CHAPTER 1

Deciphering Violence: Contours and Relationship with Films.

Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.

UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

Violence translates into any language and sells well in a global market: profit is almost the overriding motive. Increasingly media conglomerates with little to tell but a great deal to sell are replacing traditional storytellers who were essentially a part of the social milieu. Dyson (2003) says what we confront today is a “toxic culture” where media violence is mushrooming, a ticking time-bomb where we don’t get to see its subtle, systemic forms as expressed through growing media ownership and concentration.

Cinema has always been a popular cultural institution, which helps to mediate a broad spectrum of social meanings, values and structures (Tudor, 1972). Yet depictions of violent behavior are special. They invoke some of societies most central and guiding values, those, which justify the use of force, illuminate the parameters of social order and demarcate legitimate from illegitimate actions. Put in a few words, violence in social life lends special significance to public discourse about violence in films (Slocum, 2000). The history of film violence thus offers an account of cinemas evolving role as a crucible of standards of legitimate actions and social order. There is no simple explanation for frequency of violent crime against women, but it has been suggested that one contributing factor, may be the way that women are portrayed in the media. Women are more than often depicted as victims of violence or as sexual objects and mounting evidence shows that negative perceptions of women in entertainment can affect women in real life.

Worldwide research has repeatedly suggested that on screen violence towards women can cause emotional desensitization after viewing as few as two films containing sexually degrading and violent themes. “Sexually violent material can contribute to a social climate in which violence against women is more accepted and thus may be more likely to occur. The consumer of this material may never commit an aggressive act. But sexually violent material may affect other aspects of some individuals' relationships with women.”
Dyson adds that men who view a number of films in which women are portrayed in sexually vulnerable situations become increasingly less disturbed by violence against women and less sympathetic towards female victims of violence in real life. This holds true for most male audiences who derive some sadistic pleasure from the mandatory rapes/sexual harassment scenes or they choose to remain passive gazers. A person could just remain at the fantasy level, where he would just imagine his role as the violent propagator and derive pleasure. The scenes from the movie would flash intermittently and the pleasure idiom would be achieved. Over time, the viewer might tend to forget the intensity of violence in the film and then derive less pleasure.

A person in the same situation with violent antecedents may create an environment of violence and replicate the same as seen in the film. Therefore we have more victims and even more exploitation and the nature of crime even more violent. The unreal horror becomes real. Our ‘desi’ versions of slasher films further distort reality by sending out the message that sexual violence is normal or acceptable and like domestic violence in our regular tear-jerkers too carry forth this norm. The very characters of these films have regularly portrayed graphic violence against passive female victims. Recent studies have found out that a few of these films tend to lack empathy toward female victims of rape, believing “she deserved what she got.” In addition, these men often do not believe the rapist should be punished. There is no simple explanation for the frequency of violent crimes against women, but it has been suggested that one contributing factor may be the way women are portrayed in the media. Women are often depicted as victims of violence or as sexual objects, and researchers have found that these media portrayals may influence the way women are viewed and treated in society. Films have often been criticized for their element of content considered demeaning to women, such as sexual objectification, depictions of violence against women, and the frequent association of violence with sexuality. Over 40 years of scientific investigation has led researchers to conclude that media violence significantly contributes to aggressive attitudes and behavior in society (Donnerstein, Slaby, R. and Eron, 1993).

Violence has become its very own raison d'être, irrespective of its place in any supposed narrative order. Film critic David Thomson, agrees: 'we've reached a point where there is excessive pressure to show us what we haven't seen before, with or without - but increasingly, without - dramatic or narrative support.' Says filmmaker Gaspar Noé: “This is a worldwide revolution. All around the world graphic violence is becoming more and more explicit.”

Cinema, like all art forms, designs ideas that are larger than life. Wildest fantasies can be 'designed' into film-settings or situations. Call it
massy, mainstream, off-beat, commercial or arty cinemas, all mark their significant impressions on audiences irrespective of age, gender, sex and class. Increasingly though, film scholars have sought to complicate prevailing models of social control by emphasizing the ongoing contestation of dominant values and norms occurring in contemporary popular and even classical cinema (Polan, 1985; Gaines, 1992; Bernstein, 1999). Their guiding assumption is that regular oscillation between popular cinema's challenges to and maintenance of social values and structures, enables Bollywood to serve as both an agent of social control and change. It has repeated featured women as homemakers, mothers, girlfriends, sisters, decorative sex sirens and victims of male violence. The change in women's images has been pseudomatic in character, in their attempt to project women as normal mortals in control of the libido and their careers. Somewhere down the line, libido got confused with lust and this is what Hindi cinema has brought to the silver screen, with a vengeance never seen before. Film violence can be seen as an especially telling manifestation of the struggles of popular cinema to balance at any given point of time, the forces changing society and those controlling it.

Social scientists have traditionally conceptualized media as serving one of two functions in society. Either they affect social change, as in the case of muckraking journalists whose illumination of social ills and inequalities contributed to amelioration, or they further the social control of predominant ideologies and social structures (Vishwanath and Demers, 1999). The latter function, by which mainstream media perpetuate existing institutions, regnant values, and normative social system, underlies many recent analyses (Ewen, 1992; Gitlin, 1982, Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Paletz and Entman, 1981). Not surprisingly, Bollywood cinema has figured importantly in efforts to posit media as a significant force in the consolidation, extension and continuation of the established social order.

Though violence against women is not just about being physically violated, the physical acts of violence are perhaps more visible because they are explicit. What needs to uncovered, are the underlying structures of violence perpetuated by a society, which tends to treat women in a differential way. Patriarchal violence, domestic and marital violence and other forms of sexual harassment are rampant in our films and yet there is a tendency to negate these areas perhaps because of their apparent invisibility.

Indian Women: Stereotypes and Forms of Violence in Cinema.

The incidence of sexual violence against women is greater in societies that have male-dominated ideologies and a history of violence, as in the case
of India (Burt, 1980; Check and Malamuth, 1985; Linz and Malamuth, 1993). Genre violence is therefore the most pervasive in most South Asian countries; "Popular entertainment in India, particularly films, portrays violence against women and men in a graphic manner." At one level, they convey some sense of reality (women do get raped and battered). But as Shivdas (1999) argues that the construction of the message leaves many questions unanswered because popular entertainment in India often relies on binary constructs of womanhood (i.e. whore/Goddess) to convey messages about women and similar constructs of the ideal woman.

According to available data only 10 per cent of rapes get reported. According to NCRB (National Crime and Records Bureau) data for 2003, there were 15,847 rapes, of which two-thirds were of women between the ages of 18 to 30. The capital alone, accounts for over 30 per cent of rapes and abductions in urban India. According to data collected by various women's organizations, a woman is raped every half hour somewhere in India. Long-time women's activist Brinda Karat says, "What is worse is the lack of outrage. That's what is wrong, our mistaken modernity, where you can wear the latest label in clothes yet still regard women as property or a sex object."

"If art imitates life then something is definitely amiss here," says Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal. Indian women in real life are progressing, yet our contemporary arts do not reflect this progress at all. Box-office cinema rarely projects the lives of real women, whether educated or educated, rich or poor.

Actor Mallika Sherawat, in spite of her new age vixen image, is quick to reiterate that "just because India's film industry has spent decades portraying life as a fairy tale story where the prince saves the princess in distress, it doesn't mean that this is how we really live." The portrayal of women in films perhaps resonates with Indian society's unhealthy relationship with the progress of women. Hence the urge to rein her in and relegate her to the spot by the kitchen sink. "It is thus a sorry picture, which proves that we continue to perpetuate the archetypal Indian woman as a titillating showpiece." From the weeping mother and the doormat wife to the bold, bra-clad heroine, with the new sexual nymphet image, the change has been just superficial and unreal. An older women-younger man relationship or a neglected wife seeking sex elsewhere are increasingly epitomising the "bold" face of Hindi cinema, but it is a fact that our films are exploiting women's sexual identity rather than sensibly exploring them.

Shielding behind the premise of entertaining the masses, time and again these 'popular culture commodities' are depicting violence, putting forth the argument that smart kids and adults know the difference between reality
and fantasy (Dyson, 1999). Chandrakant K Kakodkar V. State of Maharashtra (1969), 2 SCC 687 conclude that it is not easy to lay down a true test because "art has such varies facts and individualists appeals that in the same object the insensitive sees only obscenity because his attention is arrested, not by the general or artistic appeal or message which he cannot comprehend but by what he can see and the intellectual sees beauty but nothing gross." This statement becomes a point of focus because obscenity is a violence of sorts and many a times their is not a thin line but a vast sea of divide between aesthetics and the sex-in-your-face factor.

The variables that give rise to sexual violence in India are numerous and complex. However, for feminist media scholars, the idea that popular cinema lays a significant role in shaping notions about gender roles and gender identities within the Indian context, is of special interest and concern (Bagchi, 1996; Ram, 2002). The few systematic studies that have been conducted on the topic unequivocally claim that the social roles portrayed in the films are strictly dichotomous as well as stereotypical. Box office films hardly tread over the boundaries of gendered roles. The traditional roles of the subservient female and the dominant male are repeatedly reinforced on the Indian screen. Resplendent with the idealized characteristics of purity, patience, selflessness and chastity, "society expects her to efface her desires, rights and even her life for others." The importance of sexual portrayals in motion pictures is particularly relevant to Indian audiences, not because these portrayals are viewed in abundance, but also because issues of sexuality are rarely discussed in other contexts (Derne, 1999). As actor Priety Zinta says that "a conservative society where most parents still don't discuss sex with children is leapfrogging from orthodoxy to in-your-face sex on television, films and the Internet." According to Derne (1999), Indian film portrayals form a "privileged area for construction of sexuality" for all common persons, and serve as primary sources of information about men and women are to behave in sexual relationships.

A study carried out by UNICEF and Save the Children's Fund in the subcontinent showed that the film medium is influential especially with teenaged boys, in teaching notions about the masculinity, power and violence in relationships with women (Poudyal, 2002). Similarly, researchers in the North American context have found that children and adolescents use media narratives (especially teen magazines and prime-time television programs) as sexual scripts for learning about dominant norms concerning gender, love and sexuality (Carpenter, 1998; Pardun, 2002; Ward, 1995; Wood, 2001; Senn, Desmark, Park and Verberg, 2002). Academics have pointed out that men's abuse of women is often glorified within Indian cinema (Derne, 1999). More
specifically, critics have argued that the repeated glamorization various forms of sexual harassment in films, and male actors as a macho manifestation of the tough acting, college going student hero, who initially upsets the heroine but finally wins her attention, has ushered a climate supportive of such acts in real life (Birla, 2001,'Films', 1998;Ravindran, 2001). One specific form of sexual harassment called "eve-teasing" is prevalent, especially in urban India. The term eve-teasing is used to refer to sexual harassment of women in public places such as the streets, public transportation, parks, beaches, and cinema halls. This type of public harassment by a lone man or gangs of men includes verbal assaults such as making passes or unwelcome sexual jokes; nonverbal assaults such as showing obscene gestures, winking, whistling, and staring; and physical assaults such as pinching, fondling, and rubbing against women in public places ("Eve-teasing," 1999; Stevens, 1984). In addition, in several instances eve-teasing has been followed by more violent assaults such as rape and murder. In trying to construct the profile of an eve­ teaser, it is interesting to note that about 32% of eve-teasers are college students ("Films," 1998).

Eve teasing lives in post-colonial India as a cognitive category that refers largely to sexual harassment of women in public spaces, thereby constituting women as 'eves', temptresses who provoke men into states of sexual titillation. This popular perception of sexual harassment posits the phenomena as a joke where women are both a tease and deserve to be teased. By treating sexual harassment as eve teasing, structural violence against women is disguised as an individualized act of deviancy categorised as natural heterosexist male behaviour towards women who provoke men. However, in positing women in public spaces as temptresses, the discourse on eve teasing does not even begin to address the sexual harassment faced by sex workers. Their occupation already defines them as temptresses, and it is in comparison to the stigmatized status of sex workers that women in other kinds of public spaces are evaluated. Nor does the discourse address the sexual harassment faced by women at home. The grammar of this discourse then rests on a primary classification between good and bad women, which alone makes it possible for the cognitive category of eve teasing to derive meaning.

Eve teasing then acts as a control on most women by censoring their general mobility in and accessibility to public spaces, thereby affecting their sense of personhood and security. It heightens feelings of dependency on men for protection even though some women may be economically or emotionally independent. It often adds to the traumas experienced in other spaces, be it other work places or in the domestic sphere, making the experience of male violence a rather seamless and everyday affair. Women too internalize the idea that eve teasing is normal, harmless and often deserved. Eve teasing was
recognized as a popular form of harassment of women in public spaces, but the popular understanding that it falls short of molestation underlay the distinction between molestation and eve teasing. Eve teasing was then classified as those offences that outrage the modesty of women by word, gesture or act, thereby reifying popular and normative distinctions between physical and verbal (or non-physical form) of harassment. It affirmed the idea that eve teasing is not assault and causes lesser ‘hurt’ than molestation.

Zinta reiterates that she does not feel safe on the streets and so do a lot of women in India because of eve teasing. She says that it does sound rather biblical and innocent but eve teasing could result from just being a verbal assault to a more serious violation. Zinta also blames today’s cinema for distorting the images of women and agrees to the fact that men would end up imitating the dangerously sexist images that blaze the screen. It is a distorted ‘sex-in-your-face’ factor that is sending out a clear message that such behaviour is normal and perhaps rewarding.

So consider the odds stacked against our women. “I find that in Hindi films romance borders on eve-teasing. It’s all about possessing and acquiring the girl,” says filmmaker Meghna Gulzar. A victim of a sex crime has to go through the humiliating process of proving to our judiciary that she was not a “loose” character who consented to or invited the offender. Ashis Nandy, political psychologist at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, says most eve-teasers are “first- or second-generation rural immigrants who look at the city as a place where the laws of the jungle operate. For them, only the family and a few friends are sacrosanct.”

Somewhere down the line, television took up from where cinema left. It didn’t improve matters so far as projection of women on the screen was concerned. If anything, it has made things worse, giving obscenity a new definition by extending it beyond the simple exposure of the body to obscenity of the mind and the heart. Top of the list are the Saas-bhi-kabhi bahu-thi kind of soap operas that centered around a very limited portrayal of Indian women—as vamps, doormats and schemers. Even when women are shown as top executives leading organisations, they are projected as over-wealthy, frivolous characters who slip from one extra-marital affair into another with equal ease.

Creativity and Art: The Justification of Women’s Images in Cinema.

What is surprising is that such blatantly obnoxious depiction of women on screen has provoked little protest, even among the thinking, educated women. So used to are, the large majority of women living in subjugation that anything else seems unthinkable. The reason why, perhaps, when some of the cream of Bollywood gathered for FICCI’s much-hyped brainstorming, soul-
searching session on 'The Impact Of Cinema and Portrayal Of Women In Films' at a seminar on 'Women, cinema and society', they emerged out of the meeting strongly united on the need to let things take their own course. The debate ended inconclusively, with hardly a whimper of protest even from serious film-makers like Mrinal Sen and Shashi Kapoor, all of whom agreed to leave censorship of all kind to "individual choice", choosing not to put their foot down on the shockingly obscene portrayal of women in films and on television. Quite expectedly, the then Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ravi Shankar Prasad was happy to endorse the view of the stars. “Creativity, beauty and the depiction of women and everything else associated with films is strictly the job of its creator; the Government is not in the banning business. People have to help us decide what to show and what to censor,”’IS as he put it, quite happy not to have to tread into controversial ground.

The fact, however, is that with or without government intervention, it's a subject of much controversy and frequent debate. On the one side are films, sitcoms and ad makers, and the stars themselves, who feel that the choice of what to see or what not to see rests entirely with the people. As Mrinal Sen and Mahesh Bhatt put it at the FICCI meet: “We are in the business of selling illusions, it is up to the people to decide what they want to see and how. No government or censor board can do that job.”19 Mrinal Sen, in fact, blames the excessive negative portrayal of women on the male chauvinistic society that we live in. A view that most of his colleagues in the film industry share. 'We are only showing what exists' is their constant refrain to any criticism on this count. An example of censorship's influence on cinema, for instance, is what Gopalan refers to as "coitus interruptus", a term used to describe the ways in which Indian filmmakers negotiate obscenity codes to “finally produce the female body on screen.”20 This technique, familiar to Indian viewers, involves the withdrawal of the camera just before a steamy love scene, which is then represented symbolically by shots of waterfalls, flowers and other natural objects. Gopalan stresses that the Indian film industry, “despite its laments about state control, has been preoccupied with the withdrawal-of-the-camera technique as a crucial source of surplus pleasure.”21

The escalation of violence in contemporary Indian cinema is considered by many to have originated from the state-of-emergency imposed from 1975 to 1977. Following the success of N. Chandra's Pratighat (1987), the early 1990's witnessed the growing popularity of avenging women- themed films in Hindi cinema, such as Sherni, Khoon Bhari Maang and Kali Ganga. These rape-revenge dramas, characterised by sexually violent scenes, are actually an acknowledgement of the indispensability of state censorship regulations,
according to Gopalan, who reads these narratives as representations of “aggressive strands of feminism.”

This argument does not, however, go down well with women activists and social groups fighting for the cause of women. As Kirti Singh, Legal Counsel for All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) says: "The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act would be rendered meaningless if there is no censorship imposed by the government." Reacting to the argument taken by most filmmakers, she says their response is probably prompted by the need to keep a check on unwarranted censorship. She is, however, adamant on the need for strong enactment to check the obscene portrayal of women on the screen. She is strongly of the opinion that obscenity has no place in the on-screen projection of women. And obscenity, she is quick to emphasise, extends much beyond physical exposure and encompasses any portrayal of women in the subservient or negative role. What she objects to is not the negative portrayal of women but such projections as a norm rather than the exception. A key recommendation of the NCW is that the Act should not remain limited to the print media but should also be extended to visual media such as films, computer media including Internet.

Though not widespread, there is some support for this point of view among members of the film industry. Filmmaker Tanuja Chandra feels the saas-bahu genres of TV serials are just tactics to get TRPs and sponsors. "I do feel bad that television is being misused because it provides an excellent opportunity to experiment but that has unfortunately not happened," she says.

Author and Indian film scholar, Dr John W. Hood, is contemptuous of the Bollywood film, agreeing with Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, who argued that if you’ve seen four Bollywood films, you’ve seen them all. Bollywood films are full of froth and bubble, just like their Hollywood counterparts. Some are technically outstanding and some are entertaining. There is usually a clash between good and evil. Good is represented by a good looking young man, evil is an ugly man, and vulnerability is represented by a woman who is stupid and helpless and depends on the man to help save her. In the end, good overrides evil. The formula is dressed in different dances, fights, etc., and oozes with melodrama.

While most westerners see Bollywood as a bit of fun, the films have been accused of subverting independent thought within India, and promoting backward-looking traditional Indian values. Dr Hood feels strongly about the intentions of Bollywood film-makers. 'I condemn the myth that the Bollywood musicals give the masses what they want. Actually, it’s how they (the producers) can make money out of it. Bollywood films
maintain the social conservative mores, and use domestic violence and the subjugation of women as entertainment."24

A Brief Chronology on the History of Violence in Films: Cinematic Norms and Reception.

In spite of these revelations, very few researchers have dealt with sexually violent portrayals in Indian films. In a rare study of its kind, Derne (1999) conducted a qualitative content of a few selected Hindi films in which violence and sexuality were often intertwined. Derne (1999) suggested that these films conveyed that violence was not only "normal" but also expected in romantic relationships between heroes and heroines.

Among the norms of cinematic productions and reception that clarify and mark changes in the popular cinematic representation of violence are narrative, genre, and (often gendered) viewing practices. A capsule view of narrative filmmaking practices during what we can call the 'classical period of Hindi cinema' held up the virtues of spirituality, honesty, chastity and integrity through it's gripping mythological renditions for a spell bound audience. Next came, the cinema of linear narratives, typically centered on the individual, psychologically well-motivated male protagonist who moves towards the resolution of public conflicts. The resolution, furthermore, is a dual one involving both a social integration and heterosexual coupling, which together reaffirmed prevailing ideological currents and were usually grounded in national and cultural myths. Narratives were presented visually through well-focused composition, frequent reliance on generic story forms and recognizable star performers.

As outlined by film scholar, David Bordwell, these tendencies function to establish the parameters of images of conformity and non-conformity alike. Breaks from these norms including images or suggestions of violence, thus frequently represent non-conformity, deviance and transgressive behaviour. For women deviation from these norms brought about their destruction and downfall. "But for men, the images showed violent actions deemed illegitimate in reality but acceptable as part of a mainstream cultural production."25

As Judith Butler has argued, "sex" works as a regulatory category, and only the "properly sexed," the "coherent," get recognized as "legitimate" subjects: "In this sense, the category of sex constitutes and regulates what will and will not be an intelligible and recognizable human existence, what will and will not be a citizen capable of rights or speech, an individual protected by law against violence or injury."26 The over-the-top nature of the law's reaction demonstrates the anxiety provoked by female outlawry. The unrestrained body
is a statement or a language about unrestrained morality says historian Bryan S. Turner (1994). "To control women's bodies is to control their personalities, and represents an act of authority over the body in the interests of public order organized around male values of what is rational." 27

A UNESCO study on Hindi films indicated that 75 per cent of them have elements of violence in them, either physical or verbal. The study found out that while the actual number of rapes explicitly shown in Hindi films have not increased over the years-ranging between 12 to 26 per cent, between 1949 and 1997 - the sexual harassment of women in films has gone up from 35 per cent in the pre-1975 period to 65 per cent, in films made over the last decade. Rape scenes were generally used in the early cinema to strengthen the narrative or to justify the social rebellion portrayed in the films, as in Madhumati (1958) or Roti, Kapda Aur Makan (1974). While the 1975-85 period employed rapes to outline the personality of the angry young man, who put himself on the wrong side of the law to avenge personal tragedies, as in Lawaris (1981) - or were used to justify the death of protagonists as in Ek Duje Ke Liye, (1981), which was a love story gone wrong.

The post mid eighties saw the rise of rape-revenge thrillers, which were advertised to showcase the heinous crime of rape and the empowerment of women. Unfortunately these films did nothing less but titillate the masses in portraying the bodies of helpless, beautiful women in mindless rape scenes as in Zakhmi Aurat (1985). Even Shekhar Kapur's widely acclaimed Bandit Queen was cleverly used to graphically portray a gang rape and not meant to bring about the pain and agony of the victim as claimed by the director. A movie would, of course tell an honest story about sexual violence if it happened to someone who was not exciting but frightening only- and even then certain elements of the scene would appeal to a section of the audience. Another approach, of course, would be to show the events prior to the assault and then the consequences without having to portray the violence itself. Both choices are completely inimical to the nature of filmmaking.

However, since the early 1970s cinema has offered the public far more than television in the way of sex, violence and general depravity. The gangster mindscape urging for immediate, violent rebellion manifested itself only in the 70's-80's when it was the popular mood - popular cinema too - had grown acerbic and anarchy was the underlying leitmotif. While television sitcoms churned out weepy family sagas, films like Zanjeer, Deewar, Agneepath saw the birth of the tormented vigilante.

From the seventies onwards, one actor had a curiously energising effect on Hindi cinema. Perhaps no Indian actor has exercised such hypnotic appeal and sway on popular imagination as Amitabh Bachchan. His angry young
man persona in the seventies and early eighties in films like *Zanjeer, Deewar, Trishul, Muqaddar Ka Sikandar, Inquilab* and *Coolie* was a turning point in the history of Indian cinema. Here was a social underdog who threw off some of the constraints that inhibit the use of personal force to achieve his mission of social justice. Violence, the first resort of traditional masculinity, was used as a metaphor for fight against injustice and inequality. Violence did not attain a pejorative connotation in these movies as the spectre of Emergency in the mid-seventies had shattered common man's faith in the institution of democracy. He was looking for a messiah to voice his repressed anguish and it was left to this angry young man to act as a conduit for this pent up frustration. Violence, in all these movies, heals the wounds it has inflicted on the victim's psyche.

However, less than three decades after he first emerged, Amitabh Bachchan's brand of violence seems almost innocuous. In today's mainstream cinema, there is enough to suggest that ours is a darker age: the macho brigade has taken over, the Adonis with muscles of steel and the heart of a Shakespearean romantic, and their viewers unfortunately are not the least startled if they were to first beat up the villains and shoot them dead later. Indeed, poetic justice is inevitable in the good-versus-bad brand of commercial cinema, but a simple shot in the chest is downright boring. So, the hero places the pistol on the villain's forehead, and presses the trigger without uttering a word. Hair, blood and bullet fly out of the back of the villain's head. That's attractive, unpredictable, beyond the threshold limit of the viewer's tolerance.

Today's violent heroes do stretch their importance across several films. However, they do not achieve the status of personae because the narratives they are inscribed in do not offer any logic for the acts being performed. It is here that spells out the major difference between the 'anti-hero' image of Shah Rukh Khan, the current numero-uno and the 'angry young man' persona of Amitabh Bachchan. *Zanjeer* (1973) charted out for the first time Bachchan's smoldering presence, haunted by the childhood memory of his parents being killed and his desire for revenge. However, it was *Deewar* (1975) in which Bachchan plays a smuggler that finally pinned the persona down and gave voice to a debate on the path to be chosen of living within or without the boundaries of law. It was this transcendent logic that defined his being in all the films he acted, even in those in which, as in Mannmohan Desai's films, for example, the spirit of carnival and excess of coincidences was the dominant, rather than a single-minded desire for revenge.

In the following years, movie theater attendance fell substantially because the industry's traditional song-and-dance storylines and hackneyed
treatment of love scenes have not produced big hits. As a result, the film industry has started to deal openly with sex or offer generous doses of skin in an attempt to draw audiences. As the British news agency Reuters reported on October 21, 2004: "Daring young actors and actresses have thrown caution, and their clothes, to the wind to play amorous characters such as prostitutes, adulterers, playboys and husband swappers that Bollywood rarely touched in the past". This new approach to filmmaking appears to be having positive economic results. For example, Agence-France Presse reported that the biggest grossing film in 2003 was Jism (Body), which tells the story of a woman who is unapologetic about using her sexuality to persuade her lover to kill her rich husband. Menon for example, says that the current Bollywood formula has some cause for concern because the transplantation of Western ideas has led to extreme vulgarity with high sexual innuendo and unnecessary violence in films today. The Film Federation of India, a regulatory body that presides over film content, complains that the films made in new Bollywood are too Westernized and that they are degrading and diminishing India's true cultural identity. Social critics in India are also worried that by entering the mainstream adult movie market, the uniqueness of Bollywood of providing elaborate family-oriented musical-dramas will be lost. They also caution that apart from threatening traditional Indian values, the industry will be more vulnerable to outside competition, which in turn could damage Bollywood beyond repair. The dilemma faced by Bollywood in maintaining the economic viability of the industry on the one hand and protecting and serving traditional Indian values on the other is resulting in serious soul searching regarding the direction the industry should take. One view comes from a highly successful Bollywood director, Ram Gopal Varma who says that "anyone who does not follow the West is gone." Varma also noted that he did not care whether his movies served the needs of the rural, traditional Indian population. Indian superstar Aamir Khan responded to that view by warning that a wholesale rejection of song and dance might kill the "color, fire and innocence" that defines Indian cinema.

Exposing a broader sector of the Indian audience to divergent cultural and political perspectives could prove of enormous value. Rather than experiencing a fearsome and reductive 'clash of civilizations, we would get a truly cosmopolitan world entertainment media (e.g., more movies might even show serious problems being solved without guns or bombs, mass entertainment), concludes Plate's (2002) study, which will not in itself be adequate to overcome inclinations toward hatred and violence. Women will have to exceed the parameters of acceptable citizenship, and the state must respond by restoring "order." Left "unrestrained," the two would embody an
alternative practice of citizenship that would challenge not just the law but the very definition of "freedom."

Narrative norms are important because they represent nothing less than popular cinema's fundamental code of organizing social, cultural and psychological experience. The portrayal of women in cinema adheres to the structure, development and coherence of popular narratives which are standard means through which dominant ideology perpetuates itself and recapitulates its guiding myths (Branigan, 1992; Gaines 1992; Ray 1985). Narrative conventions in Bollywood cinema strongly inscribe and code representations of violence, creating ideological and formal framework for spectacles of destruction and death. Instances of violence in this way punctuate narratives and highlight their structural conflicts and resolutions. Also, when depictions of violence fall outside, run counter to, or exceed those normative frameworks, the acts mount to cultural challenges.

The subject of women being mere props and victims in cinema is a transnational phenomenon. It occurs, at least within legal discourse, in both the "West" and the Third World. However, the Third World victim subject has come to represent the more victimized subject; that is, the real or authentic victim subject. Feminist politics in the international human rights arena, as well as in parts of the Third World, have promoted this image of the authentic victim subject while advocating for women's human rights.

The global campaign reinforces gender and cultural essentialism in the international women's human rights arena. It also buttresses claims of some "feminist" positions in India that do not produce an emancipatory politics for women in our country. This focus fails to take advantage of the liberating potential of important feminist insights. These insights have challenged the public/private distinction along which human rights has operated, and traditional understandings of power as emanating exclusively from a sovereign state. The focus on violence against women has had some extremely important and beneficial consequences for women. The women's human rights movement drew attention to the lack of domestic governmental response to women's demands for more effective rape laws, laws against child sexual abuse, and domestic violence laws. However, an exclusive reliance on the victim subject to make claims for rights and for women's empowerment has some serious limitations.

The articulation of the victim subject is based on gender essentialism; that is, over generalized claims about women. As Chandra Mohanty points out, essentialism assumes that "women have a coherent group identity within different cultures . . . prior to their entry into social relations." Such generalizations are hegemonic in that they represent the problems of
privileged women, who are often (though not exclusively) white, Western, middle-class, and heterosexual women. These generalizations efface the problems, perspectives, and political concerns of women marginalized because of their class, race, religion, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation. The victim subject ultimately relies on a universal subject: a subject that resembles the uncomplicated subject of liberal discourse. It is a subject that cannot accommodate a multi-layered experience.

The second problem with a focus on violence against women is that it is a position based on cultural essentialism. Women in the Third World are portrayed as victims of their culture, which reinforces stereotyped and racist representations of that culture and privileges the culture of the West. In the end, the focus on the victim subject reinforces the depiction of women in the Third World as perpetually marginalized and underprivileged, and has serious implications for the strategies subsequently adopted to remedy the harms that women experience. It encourages some feminists in the international arena to propose strategies which are reminiscent of imperial interventions in the lives of the native subject and which represent the “Eastern” woman as a victim of a “backward” and “uncivilized” culture.

Gender essentialism refers to the fixing of certain attributes to women. These attributes may be natural, biological, or psychological, or may refer to activities and procedures that are not necessarily dictated by biology. These essential attributes are considered to be shared by all women and hence also universal. “Essentialism thus refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus social reorganization.” The limits of gender essentialism are not new to feminist legal thinking, and in recent years there has been considerable critique of the hegemonic generalizations about women that result from this essentialism. For those who do not experience such intersecting oppressions, the focus on gender remains less complicated. As Marlee Kline explains, the focus on gender as the primary variable of oppression conceals the way in which privilege may be operating simultaneously.

Kline (1989) provides an insightful critique of Catherine MacKinnon’s dominance feminism agenda, which has focused on sexuality as the central source of women’s oppression. MacKinnon argues that women identify themselves, through a process of gender socialization, as sexual beings who exist for men. Men and women are divided into gender categories through the social requirement of heterosexuality, through which male sexual dominance and female sexual submission are institutionalized. Dominance feminism thus asserts that sexuality is the lynchpin of gender inequality. While she acknowledges the multiplicity of women’s experience, she has remained
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reluctant to interrogate the extent to which this multiplicity displaces gender as the central category of analysis. She focuses on that which is shared amongst women rather than on their differences.37 Focusing on the commonality of women's experiences places the analysis on a slippery slope where it can slide into the essentialist and prioritizing category of gender; it can blunt rather than sharpen our analysis of oppression. As MacKinnon states, "what [women] have in common is not that our conditions have particularity in ways that matter. But we are all measured by a male standard for women, a standard that is not ours."38 In her analysis, sexuality and sexual relations remain central to women's oppression.39 The fact that women do not come from a shared social position (and hence may not prioritize issues of sexuality or sexual violence) is not addressed in MacKinnon's work.

Consistent with her theory that sexual exploitation is the basis of women's oppression; MacKinnon focuses on the issues of rape, abortion, and pornography as constituting the primary human rights violations against women. "If sexuality is central to women's definition and forced sex is central to sexuality, rape is indigenous, not exceptional, to women's social condition."40 She argues that, as sexual exploitation and sexual violence are experiences that women share in common, these commonalities are more important than their differences. In her view, all women experience oppression at the hands of patriarchal power, and she argues that power is invariably male.41

Despite the appeal of such grand metanarratives, gender essentialism produces a theory that effaces the differences between women. The exclusive focus on violence against women does not reveal the complexity of women's lives but only the different ways in which they may experience violence. Thus, culture is invoked primarily to explain the different ways in which women experience violence—in the process often reinforcing essentialist understandings of culture and representing particular cultures as brutal and barbaric. The invocation of culture as a way in which to explain the different forms and shapes that violence against women takes has resulted in a reification of culture, especially the culture of people in the post-colonial or the Third World. And films are perhaps that abominable source of this reification. Cultural explanations ultimately neither challenge nor arrest the problem of dowry murders. They also deflect attention from the broader and more prevalent crime of domestic violence and the many other reasons why women are beaten, abused, or killed in family violence situations.42 It is this through the spectrum of violence, which has reinforced cultural essentialism and the construction of the Other as backward and uncivilized. The result is that international feminist legal politics has reinforced the representation of the Third World woman as thoroughly disempowered, brutalized, and
victimized: a representation that is far from liberating for women. Moreover, in some respects, it recreates the imperialist move that views the native subject as different and civilizationally backward.

The image that is produced is that of a truncated Third World woman who is sexually constrained, tradition-bound, incarcerated in the home, a new age décor with fancy clothes and complete with a college degree. As Kamla Kempadoo states, the representation of the Third World woman leaves her not yet a “whole or developed” person; instead, she resembles a minor, needing guidance, assistance and help. The analysis is structured along the contours of colonial thought: the assumption being that women in the Third World are infantile, civilizationally backward, and incapable of self-determination or autonomy.

**Feminism and Violence: Dominant Institutions and their Engagements**

Feminist efforts to destabilize dominant meanings have encountered real oppositions firmly inscribed in dominant institutions and structures. Such oppositions cannot be countered through a single engagement. Feminists must be attentive to the ways in which these powerful and opposing discourses may be rooted in and shaped by dominant social and economic forces. Feminist engagements with law and human rights require a constant and careful consideration of the way in which feminist claims may be transformed through the powerful and complex interplay between dominant social relations and competing discourses. However, centering the peripheral and resistive subject is a disruptive move, destabilizing universalized and naturalized claims made about women, Third World women, or the culture from which these women emerge. The production and subjugation of identities are processes that go on simultaneously through legal engagement. The victim subject counters the atomized, a historical subject of liberal rights discourse, but it is not sufficiently disruptive of naturalized and universalized assumptions about gender and culture. The challenge is to disrupt and dispute the naturalness and originality of the victim subject. It is precisely at this point that we can contemplate the production of an inclusive politics.

Finally, feminists and human rights scholars must acknowledge and engage the new arenas of power that manifest themselves in today's globalized world. In this world, the actions of non-state actors have a significant impact on women's lives and women's rights. Drawing on Foucault's analysis of power, some feminists have emphasized that power is not a monolithic construction but is exercised within social relationships and through culture. A number of feminists have examined Foucault's work and the relevance of his analysis to feminist theory: in particular, the gendered aspects of
regulation and the importance of understanding multiple sites of oppression but the focus on the victim subject and on violence has failed to develop this. By resorting to an exclusive focus on the victim subject and on women's experience of violence, feminists fell back onto an understanding of power (one that has also informed traditional human rights standards) as monolithic and emanating from a coherent sovereign.

Modern feminists most naïve formulation is rape is a crime of violence but not of sex that it is merely power masquerading as sex. But sex is power, and all power is inherently aggression. Rape is male power fighting female power. It is no more to be excused than is murder or any other assault to another's, civil rights. Society is woman's protection against rape not as some feminists absurdly maintain, the cause of rape.-Camilla Paglia.

Much of feminist film theory that developed in the 1970's relied on the notion of a cinematic apparatus through which film technologies interacted with the ideological determinants of the cinematic institution and the psychodynamics of viewers. Classical narrative cinema was seen to repetitively restage the Oedipal drama from the masculine side, following the hero through his difficult separation from his mother to his eventual and triumphal identification with paternal authority. In her seminal work, most notably the essay, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, (1975), Laura Mulvey emphasized the problem of the female erotic in classical Hollywood cinema (and, specifically in films of Josef Von Sternberg and Alfred Hitchcock). Female viewers are presented with a choice to identify with a male protagonist or secondary female characters who, in Freudian terms, are defined by lack of (or castration). The choice of the female viewers is therefore between the sadism of a patriarchal figure that subordinates women or the masochism inherent in women subordinated to patriarchy. Moreover, classical cinema not only emphatically defined gender but also did so through spectacles of physical and emotional violence.

"There is a dizzy satisfaction in witnessing the way that sexual difference under patriarchy is fraught, explosive and erupts in violence in its own private stomping ground, the family."45 Violence, for Mulvey is grounded in sexual difference manifest both in film narratives and a viewing process that stimulates popular cinema squarely in a patriarchal society (Mulvey, 1975). Liz Kelly's (1988) concept of a 'continuum of sexual violence' represented a significant theoretical shift. Rather than focusing on the different forms of violence and abuse as discrete issues, the continuum recognizes commonalities between them in women's experience and theoretically sees forms of violence underpinning patriarchal power and control. Developed to facilitate theorization of these commonalities and connections, the continuum is constituted through difference: the different
forms of sexual violence, their different impacts, and the different community and legal responses to women, positioned differently, within and between cultures and through history. It illustrates the hollowness of the frequent criticism that radical feminism, in focusing solely on commonalities in women's experiences, offers universalistic explanations.

When it comes to sexual violence, the spectacle perverts and contradicts the idea. Bollywood serves up whatever audiences will pay to see; if audiences will pay to watch sexual violence, it will make more violent movies, without even overlaying a thin veneer of political correctness. One of the functions of violence in our films is to induce fear, to demonstrate and create an imbalance between the power males and females have. According to media analyst, Jackson Katz, films fortify the notions based on gender and the roles society thinks men and women should play. "Male violence is the norm. People don't even question it", says Katz. "But when women act violently, it's talked about." Many films portray female victims as sex objects and cover up the contents of violence through sexualized humor. So when viewing a sexually violent scene, most audiences see the woman as an object and not as a victim.

Sex blinds many people to violence, Katz argues. It's another way of normalizing male violence towards women. Most critics believe that being sexually turned on is a positive feeling, and when violence occurs at the same time, the violence doesn't seem bad at all. Because of this connection between physical pleasure and violence toward women, scholars have repeated cited that men who have been exposed to repeated shows of sexualized violence are less likely to believe a rape victim. Most violence on screen is what is widely known as 'happy violence', meaning that it's swift, thrilling and always has a happy ending. It is basically entertainment for the one purpose the industry has to deliver the audiences to the next commercial in a mood to buy. The cinema recreates the thrill of violence because it recreates with a certain amount of clarity the intimacy of the violent act. Paradoxically, that large screen in the cavernous, crowded dark, public room creates intimacy. And violence is an intimate act. Therefore if the hero is harassing his ladylove in the most bizarre fashion, one is as close to the victim as a lover, trying to think like him, anticipate his moves, and attempting to overcome him. Violence in popular movies is about justice. So, when our mega star conquers a scurvy villain, one cheers. If he does it cleverly, one laughs. But he must do it, because our cinema inhabits a cult of justice in which the laws have been devised by narratives. Yet there is always something, to cheer about, when our hero triumphs. To say one likes this style of violent movies isn't to say that one likes violence in reality, or that one is incapable of appreciating analyses of violence as a phenomenon in more decidedly intellectual films. Nor is it to
say that "violence" is a genre unto itself. Rather it is more along the lines of a technique, a comic mode, a discipline, like good dialogue or story structure.

"Basically I think violence is a legitimate, artistic and journalistic feature. It exists in the world, and the legitimacy of (media) violence is that it is capable of showing the pain, tragedy, and the destruction that violent solutions to human conflict can create. Unfortunately; most of the violence is not of that kind, it does not instruct us in the real consequences."47 Most of it is happy violence. So the kind of violence that we get is pure power play, without serious consequences. Gerbner (1994) talks about his theory called the "Mean World Syndrome", which increases insecurity about the world that viewers actually live in. The situation is that people feel more insecure, not the need to be violent,"48 Gerbner states. His research brought about facts, about how men and women, especially the ones, who watch a visual medium much too often are like to think the world is a more dangerous place than it actually is. Women, who are twice likely to become victims of media violence than men, think the world is more dangerous than most men, Gerbner argues. So, as the conventional social status goes down, the relative ratio of victimization goes up, thereby preaching to all viewers the potential risks in their lives and their vulnerabilities.

From its earliest years, popular cinema has negotiated the role of women both on screen and to its viewers. In fact, underscoring it's centrality to various narrative and generic patterns, violence against women has been conceptualized as immanent in classical Bollywood cinema and across more recent popular cinema. Many feminist film theorists have viewed mainstream filmmaking as composed of production and exhibition practices imbricated in an identifiable set of social and political power relations. In the process, these writers have offered sophisticated articulations of the links between filmic representations and cinema's place in society. Over the last twenty years or so, and especially during the 1990's, popular cinema generally and film violence specially have continued to evolve. The greater role of movies in shaping popular understandings of the past raises profound questions about the traditional modes of understanding history or violence. Beyond recognizing the historical claims made by (and familiar representational forms used in) contemporary films in their depiction of specific events, the challenge is to explore how the representation of historical violence affects viewers relationship to cinema and cinema's relationship to the society (Rosenstone, 1995; Toplin 1996; Sorlin,1980; American Historical Review, 1988). History also furnishes, either through reference to earlier films or cultural formations, a backdrop for the explication of recent film violence.
Violence Against Women: Global Perspectives on Political and Theoretical Currency.

It is the global perspective which, following the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1992 has been influential in effecting a more recent shift to the language of gender violence. However all three concepts: violence against women, sexual violence and gender violence continue to hold political and theoretical currency.

The changed global context, highlighted by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women 1995, and subsequent conferences like the 1996 International Conference on Violence, Abuse and Women's Citizenship, Brighton, have initiated feminist understandings of and research on gender violence, its nature, impacts, prevalence and critiques of the limited responses on the part of law, police and community.

Both Hester and Radford, 1996, locate their contributions in the context of developing cross-national collaborations in relation to research, law and policy initiatives. Their study point to the ways socio-historical specificity shapes the meaning, forms and nature of gender violence and has informed legal, policy and feminist responses. Signatories to the Beijing Declaration are now required to report regularly to the United Nations on progress made on 12 'critical areas of concern' relating to the ‘advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men’ as a matter of human rights.

‘Violence against women’ and ‘persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child’ are respectively the fourth and twelfth of these critical areas, and as such are issues centrally included in government reports to the UN. Progressive interpretations of the definition found in the UN Declaration state that acts of omission—such as neglect or deprivation—can constitute violence against women. More recent international legal instruments broaden the definition, in particular to include structural violence—that is, harm resulting from the impact of the organization of the economy on women's lives. Amnesty International basing its work on the definition in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that violence against women includes, but is not limited, to:

1) Violence in the family: This includes battering by intimate partners, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape and female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women. Popular Hindi films more than often include physical violence by an
intimate partner and other types of psychological harassment by close family members, which are widely overlooked.

2) Violence against women in the community: This includes rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and assault and homophobic hate crimes at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere. Trafficking, forced prostitution and forced labour fall into this category, which also covers rape and other abuses by armed groups. Hindi films have a tendency to show women at work to being in a dangerous position where they would be likely to be harassed and exploited. Eve-teasing is rampant in our movies, where male actors are shown to woo their ladies through this kind of a mindless harassment. Rape scenes are more than often meant for the titillation value and not shown for their bestiality.

3) Gender-based violence perpetrated or condoned by the state: or by ‘state actors’—(police, prison guards, soldiers, border guards, immigration officials and so on). This includes, for example, rape by government force during armed conflict, torture in custody and violence by officials against refugee women. These scenes are also common in our films where violence against women is justified through the role of the state and its agencies in an almost negative manner, as if those who are in custody either deserved it or that all prison inmates are not normal beings and need to be tortured.

Gender based violence is therefore being recognized today as a major issue on the international human rights agenda. "Gender-based violence is universal, differing only in scope from one society to the next. Much of this violence is inflicted on girls and women by husbands, fathers, or other male relatives. The home can be one of the most dangerous places for a woman to be."53

Violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assume men to be superior to women. Given the subordinate status of women, much of gender violence is considered normal and enjoys social sanction. Manifestations of violence include physical aggression, such as blows of varying intensity, burns, attempted hanging, sexual abuse and rape, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats, and control over speech and actions. In extreme, but not unknown cases, death is the result (Adriana, 1996). These expressions of violence take place in a man-woman relationship within the family, state and society. Usually, domestic aggression towards women and girls, due to various reasons remain hidden. Cultural and social factors are interlinked with the development and propagation of violent behaviour. With
different processes of socialization that men and women undergo, men take up stereotyped gender roles of domination and control, whereas women take up that of submission, dependence and respect for authority. A female child grows up with a constant sense of being weak and in need of protection whether physical, social or economic. This helplessness has led to her exploitation at almost every stage of life. The family socializes its members to accept hierarchical relations expressed in unequal division of labour between the sexes and power over the allocation of resources. The family and its operational unit is where the child is exposed to gender differences since birth, and in recent times even before birth, in the form of sex-determination tests leading to foeticide and female infanticide. The home, which is supposed to be the most secure place, is where women are most exposed to violence.

Violence against women has been clearly defined as a form of discrimination in numerous documents. The World Human Rights Conference in Vienna, first recognised gender-based violence as a human rights violation in 1993. In the same year, United Nations declaration, 1993, defined violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.

Radhika Coomaraswamy identifies different kinds of violence against women, in the United Nation’s special report 1995, on Violence Against Women; a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non spousal violence and violence related to exploitation. b) Physical sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution. c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs. This definition added ‘violence perpetrated or condoned by the State’, to the definition by United Nations in 1993. Coomaraswamy (1992) points out that women are vulnerable to various forms of violent treatment for several reasons, all based on gender. 1) Because of being female, a woman is subject to rape, female circumcision/genital mutilation, female infanticide and sex related crimes. This reason relates to society’s construction of female sexuality and its role in social hierarchy. 2) Because of her relationship to a man, a woman is vulnerable to domestic violence, dowry murder. This reason relates to society’s concept of a woman as a property and dependent of the male protector, father,
husband, son, etc. 3) Because of the social group to which she belongs, in times of war, riots. Or ethnic, caste, or class violence, a woman may be raped and brutalized as a means of humiliating the community to which she belongs. This also relates to male perception of female sexuality and women as the property of men.

Combining these types of abuse with the concept of hierarchical gender relations, a useful way to view gender violence is by identifying where the violence towards women occurs. Essentially, violence happens in three contexts - the family, the community and the state and at each point key social institutions fulfill critical and interactive functions in defining legitimating and maintaining the violence. 1) The family socializes its members to accept hierarchical relations expressed in unequal division of labour between the sexes and power over the allocation of resources. 2) The community (i.e., social, economic, religious, and cultural institutions) provides the mechanisms for perpetuating male control over women's sexuality, mobility and labour. 3) The state legitimizes the proprietary rights of men over women, providing a legal basis to the family and the community to perpetuate these relations. The state does this through the enactment of discriminatory application of the law.

Margaret Schuler has divided gender violence into four major categories;

1) Overt physical abuse (battering sexual assault, at home and in the work place) 2) Psychological abuse (confine, forced marriage) 3) Deprivation of resources for physical and psychological well being (health/nutrition, education, means of livelihood) 4) Commodification of women (trafficking, prostitution).

The Fourth Conference of Women, 1995 has defined violence against women as a physical act of aggression of one individual or group against another or others. Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence which results in, physical, sexual or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life and violation of human rights of women in violation of human rights of women in situations of armed conflicts.55

Violence is an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person (Gelles and Straus, 1979). Gender violence is defined as "any act involving use of force or coercion with intent of perpetuating promoting hierarchical gender relations."56 Adding gender dimension to that definition amplifies it to include violent acts perpetrated on women because they are women. With this addition, the definition is no longer
simple or obvious. Understanding the phenomenon of gender violence requires an analysis of the patterns of violence directed towards women and the underlying mechanisms that permit the emergence and perpetuation of these patterns.

Liz Kelly (1998), has defined violence as "any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl at the time or later as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to contest an intimate contact." This definition was later modified to: "any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the person at the time or later as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting or disregarding or removing the ability to control one's own behaviour or an interaction, whether this be within the workplace, the home, on the streets or in any other area of the community." What we need to emphasize here is the importance of recognizing the changed political context which has opened new doors to collaborative working with state agencies and national government, but note that strategic thinking is necessary if this is to be achieved without losing sight of feminist visions and theoretical understandings of sexual violence as central to the power relations underpinning patriarchal control.

Stephen Prince (1998), takes the position that the kind of violence found in films today desensitizes people and contributes to the level of fascination with bloodshed. Social science he says shows that, for a small number of viewers, these films do help instigate aggressive thoughts, ideas, and behaviors. The question of violence in film has been around since the 30s, Prince argues but the difference in today's film violence is the way the filmmakers use media tools to "pump it up and make it attractive and make violence go on and on, where in older films, it was over in a second." "There have been real changes in the way violence is shown today that accounts for why we might see a different effect than we did in the early decades," Prince said. "The bar about what's permissible keeps getting higher." Steven Spielberg, in Saving Private Ryan, pushed the limits of what a film could show, Prince said. "Spielberg showed violence in a way it had not been shown before. "Now, I think that's the new threshold that films in a few years will go beyond." When the series of B-grade rape-revenge thrillers like Zakhmi Aurat and Insaaf Ka Tarazu were made, the directors claimed that it would wake people up to the realities of gangrapes. "I think, as time goes on, that claim becomes increasingly untenable," Prince argues. One problem, Prince states, is that nearly all filmmakers are concentrating on the visual, physical aspects of the violence and not "on the emotional or spiritual dimensions of it." It is possible for a filmmaker to deal with violence without being visually graphic, he said,
"but that's not where movie makers' emphasis has been. It's been on the visual phenomenon."63

A second problem with using film to "show what physical violence is like is that "the visual rhetoric of the films is working in the opposite direction," Prince argues. Indian directors claim they want to show the pain in a physical act but "the visual effects such as slow motion make it mesmerizing and create a fascination with violence that very few films get beyond. For those in the audience who have trouble distinguishing between fantasy and reality and who harbor those aggressive thoughts, this level of media violence can stoke those kinds of fantasies."64 About 40 years of social-science studies has corroborated that effect. Another problem with popular Indian films is that most of them do not show a time of reckoning. "The lack of consequences is one of the damaging messages that get sent."65 Even some adults, film scholars argue, cannot see the difference in fiction and reality. A fourth problem with such films is that "movie makers cannot control the reactions of their viewers," argues Prince. "Screen violence is exciting, and that may produce a volatile reaction in viewers that the movie makers can't control."66

In his book Savage Cinema, Prince argues that violence is a legitimate subject for filmmakers to handle. 'It's as old as art,' he said. The question he raises, however, is "What are the grounds for its legitimate use?"67 Most of our films don't produce a catharsis, instead of releasing tension, they work people up into an agitated state, the result being "the problematic climate we inhabit today," including the new type of audience that demands such violent movies. Prince believes audiences will have to be the ones to say, that 'enough is enough'.

But it is a never-ending story. Through the decades, in so many survey reports, conference proceedings, books and newspaper articles, feminists have documented and decried commercial media's treatment of women and stories that have perpetrated violence against them. It seems that their battles have not yet been won.

Usually very calculated decisions are made at every stage of construction of media violence. Shari Graydon and Elizabeth Verrall, in a curriculum kit released by the Federation of Women Teachers Associations of Ontario, wrote that, "Violence is made to seem appealing, often linking it with power and pleasure. In the electronic media, violence is a quick way to resolve conflict within a given time-slot. They said that violence through the media could be verbal, physical, psychological, and/or sexual. Aid violence against women, subtle or overt, is often portrayed in the media. A look at how Asian media practitioners and experts see the violence against women perpetrated in the media throw light on the problem. Reports collated from papers presented
at the Regional Conference on Gender and Communication Policy held in the Philippines in July 1997 shows that the increase in rape cases, including rape of children, and harassment in the streets of India is linked to the way women are projected in media. Films, the major source of entertainment in India, and television programs always revolve around sex plots and divorce and bigamy themes to excite and entertain audiences including young viewers who are highly impressionable.

Sudip Mazumdar, Newsweek correspondent, reports, “The Indian film industry, the second largest producer of cheap popular dramas, is having second thoughts about gore.”68 Western film imports, he says, are now driving many of the improvements in Indian theater. Feel-good movies are in, violence out. “The women-media relationship can only be analyzed, and successful strategies for changing it can only be developed, if we can take into account the entire cultural, political and ideological spectrum and study the economic context in which this particular relation (media-women) is created and takes shape.”69 Meena Shivadas (2003) says that “While it is important to strategize and pressure for changes to the women and media situation with our reading and understanding of portrayal and representation, it is equally important to understand the implications of global processes of deregulation and developments in new technology. This is in order for us to locate the strategies within the framework of globalisation and new technology which have given new dimensions to freedom of expression.”70

The Beijing Platform on media and violence.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted by UN member states in 1995 outlines the issues around women and media under Section J and points to key strategies and actions that address the media concerns of women. While the BPFA recognises the advances made in communications technology, it is important to emphasise the continued stereotyped media portrayal with a significant increase in media images that perpetuate violence against women, and also women’s lack of access to expression and decision-making in and through the media. The recommendations to governments, NGOs and media organisations are made under two specific strategic objectives 1) increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; 2) promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

The BPFA underscores the importance of a gender perspective in media policies and programmes. It also emphasises advocating for change within mainstream media that is based on sustained monitoring of media content
and intent toward gender sensitivity. Section J of the BPFA highlighted a few points which are important for this study in particular:

1) The increase in the numbers of women who work in the communications sector, however, this has not translated into increased access to power and decision-making in media organisations; women are also not able to influence media policies; 2) The lack of gender sensitivity in media policies and programmes; increased promotion of consumerism; and the need to create self-regulatory mechanisms for the media; 3) The continued stereotyped portrayal of women in the media and the increase in violent and pornographic images of women;

Although there are regional differences in the type of obstacles encountered in implementing Section J, there are many common impediments including those based on gender bias and discrimination. These are outlined here.

1) Patriarchal societies: one of the biggest obstacles to women's access, participation and control of the media is the patriarchal structure of societies where men continue to see women as subordinate to them. Patriarchal attitudes of governments and media are manifest in their being predominantly male institutions which tend to view women as an undifferentiated mass of low status in society 2) Lack of gender perspective on issues and gender bias. Few journalism schools have incorporated gender issues in their curriculum. Journalists who attempt to introduce a gender focus in their work often meet resistance or ridicule from their colleagues or bosses. 3) It is also extremely difficult to open a public debate on issues of communication and democracy, codes of ethics or the social responsibility of the media, when many media directors and even some journalists refuse to recognise this responsibility, and very few are willing to air the issues publicly. The continued projection of negative and degrading images of women, of gender stereotypes and violent and/or pornographic examples in media have an overall negative impact and thus hinders women's full participation in society. 4) Lack of effective media policies. Media policies against sexist and stereotyped coverage, representation and portrayal of women remain as a big gap. Existing media codes and guidelines are mainly concerned with "lewd", "obscene", "indecent" exposure of human bodies, "immoral" sexual relations, sexually "provocative" material, and pornographic content. Current policies are framed around questions of morality, rather than recognising sexual violence against women as a violation of human rights. There have been some efforts to establish or maintain self-regulatory mechanisms on media content. Governments in general take little responsibility for regulation of media industries with regard to gender stereotyping. 5) Lack of effective sanctions against violators. Although calls have been made for codes of conduct with minimum international standards and requirements to be instituted at the international level, the failure to respond to this need bears on
the continuing absence of sanctions against violators of women’s human right in the media.

Recommendations on Media Portrayal

1) The media need to refrain from presenting women as inferior and exploiting them as sex objects. On the contrary, the media could be a useful tool to promote a positive and realistic image of women. All media presentation should be in line with the demographic context of the community. Gender stereotyping should be eliminated through an exertion of will and foresight on the part of the media industry, which, for starters, should also seek to eliminate violent and degrading portrayals of women. 2) States need to formulate international ethical standards, based on equality between the sexes that could be reflected in all communication productions, including programming and media portrayal. 3) The lack of specific research on media portrayal is one of the most critical barriers to ongoing and effective analysis. Studies should be funded in order to raise the awareness about gender-fair images in relation to policy-making. Regional differences should be identified and the implementatio of law should be based on comparative research in this field.

Media Policy

1) Governments and NGOs have to ensure that regulatory mechanisms on media are guided by the values of gender justice, human rights, sustainable development and respect for cultural diversity and of cultural expression, sexuality and lifestyle. 2) There is a need to explore the development of an International Convention on Women and Media which addresses problems of diversity, human rights and gender issues using existing international conventions and instruments.

Advocacy

1) Both audiences and journalists need to be sensitised on how women and men are portrayed, and to what extent and on which issues they are or are not given a voice, including how the lack of women in decision-making position affects these portrayals. Further research needs to be done and courses and study groups encouraged. New equality projects in the media must be launched and supported. 2) Immediate steps should be taken to establish and support centres, which are responsible for monitoring national media in all countries. 3) Governments should revise their policies on financial support and international cooperation with regard to giving priority to the strengthening of women’s communication networks and media, and their gender dimension.
The Law: Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, the need for action.

It becomes imperative to analyse in brief the implications of law pertaining to women in the media. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was enacted in 1986 but is not considered an active domain because cases are seldom registered under this act.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was enacted, as none of the other censorship laws provide effectively for the protection of women's rights and for punishment for displaying and distributing indecent depictions of women. This Act attempts to control the nature of depictions of women, or the form of the woman. It extends to advertisements, and even on labels affixed on the cover of products, and basically includes any kind of visual representations. What is specifically mentioned is that no book, pamphlet, paper, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting, photograph, representation or figure will depict a woman or women in an indecent manner.

What is considered objectionable under this Act is the use of the figure of a woman, her form or body, or any part of it, in a manner that is indecent, derogatory or denigrating women. If these depictions are such that they are likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals, then they can be prohibited. This is almost identical to the test for obscenity under the Indian Penal Code. It also means that the law does not provide any specific example of what is or will be considered indecent. Whether this law is merely a tool for politicians relying on women's rights, or is actually used to ensure that depictions offensive to women banned in television or magazines is a moot point. As again, the thin line between art and indecency, or a social, educational or health message and pornography is blurred because of the lack of clarity in the law.

The law has often been used in conjunction with other obscenity laws, but so far the Supreme Court has not been called upon to decide on its ambit. This law is also subject to the same restrictions as that of obscenity. This means that any representation that is for public good, meant for religious purposes, any sculpture or painting in an ancient monument etc. is exempt from the law. The main purpose of this Act was to target advertisements that use the images of women to sell products, and are sometimes demeaning and offensive to women. Therefore the Act specifically provides for punishment for a company that brings out any derogatory or demeaning advertisement. This would make various people in the ad-world who are aware of the content of the advertisement, but have neglected the fact that it could be demeaning to women, responsible. Under the Act they can be proceeded against for fine or imprisonment. However if they can establish that the offence was committed
without their knowledge, or inspite of their diligence to prevent the commission of an offence, then they will not be liable for punishment. Apart from this, due to the lack of individual responsibility, no person can be singled out as an offender and thus punished.

Men and women alike are the objects of sex stereotyping in the media. Trade observers say though the marked change in the way women are projected onscreen by Bollywood is welcome, the change is superficial and the reasons are economic. “Established actors are mostly working in their own productions or their charges are beyond the reach of most producers. As a result, producers hype the sex-component in low-budget films that are nothing more than glamourised C-grade films to attract crowds,”71 said an observer. For Bollywood, a "bold" and "modern" woman has come to mean a skimpily clad female. Thus, we find a swelling slew of low-budget films that are seemingly women-oriented but, according to observers, treat women like sex objects. Similarly, in all the recent spat of films based on older woman-younger man relationships, the women has been shown as a pitiable character who is not in control of her life. Says commentator Deepa Gehlot: “It must be unthinkable for the Hindi filmmaker to imagine a female character who is happy and fulfilled without the conventional notions of 'love'. 72

Women are often represented in archetypal feminine and caring roles or as sex objects. The stereotyped beauty myth attached to them has been most strongly criticized by women who face barriers to their advancement for reasons of race, age, ethnicity and disability. Early critics simply requested the removal of stereotyped portrayals or negative images of women, not taking into account that a value judgement was attached to any critique of so-called negative and positive images. The Beijing Platform for Action reflects new thinking when it states “Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women’s diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world.”73 It asks for a “balanced portrayal of women and girls in their multiple roles”74 and encourages the “use of non-stereotyped, balanced and diverse images of women in the media.”75

Notwithstanding the great advance of science, equality, war, abridgement of human rights individual and corporate immorality are rampant. Women are advertised and vulgarized as a consummate commodity, annually two million girls are genitally mutilated, two million are forced into prostitution, and one in every three women in the world is a victim of violence. (BBC Program aired on 6-3-2004).
Effects of violence: Variables in the visual medium

The variables that give rise to sexual violence in India are undoubtedly numerous and complex. However, for feminist media scholars, the idea that popular cinema plays a significant role in shaping notions about gender roles and gender identities within the Indian context is of special interest and concern (Bagchi, 1996; Ram, 2002). Cinema has been a dominant medium in India because of the sheer size and reach of its indigenous film industry. The Indian film industry produces about 800 feature films annually—the highest in the world (National Film Development Corporation). Not only does India produce the largest numbers of films in the world, but also a sizeable amount of film consumption is common among almost all age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographical locations within India (Derne, 1995). It is estimated that every week approximately 90-100 million Indian viewers go to the cinema halls to watch films (Nair, Barman, & Chattopadhyay, 1999). Many cinemagoers ritualistically make as many as 20-30 visits to the cinema hall in a month and repeatedly view a favorite film several dozens of times (Derne, 1999; Khare, 1985).

Amitabh Bachchan says, "The age group of 15-20 has accounted for more than 56% of the ticket buying public. Not surprisingly then, it is this segment that is wooed by filmmakers everywhere." According to the latest figures NCRB, reports, the youth groups in the age of 18-30 were responsible for 41% of the total heinous crimes -murder, rape, burglary, dacoity and kidnapping- in 2002. There is a desensitization to violence. "Some youths see it as a solution to day-to-day problems," argues Dr. Rajesh Parikh, psychiatrist at Mumbai’s Jaslok Hospital. Influenced by such violent images in the media, especially films, many young people feel that they can get away with anything. "This mistaken notion that crime is low risk and high gain is their motto" adds Parikh. Filmmaker Tanuja Chandra, whose film Dushman, dealt with the issue of rape, opines that rape is the product of a mind that believes that women are essentially subordinate to men. "Men who rape women have this ‘so-you-think-you-are-more-intelligent-and-I-will-show-you-that-I-can-overpower-you, mentality.' They feel that they are supermen by subduing a woman,’ she maintains. Bachchan also echoes the same concerns when he says, "Unabatedly though it is a form of entertainment that is a mirror to contemporary conditions, a reflection of the bright as well as the bleak aspects of everyday living."

Feminist scholars are particularly concerned that popular films in India too often portray women in stereotypical roles of subordination—accepting sexual violence as a normal part of relationships with men.
(Dasgupta & Hegde, 1988; Gandhi & Shah, 2002). Although little systematic research has explored the causal influences of Hindi films on sexual violence in India specifically, there is research in other cultures, particularly North America, that has explored the role of consumption of media portrayals of sexuality on viewers' behaviors. In this regard, some researchers have suggested that there is no causal relationship between access to sexually explicit material and the incidence of sexual crimes (Kutchinsky, 1991), that effects are observed only for individuals who are predisposed to be aggressive (Zillmann & Sapolsky, 1977), or that harmful effects are observed only for explicitly violent portrayals (Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987).

However, results of meta-analytic research suggest that there is a relationship between media consumption of sexually explicit materials (and particularly violent materials) and a number of variables related to sexual violence (Allen, D'Alessio, & Brezgel, 1995; Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995). These analyses reported that exposure to sexually explicit media (both violent and nonviolent) was associated with increased rape-myth acceptance and with increased subsequent aggression, especially among angered participants (Allen, D'Alessio, et al., 1995; Allen, Emmers, et al., 1995). In addition, researchers have also reported that consumption of sexually explicit media (both violent and nonviolent) may lead to increased sexual callousness, disregard or contempt for a woman's right to deny sexual access (Zillmann & Weaver, 1989). Similarly, other researchers have argued that consumption of media portrayals of sexual violence may lead to target desensitization—the belief that certain individuals are appropriate, natural, and safe targets of violence who are deserving of aggression (Check & Malamuth, 1985; Donnerstein & Berkowitz, 1981). Behavioral effects of exposure to sexually explicit material can take the form of imitation of new behaviors as well as lowered inhibitions to try out already learned behaviors (Russell, 1988). Finally, other researchers have examined the idea of sexual objectification, and have reported that the viewing of pornography can lead some male viewers to interpret subsequent interactions with women in inappropriate sexual or erotic terms (McKenzie-Mohr & Zanna, 1990).

In summary, although most of the research on the effects of sexual portrayals suggests that some types of explicit images, particularly those that contain aggression, can lead to harmful effects on viewers, there are some inconsistencies in the literature that have made it difficult to determine causal effects. These differences have been attributed to the types of stimulus materials employed, the types of populations studied (e.g., rapists/noncriminals, hypermasculine men, whether or not the participants are under the influence of alcohol, propensity to use force), the environment, and additional cultural factors (Harris & Scott, 2002). Despite these factors,
however, meta-analytic research that synthesized the body of literature in this area suggested that exposure to media portrayals of sexually explicit material can have a variety of effects on viewers' attitudes and behaviors, many of which are causes for concern (Allen, D'Alessio, et al., 1995; Allen, Emmers, et al., 1995; Harris & Scott, 2002).

“We overplay. Overdress. A floozy dress or tight pants tell the whole story. Or a platinum wig. Or spectacles or cleavage. Our women slide into easy character niches (tomboy Debbie, volatile Liz, kooky Liza)”

Rosen shows well the discrepancy between the images of women on the screen and the reality of their lives off screen. On screen, women were shown succeeding through wit in a series of comedies and gutsy dramas where they played “detectives, spies, con artists, private secretaries, molls, and especially reporters and editors” But, Rosen says, this was a “distortion of the truth of women’s social role. In the name of escapism, films were guilty of extravagant misrepresentations, exuding a sense of well being to the nation in general and women in particular. In fact, precisely the opposite was true.”

We are constantly aware of an alert, perceptive, judging intelligence behind the material, keenly aware of the trivial nature of the commercial films under discussion, of the obvious and nearly ridiculous sexism at work, of male directors’ pathetic needs to undercut women through the decades. Rosen asks rhetorically whether art reflects life or life art? She answers both questions affirmatively, because in the first case “films have been a mirror held up to society’s porous face. They therefore reflect the changing societal image of women—which, until recently, has not been taken seriously enough.” But life also reflects art “because of the magnetism of the movies—because their glamour and intensity and ‘entertainment’ are so distracting and seemingly innocuous—women accept their morality or values.”

For many years agencies of media have come under fire for their increasing reliance on sexual and violent content. The effects of this have been studies, debated, and tested, spawning a plethora of mass communication theories of media effects. Research into media violence and its possible effects has been conducted for many years. In the fifties and sixties, for example, there was major concern about the possible links between the portrayal of violence and juvenile delinquency and that concern has continued to the present day.

**Laboratory research into violence**

The classic pieces of laboratory research into violence are by Bandura, Berkowitz and Buss. All of them were conducted in the early sixties and were
to an extent a reflection of widespread concern in the USA about juvenile delinquency and its possible relationship with film and the then relatively new medium of TV.

Bandura was concerned to develop theories of learning beyond the simple stimulus-response theories of behaviourism. As part of his development of observational or social learning theory, Bandura was concerned to demonstrate that children, in addition to learning by response to reward or punishment as the behaviorists had demonstrated, also learnt by imitation, without the presence of reward or punishment. His investigation into the effects of violence involved the use of a film of a plastic doll, which was punched, kicked and generally maltreated. In the presence of the actual plastic doll, the young children who had seen the film displayed much greater aggression towards it than those who had not seen the film.

Berkowitz built upon Bandura's work. He concluded that media representation of aggression as justified was most likely to lead to real aggression. His experiment on a group of students exposed to violence showed that when the angered subject had the opportunity to behave aggressively towards all the experimenters, s/he behaved aggressively only towards the one who had angered her.

One of Buss's experiments was similar in design to Milgram's work on obedience to authority. It involved allowing subjects to administer electric shocks to a learner in an experiment to study the effects of punishment on learning. In fact, the experiment delivered no real shocks and had nothing to do with learning. The 'learner' merely acted pain. Prior to beginning the 'learning experiment' subjects had been shown a film of a violent beating. Those subjects who had seen 'the baddy' being beaten (rather than someone they might sympathize with) exhibited the greatest aggression in administering electric shocks.

Studies in this vein have all been subjected to criticism. One criticism is that it is probably not valid to draw conclusions about children's violence towards people from their violence towards a doll. Where Bandura's experiment is concerned, it should be noted that, immediately after seeing the film, children were led into the very room, which they had just seen in the film. Typically, children are anxious to please adults and, in this case, they had just seen film of an adult showing them how to behave in the room they now found themselves in, an example of what is known as 'experimenter demand'. In any case, aggression and violence in children may well be innate. They typically are aggressive towards their carer or towards other children, or throw tantrums in public, all ways of testing the carer's boundaries and through which they learn to contain their aggression. The explicit
demonstration of violence and aggression by a filmed adult seems under these circumstances bound to lead to aggressive behaviour on the part of the child, the experimenters thereby succeeding in confirming their original hypothesis.

Another criticism is that the laboratory environment is not real life. People behave differently in a laboratory environment. Some studies appear to have shown that the kind of behaviour imitated in the laboratory is in fact subject to controls outside the laboratory. One of the reasons that field studies generally show less effect than laboratory studies is almost certainly that the normal constraints and controls as to what is acceptable behaviour are suspended in the artificial laboratory environment. Another is the relative absence of experimenter demand.

In Bandura's experiment the sample sizes have been matched, as have the methods of selection of the experimental group and the control group. In effect, it becomes impossible to draw any firm conclusions because we don't know how representative they were. Although Bandura's experiment with the doll has been rightly criticized, it should be said in his defense that he recognized that the relatively simplistic conclusions drawn from the experiment were not the whole story and that, for example, people's perception of the legitimacy of violence could differ markedly depending on their position in society and that:

The critical question for social scientists to answer is not why some people who are subjected to aversive conditions aggress, but rather why a sizable majority of them acquiesce to dismal living conditions in the midst of affluent styles of life. To invoke the frustration-aggression hypothesis, as is commonly done, is to disregard the more striking evidence that severe privation generally produces feelings of hopelessness and massive apathy.6

A criticism of Berkowitz's work is that subjects may well have acted the way they did because they thought that's what the experimenter expected of them - experimenter demand. Finally, in an experiment by Mueller, Donnerstein and Hallam, subjects were treated either kindly or neutrally and were then shown a violent film, a neutral film or no film. The experiment found no effects at all for aggression, but subjects who had been treated kindly and were then shown a violent film acted more pro-socially than any other subjects. We can hardly conclude from this that exposure to media violence encourages pro-social activity, but we can certainly conclude that it doesn't necessarily (at least within the laboratory) encourage anti-social activity. What we may perhaps conclude is that there is evidence of an
'arousal effect' and that, taking advantage of that effect virtually any response can be called forth in a laboratory experiment.\textsuperscript{87}

\textbf{Theories of mass audience: Films and their appeal.}

If one looks at the early history of the media, it is fairly easy to see where the idea of a mass audience came from. Within less than a hundred years photography, film, radio and television were all invented. Each one of them allowed works of art or pieces of entertainment that might once have been restricted to the number of people who could fit into an art gallery or a theatre to be transmitted in exactly the same form to enormous numbers of people in different parts of the world. It can be very easy, living in this media saturated world to forget how strange this might once have seemed. These media quickly became extremely popular and at the same time there was an important difference between them and older forms of entertainment. Whereas in the past, many forms of entertainment were only available to those who could afford them, now suddenly films and radio particularly were available to all. Early media theorists struggled to understand this and found it easiest to compare the media audiences with the kinds of crowds they were used to from the world before the media- they came up with the ideas of the mass audience. Here is how the sociologist Herbert Blumer described it in 1950:

\begin{quote}
First, its membership may come from all walks of life, and from all distinguishable social strata; it may include people of different class position, of different vocation, of different cultural attainment, and of different wealth. ..... Secondly, the mass is an anonymous group, or more exactly is composed of anonymous individuals. [Blumer means anonymous in the sense that unlike the citizens of earlier communities, the people who are members of the mass audience for the media do not know each other]. Third, there exists little interaction or change of experience between members of the mass. They are usually physically separated from one another, and, being anonymous, do not have the opportunity to mill as do members of the crowd. Fourth, the mass is very loosely organised and is not able to act with the concertedness or unity of a crowd.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

There have been a number of theories over the years about how exactly the media work on the mass audience. Perhaps the simplest to understand is the hypodermic syringe this has been very popular down the years with many people who fear the effects of the media. According to the theory the media is like a syringe which injects ideas, attitudes and beliefs into the audience who as a powerless mass have little choice but to be influenced- in other words, you watch something violent, you may go and do something violent. This
theory has been particularly popular when people have been considering violence in films.

Because of the difficulty of proving the effects of individual media texts on their audience a more refined version of the theory has been created called the cultivation model: According to this, while any one media text does not have too much effect, years and years of watching more violence could turn audiences less sensitive to violence, years and years of watching women being mistreated in films would make us less bothered about it in real life. Some critics of these kind of theories have argued that the problem is not just with the idea that the media has such obvious effects, but about the assumptions that mass audience theory makes about the members of the audience. Critics of the idea often claim that it is elitist- in other words that it suggests a value judgment about these masses- that they are easily led and not so perceptive and self- aware as the theorists who are analysing them.

A theory that springs from this idea is called the two-step flow. The idea of this is that whatever our experience of the media we will be likely to discuss it with others and if we respect their opinion, the chances are that we will be more likely to be affected by it. (The theory calls these people opinion leaders.)

**Uses and Gratifications**

This is probably the most important theory for us to know. According to uses and gratification theory, we all have different uses for the media and we make choices over what we want to watch. In other words, when we encounter a media text, it is not just some kind of mindless entertainment- we are expecting to get something from it: some kind of ratification. But what does this actually mean? What kinds of gratification can we be getting? In general researchers have found

**Personal Identity**- we may watch the television or films in order to look for models for our behaviour. So, for example, we may identify with characters that we see in sitcoms. The characters help us to decide what feel about ourselves and if we agree with their actions and they succeed we feel better about ourselves.

**Integration and Social Interaction**- we use the media in order to find out more about the circumstances of other people. Watching a film helps us to empathise and sympathise with the lives of others so that we may even end up thinking of the characters in a film. Unfortunately nobody identifies with a victim specially the image of a battered woman in Indian cinema.

**Entertainment**- sometimes we simply use the media for enjoyment, relaxation or just to fill time. One can probably recognise oneself in some of these descriptions and not surprisingly uses and gratification theory has become
quite popular amongst media critics. It is important to remember with this theory that it is likely that with any media text one enjoys, one will be getting a number of gratifications from it and not just one.

However, despite this popularity amongst critics, there have also been criticisms made of some features of the theory. First of all, it ignores the fact that we do not always have complete choice as to what we receive from the media. For example one does not have that much choice about the posters that one sees everyday however objectionable one may find some of them. A second problem relates to this last example. The poster that one sees on a billboard, may be extremely sexist. However, one clearly cannot choose a different poster that one would want to see, that one might find more pleasant. If we are made to think about it, this problem also affects us in our other encounters with the media- we generally have to choose the media that we consume from what is available. This undermines the idea of uses and gratifications- we may not all have the same potential to use and enjoy the media products that we want. In society there are in fact plenty of minorities who feel that the media does not provide for them the texts that they want to use.

It has been something of a cliché to observe that despite many decades of research and hundreds of studies, the connections between people's consumption of the mass media have remained persistently elusive. Indeed researchers have enjoyed an unusual degree of patience from their scholarly and more public audiences. (Gauntlett, 1995). Thus Sonia Livingstone (1996) argues that despite the volume of research, the debate about media effects ... remains unresolved and Rob Reiner in his meticulous survey of research for The Oxford Handbook of Criminology notes that: the meagre conclusion from the expenditure of countless research hours and dollars is primarily a testimony to the limitations of empirical social science ... because the armoury of possible research techniques for assessing directly the effects of media images on crime is sparse and suffers from evident and long-recognized limitations."89

The public first expressed concerns over the potential harmful effects of media exposure during the explosive growth in movies in the 1920's. Researchers responded to these concerns in a series of studies called the Payne Fund Studies, which included both a content analysis of movies and a survey of public responses to the movies (Blumer, 1933; Dale, 1935). In the survey portion of the study, many people reported having directly imitated acts of violence viewed in movies, fueling both the concern of the public and the curiosity of researchers. Social scientists have been studying the effects of media violence ever since.
Potter (1999) provides a concise summary of the overall findings from seven decades of research on the potential effects of media violence. He groups the findings into two categories: short-term and long-term effects of exposure to media violence. Potter explains that short-term effects are immediate effects that occur either during one single exposure or shortly thereafter (up to one hour later). These short-term effects can last up to several weeks, however. Long-term effects of media violence exposure, on the other hand, do not show up after one exposure. Long-term effects are a cumulative process; they are effects that develop after long-term, repeated exposure to media violence. Once a long-term media effect occurs, it typically lasts for a long time. Potter isolates three major short-term effects of exposure to media violence. First, exposure to media violence can lead to viewer aggression. Another important short-term effect of exposure to violence, as proposed by Potter (1999), is desensitization. After exposure to violence, some viewers' level of arousal and emotional responses decrease. People become jaded and as a result, are less concerned while watching scenes of violence and mayhem. Some potential consequences of desensitization are a greater acceptance of violence and a decrease in empathy and concern for victims of violence (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984).

Potter also summarizes the four major categories of effects that are considered to be long-term effects of violence exposure. First, long-term exposure to media violence is related to the level of aggression in a person's life. This finding is largely supported by correlational studies that compare the amount of an adult's exposure to media violence to their aggressive behavior. Studies consistently support the notion that individuals who watch high levels of media violence tend to be more aggressive people. These studies acknowledge that media exposure is not the only factor contributing to aggressive behavior, but its contribution is significant. Another long-term effect is that media violence is related to violence in society.

Researchers have argued that yet another long-term effect of violence exposure is that it leads people to think they have a strong likelihood of being a victim of crime. Researchers working under the framework of cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986) Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980) are largely responsible for the research conducted in this area. Cultivation theory says that long-term exposure to television impacts the ways in which individuals see the world. Because the television landscape is ultimately very violent, according to these theorists, heavy viewers of television are likely to cultivate the belief that the world is a mean and violent place. The final long-term effect summarized by Potter is the increased likelihood that people will be accepting of violence after long-term exposure. This long-term effect is related to the short-term desensitization
effect; it involves the gradual desensitizing of viewers to the plight of victims including a lack of sympathy for them.

Potter (1999) makes one final observation regarding the above short- and long-term effects of media violence: aggression, fear, and other responses to media violence are heavily mediated by situational factors such as viewer demographics, viewer traits, and characteristics of the portrayal, situational cues, and viewer states. For example, demographic factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity impact the way in which audience members receive media violence portrayals. Younger children and boys are more affected by media violence, while minorities and individuals from low socio-economic groups experience greater exposure to media violence. Viewer traits such as their socialization against aggression, intelligence, cognitive processing, and personality type also mediate the effects process. Characteristics in the violent portrayals themselves also impact viewer responses. For example, viewer responses may vary based on the rewards and punishments received by characters, the justification of the violence, and the realism of the portrayal, production techniques, and the presence of weapons.

Malamuth (1993) suggested that there were differences between the effects on men and women of this sort of projection. Men who watched two movies portraying positive consequences of violence against women seemed to develop an increased acceptance of interpersonal violence. Women who saw the same material tended to become less accepting, but for them the differences were not statistically significant. When asked whether men were likely to get influenced by violent portrayals of women on the screen, he categorically agreed. Prior to participating in his study, he questioned his subjects about a number of their sexual attitudes, including their self-perceived likelihood of raping. Participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale ranging from "not at all likely" to "very likely" as to whether they would commit rape if they could be assured that they would not be caught and punished. Malamuth found that the "high likelihood of raping" men—men who were more aggressively inclined to begin with—were most likely to be influenced by media stimuli. And they were also more likely to be accepting of violence in the real world.

What's important to remember is that this sort of research supports the notion of a continuum. We tend to think of a "rapist" as being quite different from a "normal" individual, but that's not necessarily so. We're actually talking about aggressive tendencies that may exist to greater or lesser degree in many so-called "normal" men. That's why the kinds of attitudes that are created are so important.
Sexually violent material can contribute to a social climate in which violence against women is more accepted and thus may be more likely to occur. The consumer of this material may never commit an aggressive act. But sexually violent material may affect other aspects of some individuals' relationships with women. Then why are such images so popular? Researchers like Malamuth think that films have been breaking into that previously taboo zone. Or it may be a partial reaction to the women's movement in which men who are threatened by societal changes express their anger. Thus, violent portrayals in the media do not affect all audience members in the same way. Media portrayals do not act like "magic bullets" and infect all audience members identically; rather, responses vary based on individual and situational differences. Social scientists are no longer focused on determining whether or not exposure to media violence leads to harmful effects: that connection is well established. The focus for most media scholars at present is creating a solution to the problem.

In light of the plethora of potential harmful effects of violent media exposure, one might assume that media scholars would support efforts to censor the entertainment industry. Although that might be a solution for some scholars, most instead support media literacy programs to combat the problem. Media literacy is a perspective designed to give audiences greater control over media messages by teaching them to place media messages within an appropriate context (Potter, 1998). Scholars advocating media literacy have reached out to parents, educators, and policymakers to try to develop and implement programs to encourage responsible media use in both youths and adults.

In sum, media scholars consider themselves to be fully knowledgeable regarding the potentially harmful effects of media violence exposure. Through media literacy programs, they have attempted to spread this knowledge from the ivory towers to the public outside. Despite these efforts, the public is still largely "out of the loop" with regards to what we know about media effects. Their lack of knowledge may be caused, in part, by the entertainment industry itself, which tries (knowingly or otherwise) to perpetuate the myth that we do not know how the media affects people.

Violence in film certainly seems to be a contributing causal factor in the increasing crime rate, although there are people who say it isn't. Margaret Ervin Bruder, in her essay, *Aestheticizing Violence, or How to Do Things with Style*, 1994 deconstructs several films, and argues that highly stylized violence in films can be viewed as a commentary on new ways of thinking about the complex cultural interactions in our world. She argues that those who criticize such violence in movies simply don't understand this new language of film and how audiences relate to it. Critics have also defended violence in film by
saying it may have a cathartic value. Others argue that it desensitizes people to real violence, making them more violence-prone. Tom Laughlin, actor, director and producer in Hollywood for many years, recently published an essay on the topic of violence in the media. In the essay, he writes:

"There are two decisive questions that must be answered in the debate about whether or not entertainment and media violence, especially films, cause violence in our society. Do films have the power to influence human beliefs, attitudes and behavior? Is violence in films and the media a major cause of violence in the world today?" He answers both questions in the affirmative.

Of course, violence in films has been around for decades, but the inappropriate use of violence as a plot resolution device is much more popular today than before. Were we inclined towards an essentialization of the cinematic apparatus, we might be tempted to assume that, most of the films coming out of our industry', to illustrate Michel Mourlet's point that "cinema is the art most attuned to violence," or to underline Rick Trader Witcombe's assertion that part of the reason for the special affinity between violence and film might lie in what he calls the "brutality of the camera eye". Perhaps because of his experience of the visceral pleasures of violent films, Philip French also seems desirous of attaching a form of violence to the nature of the apparatus. He writes,

"... it can be maintained that the flickering passage of twenty-four frames per second through the projector, the vertiginous movement of the camera, the continuous shifting of view point, the rapid change of image in both size and character, the very idea of montage, make films--irrespective of their subjects--a violent experience for the audience." Yet to avoid the problematic involved in asserting any ontology of the film image, it might be safer to simply acknowledge that film violence, as a number of film critics ranging from David Thomson to Linda Williams have noted, has its own special form of beauty. In that violent images encourage us to take pleasure in the spectacular representation of other people's pain, our fascination with them may be difficult to justify. However, if recent movie attendance serves as evidence, it seems that we do manage in one way or another to get around our moral qualms, not just in the United States, in that "most violent of Western societies," but in the rest of the world as well.

As film producer Larry Gordon acknowledges, one of the chief reasons for the industry's attraction to "the action genre" is that violence "travels well..." Despite the commercial appeal of film violence, very few critics have found comfortable ways of discussing it. Historically critics tend to fall into
two categories on the subject. Those critics who see film violence as style, as superficial and exploitative, argue that it leads us to a "desensitization to brutality" and thereby increases aggressivity. Those who view it as content, as theme, claim it serves a "cathartic or dissipating effect...", providing acceptable outlets for anti-social impulses. If it is to merit social justification, then, violence must apparently replicate what R. L. Rutsky and Justin Wyatt, in their article "Serious Pleasures: Cinematic Pleasure and the Notion of Fun," refer to as "serious pleasures" or "the pleasures of rational critique"; it must, to paraphrase McKinney, be deep enough so that "empathies are... engaged, commitments are... brought to bear, ambivalences are... acknowledged". Such pleasure stands in a kind of contrast to another form, that Rutsky and Wyatt discuss in terms of "non-serious pleasure" or "fun" which "cannot be figured in terms of depth" and which encourages a mode of viewing that "slides over the surface of a text like a passing glance, never staying fixed for long, never 'anchoring' itself in the depths of meaning, character identification or imagistic fascination". A film violence which lends itself to such a mode of viewing is seductive in the same way that Friedrich Nietzsche found the "decadent" art of Wagner's Operas to be, calling us towards "style" or "effect" and away from "truth." Our discomfort with the attractiveness of style, particularly that aspect of it which can lead us to forget content, is one basis for our anxiety in accepting violence on "purely" aesthetic grounds. Yet as Nietzsche also notes, such an attention to surfaces is not without its own rewards.

If one attempts to break up this dichotomy of strong (deep) and weak (surface) violence by suggesting that what would be for McKinney the very weakest form--the aestheticized violence found in a number of recent commercial films--ultimately does make sense, though perhaps of a kind which defies conventional constructions of truth as "depth." In a similar fashion, further investigation seems to blur the boundaries traditionally erected between the "visual pleasure" and "political" cinema as constructed by seventies film critics like Laura Mulvey and Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni. By remaining within the possibilities these theorists have granted in relation to both the significance of violence and of style in films--that certain manifestations of film violence should be condemned as gratuitous while others are socially meaningful, or that certain stylistic approaches are complicitous while others are progressive--we are forced to reduce suchcinematic thrills to mere guilty pleasure. The recent increase in the stylization of violence in the mainstream cinema must have something to say about the culture consuming and producing it, and it is my intention to locate some avenues through which we might engage that discussion.
Embedded within both the political and the popular culture's tendency towards an aestheticization of violence is a mobilization of the image, which Arjun Appadurai connects specifically to post-industrial culture. He notes; "people, machinery, money, images, and ideas now follow increasingly non-isomorphic paths:...the sheer speed, scale and volume of each of these flows is now so great that the disjunctures have become central to the politics of the global culture." Appadurai's reading of global economic culture is consistent with Jim Collins' assessment of certain trends in the New Hollywood film, exemplified by some filmmakers attempts "to incorporate the array that now forms the 'imaginative landscape' of contemporary cultural life". And stars and genres have traditionally been employed as a form of shorthand, serving, as Andrew Britton notes, as both "embodiments" and "mediators" of certain kinds of contradictions. Their appearance in current films seems aimed towards less "constructive" ends.

One of the most interesting aspects of these films is the way in which they put themselves into cultural play through a process of dispersal, a centrifugal force created in part by references to genre and star image, but also to other films and media products. The film makes the consumer of cinematic images, in Timothy Corrigan's words, into a "tourist" who enters the alien city of the film text and makes it personally meaningful by taking parts home with him as if they were snapshots or souvenirs. In addition, the capacity for manipulation, and thereby, fetishization of the video image dramatically changes the nature of our reception of texts. As a result, spectator action becomes "radical bricolage, the play with and reassembly of signifiers from strikingly different cultures and contexts". This is particularly significant in films which exploit the kind of violence, since the spectacular moments almost beg to be rewound and reviewed.

This proliferation of images, along with our ability to manipulate and decontextualize them, serves as both the result and the basis for Collins' hyperconscious media. He suggests that "[t]he omnipresence of what Umberto Eco has called the 'already said,' now represented and recirculated as the still-being-said, is not just a matter of an ever-accumulating number of texts ready to be accessed, but also involves a transformation of the cultural terrain that contemporary genre films must somehow make sense of, or map". In contrast to the ephemeral film experience of the Classical era, where the film arrived at the theater, played for a few days, and then disappeared into studio archives, the image abundance of the present provides for a participatory method of viewing resulting both from the overwhelming plenitude and the ordinariness of those images. As Rutskey and Wyatt note in discussing "fun" texts, "... the images, often drawn from popular culture, do not generally carry
the aauratic force of the radically other; they are not mysterious, but obvious. Indeed, fun seems to result not so much from the images themselves but from a playful recombination that has little respect for either the seriousness of rationality or the fascination of the other".105

To a large extent, then, the individual film plots are not really that important. Narrative serves rather as a space for generating the various signs which are put into circulation or which are already in circulation and merely picked up and carried forward by imitations. Like the rhizome, any individual cinematic moment can function as a cultural sign which "can be connected to anything other, and must be".106 Involved as Hindi films are with textual, generic and star signs, the stylized violence they contain ultimately serves as just another interruption in the narrative drive. One might go so far as to say that these films recognize what matinee fans have always known, that narratives often only support other, more interesting aspects of Bollywood film--stars and spectacles--which can constantly be used and recycled to serve individual desires. In this they mirror Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) "semiotic chain" which "is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, slangs, and specialized languages".107 In such a "nonserious" realm, in the space where the "fun" of popular films can serve as "the limit of seriousness, the space where seriousness begins to make fun of itself".108 Also we find the possibility of considering the potentials for the new relations being formed between ourselves, our cultures, and our images.

*He [the Indian viewer] attaches little value to acting and loves very little to see whether a story is pertaining to life or not. To be short[,] the most popular film with him is that which is cramped with all sorts of impossibilities.... He has his own darlings and if they appear on screen he will shout and clap his hands with joy so as to startle the few people sitting in the high price seats behind him.*109

These simple people are mostly to be found in the two-anna pit in our local cinemas. They sincerely believe that their favourites truly perform all the extraordinary feats shown on screen. To argue with them and say that their favourites are only acting and could not really do any of those stunning feats is very dangerous. Some hundred champions will rise up and defend their favourite hero or heroine. You cannot convince them. They will silence you with their hooting. 110 Media messages can also affect the social climate that could influence behavior. That doesn't mean these individuals are ever going to commit a rape. It's clear that rapists have sexually violent fantasies, but not everyone who has sexually violent fantasies is a rapist. perhaps we do have to
ask about the effects of repeated exposure to sexually violent material over a long period. For some people the distinction between fantasy and reality may not always be very clear.

Media portrayals can promote the view that women desire violence; they can transform sensitive individuals' view of rape to make it seem more acceptable and not such an abhorrent act. They may never commit an actual rape. But exposure to this kind of material can contribute to changes in their belief structure— and these can be changes for the worse (Malamuth). As sociologist Dipankar Gupta says, "Obviously, access to higher forms of technology and glitzier forms of entertainment do not make people modern. It all depends in the ultimate analysis, on how we relate to other people and to what extent we are willing to shake off those mores and practices that draw their sustenance from primodial and ritualistic concerns." Therefore, just being out there dressed up to show a modern, brazen image with a stammering of English and half a dozen of extra marital affairs does not necessarily mean that women are shown to be progressive, deep down the conservatism unfolds, the changeover comes in through the efforts of the man who moulds his woman in accordance with his needs.

It is pointless to compare our films with the West because our society has its own limitations. Certain ideas will be unacceptable to our audience. A film like Disclosure for instance, where a woman sexually harasses a male co-worker is alien to us. We don't see women as powerful entities. Even today most heroes will tell you "I want a homely wife who will take care of my kids and look after the house." Only when women progress will the scripts progress too. –Shah Rukh Khan
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