you are referring to the sexuality. Now Devdas is not sexual in that sense. He is still adolescent. That form of sexual masculinity never took place in Indian cinema as a protagonist
figure. As a villain, yes. And always, the villain is crassly sexual. This had a lot to do with our own urban sensibilities shaped by 19th century reformism based on the British Indian experience. So the villain is sexual, crude, uncultivated. It has parallels and reverberations from Ramayana where Ravana is crassly sexual. Ram is mostly asexual in his characteristics particularly the late 19th century evolution of Ramayana into the 20th century. Ram even in our political life is Ram Raj which Gandhi offered and talked about was free of sexual connotation. So therefore the attraction between man and woman was never seen or explored.

...Love marriage is thought of as an aspect of modernity which you really felt very guilty about. So to explore masculinity, you have to come to this conclusion. Sex does not play any role on the surface.

...Bachchan too is not very sexual. With the coming of Bachchan, the female character lost her equality to some extent. Female was necessary with the logic that you cannot have a hero without his love interest. In Indian cinema, you have a very strange kind of thing where a boy’s feeling for his mother is very, very great – a kind of mother-fixation. And very recently it is starting to disappear from popular Indian cinema.

...Now masculinity in terms of Amitabh Bachchan is expressed in other terms like pursuit of power. Those who are powerful in his films become so through illegitimate means. And he comes there to legitimise the process. Even if he uses illegitimate means against illegitimate people.

...And Rajesh Khanna was a continuation of the Devdas archetype.

...So the masculine image was always romantic but not essentially figured in any sexual way. There are many reasons. Any display of sexuality would be promptly cut off by the censors. So it came in very subversive ways in cinema. It never came in very legitimate ways. Expression of sexuality through dance. In the 40s, you will find a great deal of sexual imagery in the poetry of film songs especially in the lyrics.
...And yes, there is the post-Amitabh phase where you find, what one might call parallel cinema. Parallel cinema portrayed a rendition of more real imagery of male-female relations.

...Today, masculinity in Indian cinema is depicted by a machoness in male-female relationship. That macho quality was not counted in earlier days. That macho quality was not considered legitimate in earlier times.

...So then you have to go to analyse the process of subversion of the system. You have to study individual films.

...Both Aamir and Shah Rukh are evolutions of the Amitabh Bachchan figure. Amitabh was not sexual but was devoted to his family particularly his mother.

...So in the analysis of popular Hindi cinema by Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakar, one finds the contradiction of modernity and tradition. There is confrontation and reconciliation as well. Sometimes coopting one for the other. You find in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, Yash Chopra's films, Karan Johar's films where modern is coopted in the tradition. This is reflected in political attitudes. For example, the evolution of Hindu nationalism from extreme tradition to reconciliation. So taking over of modernity to fit into the traditional format is the very scheme which we see in today's cinema.

...Androgyny is not a foreign idea. The feminine in the masculine is accepted quite easily and it is not kept hidden in Indian society unlike the Western society. In West, it is seen almost like a sin. All *Devdas* like heroes are androgynous in their attitude. That is very much part of the tradition. Its not cinema that has brought this to the fore. It has always been there even in other arts. Masculinity as a test of courage or courage as a mark of masculinity is not essentially the image of man. Courage in Indian mythology is to be found in both women and men in equal measure.

...There was a certain kind of challenge to institutions during the time of Mrs Gandhi, institutions which were created during her father's time. And which were beginning to be distracted during her time. And
now today, the value of institutions have been totally negated. And that is a kind of a process which you see in cinema as well.

...Films cost money to make more than most other art forms. Naturally, it is affected most by the market because the recovery of money becomes essential. The effect is very strong. So they go by the logic of what they see as popular need and popular demand. And they play on them as well. Popular entertainment attracts the audience on a wider scale. The person who is making the film also has his/her sensibility depending on the creative urge. These two points meet and the film emerges.

...Statistics say 80% films fail in the box-office test. And which 20% would succeed, no body really can tell.

...Cinema is a creature of technology.

Shammi Kapoor (The original interview was carried out mostly in Hindi. Here I offer my translations in the excerpts that follow):

...The concept of a bound script does not usually exist in the Hindi film industry. The basic storyline is narrated to us. The same happened with Junglee. Things, that is, details grow along with the film-making process. Today there are more definitive ideas about the film-making process. The whole platform is in a more broader canvas. The economics is different. Today they have to show a script.

...During the shooting of Junglee, both the director and me had not seen the location meant for filming the famous “Yahoo” song. I was upset about the location. So I emotionally blackmailed Subodhda about the lack of snow in the location. I managed to convince him to take me to Shimla for the picturisation.

...I used the word “Yahoo” in Tum Sa Nahin Dekha for the first time.

...I again used the word “Yahoo” in Dil Deke Dekho. It is the sound of outcry of joy, exuberance, happiness. It is a loud expression. In a way it is a correct expression of fulfilment. When Shankar-Jaikishen was composing music, they really liked my suggestion. The full song was by Rafi Saab but that word is uttered by Prayagraj. It was a kind of a
continuation of the usage of the expression and it was like a peak of that process. It is an aspect of physical outburst but no sexual connotation at all. The audience cannot identify sexually to the on-screen imagery. They just relate indirectly to sex. I don’t think there was any hidden sexual agenda behind the usage of the expression “Yahoo”.

…I perhaps portrayed the “macho” image – a man who could not care any less. He is doing something which is justified, so there are no negative tones involved. I essayed the role of positive energy – a man who is enjoying life in a very legitimate way. Let me give you some examples. When I see today’s films, it seems that the actors are just mechanically doing their parts and not involved with the process of film-making. They don’t seem to enjoy what they are doing. And some how it shows on the screen. You can very well understand they are performing. In our times, as far as I was concerned, there was a kind of happiness in whatever I was doing. And that happiness/mazaa reflected on the screen. We used to really enjoy while shooting. I term that time as “happy times”. No greys, no complexities just pure colour. That exuberance is not seen today.

…I personally think that Dev Anand could have carried the image of masculinity from the 50s. Perhaps I was the one who carried it forward. I could have picked up the girl on my shoulders and moved forward like the Hollywood films. Dilip Kumar had that emotional underplay style. Raj Kapoor had that extrovert situational comedy style. Only Dev Anand seemed to have that macho quality which he did not carry forward. I think I carried forward that quality. I went two steps ahead of that. He just flirted with the girls but I went ahead to the extreme “Yahoo” persona and gave a “macho” figure.

…I never studied or felt the need to study my roles deeply whether they were modelled on the Krishna, Shiva or Rama archetype.

…You had to fight with the director for your rights to be included in a particular scene or song along with the heroine.
...That time the film industry was not organised like it is today.
...I used to discuss the picturisation of my songs with the script writer, director, music composer, singer. There was an uncanny relation with Rafi Saab. In most of the recordings of my songs, I used to be there. Both of us had an unique tuning.
...There is no melody in today’s film music. Rahman has been responsible to bring back melody. (He started explaining by singing and dancing.)
...The character of Junglee can be that of the Birlas or from any other business family of India.
...The original name of the film Junglee was Mr. Hitler.
...There is a line you draw between the character you are performing and your self.
...Saira Banu was a new girl. I had a bad equation with her. Lot of my performance depended on her reaction. So that was a challenge.
...Sometimes you have to live upto that image which you have created – to live up to what you are not. I am a great extrovert. I love hunting.
...When I got married, my wife was a bigger star than me. I had to carve out a niche for myself as a ‘hero’.

Randhir Kapoor:
...Raj Kapoor was the maker of Shree 420. It was his project. He was the producer, director of this film. And he thought about the idea along with K.A. Abbas. Abbas gave the idea of Awara to Raj Kapoor. In a way Shree 420 is an extension of the same character of Awara.
...Bringing of the Chaplin model was to bring forth the common man. India was trying to stand on its own feet after independence. We were going through a struggle in our lives. And there were hopes and desires. Every man was looking for a better tomorrow. There was a lot of aspirations and hopes which were let down by the Britishers. Raj brought that flavour of hope, of thinking positive. He gave the common man the hope that there will be a better tomorrow.
...Nehru was a similar character. He was a very positive thinking man. In today's cinema, we have lost the innocence all over the world in terms of relationships.

...Raj was brought up to think positive. Whatever he portrayed was a little extension of himself. From real to reel life, there was a lot of Raj Kapoor in all his films including Mera Naam Joker, Jis Desh Mein Ganga Bahti Hain. Those days, cinema was of that kind.

...The idea of Shree 420 and Awara came together to Abbas and Raj.

...Raj was an admirer of Chaplin’s films because of the way he portrayed the character of the common man. And he made a satire of all the problems he faced in life.

...There is such a lot of innocence in Shree 420. The picture had a lot of double meanings and undercurrents of what he wanted to say.

...Raj was totally involved in his films. He was not a socialiser. He had no friends. He never went to parties. He was obsessed with his work.

...Raj was a great follower of Nehru. He believed in Nehru. He was not into active politics. He was a secular man. If you see his films, you find such a lot of social messages. He thought big and his films were always big. In fact everything about him was larger than life. He used to like mixing with the common man.

...Raj Kapoor was a very good father. He was a very good employer. His staff was like a big family. Everything about him was big. He was very large hearted. And he was simple in his ways. He would talk to everybody.

...Raj took out the best out of all the leading actresses like Nargis, Vijantimala, Dimple, Padmini Kolhapure.

...In Shree 420, I don't think there is any mythological reference involved. Later in Raj's films like Satyam Shivam Sundaram, there was but not in Shree 420 or Awara.

...In the 50s and the 60s, there were only socialist films. Raj was a dream merchant. Shree 420 is exactly that.
...Raju goes back to the village at the end of *Shree 420* for a better tomorrow.

...Raj never made or believed in action films. He used to live in his own world.

...He had great respect for his contemporaries. They were his friends and no enmity or animosity was there.

...He never had a budget for any film.

...He was a very tradition-bound family-minded man. He got involved with many women but never married them. He was a very good father and a brother also.

...Media created a blown-up notion that the Kapoors do not allow their women to participate in cinema. My mother had no film background. She was not an actress. We are Punjabis but don’t speak Punjabi. She belonged to a conservative family. She would not give interviews. My sisters were like her. They were not inclined to acting. If you notice, we have all married actresses. Geeta Bali, wife of Shammi Kapoor, was in films even after her marriage. Sanjana, daughter of Shashi Kapoor did act. She was not successful so she gave up. Today, times have changed. My children wanted to work. I said: go ahead.

...I am proud of the way my daughters, Karishma and Kareena have conducted themselves. They are professionals. They are not party animals. They don’t like late-night parties. Today’s generation are bradpack. I think Kareena belongs to that.

...I was shocked on a comment from a friend’s son’s remark about *Mother India* which he regarded as a shit film. For him, the villain of the film is the mother. He saw the film from a different perspective altogether. Perspectives have changed for today’s generation. He was critical of Raj Kapoor’s *Sangam*. We can see how cinema has changed. This is the result of globalisation. Today’s generation wants to see *Devdas* made by Sanjay Leela Bhansali because Shah rukh, Madhuri and Aishwarya are there. You ask the new generation and they will say that it is the story of an alcoholic.
Mita Vashishth:

...In any commercial cinema, no body gives you a script before the shooting. They basically give you an overview of the role. And then you start asking about the viability of the project, about who would be your co-stars, other people involved in the film.

...If you know that the role is good but not great, then you think about the money. Then money becomes the guiding factor. Even if the role is great, then also you don't want yourself to be sold so cheap because that is the way you are viewed or valued in film industry. If they really want you, then you are in a position to bargain.

...I need to know what the director wants from me. How he has visualised the role...What is the chemistry between your co-stars also determine how you essay a particular role. I rewrote the whole climax of "Oops" with the director, Deepak Tijori.

...Inputs from script writers and directors vary. Some directors are completely dictatorial. They think they are also actors. In popular film genre, they cast types. And they cater and adhere to that types. For example, if you take Karishma or Kareena Kapoor, their performances don't vary much from one film to another. They are absolutely the same. So they are not into any background reading. Popular films use broad brushes using broad strokes. They are into larger mapping. It's like Mahabharata.

...I don't think there is any difference between your imagination and the reel and real life character. We also daydream all the time.

...There is something you have to maintain in your day-to-day life. After a while, it is an expectation/demand if you are someone who is catering to, or perceived as, allowing people to fantasise – then its something that becomes your responsibility.

...Since you are a film star, you try to dress like an ordinary person. But on the other hand, you find an ordinary housewife dressed like a film star in a marriage party.
...After a while you develop private spaces. I find how it has affected me. I tend to forget people's names as soon as I hear it...You learn to shut out people after a while.

...I think every one has their own insecurities and it is not unique or specific to those connected with the film industry. What is true is that we are under constant public scrutiny: how we look, what is my weight level, etc. You must have deeper coping levels.

...Of course this is a male-dominated industry. I think there is as much exploitation as any other profession.

...There is a kind of hierarchy. You get the kind of dressing room depending on where you are placed in that ordering, etc.

...Interaction and equation with co-stars depend from person to person. May be here its heightened because you deal with high emotions, feelings, thoughts. So interaction can be very intense. But at the same time, it can be very short-lived as well.

...Raj Kapoor was, for me, a very little, nice male who needs to be emotionally indulged by the women. His emotional pitches are very self-indulgent as a human being. In some films like Aag, Sangam, he is the passive, aggressive male who demands that his love be returned. He demands a self-indulgent feeling from his female partner...Charlie Chaplin's politics is very different from Raj Kapoor's. There was no comparison. Raj Kapoor wants that emotionally everybody should think in his way. All the characters would emotionally be gripped in his way eventually in his films.

...I simply love Shammi Kapoor. He is such a celebration of the moment with his body and sense of fun. Every moment you realise he is alive. He has a beautiful, physical energy. There is a great sense of playful eroticism in him and especially in his songs. He has a very corporial body. But it is completely a non-aggressive one. Raj Kapoor, on the other hand, even with a tiny body had an aggressive quality to him. It's like being adamant about something (zid pakar lena).

...By seeing Rajesh Khanna, you can understand why he was such a superstar. He had style, great charm and you always think that he
would grow old very gracefully. When you see his films as a young man, you sense a great future to his persona. He had a great appeal then and he also had a great longevity to that appeal. You almost think of walking into the distant sunset with him. He was just not the next-door boy but very charming.

...Mr. Bachchan has gone all the way from being the ugly duckling to the most sexy, sensuous man; a kind of icon that he is today. He is still so much there. During the time of Deewaar, I had a major crush. He was like Shiva who can take the poison in his own throat. He was like the saviour. And it was not just for women but for men as well. His ideals did not stop him from taking things like law in his own hands. He is someone who would be able to control the moment. He has quite a range of the male. He has a patriarchal machoness unlike Rajesh Khanna.

...Aamir also has a great deal of charm. You always see him as a young man rather than a man. He has a great presence now. But I do not see him performing at the age of fifty like Amitabh does. Neither do I see Shah Rukh doing that for that matter.

...In a smaller way, Aamir and Shah Rukh are a contrast of Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh. Shah Rukh has an aggressive masculine appeal like Amitabh and Aamir has the romantic appeal of Rajesh. But there are differences being twenty years apart. Except Amitabh who has performed a wide range of characters, these guys have also tried to play a whole range of characters from comedy to romantic to villainy.

...Govinda: I don’t think anything about him. Yes, he is a phenomenon.

...The popular film industry works with archetypes, big themes, larger-than-life characters. I think larger-than-life archetypes and stereotypes are connected. Larger-than-life is all about some kind of mythical representation.
Reema Lagoo:

...Sometimes exploitation does take place in the film industry. But no one is forcing you to do it. In that way, I think the film industry is the safest thing. Since we are in limelight, things are known to everybody.

...Basically Indians are very emotional, sensitive. The mother can be a central character in films. She can be a modern mother. May be the interactions would change. But that basic mother-fixation would remain.

...If a new comer is acting with me, it is my duty to make him/her comfortable initially. With Aamir, Shah Rukh, Salman, Ajay, we are like friends after working with them for so long. Again you cannot be friendly with everyone.

...I have kept myself aloof from the press from the very beginning...You get psychic if you go on reading film magazines especially gossip columns.

...I don’t like to give interviews.

...Sometimes secretaries overpower you.

...I strongly feel film is a director-based medium. So you are at the disposal of the director and the producer.

...I don’t know why the directors have to go the extreme way – why seduction has to be conveyed by making the female character half naked? Even with clothes, you can seduce if you are capable.

...I don’t have problems doing that kind of scenes if I am told in advance or the director is sensible (especially female) or the film story is based on real incidents and my co-star is someone, I am comfortable with. This was the case during the shooting of Rihaai.

...I have always done positive roles. So people always expect that I am a lovey-dovey, good spirit. But I also have my mood swings. Sometimes I don’t feel like interacting. Then they feel I am rude or snobbish.

...If some actors are shy in real life while meeting people, then the perception about the stars get wrongly projected. I am personally an introvert.
...Raj Kapoor is my idol. He had tremendous foresight. Just see the climax of Shree 420. At that time he had visualised such a climax which is so relevant even today. He has been very progressive and bold in his thinking. He knew how to exploit a woman but gracefully like Satyam Shivam Sundaram. He is a great showman. Others who are also great include V. Shantaram, Vijay Anand, Yash Chopra, etc. Raj Kapoor was very popular among the industry people and also outside India. He was a very down-to-earth person. He was also very creative.

...Shammi Kapoor was a great matinee hero of my age. Dev Anand also was very popular. Shammi always experimented with his dance. He was a different kind of actor who was so full of life. The audience used to go crazy with his kind of dancing. His acting was very intense.

...Rajesh Khanna – I used to like and copy and imitate him in my school days. My crush was Dharmendra and not Rajesh Khanna. Rajesh Khanna has given more variety than Amitabh Bachchan because Rajesh can look middle class and can also convincingly portray a clerk, truck driver, bawarchi, Bengali Babu, etc. Rajesh would always respect his wife in his films. He was popular among the upper middle class audiences to the lowest ranges of society. He had the boy next-door image. Amitabh had a charismatic, personality whom people would not dare to approach. An indentification with the audience happened in the case of Rajesh Khanna.

...Amitji has a different charisma. I always used to watch Kaun Banega Corepati. The way he carries himself, his height everything is so imposing. You somehow feel distant with him. He is the most punctual, professional person. He is so sure of himself. He is very reserved unlike Shammiji or Shah Rukh (who is famous for cracking jokes and making the surroundings jubilant on the sets) or Salman. He is a wonderful actor. Some of his films are so atrocious but even these roles he portrayed so convincingly. Doing commercial films is much more difficult than doing realistic films. His personality along with his
voice has several restrictions. You can’t make out that he is performing.

Aamir has been a very sensible, intelligent actor. He knows his limitations as well as his positive points. He was and is always choosy. He always goes into the skin of the character. He is a very methodical, studious actor.

Shah Rukh is a more spontaneous than methodical actor. He was very good in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. But I did not like him in *Devdas*. He was good in *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman*.

Salman is good but not serious about his work. He should put more effort. Salman has a good physique. So its okay to show off or flaunt like Stallone in Hollywood especially for today’s generation.

Govinda is very talented and a brilliant actor who has a tremendous sense of timing in comedy. He is a brilliant dancer. He is fat but very graceful in his movements. I have worked with him. The problem is he never comes in time on the sets.

I was impressed with Mithun’s two-three films (*Mrigaya, Agneepath*). He has a different class of audience among whom he is only successful.

In most cases, its like routine nine to five job for us in commercial cinema. We go and perform and come back...Looking back at previously performed roles in commercial cinema are not very common unless the role was and is so exciting or challenging.

There is no grey shade in popular, films only black and white.

Maithili Rao:

Among the two films, *Awara* and *Shree 420*, the latter is more representative of its time. Raj Kapoor represents the birth of a new nation and a new generation of film-making. His creative period coincides with the new Nehruvian India. There is a kind of romantic socialism in Raj Kapoor’s films. It is also to do with his own youthful idealism and K.A. Abbas’s scripts for his films. The complexity of the images and trends make a work of art stand out. And there is a certain
amount of ambiguity involved as well. *Shree 420* had a certain kind of Nehruvian idealism involved. A nation with ideals of socialism and secularism and the feeling that everybody will have a place under the sun – that kind of a fervour is present in *Shree 420*. Innocence and hope is also there. *Shree 420* has a certain amount of amalgamation of Chaplin's Tramp Indianised thoroughly. Chaplin is an universal icon of world cinema. *Shree 420* is also a recognition of modernity in Indian cinema. For the first time in Indian cinema, you see the warmth of the streets. It is a sanitised city and not the one you find in *Satya* which hits you in your face with a brutality. And the surrogate mother as the banana seller is noteworthy. The basic thing in *Shree 420* is the corruption of innocence. And the pursuit of the bitch goddess of success. That “get rich quick” philosophy seduces the idealistic hero, Raju. Even the two women’s names, Vidya and Maya, are very fundamental. What is significant, Raj puts this whole thing in a cinematic idiom. A film is successful when it gives full scope to the temptation which comes alive with Nadira’s portrayal of Maya with the appreciable picturization of *mur mur Ke na dekh mur mur ke* (Don’t look back – surge ahead...). He gets to the housing scam...It’s a film which can always be updated like *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman*. The TV serial *Nukkad* was a translation of the ambience of *Shree 420* into television from cinema...The idea of masculinity is connected with your idea of femininity. Throughout his films, ‘she’ is the beloved mother with the maternal warmth. She is sexually attractive but at the same time she has the all-encompassing warmth and nurturing of the mother...Even if you go back to some periodicals of that time, you don’t find blatant reportage of the Raj Kapoor – Nargis romance. Stars were not that approachable at that time unlike today’s TV age. At that point it was Hollywoodish with the aura of the grand premiers of the Hindi films. There were not many colour glossies like today – only *Filmfare, Screen, Mother India*. Outside media, only flattered the ego of the stars...Raj Kapoor had the combination of innocence and bravado and also the humility of Raju with no surnames
(Raj Kapoor's alter ego on-screen). Raj Kapoor had that fixed bag of tricks for his acting skills. On the other hand, Dev Anand's image was very casual, urbane, debonair. Dev only played light romances except for a couple of films. Dev was the city-slicker. Dilip Kumar had a kind of deep-burning intensity that he projected. There is a kind of rock-like strength in Dilip Kumar. The combination of both the characteristics is deadly.

...We don't have very many tragic archetypes in our mythology through which one can identify with Dilip's on-screen persona. Raj Kapoor would be a likeable Indra.

...Lot of things come into the persona of Shammi Kapoor. At one point, he is rebelling against the big brother, Raj Kapoor's authority. Shammi had a ready-made model in Elvis Presley. In Junglee, there is that exaggerated body language. He had been a big ladies-man in his days. His body language is so calculated and calibrated that its like the jerkiness of a puppet moving. For Dilip Kumar, every gesture is so deliberated upon. Dilip Kumar has single-handedly written the grammar of underplayed kind of acting in popular Hindi cinema. Shammi Kapoor has a kind of raw sexuality but packaged in an urbane way. There is a certain amount of conscious control while projecting it. In Junglee, he is the male counterpart of Snow White and he needs the kind of innocence of Saira Banu to set him free. There is a whole range of sexual dynamics going on in Junglee. Yahoo is that total cry of liberation and freedom. It encapsulated the spirit of youth of that age. He opened the floodgate of a more raw assertiveness of masculinity. He brought in the Westernisation of the Hindi film hero. He was called the 'rebel star' in his times.

...The whole repression of Indian society came in through the deadly combination of Brahmanical Puritanism and Victorian Prudery that have led to a kind of schizophrenia and this applies more to the depiction of women on the screen. On the one hand, you have images of the sculptures of Khajuraho with unashamed physicality in a sacred space. On the other, over the years you deny women their sexuality.
At the same time she has to be the sex object on the screen without an awareness of her own sexuality. It does not apply that much to men. Because whatever patriarchal norms of being a good son like Rama, be a patnibrat (faithful devoted husband), you also had the Krishna as the counter balancing ideal. Celibacy and monogamy did not apply to the man as much as it did to the woman. These were the normative influences which when you see their representation on cinema – you find that the ideal is Rama. Every hero has to be like Rama, the obedient son. But some where, there is the desire to be Krishna – the playfulness, the romantic banter. In Shiva-Parvati, you find the ideal marriage of equals in its principle. To live up to the ideal of Shiva on screen is really difficult. Karna would be more appropriate as an archetype for the Hindi film hero. Aspects of Krishna come into the persona of Shammi Kapoor with the Westernised sensibility.

...Rajesh Khanna is a very mannered actor. His roles had very shallow characterisation. Amar Prem can give one more richer readings than Kati Patang. With Rajesh Khanna, you have a very comfortable kind of masculinity – of the kind of boy-next-door. You never see him as a kind of threat. His mannerism was a conscious effort at disarming you. He had a certain kind of middle-class acceptibility. His was somewhat of a filling up of a certain kind of vacuum after Shammi faded away though Jeetendra’s presence was around. Dharmendra was meant for a long race. Both teenage girls and their mothers were fans of Rajesh Khanna. In a way this later got repeated with Aamir Khan. He made the boy-next-door sexy in a non-threatening way. After Shammi Kapoor’s explosive masculinity it was difficult for the Indian audience to accept any effeminate male character. He came to represent the conscience of the middle class propriety and morality. Krishna, the playful child and the playful lover is represented in Rajesh’s on-screen persona. Rajesh was very unconventional in his personal life-style. He had very open love affairs. In a way the off-screen Krishna image of Rajesh was important. He was the prince charming or the reigning King of Bollywood who married the gorgeous young girl, Dimple.
Kapadia, who had taken the nation by storm at that time. In Aradhana, Rajesh played the son as well as the lover to the same woman. The Oedipal complex comes alive in real terms.

...Amitabh had that contained intensity which could both implode and explode. His look was that of internalised anger with a voice that matched. It took a while for people to react to the Bachchan persona on screen. Combination of the Karna type set in modern times is the highlight of Bachchan persona in Deewaar. In Deewaar, you also have the Mother India transformed to the urban setting. Both the sons want their mother’s approval. The women in their lives are insignificant. Bachchan is the unruly son who can’t be disciplined in the other kind of Krishna mould. The emergency excesses along with other factors of that time went against the establishment. You were looking for somebody who would represent the underdog and fight for you in your battles of everyday life...Because of his tall height, so when he cross-dresses, it becomes a big event. Bombay film press used the term ‘angry young man’ for Bachchan, may be it was Vikram Singh who used it for the first time. Amitabh’s off-screen persona was contrary to his on-screen image. But there was also the mystery of the Rekha thing that loomed large. He had the cultured aloofness to his persona. Jaya Bachchan was like a complement to him. Amitabh Bachchan today has reinvented himself.

...Aamir Khan is really the well behaved boy-next-door. Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak is the quickie clean love story. I call it the Romeo Juliet story set in Thakur land. It brought back young love into fashion again.

...Govinda is a very interesting sociological factor. He is a mass hero.

...Aamir is not a spontaneous actor. He is a thinking actor which shows. He gives you the impression of being in control of himself and the person he is playing. He is good in essaying romantic roles. He has a clean-cut image. He has the combination of innocence and go-getting character to him. The playfulness of Krishna can be found in
Aamir. He himself admits that personally he is a boring person and there in no ‘masala’ (spice) in him.

...Shah Rukh is a real sweetheart. He has such a hyper energy that is infectious. He has that incredible screen presence which draws you. He fits the Krishna image if you want it in the modern context. He is a total city guy, cosmopolitan person with the willingness to woo and the effort that he gives into it. And the self-deprecating humour that he brings in. The combination works brilliantly for him. In Dilwale dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ), getting the approval of the elder is more than getting the girl. The larger Indian family is reasserting its centrality as a nation against the threat of Western values where the importance is on individualism. You can catering to the nostalgia of the entire Indian diaspora and their sense of rootlessness in an alien society which is seeking a kind of reassurance in Indian values. The popular Hindi film-makers like Yash Chopra, Subhash Ghai are consciously wooing the NRIs through their films. There is so much of hypocrisy. DDLJ takes the plight of a girl and sugarcoats it so much. It is a very clever film. It knows what it is doing in the name of tradition and there is an acknowledgement of the injustice that is done to women. Its like selling the dream of combining East and West. Even if the girl is willing to run away, the boy with Western idealism waits till the girl is approvingly released from the father’s custody to the husband’s custody. That is the most regressive part of the film. And that is packaged so seductively that it still runs to packed houses in Martha Mandir in Mumbai. These films are all made by young people and that is so dangerous and disturbing. Shah Rukh accommodates the dark side of Krishna as well in his persona in his entire gamut of films. Along with this, there is a modernity of self-knowledge. About his off-screen image, you hear the stories of his bisexuality. But this is gossip. Earlier for a male actor, it was the female audience. Now you are getting a cross-over kind of audience. That is what is said about Salman Khan. Salman is a brat who cannot act. And his ‘opening his shirt’ antics is that you are catering to a
bisexual audience where you reduce yourself to a sex object. Whether
the stars are doing it consciously or is it just that you have a perfectly
honed body that you are on display are points to ponder. Women were
the ones who were display objects before and catering to ‘male gaze’.
Now with male stars as sex objects, are you catering to ‘female gaze’
or ‘bisexual gaze’ – that is a very interesting concept that has come up
with these actors. They call Salman the ‘Nanga’ Khan (The Naked
Khan). The concept of body for male stars has changed from the 90s.
It applies to the girls also. The body building thing was there before
(the akharas/Indianised gym). Now the entire ‘look’ of the hero is co­
ordinated. So now what you are selling is the ‘look’ and the ‘life-style’
in films.

...How can you have drama without good and the bad? So the need of
the struggle of good over evil in popular films exist. We have the rich
mythology of Ravana. So you have to have Amrish Puri kind of
exaggeration of villains with (sometimes) elements of comedy. Hindi
cinema attempts at only the external battle and never on the internal
battle of good versus evil.

...Without stereotyping, mainstream Hindi cinema cannot tell stories.
Stereotypes are not only of gender but also of ethnic types, etc. This is
true of such a diverse country like India. Gender stereotyping is very
comforting. It is also lazy story-telling/scripting. All the ambience
goes into the gender stereotyping. Exceptions are very few.

...All the commercial film-makers are slaves of the market. There is
absolute lack of original thinking. One formula succeeds and
everybody wants to make the same thing.

It can be noted that the above excerpts are from the open-ended interviews
ducted during my Mumbai field-work. The above interviews are that of a
ipt-writer (Javed Akhtar), a director (Shyam Benegal), a male star (Shammi
poor), an actor and star son (Randhir Kapoor), a heroine (Mita Vashishth), a
acter artiste specialising in mother roles (Reema Lagoo) and a renowned film
ic (Maithili Rao). In a way, the interviews give an understanding of the
perspectives of the insiders about themselves and their products which we as
audience consume. The interviews speak for themselves but let me enumerate the
following points:

- In popular Hindi film industry, the idea of getting a formal script ready before
  film making starts did not quite exist. Informally the story-line was discussed
  with the proposed and selected artists.
- The process of writing scripts and the actual film-making process does not
  always match. When the characters start taking form in the script, they
  themselves many a time determine the evolution of the characters.
- Sometimes real life characters and events shape the script writing process as
  they influence the script writers.
- Quite often many of the personal autobiographical details along with reigning
  ideas of the times do affect the script and the eventual film – making process.
  In a way, scripts often reflect contemporary times.
- Sometimes a script is written with a star in mind. Many a time, the character
  becomes the star and once he becomes someone iconic, scripts are written to
  showcase his histrionic talents.
- Devdas is an important archetype as far as the popular Hindi film hero is
  concerned, the only other exception being the Amitabh Bachchan masculinity
  archetype.
- There is acknowledgement of the different masculinity constructs being
  represented by the popular Hindi film heroes from the 1950s onwards. All the
  leading superstars have their signature tunes to their respective personas.
- There is echo of the archetypes of Indian masculinity constructs on the
  characters which popular Hindi film heroes portray on screen. Predominance
  of the Rama and snippets of the Krishna archetypes are important influences
  rather than the Shiva archetype. Mention of the Karna model especially to
  analyse the Bachchan persona seems important.
- Popular Hindi cinema relies on stereotyping especially gender stereotyping as
  they feel comforting enough to be in that mould.
- Markets do determine and influence the film-making process in popular Hindi
  film genre.
The development and refinement of film owes a lot to D.W. Griffith, the American filmmaker of the silent era, who improvised on film ‘language’ by his discovery of the close-up. His film, *The Birth Of A Nation*, which opened in 1915, is considered an artistic landmark. American cinema during the twenties saw the rise of eminent personalities such as Cecil B. De Mille, Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Douglas Fairbanks, and others, and also saw the emergence of film studios such as Paramount Pictures, Twentieth-Century Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Warner Brothers.

While cinema flourished in several countries, it was in Russia that it underwent further refinement. Men such as Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod I. Pudovkin, Sergei M. Eisenstein, and Alexander Dovzhenko set about defining the various functions of film and experimenting with various devices for more effective and poetic ways of telling a story and creating social awareness. Techniques of montage, speeded motion, rapid undercutting, multiple-exposure shots, etc., received considerable attention, and directorial style in film became more marked. The aesthetics of film seemed for the first time to call for a distinct kind of theoretical analysis.

With the coming of sound, the focus shifted to America, and Hollywood became something of a world laboratory, making films for mass entertainment and setting up new and highly innovative traditions of filmmaking. These traditions, which have become firmly entrenched, were shaped by Howard Hawks, Frank Capra, the Marx brothers, John Ford, Orson Welles and countless others.

Alternatives to Hollywood arose in the forties in Italy with Vittoria De Sica and others discovering the virtues of realism, and in France with Francois Truffaut and others proclaiming a new wave. Today, the film scene is complex, with a variety of films of different genres being made in France, Italy, England, East Europe, Sweden, Japan and, of course, India.

*Raja Harishchandra* was a milestone in the history of Indian cinema. It travelled to Surat, Poona, Calcutta and even to Rangoon. The single print of the film proved to be a fortune-spinner, suggesting the commercial viability of film, and providing an index for audience response. It “...firmly and surely laid the foundation of the Indian cinema industry, making the film a commercially profitable proposition. Moreover, Phalke, unlike others, kept up the effort by making more films one after another...his most valuable contribution was laying down the operative norms of Indian films...All this legitimately ensures for Dadasaheb Phalke the title of the ‘Father of Indian Cinema’.” (Rangoonwalla, 1983).

Rabindranath Tagore had rejected the Western approach to academics for a more Indian kind of education based on Indian traditions, especially on Indian art. The painter Nandalal Bose, who also tutored the famous filmmaker, Satyajit Ray, had begun to explore Indian themes and evolved a distinctively Indian style of painting. Theatre in Bengal also reflected this new mood. Traditional motifs were given new meanings conveying freedom and independence. Several of Tagore’s plays – *Raja* (The King of the Dark Chamber), *Muktadhara* (Free Current), *Natir Puja* (The Worship and Rakta Karabi (Red Oleanders)) – have a king who, in his lust for glory and power, enslaves his people. There is either a flower girl symbolising beauty or a young man who defiantly leads the people to freedom.

Dhiren Ganguly (Dhirendra Nath Gangopadhyaya) who formed the Indo British Film Company along with P.B. Dutt, N.C. Laharrie and cameraman J.C. Sircar made *Bilet Pherot* (England Returned) in 1920. It was a comedy that satirised the pretentious habits of English speaking Indians who considered themselves ‘sahibs’.

In fact, the problem of finding a means to transcend the cultural diversity of its audience was not peculiar to the Hindi film. The Hollywood film also had to evolve its own peculiar dialect. This can be seen in the close-clipped dialogues used in the early Hollywood films of John Huston and others. It was a problem that the serious cinema in India, too, faced in its attempt to avoid the ‘film’ linguistic style of the popular film, a style that had been drained of any further potential because of its artificiality. The only thing that could be done with it was to lampoon it, as Sai Paranjpye did in *Chushme Budd oar*. The serious cinema had to evolve a specific linguistic style; a slow, subdued and more self-conscious kind of articulation.

Notes

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6 Devdas was made in Bengali with Barua in the lead, and in Hindi with Kundan Lal Saigal making his
debut. Based on the novel by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, it used a quiet and natural style of speech that
was at once charming and graceful. Saigal sang songs that not only became phenomenally popular but
also established a new style of singing. The cameraman was Bimal Roy, who later remade Devdas in
1956 with Dilip Kumar, Suchitra Sen and Vyjayanthimala. Barua’s Hindi film had been scripted by
Kidar Sharma. It was an extraordinary film and ‘virtually a generation wept over Devdas’ (Barnouw
and Krishnaswamy, 1980).

Devdas became a cultural landmark because it seemed to root the Indian film in a distinct and traceable
tradition. This was the sentimental India of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, a mythic India of ineffectual
males and unrequited love. Devdas showed the way to a new credibility and also to new riches.
Chidananda Das Gupta writes that ‘...the historical importance of both Sarat Chandra and Barua lie in
the fact that the male sex symbol they built up as a weak hero in need of feminine domination was not
just a creature of their fancy, but embodied a familiar type in real life, particularly in Bengali. It is the
adolescent incapable of action to realise his own ambition, seeking solution in escape, who drowns
himself in a lake of unrequited love after writing a lot of puerile verse; the adolescent who has not yet
become a man – and never will be’ (Das Gupta, 1981).

7 The film was significant because it brought together... all the most representative features of the
Indian social film of the first decade of sound. Its writers were perhaps too apt to grasp at the neat plot,
the ready-made ironies, the popular yearning for doom. Indeed, it was a charming film in a simple
rural setting, and marked an era in which there was a wistful yearning for folk melodies, simple
romances and a desire to discover the reality of rural India. This trend came to a close with Jhoola
which was released in 1941, starring Ashok Kumar and Leela Chitnis. In a sense, this film marked the
end of an era.

8 The fifties also belong to the serious filmmaker in India. The first international film festival, held in
1952, opened to filmmakers a whole world of films that reflected new trends and new directions.
Indian filmmakers and audiences who had been fed on typical Hollywood fare were exposed to neo-
realist films such as Yukikawarissu and Bicycle Thieves. De Sica’s Bicycle Thieves provided a glimpse
into a new kind of cinema, one that could function as a searing social and political document. This
exposure resulted in a more serious and, in artistic terms, a more articulate kind of Indian film. Bimal
Roy was one of the first to break new ground with his Do Bigha Zamin (1953), a film that spoke
realistically of the problems of the poor farmer. Bimal Roy became the precursor of a new style which
was apparent also in his Sujata, the story of an untouchable girl. The film was released in 1959, and
followed the success of Bimal Roy’s earlier Devdas, which had appeared in 1955.

Guru Dutt, another earnest filmmaker of the time, made Kagaz Ke Phool in 1959. He remained
primarily a romantic who carried the Devdas image within him. But he used a new idiom that
emphasised subjectivity and spontaneity and also revealed a concern for both the artistic medium he
used and for the conflict and unrest he perceived in Indian society. His Pyasa, released in 1957, and
Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam, released in 1962, are two of his most aesthetically articulate films.

Another significant development of the period is the emergence of Satyajit Ray, whose Pather
Panchali was released in 1955. Ray began a trend towards a personal, conscience-based cinema, fully
dedicated to artistic goals. This trend received a further impetus with Mrinal Sen’s Bhuvan Shome,
released in 1969. Several filmmakers gradually made inroads in the Hindi film scene – Shyam
Benegal, Girish Karnad, Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani and others. Theirs was a more sensitive cinema
that had its roots in a recognisable Indian reality and dealt with characters that were closer to life.
Their films reflect not only a concern for cinematic and social-human values but also a desire to alter
the economics of the Indian film. Practically all films of this kind had low budgets, were mostly shot
on location and experimented with new actors.

9 This was an interesting phenomenon; at a time when almost all the serious filmmakers were
concerned with the conflict between tradition and modernity – Satyajit Ray’s Pratidwandi, Tapan
Sinha’s Sagina Mahato, Basu Chatterjee’s Sara Akash, Mani Kaul’s Uski Roti, Girish Karnad’s
Samskara, etc. – Rajesh Khanna wavered between an orthodox, conventional image and a new radical
one. In Safar and Amar Prem, he had presented himself in the image of the tragic hero while in Sacha
Jhutha and Haathi Meere Saathi, he was very much a showman.
Dealt with as a literary genre, cinema would be drama, which in classical Indian aesthetics was called *drṣṭya kavya*, visible poetry. Even in this traditional definition, the conception of literature as verbal art is transcended by the inclusion of the visual — i.e., a non-verbal — element; and indeed, one will do more justice to cinematic art if one remains aware from the outset that in the composition of a film, to put it within an Indian frame of reference, all the three *akademis* are represented — *Sangit Natak* for music and dance, *Lalit Kala* for the pictorial part, *Sahitya* for the dialogues and lyrics. Obviously, speech, in cinema aesthetics is only one out of several languages, and as a rule a subservient one; most of what the film has to say is to be 'read' as percepts — "pre-verbal and concrete observations and simple identifications" — rather than words (Lutze, 1985, 3-14).

Cinema, like other forms of art, functions as communication between producer(s) and recipient(s), along certain 'channels', with at least as much emphasis on how a message is organised as on what is conveyed.

Pundits interpret *Rasa*, a theory that was fully in place by the second century A.D., as something that goes beyond the realm of epic poetry and heroic drama. It applies to all the performing arts and would make *rasikas* (connoisseurs) of us all, if we only would take the trouble to cultivate the art of being *sa-hridaya* ("a person of attuned heart"). The heroic play was regarded as the highest type of drama, dealing with the actions of gods, their avatars (incarnations) as well as royal heroes of sublime nobility. The primary aim was not a didactic depiction of "elevated characters" but the discerning connoisseur's artistic enjoyment of the emotion these characters embody. The playwright has to communicate this emotion to his audience. His or her emphasis must be on the primacy of "enduring sentiments" (*sthayi-bhavas*), emotions that are present in every human heart. It is through the skill of the portrayal that the corresponding emotional receptivity in the *rasika*, who should come along with a willingness to be "attuned", is touched. The willing suspension of disbelief, Indian style? Atonement leads to aesthetic rapport, followed by a cultivated emotional response and appreciation. As with most things Indian, this state of aesthetic enjoyment is allied to the moral satisfaction of doing one's *dharma*, fulfilling one's assigned role in the overall scheme of things. An uplifting moral piety is mandatory, and Hindi cinema has always embraced this injunction with fervour.

Popular film is a form of story telling, and traces a linear descent form ritual and myth, folklore and traditional tales. Even when this link is obscured, as it often is in the West, sociologists have been quick to notice that both the cinema and the older narrative traditions stand to society in a relation of functional equivalence. The teller of tales, the bard and the strolling minstrel were as much vehicles for the expression of emotion and society's beliefs about morality, as the cinema is today. This is particularly clear in India, where the cinema has actually overlapped with these traditions and displaced them. Unlike in the West, no long intervening literary culture separated the oral traditions of peasant society from the advent of cinema. Indeed, that the cinema actively set out to displace folk entertainments is suggested by the fact that the cinema appropriated its forms, transposing its ingredients and often its subjects, into the standard fare of the Indian screen (Kothari, 1980, 31).

Yet apart from the appropriation of its forms and an apparent similarity of function, the precise nature of the traffic in ideas and inspiration between the oral narrative traditions and Indian popular cinema is not at all clear. There are huge gaps of information. It is possible to view cinema, on the one hand, as part of a vast historical osmotic process in which the creative juices have passed slowly through the bardic traditions and epics, the miracle plays and urban *Vaishnav* theatre, suddenly to emerge in the neon glare of a great urban mass entertainment. Opposite to such a theory of continuity is a view that stresses the newness of popular cinema. The nature of its technology, the Western influences, but also, the very fact of its trans-regional appeal, are all cited as evidence of the cinema's discontinuities with traditional culture. At any rate, for any exploration of popular cinema in India, an important dimension of understanding may be served by exploring the substratum of oral narrative traditions that have functioned as popular rural media for centuries.

Kakar (1980, 14-15) notes that the relationship between the collective fantasy of Hindi films and Indian culture is complex. Though itself a cultural product, Hindi film, in turn, also shapes the popular culture in an unprecedented way. Values of film determine the visual style of other forms of popular visual communication: calendar pictures, magazine illustrations, hoardings, posters and advertisements, schemes of interior decoration.
He notes further that Hindi movies are contemporary myths, which through the vehicle of fantasy and the process of identification temporarily heal for their audience the principal stresses arising out of Indian family relationships. Many of these contemporary myths have a continuity, which can be traced to ancient models; or, in other words Hindi films are modern versions of certain old and familiar myths. This clear-cut link with the past may also be due to the fact that Kakar has specifically concentrated on family relationships - perhaps one of the most conservative of cultural categories - where the continuity between the ancient and the modern is far more probable. For Kakar, Hindi films are also creating new myths, offering solutions for conflicts that are being generated by new political, economic and social forces. The study of collective fantasy in response to these new forces, in a way, could prove to be a fascinating task.

The statuses of men and women, as has been repeated ad infinitum, have been constructed around a whole series of dichotomous categories: the 'one' and the 'other', the public and private domains, work and home, rationality and emotionality, culture and nature, mind and body, to name just a few. The first of each of these pairs tend to be associated with men and are positively valued. The second is associated with women and are negatively valued. The interpretations of social reality in this manner, as a series of opposites, leaves little or no room for gradations or overlapping. Shades of grey are neatly kept away. As if they did not exist.

These dichotomies are now raising questions among feminists. "We live in a state of socially constructed binaries, based on 'differences' between men and women that privilege the masculine" writes Stephanie Leftwich, in the introduction to her review of the film Like Water For Chocolate in an e-zine (electronic magazine) on the Internet, called women/cinema - women/cinema (which has since folded up). She goes on to identify these binaries as - culture/nature, logic/emotion, active/passive, father/mother, dominant/submissive, etc. (Chatterji, 1998,262-263).

In these songs, the styling in terms of make-up and costumes, and the cinematic elements of lighting and shot taking, i.e. the way the body is arranged with respect to the camera and hence the eye of the audience, the movements of the body, all add up in turning the woman into a spectacle. The gaze is invited to certain parts of the body selectively considered sexual - the eyes, the lips, the breasts, the navel, the buttocks and the legs. Make-up techniques include brightly coloured, glossy lips, cleavage rouged darker than the rest of the body, tattoos on the navel, etc. the costumes are often dazzling with sequins or a metallic finish, brightly coloured, and revealingly cut. The natural contours of the bodies of the actresses are frequently distorted with push-up bras, breast and/or buttock paddings. And to emphasise these unnaturally distended body proportions, the women are frequently shot either from a low angle, or from a high angle to show the cleavage. The actions of the women in the dance often mimic sexual movements with numerous shots of just body parts, like that of heaving breasts, of pelvic thrusts.

Rape in mainstream popular Hindi cinema could be defined as merely occupying one point on a continuum of representations of women, a continuum along which are also situated such commonly available and highly socially visible representations such as women in advertisements. Cinematic techniques like the close-up, fast cutting, slow motion, the sophistication of modern makeup and special effect techniques, the heightening effect of sound and music all combine on the large screen to produce an impact which no other medium can create.

Rape in cinema, in any language, in any patriarchal culture, has certain unwritten specific functions. One of these is to arouse the male in the audience sexually. Another one is to use, to a certain extent, the opportunity of explicit representations of the female anatomy in a physically violent act that has been forced on that very body. The fragmentation and fabrication of the female body, the play of skin and make-up, nudity and dress, the constant recombination of organs as equivalent terms of a combinatory are but the repetition, inside the erotic scene, of the operations and techniques of the apparatus: fragmentation of the scene by camera movements, construction of the representational space by depth of field, diffraction of light, and colour effects - in short, the process of fabrication of the film from decoupage to montage.

It all happens as if a long-drawn-out sequence of rape places cinema on trial, converting every film depicting rape graphically and voyeuristically into a soft-porn product placed for sale in the open market. The camera offers infinite possibilities of capturing the female anatomy and the female persona in certain fixed ways. In varied degrees of undress for example. Or, in the process of being
stripped either in a static position or in the act of being chased by the rapist/s. Or, being raped with hands and feet tied to the posts of a four-poster bed which suddenly appears in the midst of an urban, sophisticated and sleekly decorated modern apartment.

Sometimes, the victim remains static but the camera is almost violently mobile, magnifying the tragedy of the victim by intruding into her moments of private pain. Often, one can see clothes and underclothes strewn around in the act of being torn off the victim's body; a blouse being ripped off against an appropriate soundtrack, exposing a bra; the woman being dragged across the floor by her hair, and such other Western and Oriental visual variants. But it is the rhetoric of these representations as much as, or more than, their immediate connotations that feminists are worried about.

The lasting psycho-social impact of these representations are more derogatory to the image and the ideology of woman as a human being per se than the immediate, audiovisual connotations they carry. Rape has the powerful potential of constructing the body of a woman as spectacle. The aim is to cater to visual voyeurism. In the Hindi mainstream, duplicated ad infinitum in the regional language, films of mainstream cinema, the props have become cliché in their stereotype: a lamp falls across the floor during a struggle, the woman desperately tries to cover herself with her outspread palms/clothes/accessories, a cloud covers the moon in the sky on a dark, sinister night.

It is important to note that Dyer's (1993,92-98) observations on the male sexuality in the media is mostly based on Western scenario. But it can be pointed out that the projections have the potential to be extrapolated in the popular Hindi film genre. Given the range and pervasiveness of imagery of male sexuality in the media, Dyer concentrates on three specific aspects: the visual symbols for it, the treatment of it in comedy, and the way it informs the telling of stories.

In a way, in Western media parlance especially films, the most common imagery of male sexuality, and sees the penis in a particular way – down there, hard, importunate. This is an extraordinarily constricted and ugly way of imagining the erotic, which makes it difficult to portray male sexual experience in terms of tenderness and beauty. It is also very tough, serious and po-faced, which is why one can't help wanting to giggle at it sometimes, and why it is such a rich source of comedy.

Comedy is unruly. In comedy, Dyer sees now a reinforcement of ideas expressed by the imagery of male sexuality, and now an undermining of them. What there isn't is comedy which shows that male sexuality need not be importunate, uncontrollable and quickly exhausted. Most comedy does in the end insist that, no matter how absurd male sexuality may be, that is what it is like. Comedy may often undermine men by ridiculing their sexuality but it still ends up asserting as natural the prevalent social definition of that sexuality.

Male sexuality is said to be goal-oriented; seduction and foreplay are merely the means by which one gets to the real thing, an orgasm, the great simple climax. Equally, it has been suggested that if one compares the underlying structure of most narratives in Western fiction discourse; it is about the pursuit of a goal and its attainment, usually through possession. Thus male sexuality is like a story, or stories are like sexuality. Both keep women in their place (Dyer,1993, 96-98).

When the creators of Superman decided to let their comic book hero rest in peace, after a doomsday encounter with the villain, they were unable to do so. Simply because the readers were not willing to let go of their favourite alter ego. Outraged fans expressed their dismay through letters of protest; the international press brimmed over features that questioned the validity and feasibility of such a mortal twist to accepted immortality.

A universal hue and cry rent the air. “How can we live without a hero? Everybody needs a hero!” clamoured an agitated fan. So that, eventually, the makers had to end on a note of ambiguity. Superman didn’t die. He merely disappeared, keeping alive the hope of a second coming some day of the winged archangel in some new encounter.

Indian stars sell countless film, lifestyle and gossip magazines, and are idolised and adored. The adoration a star enjoys can even be transferred from the silver screen to the voting booth. Southern Indian stars M.G. Ramachandran and N.T. Rama Rao enjoyed long film careers playing religious figures and fighters of evil, and both became Chief Ministers in their respective states.
Even today, audiences consider N.T. Rama Rao to be the most convincing Krishna. His image as Lord Krishna was built over a number of films and over a period of time. Once you have that image in your mind, you associate values attributed to that God with this actor. In the beginning it works, people vote blindly, but problems start if the actor doesn’t deliver when he is in power. That is why N.T. Rama Rao finally lost the second or third election, whereas M.G.R. managed to prove his worth. He never disappointed his audience’s expectations. His image was of a man who fights against injustice and corrects all wrongs, especially those suffered by the downtrodden and the have-nots. Moreover, whatever the M.G.R. character did on screen was for his mother – and the mother character is associated with the land, therefore, by implication, Tamil Nadu. When M.G.R. was Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, he never let his people down. Years later, other politicians were still cashing in on his image, including Jayalalitha; she became known because of her association with him. It takes a long time for the image of a hero to be erased from the public’s memory.

Costume designer Akbar Shahpurwalla has spent many years making clothes for Bachchan and other popular actors and has seen the look of the hero change over the years. One rule that stays much the same is that, in contrast to Hollywood, where clothes are designed around the screen character, sensible and practical clothes for the Indian hero are not appreciated. He notes:

In the past, we had Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand, Rajesh Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan, and now we have Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, Bobby Deol and Hritik Roshan.

Shammi Kapoor was my favourite; he was a man who really made a big impact on the film industry in the 1960s with his flamboyant jackets, shirts, cardigans and sweaters. Raj Kapoor had a vagabond look, drawing on the character he developed in films like Awaara and Shree 420. Dilip was more classy and always wore comfortable jackets and pleated, baggy trousers; he had a similar look to Cary Grant. Dev Anand always played a youthful character. He wore shirts with stand-up collars, bright coats, bright shirts. Rajesh Khanna tried to be a little Indianised with his kurtas and all that. He made a great impression on people too.

People are fascinated by a European look; when a boy is born, you hear people say, ‘Oh, he’s so fair, he’s got such lovely brown eyes.’ So that’s part of the culture and that’s how people thought a new hero should be. Well, all that changed when Amitabh came along. He was dark-skinned, long-legged and tall. When I started designing his clothes, I realised that he shouldn’t wear mono-colours. So in Deewar, you’ll see him in khaki trousers and a navy blue shirt — and that did the trick.

Nowhere was it more typified than the Amitabh Bachchan Manmohan Desai films such as Coolie and Mard.

What is obviously thrilling to viewers is the ease with which everything is up for grabs for rebels and lovers alike: a police uniform, an outlaw’s rifle, the golden heart of a tawaif, the snooty lil’ rich girl’s capitulation, glorious revenge, a martyr’s death. A hero lives on, having beaten the odds resoundingly (Tezaab) or in a blaze of glory, leaving behind soaked handkerchiefs (Sholay, Deewar).

Simple logistics of how, why and when, don’t count. Recall Rajesh Khanna serenading Sharmila Tagore as she dimpled from a speeding train in Aradhana — she was receiving him loud and clear from a distance, no megaphone needed. Or Hero where the dashing, red bandannaed kidnapper is the answer to the prayers of the abducted woman. Or the Mard taangewala who ultimately wins the rich bare-shouldered, floury-skirted, high-heeled spitfire, making the hearts of all rickshawallas dance as they carried their memsabs to their destinations in Delhi, Calcutta, Lucknow and Hyderabad.

Sartorial and tonsorial imitations are just the mandatory tributes in return for making everything seem so feasible. If it was Rajesh Khanna’s guru kurta cons back, Bachchan’s kurta and shawl were spotlighted more recently. Periodically the downtown barber or the five-star saloon is inundated with requests for the Bachchan look, or the Anil Kapoor/Jackie Shroff/Aamir Khan/Salman Khan coiffure.

Occasionally, short-lived cult figures dramatically influence viewers as happened when the star-crossed lovers of Ek Dhuje Ke Liye devastated teenyboppers and several off-screen suicides were reported.
If the rustic is not eulogised and the hip hero holds away, the closest one came to a credible and popular male protagonist in a boy-meets-girl story was in the films featuring Amol Palekar in the mid 70s: Chitchor, Rajnigandha, Baaton Baaton Mein and Gharaonda, which attracted for the actor a compulsive if short-lived fan following. The middle-class persona was elevated to stardom. It was legitimate to be earthy home-spun, simple and warble semi-classical songs, yet have aspirations which because they were more ‘realistically’ depicted, seemed correspondingly closer to fruition.

This was however a delightful aberration that was soon discarded. Blood and gore took over with greater panache, skill and meanness. Hemmed in by thwarted desires and decaying barren ambitions, an entire new generation worked off its frustrations in movie halls. With few goals and scantly leadership in the country, a whole bunch of films portraying politicians as villains (including Inquilaab where Amitabh Bachchan pulled the trigger on an entire ministerial cabinet) seemed to figuratively show the finger to parliamentary politics and to law and order. The cash registers rang as the indigenous answers to Sylvester Stallone and Charles Bronson rendered basic justice in a garbled socio-political system. Violence was a credo that served movie makers and moviegoers well.

A prime example is Amitabh Bachchan in Main Azaad Hoon, the remake of the American film Meet John Doe. Bachchan was simply unacceptable as the faltering, defeated protagonist.

In this context, Shaukeen comes to mind. Ashok Kumar, A.K. Hangal and Utpal Dutt comprise a trio of retired gentlemen who compete to arouse the affection of a young woman, Rati Agnihotri, during a holiday. It is quite difficult to visualise the earlier heroines Nanda, Waheeda Rehman and Asha Parekh in a similar situation.

For adolescent viewers who once saw Jeetendra quickstep with Leena Chandvarkar it is a miracle to see him energetically jiving with the much younger Meenakshi Seshadri. Bachchan bridged generations by co-starring with Waheeda Rehman and Amrita Singh. Sridevi and Madhuri Dixit have to start worrying about looking older than their heroes, far ahead of their male co-stars.

If Guru Dutt became part of the male mystique, it was in no mean measure because of his personal passions and tragedies.

The occasional ‘Sadhana cut’ hairstyle or the Sharmila Tagore bouffant or the Guddi giggles were but passing fancies. Middle-of-the-road cinema is unlikely to fill the gap for they sometimes portray strong, mature women who make their own decision even if it spells heartache and angst. Subah or Arth, for instance, did not excite a culture-clan fan following.

So what does one expect from the heroines? Not the magnetism of a Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe or Sigourney Weaver. Nothing remotely resembling Madonna. There is simply not enough allure and mystery – be it Hema Malini, Rekha, Sridevi or Madhuri Dixit. Likewise the persecuted woman turned avenger heroines seen in countless dacoit heroines’ films or Khoon Bhari Maang were limited fantasies and too remote to evoke mass hysteria. In any case, in most of these films, solicitous male temperance was waiting nearby. Women are never left without a crutch.