CHAPTER 3
Desiring Men of India: A Critique of the Heroes’ Carnal Desires

Merchant Ivory films are renowned for their treatment of a large range of issues from those affecting a householder to that of a Nawab. These movies highlight the private gendered interactions of the protagonists with Indian and foreign women: British and American. The nodal point of these interactions is hinged on desire: a strong feeling for someone or something to happen. Interestingly, Shashi Kapoor, the protagonist of all the select movies becomes the repository of the carnal desires of Indian men in his relation with both Indian and Western men. The Indian man, through the protagonist, becomes a hyper sexualized being, in all its obviousness. Sexuality, “a central aspect of being human throughout life, (which) encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction” (WHO, 2006). By highlighting sexuality, the sexual anxieties of the heroes are opened up to expose the inbuilt traditional biases of the nation.

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of India through the heroes, in the select films of the renowned Merchant Ivory Productions, as ironic incarnations especially in terms of their sexuality. Prem, the hero of The Householder, is critiqued with a gendered nostalgia. Consequently, the play-boy and chocolate heroes of Shakespeare Wallah and Bombay Talkie respectively portray the ambiguity and the confused romance with Indian and foreign women. In Heat and Dust, the Nawab re-establishes miscegenation through his exertion of power over Olivia, the British Administrator’s wife. This chapter concentrates on the representation of male sexuality, “expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships” (WHO) and its anxiety in The Householder, Shakespeare Wallah, Bombay Talkie, and Heat and Dust, keeping the cultural transformations of the Hindi film industry in the background. It also focuses on the representation and positioning of
different genders (male, female and hijra) in the private and public sphere of life and their heterosexual and homosexual interactions, spotlighting the role of the protagonists in the selected film texts.

For a close-look at the sexuality of the heroes in these movies, they are analyzed in tandem with the Hindi films that are released in foreign nations from 1960-1985 (Appendix F). In addition, we can see that, the select MIPs were released in the European Union nations - Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom. For the convenience of study, the researcher has selected Hindi films released in the West during that time span. This deliberately excludes those films released for any film festivals and released before 1960 and after 1985, since the last Merchant Ivory film of the study was released in 1983. As a result, 90 Hindi films are selected for analysis. From these the stock themes/storylines of the time could be easily traced. In the 60s, there were only two Hindi movies belong to this category- *Arzoo* (1965) and *Ankhen* (1968). *Arzoo* portrays the triumph of love over fate, while the spy thriller *Anken* is on terrorist attacks in Independent India. In the 1970s there was a wide variety of stock themes, like betrayal and loss of love, orphanhood, identity crisis, treachery and corruption in society, conflicts of Eastern and Western world-views, relations inside families, class difference, separation of siblings and their reunion, miscegenation, rural development programmes, superstition and black magic, and the conflicts in a triangular relationships. In the early half of the 1980s, films documented issues such as the corruption in the legal/judicial system, the abduction of the powerless, rivals against the British, the caste system and untouchability, life and business in the criminal world/underworld, along with the common theme of romance through genres like satire, action drama and psychological thrillers.

MIP’s Indian films exemplify the hybridity and the problematic of the inter-twinning of Indian and Western cultures right from the first movie, *The Householder* (1963), onwards. In the Hindi cinema of the 1960s, the male body can be seen as the text that

47 A solidarity of 28 states of Europe, politically and economically united, formed in 1958, January 1st.
goes beyond various religious, linguistic and regional boundaries. Popular films like *Hum Dono* (1961), *Chinatown* (1962), *Love in Tokyo* (1966), *Mera Naam Joker* (1967), *An Evening in Paris* (1967), etc. exemplify “the ‘enigma’ of (male) subjectivity and the need for the disavowal of fixed notions of identity” (Chakravarty, 200). In contrast to the roles of the male characters, women become the embodiment of obedient and loyal preservers of traditional values. Interestingly, another category of women characters become the upholders of modernity, and iconoclasts of their own bondages. This contrasting stereotype is the result of “the hypocrisy that equates independence and modernity with badness is very much a product of the middle class morality that pervades Indian films” (Butalia, 109). Another interesting factor in the industry is the presence of item dance. The dancers’ presence and performance in the ‘hypersexualized’ space satisfy the illicit voyeuristic desires of the audience through “transgressive sexual relations” (Dwyer, 68).

Sexuality, which encompasses the “ideas about pleasure and physiology, fantasy and anatomy”, defines “both internal and external phenomena, and both the realm of the psyche and the material world” (Bristow, 1). Merchant Ivory production’s films of India like *The Householder* (1963), *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965), *Bombay Talkie* (1970) and *Heat and Dust* (1983) are portrayals of the socio-cultural changes in pre and post-independent India. Concurrently, except in *The Householder*, these films give a detailed illustration of miscegenation and the sexual anxiety of Indian men while mingling with foreign women. Signifiers of language and costume of the characters influence the spectators “both identify and nullify marks of (intercultural) difference in a wide variety of textual situations” (Chakravarty, 200). *Shakespeare Wallah* and *Bombay Talkie* are significant in the film heritage of the MIP, as both historicize the literary, cultural and aesthetic trends of the newly Independent nation, India of the 60s and 70s. Through Shashi Kapoor these films document another face of India, and explores question regarding miscegenation, misogyny and xenophobia. As far as *Shakespeare Wallah* is concerned, parallel to the introduction of the heroine, Lizzie who appears in Elizabethan costume, the hero Sanju is portrayed as a playboy, superficially English in taste. Eventually, his inner conflicts about his Western lover’s sexuality make him synonymous with the traditional Indian man. Parallel to this, in *Bombay Talkie*, the
American novelist heroine Lucia is introduced into the studio of a Bombay film, where the stunning hero Vikram discusses his role. His charming costume, physique and feminine and charismatic performance remind us of the cult of the chocolate heroes of the 70s, epitomized by Rajesh Khanna. The heroine is fully attracted to the hallucinogenic world of the Bombay film industry, and more to its romantic hero Vikram. Through the Nawab of Heat and Dust we also get a clear picture about the illicit relationship between an Indian ruler and white women, which connotes the affection of Nehru and Mrs. Mountbatten (Edwina), wife of the last British Viceroy and first Governor –General of Independent India. Shakespeare Wallah, Bombay Talkie and Heat and Dust are biographic in nature as they replicate Shashi Kapoor’s romance with the Shakespearean actress Jennifer Kendal.

3.1. Gendering Nostalgia in The Householder

The Householder makes use of nostalgia, ‘a sentimentality for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations’, to unravel the problems of a newly married couple. The movie develops its plot around the flashback of the hero, Prem, in his rented home in Delhi. The flashback begins with Prem’s musings of his early maladjusted days with his newly wedded wife, Indu. Almost all the main characters are engaged in nostalgic reminiscences throughout the movie. The major ekin of the movie is thus the longing for a pristine past, which is a tantamount to the condition of a disappointed new generation. Here, we can observe that the past is idealized through memory and desire. The temporality of the past more than its spatiality, modulates the nostalgic reminisces, which ‘exiles (us) from the present as it brings the imagined past near’ (Hutcheon, 1998).

Prem’s emotional response to his present state of affairs makes him nostalgic about his family and friends, which was “the simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful, or harmonious past” (Hutcheon, 1998). Private and collective memories of the protagonist render clues about the struggles of the youth to come into terms with the turbulences of a developing country under the euphoric leadership of Nehru. On one occasion, Prem’s reminiscence fades into the excerpt of a film song of his favorite actress Nimmy; “Aye mere dil kahin
aur chal…”⁴⁸ which mirrors his longing for a secure place, from the ‘unexpected and the untoward’ (Lowenthal, 1985) present. In juxtaposition to this, we can see the mundane, dull life of Indu as a housewife, lying on the bed, reading books, posing in front of the mirror, ‘a principal metaphor for both sinful vanity and truthful introspection’ (Manukyan, 2009), etc, with pigeons in the roof and a rattling fan in the background. Through this she tries to assuage the monotony and boredom of housewife. Even within the marriage tie Indu tries to search for her identity. The camera frames are also pertinently arranged to invoke nostalgia. In one frame, Prem approaches Indu with ladoos while she combs her long hair in front of the mirror.

In Indu’s absence too we can see Prem’s occurrence in that (her private) space, i.e. in front of her mirror and shelf, in many scenes (Fig.3.1). At the climax of movie we can see the romance of Prem and Indu in front of the mirror, behind the curtain. She realizes the happiness she always longed for.

Fig.3.1 Prem writes a letter to Indu in front of her mirror.

In Indu’s absence too we can see Prem’s occurrence in that (her private) space, i.e. in front of her mirror and shelf, in many scenes (Fig.3.1). At the climax of movie we can see the romance of Prem and Indu in front of the mirror, behind the curtain. She realizes the happiness she always longed for.

⁴⁸ This song has been taken from the movie Daag (1952), Singer: Talat Mehamood.

“Aye mere dil kahin aur chal
aur chal…” It means,
‘Oh my heart, move to another place
I’m over with this world of pain
Now find some new home’.
Just like Indu and Prem, the aged mother-in-law too lives in the world of nostalgia as she cherishes the sweet memories of her late husband and children. Her reminiscences and collection of old photographs exemplify her egotistic attachment and possessiveness to the memories of the past. Women’s identities are constructed not only through the conventional practices in the outside world, but also through the self-reflexive processes like watching mirror images. In the words of the feminist-psychologist Carmen Williams, “the values, expectations, and norms associated with gender in our society powerfully affect women’s self-perception and behavior” (28). In this film, Indu became a self-reliant woman and, at the same time satisfies the gendered notions of married life too. Prem’s insistence on cooking and tidiness, a “spic and span” house and her mother in law’s loveless relations make her feel depressed and inferior in the family.

As a result of the prevalence of the *ghar* and *bahir* dichotomy of the time, the domains of women and men are restricted respectively. The *bahir* phenomenon by extension becomes anything which is outside, means the profaneness of the outside world, a replica of the West. The costume of Indu in the establishing shot of the movie gives a clear picture of the traditional concepts of dressing up. Her confusion, whether she should select a ‘pink or a blue sari’ for the wedding, places her as one among

![Fig. 3.2 Sanju becomes a stereotypical husband.](image-url)
stereotypical Indian women, fusing about clothes and ornaments. A typical Indian husband, Prem always asks her to emulate his mother in cooking and in housekeeping. He even tells her that she does not have any other work in the house, compared to his busy schedule in college. The camera renders a new visual life to capture the homesick Prem who is not at all satisfied with his present home. Subtle shots of a weeping Indu are also juxtaposed in the movie. Prem’s sexist or male-centered language unsettles Indu, who is portrayed as uneducated and sentimental. Prem is also a typical middle class Indian male who has to constantly choose between his mother and wife. In certain deft symbolisms too Prem’s suffering is poignantly captured in the movie.

Merchant Ivory Productions introduce both twist dance, the predecessor of ‘item dance’, and ‘femme fatale’ in India, through the character Bobo. Her twist dance complicates the conflict of Eastern and Western concepts of aesthetics, insider-outsider dichotomy and self-expression. Prem’s astonishing comments on her dance to Indu clearly bring to screen the cultural cleavage of different classes in India and the ‘urban anxiety about women’s sexuality’ (Mazumdar, 79). With respect to the moral discourse, Bobo’s dance resembles that of a ‘westernized vamp, pitted against the female protagonist’. Even, the name Bobo is a playful western one, which does not have any Sanskrittc/ Indian origin, like other Indian characters’ like Prem, Indu, Sohan Lal, Raj, etc

The setting of the movie is limited mainly to Prem’s personal (rented home and Raj’s home) and the official (classroom and staff room) spaces. Gender based discrimination in India is pictured throughout the movie through the families of Prem and his friend Raj, different from that of Mr. Khanna and Mr. Sehgal. While Prem’s and Raj’s struggling wives are secluded inside the house, Mrs. Khanna and Mrs. Sehgal become symbols of the upper middle class housewives. This categorizes the public and the private spaces assigned to both men and women with respect to their relationship to the external world and class positions: i.e. the upper middle-class women were secluded in andarmahals,⁴⁹ like the house-owner’s wife. Just like a traditional middle-class

⁴⁹ Used by Ranjani Mazumdar to describe the palace interiors.
housewife, Indu’s exposure to the world is limited to the internal space of the home only, unlike the Principal’s wife, who exerts control over the college staff. Prem considers Indu as a docile woman, who does not know how to speak in front of others. Her lack of experience with the outside world is explicitly portrayed in the tea-party arranged by Khanna’s family, “the first of the ghastly and failed social occasions to be seen in many Merchant Ivory films” (Long, 44). For Indu, her world is limited within the traditional domestic space—family and friends. Women in the party reflect their status in society, through their way of talking, eating, etc. Mrs. Khanna, the socialite, seems to have authority over all the people there, while Indu is carefree while indulging with sweets and delicacies. Prem is embarrassed, but Indu is at ease with a typical village-belle naïveté. The party hall is huge and donned up in the Western styles, with refrigerators, high chandeliers and fans.

The unrestrained sexuality and license expressed in Bobo’s dance place her in the public space as an available, desirable and licentious commodity. As a result of the confrontation of nationalism and colonialism, ‘women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated’ (Mani, 1989). Indu does a blind imitation of the dance, which is inappropriate for a married woman in the words her mother-in-law. Here, the control of a woman’s body is in key to the space she creates for herself in the society. Bobo’s sensual letting go of the body is interpreted as licentious, while Indu is asked to again and again to control her body and thereby take control of her sexuality. We can also see that the freedom of a woman is restricted within the private sphere of home while Prem’s mother warns him to restrict her freedom to behave like the wife of a college lecturer, and daughter-in-law of a college Principal. Women are deliberately neglected in Prem’s college and they are restricted to the positions of teacher or student. In Nehruvian time, “Challenging the patriarchal ethos of our society had never been on the agenda of the Indian state … women were back to their iconic roles within the family, (Where, women education was a means to) better homes, better family and better society” (Banerjee, WS2).

50 That, Indu should not laugh and dance even in front of her husband. She should be polite to her mother-in-law, and Should not spend her son’s money for bangle like things.
Indu’s rural life with her past friends under the fully bloomed vaka tree seems much more buoyant and happy than her present life in a rented home (Fig. 3.3).

![Image](image)

**Fig. 3.3** The nostalgic Indu in her husband’s home.

Indu’s longing for the past is veiled and brushed aside and the absence of any mention about her childhood, education and exposure to the outside world are unconscious patriarchal tools of ‘erasing’ and absenting the woman’s nostalgic experiential realm.

In the domestic spaces, we can see that Indu’s sexual energy is veiled. In one of the dress changing shots of Indu (Fig. 3.4), Prem is seen as correcting some papers and listening to the AIR news. Her silhouette through the curtain creates erotic nervousness in Prem; representing his timidity, which is explored in detail in the movie. Here, she becomes a “signifier of the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey, 834). The erotic encoding of nostalgia provides another face of Prem’s psyche. His obsessive voyeurism manifest in watching Indu as she changes her clothes evokes instinctual sexual desire.
It is quelled by his ego, which “continuous to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object” (Mulvey, 835). Prem’s active male gaze makes Indu the passive sexual object for the spectators, “to be looked at and displayed”, with her embedded strong visual and erotic appearance. At the end of the movie, as an indication of modernity, Indu rises to the level of the house owner’s wife as she engages in needle work during her free time, an imitation of the west.\textsuperscript{51}

### 3.2. The Playboy hero of *Shakespeare Wallah*

A ‘playboy’ is a wealthy man who behaves irresponsibly, spends his time to enjoy himself and is sexually promiscuous. In *Shakespeare Wallah*, Shashi Kapoor immortalizes the playboy concept of the industry through the womanizer, Sanju Roi. In the film, the entry of the romantic gallant Sanju to the troubled Shakespearean troupe at

night with his men and gun, and his first negligence to stop vehicle for them portrays him as a heroic figure (Fig. 3.5).

![Image](image.jpg)

Fig. 3.5 The introduction of Sanju in front of the theatre troupe at late night.

His role is heightened with its anglicized gimmicks, when Sanju doffs his hat like a gentleman, as he introduces himself to Lizzie. Her full blown smile in the background of soft music romanticizes her relation to Sanju. His fascination with the travelling troupe and billiards are examples of his interest, however superficial, in European culture.

Sanju’s gaze is an important vantage point in which multiple takes of conflict and desire are etched (Fig. 3.6). His masculinity etched out while he smokes his cigarette.
At the same time, his mimicry of birds and animals make him more appealing to Lizzie. The romance of the Indian hero and the Western heroine is detailed throughout the film. As the plot evolves Sanju compares Lizzie with other Indian actresses, and calls her condescendingly ‘a nice little English girl’ (Fig. 3.7).
He pins her down with his gaze too (Fig.3.8). And Lizzie too falls for the outwardly charm of Sanju as she clandestinely watches him from the window and surges with a sudden joy at his arrival.

Simultaneous to the theatrical performance of the travelling troupe, we also witness the shooting process of a Hindi movie, starring Manjula, an Indian actress. Her location of shooting and the presence of Sanju are juxtaposed with the incidents in the green room of Lizzie, who faces the mirror donning make-up. Through that mirror we can see Sanju’s arrival and Lizzie’s joy at seeing him. In the next moment, Lizzie, very seriously tells him that, “no one is ever allowed in the dressing room when we make up” (Shakespeare Wallah).
In her words we can detect her despair and disappointment over his absence at her last show (Fig.3.9). Sanju tells her that he has already sent her a note regarding the reason, and approaches her romantically by touching her nose and does some buffoonery actions to make her smile. Their romance is checked by Mrs. Buckingham, who mentions that, “an actresses’ dressing room is absolutely private… especially sacred to us for at least one hour before the performance” (Shakespeare Wallah). As she leaves, Sanju violates the norm further, “you know I wanted to see you” (Shakespeare Wallah) and touches her nose. Lizzie’s happiness at seeing Sanju and her concern for him are highlighted in the scene. Her performance as Ophelia (Hamlet), “a document of madness”, wins the heart of Sanju.

Soon after, we are also given a glimpse of Sanju’s romance with Manjula (Fig.3.10). Their close moments and Manjula’s dumb maid Didiji’s expression of Manjula’s awaiting Sanju adds more force to her romance.
In their close moments we can see Sanju appreciating Lizzie as a ‘fine artist’ and disgracing Manjula’s roles in movies, as “singing, dancing, tears and love” (*Shakespeare Wallah*). This is a commentary on Indian films, which is further developed in *Bombay Talkie*.

Scenes of Lady’s Grave, the burial place of an English lady, who failed in love, connote the condition of Lizzie. Sanju’s emotionless gaze and smoking a cigar in the mist reveal his inner conflict about his relation with Lizzie. His anglophilia is further exemplified by his boarding school background and interest in cricket. In one scene Lizzie asks him to recite some Sanskrit words, he fails and recites some Urdu lines. Sanju touches her nose and as they walk away from camera, we can see them hugging, covered by heavy mist, which creates a dreamlike effect, along with flute in the background, as the heavy mist stays for a longtime. The subsequent shots capture Manjula’s demeanor as supercilious as she manicures her hand. Her response to Didiji as she comes to know about the secret relation between her lover and his mistress explicitly reveals her possessiveness. It is here, that Sanju’s lovers meet and, their encounter is dramatic, in Manjula’s luxurious home.
Manjula exerts her superiority over Lizzie (Fig. 3.11) by asking of the latter’s exposure in the film field, fans associations, etc. The ménage a trois becomes intimidating, as Sanju arrives there ignorant of what is happening. The scene becomes fiery when Lizzie walks out from there. Manjula’s narcissism, her supercilious self-righteousness, expensive costumes and luxurious life style are contrasted with the artistic life style led by Lizzie.

Parallel to the romance of Lizzie and Sanju, we can also see another triangular relationship developing in the troupe as a young Indian actor; Aslam develops feelings for Lizzie and asks to accompany her for a walk (Fig.3.12).
This triangular relation of a foreign woman with two Indian characters is later developed in *Bombay Talkie* too. In these movies we can see the infatuation of western women towards the superficial male figures like Sanju and Vikram, while the real artists like Aslam and Hari are in sincere relationships with them. Mrs. Buckingham’s advice to Lizzie to select a partner from her own field is also remarkable here.

Sanju’s failure of romance in the public space (Fig.3.13) is an important tool in the movie. The camera frames the shift between the outdoor spaces of the theatre and the indoor spaces of the celluloid world.

![Fig. 3.13 Sanju’s romance with Lizzie, while others do rehearsal in the background.](image)

The public spaces indicate discomfort, wanton wanderings, uncertain nature of artistic life, and the inner spaces indicate luxury, power and promising future.

![Fig. 3.14 Sanju’s discomfort in romance with Lizzie in public space.](image)
Lizzie belongs to the outside space, where even her private life falls under scrutiny and public appraisal. While kissing, Sanju overhears the dialogues of rehearsal and stops from kissing her as he says that, he are “not used to living in public” (Shakespeare Wallah) (Fig. 3.14). Lizzie is explicit about her public life, “We never have a moment. We even have to dress and undress in public” (Shakespeare Wallah). Here again the contrast of living in public spaces (like Lizzie does) and private spaces (like Manjula does) is brought out explicitly in the movie. The very public nature of artistic living makes Lizzie vulnerable to lewd and erotic. While Lizzie defends her position Sanju becomes more and more obsessed with his patriarchal insistence upon woman’s izzat or honor (Fig.3.15).

Sanju’s rejection of Lizzie can be read in connection with sexual anxiety of post Independent Indian youth. They become conscious of the interconnections of “nationalist modernization and upper-caste cultural fears of female sexual energy and subaltern stirrings” (Mazumdar, 84). While Manjula’s dance become a representation/mirror of the historical and cultural meaning of India, which exhibits the traces of the trends of a society, Lizzie’s performance in the ‘closed space’ of the theatre makes/equates her to a cabaret dancer, who makes a direct display of the body in front of the public. Though both Manjula and Lizzie are actors, this public accessibility makes Lizzie ‘vulnerable’.
3.3. **The Chocolate hero of *Bombay Talkie***

The chocolate hero, a romantic figure with a young fresh-face, is popular among women because of his polished behavior and feminine and soft appearance. *Filmigoris*, a Bollywood diablog, relates the etymology of the word to the handsome portraits of men used to decorate chocolate boxes. Shashi Kapoor’s chocolate hero figure Vikram in *Bombay Talkie* brings to light the luxurious life (Fig.3.16) of a Bombay film star.

![Fig. 3.16 A glimpse of Sanju’s luxurious dining hall.](image)

His interactions with his traditional housewife Mala and his Western novelist lover Lucia portray philandering Indians. Vikram’s dance with the cabaret dancer Helen also throws light on the eroticization of body, which becomes a spectacle for the hidden sensual and romantic inclinations and fantasies of audience. Presence of the “wanton sexuality” (Mazumdar, 86) of cabaret dancers was an important marketing technique in Indian cinema in 1960s and 70s, where the dancer was placed in contrast to the moral conventions of the nation. The movie also showcases Indian’s interest and reception of porn movies through the director Bevin Bose. Hari mentions his presence as ‘not congenial’ and ‘positively putrid’. Mr. Bose justifies his profession as the new religion of foreign films and magazines that portray the human body in all its aspects.

The American novelist Lucia comes to India with the intention of making a movie about a Hollywood actress, “who has everything, except happiness” (*Bombay Talkie*). Her
description of the spiritual bankruptcy of the heroine, like ‘the decadent west’, and other
details ring an autobiographical bell. For her, India is a place of ‘colorful festivals’.
Lucia’s characterization of an Indian hero oscillates from a simple peasant to a
fisherman and then, to a prince or maharaja. Lucia wants a “tremendously vital and
handsome” (Bombay Talkie) person to represent India. In Vikram, Lucia finds the
correct representation of her quest, and he reciprocates her literary interest (Fig.3.17).

In the movie, we can see instances of sexuality, hidden under the veneer of conventions.
On Rakhi day, Lucia also reaches Vikram’s home to give him a gift, a watch. She ties
that to Vikram, seeking his help ‘to guide and protect’ her. Though all women including
Mala express their disapproval on tying a watch instead of a rakhi, when Mala tries to
force her to take back that watch, Vikram prevents Mala from doing so and Lucia
becomes very angry and nervous and throws the watch away and leaves to the hotel Taj.
Vikram expresses his anger at Mala and follows Lucia, a “Circe figure who turns men
into swine” (Long, 95), to solve the ‘misunderstanding’. In this drama, again the
complexities of a triangular relationship arise. Vikram is torn between legitimate and
illegitimate love.

Merchant Ivory try to create a spectacle of Vikram, dressed up as a prince/maharaja in
his attire and the Taj background complements it nicely. Like Lucia, who is conscious
of her beauty, Vikram too is conscious of his physical beauty, as a dazzling film star.
Lucia confesses that she has four ex-husbands, as “I fall in love very quickly” *(Bombay Talkie)*. Vikram tells her that since he is a realist, “a realist and a romantic make a very good combination” *(Bombay Talkie)* and kisses her. Just like Sanju in *Shakespeare Wallah*, here too Vikram asks Lucia, “Don’t you like me?” Lucia playfully asks him to go away from her and they give in easily to each other.

In contrast to this passionate relationship, we can see the desolate bedroom of Mala, where she is caressing a pink doll. When a tired Vikram comes home, she requests him in a depressed tone to accompany her to a Swami of Badrinath for a child. As a stereotypical wife she asks, “Then what should I do? Sit here quiet with my hands folded waiting for you, while you run with her all over town?” *(Bombay Talkie)*, as he rejects her request (Fig. 3.18). Vikram justifies this as ‘an intellectual relationship’ and accuses Mala of stupidity which misinterprets it.

Another character, the middle-aged Anjana, a star of yesteryears, brings to light the condition of film actresses after their active role in the industry. Anjana is portrayed as a loose and wayward actress, whose market value has gone down. She sings songs and entertains young actors. Her singing of “badimushkil se dilkibeqarari” *(Naghma-1953)* symbolizes her intimacy with Vikram, which is explicitly expressed through her efforts.
to kiss him. Vikram is also aware of her jealously towards his girl friends. She also exercises a certain level of freedom with Vikram, as she asks him about his fights and cancelled shootings, and tries to read his palm to find out his fate. But he asks Anjana to read Lucia’s palms to find out “how many best sellers and how many husbands” (*Bombay Talkie*) she had, from her palm. Anjana reads that ‘she wants too much’. She spells doom for Lucia and Vikram’s love. This scene has the undercurrents of superstition and sexuality. In another scene at Anjana’s home we can see the celebration of three young men with her, another representation of sexuality and licentiousness in the film world. Anjana’s life is symptomatic of the Bombay film industry. One moment she is at the pinnacle of popularity, another moment she vanishes. Her beautiful face, ornaments and luxurious room with lots of sandals in rows reveal the luxury she once enjoyed in the film world.

Lucia escapes to spirituality as a means to escape from Anjana’s predictions of doom, only to discover the hypocrisy there. While the Guru walks through the corridor talking with his devotees on spiritual love, Lucia is seen to be discomfited by her sari. Lucia experiences instances of segregation in the ashram. And, in another scene the Guru’s request for food to Lucia and his desire to be fed like a child by a mother seems improper (Fig. 3.19 and Fig. 3.20).

Fig.3.19  Fig.3.20
Lucia is asked to feed the Guru, seems erotic in an ashram milieu.

52 And when they are about to leave, Anjana calls him back to her room and hugs tightly caresses his face, hair and tries to kiss his fore head, nose and the lips, but he prevents her attempts and goes to Lucia.
We can also see Lucia’s desirous gaze looking at a bathing foreigner on the ashram premises. His strange rebuttal expresses his lack of interest in her. Unlike other women devotees, Lucia carries her vanity around and thinks the ashram is a “positively gruesome” place with “unsexed people … I know if I stay here another day, I shall do something desperate” (*Bombay Talkie*). She is portrayed as sexually depraved. Unlike Lizzie, the British theatre artist, Lucia, here, becomes the stereotype of the typical American woman in search of adventure, sexual adventure, especially. Lucia’s ashram life is an interlude which throws light on her sexuality.

Mala’s dullness as she prays in front of Lord Krishna is juxtaposed with the scenes of Vikram’s romance with Lucia. It reveals her powerlessness and sorrow. In the coming sequences Mala is chased by Mr. Bose, the porn movie director. He tries to seduce her and emotionally bullies her into obeying his wishes as a compensation for the money he lost on Vikram (Fig. 3.21). Parallel to the ordeal of Mala, we can see Lizzie and Vikram enjoy themselves, careless of time.

![Fig.3.21 Mr. Bose’s efforts to seduce Mala.](image)

In the final scene, Lucia’s merry making with Vikram reaches his home, where she tries to wear Mala’s wedding sari. An irate Mala, who witnesses the scene, walks out of Vikram’s home, after warning him. In the tussle after this, Vikram shows his real playboy nature, as he asks Hari to use Lucia for sexual pleasure, “She’s not bad. She’s damn good for her age” (*Bombay Talkie*) (Fig. 3.22 and Fig. 3.23). While rating Lucia

109
sexually, his eyes glitter and his clandestine smile tells the viewers more than what he actually says. Instead of responding in words, Hari brutally stabs Vikram with that knife, ‘for that beautiful dancing girl’.

Certain other stock characters, like the nameless admirer who wants to discuss the ‘valuable book’ Consenting Adults, with Lucia become examples of Indian men, who are attracted to western woman with sexual intentions. In another context, through the portrayal of an Indian woman devotee, who discovers a ‘good time’, in the ashram, the audience gets a clear picture of the enigmatic ashram life in India. It is enshrouded with the enigma of spirituality on the one hand and crass hypocrisy and materialism on the other. Another significant character of the movie is Hari, portrayed as a poet, albeit an unsuccessful one. He falls in love with Lucia from the very beginning, but he feels insecure because of Vikram and is jealous of Lucia’s attentions towards Vikram. Though Lucia knows about Hari’s sincere love (Fig. 3.24), she seems more interested in the colorful, luxurious life and glamorous looks of Vikram. Hari is more concerned with Lucia and helps her out whenever she is trouble, especially in her liaison with Vikram. Her stint as a cabaret singer also makes her a public woman, unattainable to the poor poet. Hari feels inferior to Vikram, “something happens to me when I see him. It’s his
fault” *(Bombay Talkie).* Hari seems always envious to Vikram’s wider accessibility and appreciation as a chocolate hero, desirable to many women.

Lucia shares the elements of the Western interest and curiosity in Indian culture as she comes in search of new spectacles and sensations that India can provide. Through the contrasted life styles, ethnicities and attitudes of Mala and Lucia, the movie throws light on the lives of a traditional Indian housewife and a flamboyant Western/American woman respectively. We can also trace the elements of cabaret in this movie. It reveals the changing cinematic trends in India, which moves away from enduring character roles of women to making them objects of visual entertainment. In this meta-film, the chocolate hero, the script writer and the director of porn movies characterize the different aspects of Indian male sexuality, and their misogynistic positions on women. Through the male and female characters, and their love triangles, many layers, from sincere love to superficial exploitation of sex are explored.
3.4. The Astute Nawab and the (Im)Proper Memsahib of *Heat and Dust*

Like *Shakespeare Wallah* and *Bombay Talkie*, MIP’s *Heat and Dust* also illustrates Indian protagonists, involved in complicated sexual liaisons with Western women in two time periods, the 1920s and the 1980s. Through the Nawab (Shashi Kapoor) of the 1920s, and Inder Lal (Zakir Hussain) of 1980s, the movie showcases the theme of interracial sexual unions in two decades. This section of the chapter deals the gaze of the West on the East, and the reversal of it, in pre and post Independent India, in *Heat and Dust*. The film represents India through the intricate gazes of the Nawab who wins over the West by conquering the heart of the wife of his British administrator (Douglas). Along with the portrayal of the Nawab, this section also focuses on the gaze of the West on Indians, and the representation of different races and genders in the movie. This movie revolves around the triangular relations between Indian and western families, in post and pre Independent India. The movie also has very curious features of the transgenders, in the 1920s, in their dark colored costumes and dancing styles.53

![Dr. Saunders’ observations on Olivia.](image)

53 As the commoners clap with vertical palm, as the closed fingers strike each other.
Olivia, the female protagonist of the 1920s, is portrayed as an improper memsahib of the age. She is introduced as a ‘rotten’ woman, who illegitimately aborted her illicit child (Fig. 3.25). Her character is later described through the words of Harry, as a failure in empire building (Fig.3.26).

According to critics, the memsahib was responsible to ‘ensconce’ a flawless “happy domesticity- entailing femininity, which was associated with domesticity, emotionalism, and submissiveness” (Roye and Mittapalli, 7). A memsahib also needed an enduring skill, which was to be built up by the Western woman to be safe in a foreign land. Her homemaking skills replicated a microcosm of empire making through her masculine attitudes. The memsahibs maintained a distance from the ‘other’, especially from the servants at their call. But, in this movie, Olivia becomes symbolic of ‘unbecoming’ a proper memsahib to acquire an individual status of her own. It seems significant for her to place herself in an “aggressively masculine empire that designates a specific position or role and prescribes a precise code of conduct for its female members” (Roye and Mittapalli, 2).
The sensual attraction of Olivia to the Indian Nawab (Fig. 3.27 and Fig. 3.28) is reflected in her words as she calls him *terribly handsome*.

It was the duty of the Memsahib to keep the house English in style. But in this movie Olivia never involves herself in the fineness of housekeeping, which was expected of a memsahib. She decorates her home with available Indian stuff (Fig.3.29). Olivia’s
monotonous life in the house is mitigated only by her interest on playing a piano, having caged parrots at home, etc.

In the words of Harry, Olivia was “outraging two conventions, those of her own people and those of the Indians, whose conventions are, if anything, even stronger” (*Heat and Dust*). Olivia’s interest in listening to the musical concert of the palace, which is ‘strictly for men’, throws light on her unconventional urge to go beyond gender binaries. Olivia is very curious about the Nawab and wants to unravel the rumors regarding his wife, his elopement with a Parisian girl, who was 20 years younger than him, the jealousy of the Begum who poisoned the girl, the Nawab’s romance with a ‘dancing girl’, etc. Along with this, the presence of pornographic paintings, memsahib jokes and funny dreams in the palace reveal the homoerotic fantasies of Nawab and his friend Harry. Elements of homoeroticism were also a prominent theme in Indian cinema in the 70s, like *Anand* (1971), *Zanjeer* (1973), *Namak Haram* (1973), *Sholay* (1975), etc. These movies popularize male bonds more than the boundaries of friendship, to avoid the presence/influence of a female love. In *Heat and Dust* too we can see the close bond between the Nawab and Harry in many instances. This implicates the recognition and representation of third gender in the society.
Harry, the English guest of the Nawab, has an ambiguous sexuality, and at times he is portrayed as a closet homosexual (Fig. 3.30).

Once he comments on Douglas as, “he’s very good looking. I like him” (Heat and Dust) (Fig. 3.31). Harry is effeminate in many ways as he plays cards with the Begum and other women of the palace.

Harry timidly complains to the Nawab of cheating by the Begum while playing cards. On another occasion too Harry seems powerless in front of the Nawab who comes to call him back from Douglas’ home. The Nawab seems more concerned with Harry. He
always needs his presence and friendship. He says, “I do grow fond of other people and miss them when they leave me” (*Heat and Dust*). The Nawab even prevents Harry from returning to return to his homeland and to his aged mother. The entry of the Nawab himself to call back Harry from Douglas’ home is mysterious. For Harry, home is with the people of his race. The Nawab’s triangle relationship with Harry and Olivia is reflected in his words, “once I love a friend, it’s for life, forever” (*Heat and Dust*). But, the Nawab is exploitative of Olivia. He makes use of the romance of Olivia for his personal and political benefit, in order to fight against the British administration. The romance between Olivia and the Nawab is screened in contrast with the dull nuptial life of Douglas, where Olivia seems guilty of her secret affair. Olivia is portrayed as an improper memsahib, who goes beyond the archetypal notions of the memsahib concept, because of her interest in the piano and embroidery, and more than anything else, her intimate and sincere relationship with the Nawab, an Indian man, in India.

Another important theme of discussion in the movie is marriage. While the story of 1920s discusses the failed marriages of both the Nawab and Olivia, the 1980s. Portions deal with the importance of getting married, especially for women. Religious places become centers of frequent questions revolving around marriage and domesticity. These become the pivotal questions for Anne, as she is unmarried. Through Inder’s wife, Ritu, we can see the problems of early marriage, like her frequent psychological illness. Ritu’s silence in the home, unlike other characters of the movie reveals her suppressed feelings in the household. She seems interested in Chid and follows his yoga instructions to get relief from her illness.

Inder Lal, the government employer and Anne’s landlord is yet another stock character (Fig. 3.32) in the movie who expresses the transgressive sexual desires of a householder towards a white woman. His sexual affair with Anne, in the absence of his mother and wife seems parallel to that of Nawab with Olivia. As a ‘good friend’, Inder satisfies the carnal desires of Anne, as we can see the repetition of history after 60 years.
While Olivia was too nervous to accept her Indian child, Anne decides to bring up her Indian child by Inder. This differentiates Anne, the liberated woman of the 80s, who is free to select her life beyond the boundaries of nation, race and culture in India, unlike the orthodox Ritu. Unlike the housewife Ritu, Anne lives in the public space, shares experiences and rewrites the history of India, as Olivia did in the 1920s.

Since culture is a system of representations, film representations help the audience to restore images that are perhaps ‘no longer accessible to (our) perceptual apparatus’ (Stuart Hall). It helps the filmgoer to place him/herself within the frame work, as s/he is implicated in the production of meaning. Another interesting thing we have to note here is the interconnections of different types of power in image creation, which give originality to the screened image. At the same time, this representation fixes/limits the meanings of the multilayered film text, and also affects/distorts the perception of reality. Through Shashi Kapoor the hidden/(un)conscious intentions of stereotyping the nation become concretised. In the select movies the hero is portrayed as being timid in comparison with strong women characters, either Indian or foreign. The select movies conceal or debunk hetero-normative Indian masculinity through their superficial heroes. Masculinity is “the pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order, and socially distinguished from practices linked to the position of women” (Connell). Indian masculinity, especially that portrayed in movies, where
movies are given superhuman characteristics, is critiqued here. Their bodies become “participants in the historical process; they are both agents and objects of practice”, in the words of Connell. The heroes in MIP movies are fragile, handsome and superficial. They construct, manipulate and subjugate their women (both Indian and Western) through their sexual charm. The heroes of the select films become a pastiche of an emerging India, as the sexuality of the heroes is intertwined with national identity.
Reference

6. Dwyer, R. *All you want is money, all you need is love: Sexuality and Romance in Modern India*. London, 2000.
13. Characteristics of a playboy - 
14. Origin of the term ‘chocolate hero’ -
   https://filmigoris.net/2011/09/23/september-23-2011-chocolate-heroes-a-la-

    March 2017.

16. Connell, Raewyn. https://www.eolss.net/Sample-Chapters/C11/E1-17-02-

17. WHO, 2006

18. Hutcheon, Linda. “Ivory, Nostalgia and the Postmodern” (last modified in
    Nov. 2014.