Conclusion

Violence however omnipresent in our lives has undercurrents, which has larger social implications as far as the portrayal of women in the visual medium is concerned. And Bombay cinema has never been able to extricate itself from the violent images that our society involves itself with. It has always repackaged these images in a capsule that looks attractive and desirable thereby negating its uglier side. Cinema with all its popularity and glamour help to mediate a broad range of meaning and values but its depictions of violence are a subject of constant debate since they invoke some of society's most focal values, those which justify the use of force, especially that against women. Indian popular cinema perhaps can promote the view that women desire violence and can make it seem more acceptable for them to become victims and not raise their voices against such abhorrent acts.

This study progresses with a view to analyse four films, *Ram Teri Ganga Maili, Khalnayak, Lawaaris and Mohra*, spread over a decade where violence made its presence felt with a vengeance never seen before especially when it came to projecting the images of women on the screen. This thesis attempts to provide an insight into the interrelationship of culture-specific thoughts and values in regard to the kinds of violence that is inflicted on women in cinema. How women tend to remain as mere fetishistic and voyeuristic objects of desire under the garb of progressiveness is another element that cannot be entirely ignored. Violence manifests itself not only in the physical form but could be seen in its subject matter where narrative, events/sequence, plots, visual symbols, text compositions, music, camera angles and various elements of mise-en-scene engage themselves in representing a one-dimensional look of a woman. The analyses of these four films lend support to the idea that a substantial proportion of scenes, in popular Indian cinema depict violence against women, be it sexual or psychological, and all of it is projected as normalized behaviour. Though these films were meant for audiences of all age groups for general viewing, the content largely remained for adults. However, the objective of this study was not only to examine the incidence of violence against women as portrayed in box-office hits but also investigate the very nature of such images and the social apparatus that operates in films.

Violence against women remains invisible because social stereotypes are fraught in similar ways in real life where women are passive victims. The aggressive, city bred woman eventually has to give way to the homely plain Jane after being remould in a capsule suited to be the arm candy of the male actor. Protection comes from the very echelons of the male bastion and stringent patriarchal norms are never shown as excesses while physical abuse
in a spousal or romantic relationship is certainly not frowned upon. Most forms of violence are shown as ways of disciplining an errant spouse or a disobedient daughter/sister etc.

The contemporary arts have portrayed women in the most unsophisticated forms; needless skin flicks, extra-marital affairs and unwarranted aggressive nymphets are not signs of evolution or modernity. Popular cinema makes use of women as objects, employing them to sell anything from haute-couture to marketing bland archetypes epitomizing the very core of traditional roles that women are expected to perform in society. Progressive careers or thought are passé in cinema, all we see of women is mannequins embellished with signature jewellery and designer wear. Juxtaposed between all this is an ample display of flesh meant to titillate the masses and also to make films financially secure. Women in cinema always need men when in crises, be it the mother, sister, daughter, girlfriend or wife. Women are never shown to bond with other women in such situations and in fact are often pitted against each other. Therefore it was rather unproblematic to categorize all the female protagonists in these films into watertight compartments. They are either self-sacrificing idealized virgins, done to death villainised whores, the mother or the hapless in-distress sister.

Films like these indicate a gender divide when it comes to portraying the perpetrators and the victims of sexual violence. Out of the four films selected for the study, three had incidents of rape and an attempted gang rape. With the exception of Khalnayak where there is no rape, Mohra, Ram Teri Ganga Maili all have incidents of sexual violence. Ram Teri Ganga Maili had three attempted rape scenes where the victim was disrobed. Likewise Laawaris too had an attempted rape threat though the actual act was not graphically depicted. The female protagonist of Khalnayak is a victim of physical abuse but escapes attention because it is projected as normalized behaviour. Dixit's portrayal of a dedicated police officer gets lost in the process and leaves the impression of a glamourised prop in the film. Similarly Tandon's so called professional act of a fiery journalist melts with her being the quintessential Indian woman who needs to be rescued from her evil employer by the male protagonists in the film.

Male characters are continually shown as perpetrators of the violence unleashed against women in the films. This seems to be in line with traditional gendered norms where an overtly patriarchal capsule dictates women to be submissive and the men to be the strong, decisive and dominant individuals. This repeated alignment of women's images with violence is problematic because it tends to reinforce existing beliefs that it is acceptable
to aggress against women and that women should be tolerant of any violence emanating from the relationships with men. It is interesting to note that negative character men or more popularly known as villains in films are not the only agents of violence against women. Heroes too are equally responsible for mistreating women in popular cinema. While extreme forms of sexual violence like rape/gang rape is dramatized to show its sinister form, heroes went scot free with sexual harassment or physical abuse as it was projected as normal lighthearted fare in these films. Moderate physical violence, such as a slap therefore goes unrecognised and is more likely to be portrayed as fun whereas a severe form involving the villain, takes a more serious undertone.

Most of the violence on our screens assumes what is called the happy violence syndrome, meaning that is swift, thrilling and always has a happy ending. Popular cinema thus does its part of entertaining and delivers it's audience to the neat round of repeated narratives in order to sell. The kind of violence against women in films showcases the sublimation of power play without serious consequences. In this research this is what is found to be most damaging and destructive. The very content of these films thus turn women into objects where their conventional status goes down and their victimization goes up making them more vulnerable to the challenges that normative structures pose. Thus we see that gender disparities are not born but are made by the culture that integrates them into the power structure and films perhaps reflect that ugly side of reality and do their best to retain them, repackaging them into pleasure viewing.

With the exception of Ram Teri Ganga Maili, all the other films analysed here have the male protagonist engaging in some form of physical and psychological abuse towards the women in their lives, be it the mother or the love interest. Dixit in Khalnayak gets slapped a couple of times inspite of being on the right side of the law without any retaliation on her part, while Tandon’s ‘modern miss image’ takes a beating when she is accused of infidelity by her man. Aman as the rich spoilt brat in Laawaris is at the receiving end of the hero’s continuous banter and she too succumbs to the charms of an unsophisticated man. It is a cause of concern that men who often represent the essence of the ideal manhood and male sexuality are often perpetrators of violence against women. What this implies is that being aggressive is actually being manly.

The last decade showed the blurring of the character of the villain and the hero into a character who seemed more real with shades of gray and yet is catapulted on to the screen as the good humoured individual who turns to wrong when the system frustrates him. He is the typical Mr. Jekyll and Dr.
Hyde who has an ulterior motive yet is acceptable to the larger society. Social learning perspectives suggest that when likeable and attractive characters such as anti heroes perpetrate any kind of violence they are more likely to be accepted and perhaps be emulated by viewers. Research on social learning from media portrayals suggests that viewers are more likely to internalize such behaviours that they see in the media when the modeled behaviour is portayed as rewarding (or at least not punished). This line of reasoning aids the fact that film portrayals of women as passive victims of violence and their subsequent depiction as sex objects are particularly disturbing because such behaviour might be learned, accepted or imitated by the viewers. In addition the viewers modeling of a media character’s beaviour is particularly likely to occur when the character is portrayed as heroic and macho.

Heroes and villains differ in the kind of violence that they engage in. Heroes are more likely to perpetrate moderate crimes such as eve-teasing, sexual harassment and spousal abuse whereas villains perpetrate severe crimes i.e. eroticised rape and murder. Moderate forms of violence go unnoticed and are not condemned and might even be rewarded. As we all know, heroes by definition seem to be the guardians of morality and are seen as harbingers of hope in society. Therefore the association of protagonists with such forms of violence may run the risk of sending a message to the viewers that the only severe types of violence are unacceptable and are a crime while the ones with less intensity are entirely acceptable.

Another purpose of this study has been to look beyond the visible portrayals and the mistreatments of women in films. These roles function to serve prescribed role dichotomies and project sexual brazenness as a sign of modernity, a fasces which goes unnoticed. Women function within certain parameters and film narratives do not allow women to break free from the limits demarcated to them. A bad move, an illicit relationship, a murder, or a rebellion, projected in all the four films, is either met by death, rejection or by transformation. It reconfirms the patriarchal dictum and perpetuates the existing dichotomies of sex roles. Interestingly, as many other film scholars have noted, chastity, passivity, devotion, servitude, dependence and succorance ensure women their secondary place not only in popular Bombay cinema but also in real life. The ‘item-girl’ sends adrenalines running and is never a part of the narrative, whereas the earlier vamp had a place somewhere in the storyline playing her part of the seductress and the evil ‘woman’.

Films of any era encapsulate a misconceived notion of the new age independent women in the same subordinate social positions that they are expected to occupy in society. It also legitimizes and justifies these roles and
their subsequent treatment of women in society. It reaffirms what Brownmiller (1976) and Dworkin (1979) have argued, that representations of violence against women have self-perpetuating effects as supported by literature on pornography. The acceptance of a woman constantly subjugated on the screen facilitates this acceptance in the real world. In all of these four films, it is observed that all female protagonists melt into the persona of the ‘left with no option but a man to rescue me syndrome.’ Universally, the portrayals of women in Bombay cinema are just not motivated to introduce strong narratives but altogether they are an effective mechanism to reinstate the masculine mystique. Sadly women remain stagnant perhaps even a bit remain regressive in movie narratives even today. Understandably a few decades back the choices that one could make when starkly posed, you could either be the bride or the mother or run the threat of ending up as a stringent harridan cursed in society by one and all. One has to agree with sociologist Patricia Uberoi when she argues that popular cinema still plays around with this formula but smartly repackages it into a glossy, kitschy entertainment machine cashing upon the prevailing mood in public discourse—the win-win formula.

The research questions posed in the thesis necessitated the need to approach it from a structuralist-historical mode which helped to decipher narrative/textual codes present the films. Existing literature on violence against women in Indian films is sparse compared with what one tends to find with its Western counterpart. Film theory remains by so far an alien domain but once Indian film historians and academics take note of that, studying popular Hindi cinema will gain strength and the seriousness that is perhaps been a trifle lukewarm till date. The current scenario concerning the study of Hindi films still has limited scope for a full fledged basis of theoretical study on the portrayals of women. Little systematic research has been explored on the casual influences of Hindi films on violence against women in India. In contrast, Hollywood has been more inviting for scholars to explore the role of consumption of media portrayals of sexuality in a broader spectrum. There is a serious lacuna in terms of any research carried out on unmasking the different forms of violence perpetuated against women in commercial Hindi cinema from a sociological point of view.

One has to understand that violence is not always sexual nor is it visible, its various forms become invisible to the eyes because of societal norms. It is this masquerade of violence which needs attention and this has been the main aim of this study. Bollywood has a strong presence on our minds and its sensibilities, its show is almost real but at the same time it can never tell a true story. Commercial movies are meant to entertain even if has to glamorize and eroticize the most heinous of crimes. Most studies till date
have dealt with the larger issues of obscenity but have had little other concern of the media's handling of the portrayal of women in popular culture.

Bollywood has over and over misrepresented the issue of female sexuality and reduced it to the mere titillation factor. Most of the existing literature deals with the myriad sexual oppression in the lives of women and this has perhaps obscured its vision to identify the root causes of their subordination. There is a tendency among Indian feminist film scholars to extend their prolonged infatuation of identifying only physical abuse rather than a serious understanding of gender violence prevalent in films. This has reduced it to a homogenous axis of the repeated deployment of a middle class puritanism in the field of popular culture. In addition to this Bollywood's obsession with the female form has acquired a queer complexity forcing to address the more real life issues that we are confronted with' which include our own construction of women's images on our screens and the reduction of the body by equating it with the masculine needs of our society.

The victim subject has highlighted that women suffer violence in the home and that such violence constitutes a human rights violation which is the responsibility of states to prevent or remedy. This is a very significant victory. Nonetheless, the creation and reinforcement of a victim subject has not empowered women.

In the international arena, the victim subject, in the context of the primary focus on violence against women, creates an exclusionary category built on racist perceptions and stereotypes of Third World women. Bollywood produces the perhaps the real picture of Indian women, bonded in their experience of victimization and violence. There is no space in this construction for difference or for the articulation of a subject that is empowered. Women remain at their looked-at-ness state in films and continue to fulfill their parts of the archetypal Indian woman as a titillating showpiece. For avowedly postmodern critics, violence against women in contemporary cinema has lost depth and any meaning accrued through traditional relations to the real world. Even the most graphic instance of violence in these films potentially becomes like any other image, homogenized and emptied of any meaning or seeming originality. National myths or cultural codes of representation are eroded and other substantive meanings largely evacuated, leaving only the images themselves. For as films become largely self-referential commodities, the concern remains that they are increasing intended for the spectator's consumption-regardless of content.

Needless to say, an active intervention by the masses, the state and the film-industry could perhaps improve the projection of women and in turn help to promote positive images. Routine examples of violence against women in
popular cinema merely rework and re-circulate self-consciously spectacular images that tend to affirm familiar values and existing social structures. Bombay cinema continues to rely on circumscribed representations of violence whose meaning reinforces and perpetuates dominant myths of the patriarchal order even as it frequently attempts to produce forms of violence that challenge the value of viewers and the norms of mainstream culture.