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Chapter 1:

1 Introduction

The (re)presentation of women in Bollywood cinema has been and continues to be associated with controversy and is often characterised by diverse interpretations. As far back as the mid-1980s, scholars have examined Bollywood films as cultural texts (Dudrah & Desai: 2008: 1). Even though many scholars such as Uberoi (1999); Kabir (2001); Kasbekar (2001); Ganti (2004, 2007, 2012); Viridi (2003); Raheja & Kothari (2004); Rao (2010); Gooptu (2011); and Varia (2012) have commented on the various representations of women in Bollywood films, there are still many gaps in the literature that provide a space for ongoing research in this field.

This study aims to make a new contribution to the current body of literature by examining the representation of female characters in the three popular Bollywood films of auteur director Karan Johar from a transnational perspective by taking feminist perspectives into consideration. As Dahinden (2010: 51) observes,

Since the early 1990's, studies on transnationalism have proliferated and transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding contemporary practices taking place across national borders, especially when speaking of immigrants.

In line with Dahinden's observation, it can be argued that this is a result of the exchange of cultures that takes place when one cultural group moves into the physical space that was previously occupied by another cultural group. Both social relations and belief-systems are exchanged through this process. This concept is often illustrated by Bollywood filmmakers through the construction of female characters who are represented as negotiating between loyalty to their country of origin (India) and the acceptance of certain ideals from their adopted countries of residence. This leads to the blurring of lines between Indian and Western ways of life. It can thus be argued that cultural transformations in the representation of women have been fuelled by transnational migration¹. Mc Hugh (2009: 120) posits that

¹ Migrant transnationalism is built on interpersonal relationships across borders. These relations are important for the development of migrants' place of origin as well as for their integration in the place of destination (Carling: 2008: 1452). Due to transnationalism, culture translates as a hybrid concept that is open to changing philosophies. As Shome (2006: 264) asserts, "Transnational feminist media scholars have investigated issues such as how Diasporic ethnic groups in the United States utilize media texts to stage new hybrid visions of community and belonging that are complexly constituted by flows of the global and the local through which they negotiate their gendered/sexual identities. Shome's assertion is informed by the views of Maira (2002); Valdivia (2003) and Durham (2004).

this change was dominated by images that were projected through television and film. In other words, due to the rise of a global mass culture during which images were projected through the medium of television and film, the 'woman' becomes historicised as a transnational category (McHugh: 2009: 120). As a result, the definitive divide that once existed between Indian and Western women is not clear anymore.

This study is novel because of its focus on Johar's signature style of representing two heroines with dissimilar qualities and personality styles. Through this technique, the negative aspects of stereotyping women into specific categories are highlighted. Bearing in mind the idea of Indian nationhood on representations of female characters in popular Bollywood films, the roles played by these women as carriers of tradition will be considered. The representation of women in Johar's films is valuable because he incorporates transnational perspectives into the context of his narratives. As a result, audiences are provided with material that suggests re-thinking patriarchal structures and traditional Indian belief-systems.

While Johar's representations are important, it is also necessary to examine Bollywood films against the socio-political context in India. Factors such as the large population, poverty, gender discrimination and strict adherence to societal belief-systems are prevalent in India to this day. India is clearly plagued by a complexity of aspects. Within this problematic space, Bollywood films provide audiences, more specifically, the masses of India with a form of escapism from the drudgery of their daily lives. Johar elevates the purely escapist type of Bollywood film to another level by infusing it with layers of subtexts which then speak to audiences by initiating that it is time for the re-definition of various beliefs. Through the narratives and characterisations in his films, an attempt is made to educate and influence societies.

According to Viridi (2003: xiv), there is a strong link between Indian society and Bollywood films. Pugsley & Khorana (2011: 360) agree that contemporary Bollywood films often represent the realities of life in India. From this perspective, Bollywood cinema, in its role as a cultural role player, has contributed to the ongoing dialogue on women's position in India. One of the core points of contention surrounding the representation of women in Bollywood films can be linked to the construction of the Indian/Western dichotomy. Chaturvedi (2000: 165) associates the conception of this binary with colonial dominance.

While there is truth in Chaturvedi's observation, it is significant that India has forayed through various stages of colonialism and is in a constant state of flux because of the emergence of new and changing belief-systems. In opposition to these changes, Indian nationalists have strongly advocated the idea that the West is a corrupting influence on Indian society, and more specifically, on Indian women. Loomba (1993: 271) agrees that the Indian/Western dichotomy shapes women into superficial categories according to which they are partitioned as a disruption to traditional Indian society if they are even remotely perceived as supporting westernisation².

Nevertheless, over the past two decades, particularly in relation to the representation of women, Bollywood films are increasingly promoting modernisation, westernization, urbanization and the emancipation of women (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004: 11). The creation of this new space of representation brings its own set of challenges. According to Hundal (2013), many Bollywood filmmakers have been profiled as fuelling the objectification of women through the employment of *item numbers*³ in their movies. It is relevant that the representations of women in these *item numbers* are modelled on Western aesthetics. As a result, the Indian/Western dichotomy has once again become the focus of numerous debates surrounding the representation of women in Bollywood films.

Specific allegations against Bollywood filmmakers have been made subsequent to the gang rape of a young woman on a moving bus in Delhi, India in December 2012 (Biswas:2012; Wolfe:2013; Udas:2013; North:2013; Tulshyan:2013). This is not the first incident of rape in India and it certainly will not be the last. However, due to the wide media coverage of this particular incident of rape, an international dialogue on both the issue of rape in India as well as the general treatment of women in India has been re-ignited. While it would be incorrect to lay sole blame for the rape of women in India upon representations of women in Bollywood films, it is significant that in a survey conducted by The Wall Street Journal (2013), Bollywood cinema is cited as playing a contributory role in fuelling the culture of rape in

² Westernization in this context refers to styles of dress, socialization patterns and demeanour. Indian women who do not follow traditional belief-systems and who do not conform to patriarchal structures are often considered to be immoral or 'westernised' in a derogatory sense that locates them as 'outsiders' to notions of Indianness.

³ *Item numbers* in Bollywood films can be compared to the MTV music videos of female singers in the West such as Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez and Beyonce. While the music videos are used to promote the songs exclusively, *item numbers* form an inherent part of the narratives in Bollywood films. It is notable that they are often largely fashioned on the principles of western music videos.

India. Bollywood activist and actress Azmi argues that another core reason is a general lack of respect toward women in India which is based on an internalised patriarchal mind-set within the country (BBC News: 2013c).

According to Wazir (2013:42), westernisation, individualism, consumerism, education, clothing and caste⁴ also contribute to the ongoing gender violence against women in India. Clearly a multiplicity of factors can be identified as contributing to the rape culture in India. This study will briefly engage in discussion about various representations of women in *item numbers* because these particular song sequences have been isolated as derogatory modes of representation.

Rape is a heinous crime that is not only problematic for women in India, but for women throughout the world. As far back as 1970, Greer (1971:251) argued that rape is an act of ‘murderous aggression spawned in self-loathing and enacted upon the hated other’. In response to the 2012 rape incident, American activist Eve Ensler argues that this is a ‘catalytic moment’ which provides us with a chance to re-think the degradation of women globally (Wolfe: 2013). In an interview with BBC News (2013h), journalist and literary critic Nilanjana Roy claims that this is the first time that ‘the fault lines of embedded systems such as caste, class and gender are being explored in such a mainstream fashion in India’.

The above comments that have emerged as a result of the much-publicised rape case of 2012 will be examined by taking into consideration the various reasons that have contributed to the embedded internalised patriarchal mindset that prevails in India. The idea of loyalty to Indian nationhood will then be addressed in relation to the roles played by female characters as carriers of traditional Indian belief-systems within the context of Bollywood films. The manner in which Bollywood cinema has contributed to the ongoing colloquy on women’s

⁴ Caste is basically a system of social classification according to which people are grouped into traditionally sanctioned categories (Gokulsing & Disssanayake: 2004: 72). Originating with the Indo-European nomadic tribes who came to India over thirty thousand years ago, the caste system in India is a type of social hierarchy which continues to prevail and causes much tension between the Hindu people. According to the system, the Brahmins (priests) are considered to be superior while the Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), Sudrahs (cultivators) and untouchables (scheduled classes) are all respectively inferior. It is interesting that their statuses are determined according to the work that they do. As a result of this system of classification, the ‘untouchables’, as they have come to be known, are also called the dalits (or the oppressed) and have the lowest possible status in Indian society. They are ill-treated by higher castes and many Bollywood filmmakers reflect these realities in their films. In *Lagaan* (Gowarikar: 2001), a significant scene in the film raises awareness about the negative aspects of judging and alienating people based on the caste system.

position in India over the years will also be considered. These aspects will be reviewed by specifically focusing on the representation of female characters in the films of auteur director Karan Johar. The representation of women in these films will be explored through feminist perspectives as well as the impact of transnationalism on Indian society.

According to Roudemetof (2005:113), transnationalism involves the construction of social spaces in foreign communities. In other words, transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding the new cultural expressions that emerge when migrants settle down in foreign countries (Kastoryano: 2011: 1; Carling: 2008: 1452). Within an Indian context, the individuals who choose to leave India and migrate to other countries are categorised as the Indian diaspora (Jain, R.K.: 2011: 46). Individuals who are born to Indian parents outside of India also then assume the identity of the Indian diaspora. It is thus important to acknowledge the link between the Indian diaspora and the transnational communities that they become a part of when they leave their homelands. Since transnationalism is a concept that influences most societies today, the impact of increasing 'transnational communities' on the representation of female characters in Bollywood films will be considered.

1.1 Rationale

Cinema is often considered to be an art form. The characters that appear on screen create a world that allows its spectators to immerse themselves into experiences that often resonate with them long after the film's closing credits. As an avid follower of both popular mainstream and art house cinema, I believe that a study of the underlying meanings of films provides a deep and meaningful understanding of the inherent belief-systems of societies.

Being of Indian descent, and having lived in New York and South Africa, I have grown up watching both Hollywood and Bollywood films. Over the years and with the changing construction of Bollywood films in terms of character representation, settings, and visual strategies, I have come to respect the manner in which many Bollywood film-makers are gradually making the transition from representing women as mere carriers of Indian ideologies to portraying them as individuals with human rights.

Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in academic interest in Bollywood cinema. According to Dudrah & Desai (2008: 1), 'even scholarship in India, which, at times,

was dismissive of popular Bollywood films as technicolor fantasies catering to the masses, has undergone a revolution with the works of scholars such as Rosie Thomas, Ashis Nandy, Ravi Vasudevan, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, and Madhava Prasad in the last few decades'. According to Thomas (2008: 21) it is relevant that even within the context of First world culture and society, Bollywood cinema was always marginalised and therefore ignored.

However, over the years, the popularity of Bollywood films has increased and continues to increase globally. Warner Brothers for example joined forces with Bollywood for a star-studded West End opening of *Asoka* (2001: Santosh Sivan). The film was simultaneously launched at the Venice International Film Festival and then released in Tokyo (Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 17). It is also significant that with the release of many Bollywood films in the 1990s, Bollywood film audiences asserted a uniquely Indian individuality which was validated by their preference for *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998) over the *Titanic* (Cameron: 1997) (Raheja & Kothari: 2004: 133).

In a global context, by virtue of its sheer volume of output, Bollywood cinema dominates world film production (Thomas: 2008: 21). Thomas corroborates this statement by adding that Bollywood films are also distributed through large areas of the Third World (including non-Hindustani speaking areas and even parts of the Soviet Union), where they are frequently consumed more avidly than Hollywood films. Bollywood cinema has clearly become increasingly visible in the international marketplace with various box-office successes and with a growing audience from India to West Africa to Russia and throughout the English-speaking world (Dasgupta: 1996; Ganti: 2004).

In its quest to monopolise global cinema, Bollywood is gradually attracting all kinds of new audiences (Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 29). Female characters, for example, are now often placed in innovative situations and are given new roles to play. Bollywood filmmakers are thus pushing the old boundaries by navigating away from the conventional systems of portraying female characters as being suppressed by patriarchal structures and bound by conservative Indian belief-systems. With the increase of Indian migration, Bollywood filmmakers are now also catering to the demands of the Indian diaspora, hence a more global market. In *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*, Desai (2004: 41) notes that popular films released post-1990, have consistently appeared in the annual list of top twenty most popular foreign-language films in Britain; thus, not only luring British Asians, but also

white British to the theatres. According to Fetscherin (2010: 461), Bollywood produces more films and sells more tickets than any other film industry in the world and its revenues are second only to those of the US film industry.

The effects of transnationalism have impacted on Bollywood films and influenced the narratives of these films - especially the representation of female characters. In order to understand the effects of transnationalism in Bollywood films, it is imperative to examine the cultural identities as well as the social relationships of the female characters as portrayed in these films. In this regard, an understanding of the manner in which Bollywood filmmakers deal with the continuous dialogues on the Indian/Western dichotomy is of relevance because it is closely associated with feminism in India. Since feminism in India has been influenced by feminism in the Anglo-American context, the three waves of feminism in the Anglo-American context cannot be ignored because they allow one insight into the origins of feminist studies and how they have impacted on the lives of Indian women.

Feminist studies in both the Anglo-American and Indian contexts will be focused on because feminism in India often conceives itself as emerging out of Western modernity (Shohat: 1998: 20). In line with this sentiment, Varia (2012:1) argues that 'Bollywood is constantly in tense negotiation between tradition and modernity'. It is therefore important to view Bollywood cinema as a cultural role player that adds to the continuous dialogue on the Indian/Western dichotomy. The terms 'Western' and 'Indian' are becoming increasingly blurred. These changes have impacted on Bollywood films in terms of the film narratives as well as in the manner in which characters are portrayed. Bollywood films are increasingly being set in places like New York, London and Australia and female characters in particular, are being portrayed as more open-minded as opposed to being fiercely loyal to ancient Indian traditions and belief-systems. In this regard, they are portrayed in a variety of roles that venture outside the norms of tradition. Furthermore, there has also been a change in the interactions and relationships of female characters of different generations within the narratives of Bollywood films.

In the past, Bollywood filmmakers were faithful to Indian nationalism and its articulation of the operation of the joint family system, patriarchal structures and the subjugation of women. As a normative structure, various generations of women were expected to uphold tradition as defined by Indian nationalists. However, as Viridi (2003: xiv) so aptly observes, 'Hindi films

are now deeply imbricated in social transformation.’ Therefore, there is the initiation of a new dialogue that justifies a deeper analysis into the reasons for the change and the changing philosophies. As a result, the Bollywood cinema of today is constituted by a shifting discourse that constantly re-imagines the nation. Based on this evolution, it is important to ‘view India as a political, contingent, developing, unfixed framework, without a forced coincidence between nation and territory or chronology, ethnicity, community and religion’ (Virdi: 2003: xiv). From this perspective, the following must be noted,

- Bollywood cinema has changed/evolved;
- Evolution is probably linked to what has happened in society – changes have probably been brought on/speeded-up by transnationalism;
- Change is seen in: the depiction of female characters – ‘modern’/ less conventional – questioning the old patriarchal systems.

It is thus clear that over the past two decades, Bollywood cinema has evolved. This change reflects a change in the demographic of its audience. It is important to understand that the Indian social system is based on a joint family system in which all members of the family share the same spiritual belief-systems, tradition and in many cases, property (Ahmad: 2007). However, with increasing migration and the splitting up of families, Bollywood filmmakers have been forced to change the basis of their narratives which previously focused on large families sitting around a dinner table and sharing stories about their woes and joys. The contemporary female character now has to shape her own identity and, while this may cause a disruption in the joint family system, it simultaneously opens up a hybrid of possibilities for the creation of a ‘new identity’ for the Bollywood heroine.

The consumption of Bollywood films has become a way of life for first and second generation immigrants living in the US, Europe and the UK (Raheja & Kothari, 2004: 10). When analysing Indian women living in America, Ram (2002) found that these women participate in varying degrees in community activities, religious and cultural festivals, preserve links with relations and friends in India, develop strong social bonds with other Indian immigrants, subscribe to Indian magazines and news programmes, decorate their homes with Indian handicrafts and artwork, wear Indian clothes on special occasions and at home, regularly cook Indian food, and so on. In other words, when situated in relation to their everyday lives, audience consumption of Bollywood cinema becomes one more activity that

helps them link their past with the present and their country of origin with that of their adopted country.

This new audience in turn inspires contemporary film-makers to cater to the demands of a constantly changing demographic. In the UK, cinemas specialising in Bollywood films are among the most successful in the independent market. Bollywood films often make it to the box-office top ten in the U.K. (Raheja & Kothari: 2004:10). Clearly, Bollywood cinema provides a primary link to India for the new international audience of first and second-generation emigrants. Filmmakers also use Indian tradition and the nuances of daily lives for Indian families in their movies in order for audiences to identify with the characters on screen. It is interesting to note the change in the depictions of both female characters and the internal relationships of Indian families within the narratives of contemporary Bollywood films.

According to De Souza (1975: 78-81), Indian women in the 18th century were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields. The 19th century witnessed a change in women's roles from subjugation to greater emancipation from male domination (Roy: 2006:55). Thereafter, further changes were initiated by the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation (Ross: 1961:117). Finally, it was the 20th century that brought about dynamic changes and new concepts for Indian women affording them status with "a fresh dignity and importance" (Roy: 2006:55). It is these changes that contemporary filmmakers are incorporating into their scripts and which are now becoming increasingly appealing to a global audience.

Bollywood cinema is evolving continuously. A new set of normative values is now being introduced by the representation of various generations of female characters. This will be examined in the selected case studies.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Over the years, and especially between 1947 and 1990, there has been a constant perpetuation of the belief-systems of the nationalist project into Bollywood narratives. In a sense, the Bollywood cinema industry has been used as a tool to promote Indian traditions and nationhood. According to Ganti (2004:3), the nationalist movement in India has been

influential in the construction and definition of various dichotomies in Bollywood films such as tradition/modernity, Indian/Western and spiritual/material. These representations were common during the period when the film industry in India was regulated and censored. However, after 1991 when India became liberated, Bollywood became more receptive to multi-nationals and foreign investments (Fetscherin: 2010:461). This resulted in Bollywood filmmakers being allowed more flexibility in the construction of their narratives because they were no longer compelled to write nationalist themes into their films (Govindan & Dutta: 2008; Dwyer: 2010). Since filmmakers were not restricted in terms of the theme and content of their movies, many of them began to focus more on the lives of the Indian diaspora in their narratives. Ganti (2004: 50) notes that Bollywood cinema came to be considered as an important, legitimate activity over the years.

According to Bagchi (1996),

Bollywood cinema has been a major point of reference for Indian culture in this century. It has shaped and expressed the changing scenarios of modern India to an extent that no preceding art form could ever achieve. Bollywood cinema has influenced the way in which people perceive various aspects of their lives.

In this regard, discussion on the representation of women in Bollywood films will be provided. The main focus, however, will be on the three films selected as case studies, which are: *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998); *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Johar: 2001) and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (Johar: 2006).

1.3 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study will be conducted from a feminist perspective, without stereotyping feminism. In order to gain more insight into the representation of women in Bollywood cinema, a multiplicity of feminist perspectives and approaches will be considered. This approach is corroborated by the sentiments of Warhol and Herndl (1997: x) who acknowledge that ‘while the multiplicity of approaches and assumptions inside the movement can lead to conflict and competition, they can also be the source of vitality and genuine learning’. By analysing the manner in which Johar positions two heroines as antithesis to each other in his films, gender politics can be explored. Similar to the multiple approaches to feminist theory, Johar’s creation of multiple personality types also provides audiences with the opportunity to learn. The changing representations of women in popular Bollywood cinema suggest that there is an overlap between the terms western, modern and feminism. According to Shohat (1988: 2-3),

Multicultural feminism does not offer a unified feminist subject, or a single ideological position, or a canonical repertoire of subversive acts. Rather than display women's diversity for the delectation of an imaginary 'mainstream,' there is the delineation of a worldwide web where feminist communities derive their identity and difference vis-a-vis multiple others.

The above statement by Shohat will be considered by analysing the representations of women in the selected case studies. Through analysis of these films, this study aims to challenge the old feminist dogmas which claim that emancipated women cannot be religious, cultural, 'feminine', educated and/or 'pure'.

A plethora of analysis, criticism and history is foregrounded in feminist studies. While the three waves of Anglo-American feminism will be discussed because they allow one insight into the origins of feminist studies over the years; this study will also consider other feminist perspectives. Over the past several decades, feminist scholars across the globe such as Friedan (1963); Greer (1971); Mohanty (1988); Spivak (1988, 1993, 2010); Chaudhuri (2004) and Tong (2009) continue to challenge existing frameworks of feminist studies in an attempt to re-define feminism. It is important to establish the difference between Western feminism and third-world feminism as well as to locate feminist theory within the Indian context. Due to political animosities and differing cultures, Indian feminism must be evaluated against its own rubrics of patriarchal structures and belief-systems. These existing structures, coupled with the traditional norms that are firmly embedded in Indian culture make it impossible to define Indian feminist theory according to Western ideals. Indian feminism must therefore be studied as a category of third-world feminism.

While many parallels can be drawn between Western feminism and third-world feminism, or for the purposes of this discussion, Indian feminism, there are also many differences. The rise of feminism in India was brought about by different cultural and national factors. In an Indian context specifically, women are constantly subjugated through religion, personal laws, various traditions and Indian mythology. A cultural understanding of societies is therefore necessary to evaluate both emerging and past feminist debates. According to Chaudhuri (2004), the feminist movement has failed to develop an Indian definition of women's freedom. In light of this statement the impact of feminism on the representation of the heroines in the selected films of Karan Johar will be examined. The following aspects will be conceptualised in order to link them to the representations of heroines in Bollywood cinema:

- Do Indian culture and Indian belief-systems have an impact on Indian feminism?
- What is the Indian woman's relationship to society?

In order to gain a deeper insight into the driving forces behind contemporary film-makers, the representation / presentation of women in Bollywood cinema will be examined in relation to the following:

- How are the different generations depicted in these films?
- How does the traditional patriarchal system impact on how female characters are/have been portrayed in Bollywood films?
- How has feminism impacted on the portrayal of female characters in Bollywood films?
- How have transnationalism and the Indian diaspora changed the cultural identity and social relationships of Indian women in Bollywood films.

1.4 Methodology

Within the framework of feminist studies, a descriptive, analytical and comparative analysis will be made of the representation of Indian female characters by means of three selected Bollywood films: *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Johar: 2001), *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (Johar: 2006). These films are all written and directed by Karan Johar, a contemporary filmmaker. This study will be divided as follows,

- Chapter 2 will provide a short overview of feminist theory in the Anglo-American context. An understanding of women's roles in society is valuable because of Bollywood cinema's close link with Indian society. Since feminism in India has been largely influenced by feminism in the West, an overview of feminist theory in both the American and Indian contexts will provide a backdrop from which to analyse the representation of women in Bollywood films.
- Chapter 3 will provide an overview of feminism in the Indian context. The manner in which feminist theory in the Anglo-American context has impacted on feminism in India will be discussed. This chapter will also include the influence of various Indian reformers on the position and role of women in India. The manner in which Gandhian principles have assisted Indian women with their evolutionary processes will be considered. Post-colonial discourse will be discussed in relation to the Indian/Western

dichotomy, subaltern studies and the impact of transnationalism on the Indian diaspora.

- Chapter 4 will provide a brief history of Bollywood cinema from the time when it was faithful to the *masala* format of representation, to its evolution into a global cinema that attracts all kinds of audiences (Kaur & Sinha, 2005: 29). It is relevant to note that Bollywood cinema was faithful to the nationalist project between 1947 and 1990. After 1991, when India became liberated, representations in Bollywood films changed considerably. These aspects will be considered in relation to Bollywood's position as a transnational/cultural role player. The concept of transnationalism as well as how the Indian diaspora has influenced the construction of narratives in contemporary Bollywood films will be discussed.
- Chapter 5 will focus on the films of auteur director Karan Johar. The term "auteur" refers to a director whose major works can be defined by certain expressive styles of filmmaking (Mishra, 2002:89). While a literary author has control over his/her text and can assume copyright for the content of the work, it is difficult to assign the same title to a single person in the process of filmmaking because there are numerous people involved. However, according to auteur theory, the idea of author as owner of intellectual property should be granted to a figure in the complex apparatus of cinema who could be said to be identical with the author of a literary text (Mishra, 2002: 90). In this case, the title of auteur is also deserved because Karan Johar is both the writer and director of all the films selected as case studies. The manner in which Johar develops his ideas about feminism and transnationalism will be discussed within the contexts of the three films selected as case studies. His representational style of presenting two heroines as antithesis to each other will be addressed as a theme that runs through all three films.
- Chapter 6 will provide a conclusion and recommendations for further study will be suggested.

Chapter 2:

2 Anglo-American Feminism: a brief overview

Feminist critics generally agree that the oppression of women is a fact of life; that gender leaves its traces in literary texts and on literary history and that feminist literary criticism plays a worthwhile part in the struggle to end oppression in the world outside the texts. (Warhol and Herndl, 1997: x)

In line with the above sentiments, this chapter explores feminist theory by linking it with women's fight for freedom from oppression. Feminist theory in the Anglo-American context encompasses a large body of scholars who have over many years questioned and negotiated concepts like gender, race and the nation. As Cudd & Andreasen (2005: 1) note, through feminist theory, an attempt has been made to make sense of, and then to critique, the subordination of women to men. Scholars and reformers such as Wollstonecraft (1792); John Stuart Mill (1869); De Beauvoir (1949); Friedan (1963); James Mill (1968); Greer (1971); Millett (1977); Daly (1979); Miller (1986); Brownmiller (1986) and Kristeva (1997) have contributed to early feminist theory in the Anglo-American context.

Briefly, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the first wave of Anglo-American feminism was concerned with employment, education, legal inequalities and the issue of suffrage (Castle, 2007: 94). Whelehan (1995:1) accepts that the chief aim of the 'first wave' of feminism was formal equality between the sexes, particularly with regard to suffrage. The second wave of feminism (mid-sixties) was developed a decade after the first wave and was considered a continuation of the first wave because it foregrounded many of the views of early feminist scholars (Davidson, 1988: 5). During the second wave of feminism, controversy about feminist theory was rife because even though the feminist discourse had achieved many successes, it had simultaneously created discord between many men and women. As Davidson (1988: 5) argues, the second wave was characteristic of a period during which many women did not want to be known as feminists.

Feminism. For many women as well as men this term evokes an image of strident, unattractive women angrily demanding the abandonment of family, the desertion of husbands, the killing of foetuses, or perhaps just the burning of bras. But this picture of feminism grossly misrepresents its real nature and significance. (Kourany et. al., 1993:1)

As Warhol and Herndl (1997) have rightfully argued, the original significance of the feminist movement is to be found in its ideologies of ending the unjust oppression of women across the globe. Even so, despite the noble foundation of feminist theory, over the years, various ideas have been added to the fundamental basis upon which feminist theory was initially founded. As quoted in Kourany et. al. (1993: 1),

Feminists come from all types of religious, educational, ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds; they are of different ages, body sizes, and sexual orientations; and they include men as well as women.

Based on varied individual backgrounds and needs, different feminists articulated their ideas and viewpoints about the purpose of the feminist discourse during the second wave. Mixed perceptions about the feminist movement resulted in disharmony about a discourse that was initially focused on gender equality. One of the main negative perceptions that came to be associated with the feminism was that all women were radical man-haters (Rudman and Phelan: 2007:788). Therefore, even though there was progress in terms of formal equality because women were becoming more visible in the workplace, the movement impacted on their relationships with men. Nevertheless, despite conflicting and diverse viewpoints, the feminist movement was in progress. As the second wave of feminism flowed into the third wave in the mid-1990s, women's need to search for their individual authentic identities was intensified. In trying to position themselves within the context of a world that is not gender neutral, women across the globe continue to challenge existing frameworks of feminist studies in an attempt to re-define feminism.

This chapter will provide a brief background of Anglo-American feminism because several key scholars in the West are considered to be the pioneers of the Anglo-American feminist movement which has influenced regions outside the West, namely, India. It can be argued that women from across the globe identified with the feminist movement in the USA because one of its original aims was the eradication of oppression against women in general. The first two waves of Anglo-American feminism are therefore particularly relevant to Indian feminism because amongst other successes, these two waves raised awareness about gender inequality as well as the often unjust imposition of patriarchal structures upon women. Indian women identified with both challenges.

Anglo-American feminism has developed through three waves of feminism. While the three waves of feminist thought have attempted to solve the problem of women always being

referred to as the ‘second sex’, there is still no definitive resolution on this matter. Therefore, through feminist theory, an attempt can be made to grow, change, and continue to search for a single coherent definition of feminism that is universally accepted. This chapter will be structured as follows:

- Under the broad heading of early feminist theory, the historiography of the Anglo-American woman as a victim of patriarchy will be explored.
- The notion of femininity as an artificial construct during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will be examined.
- Twentieth century feminist thought will be discussed by taking into consideration the position of women with regard to the cultural climate that prevailed during the first two waves of feminism. The manner in which feminist-consciousness was raised by various scholars during this period will be discussed.
- A brief overview of the consequences and challenges of second and third wave feminism will be provided.
- The manner in which women embraced image after previously having been confined within the patriarchal structures will be considered.
- Finally, feminist film theory will be briefly discussed in relation to the representation of female protagonists in popular Hollywood films.

2.1 Early Feminist Theory

Early feminist theory will be discussed by focusing on the relationship of Anglo-American women with patriarchy and the manner in which women were expected to choose between pursuing an education or remaining confined within the patriarchal structures of the times.

2.1.1 Anglo-American women and patriarchy

Mainstream feminism in the Anglo-American context⁵ focuses on male domination while exercising white privilege through the exclusion of first Nations, Black Hispanic and other marginalized women from the discourse and the formally organized movement (Prince & Silva-Wayne, 2004: xix). Anglo-American women of the late eighteenth and nineteenth

⁵ It must be noted that the feminist movement in America was concerned with the challenges of American women specifically. Therefore, its principles did not take the challenges of women outside America into consideration.

centuries were generally victims of male dominated societies. As Rosemeyer (2000: 36) observes,

Men have been generals, kings, writers, composers, thinkers and doers: women have been wives, mistresses, companions, friends and helpmates. The very word woman, in fact, emphasizes this dependent anonymous position. It derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'wifman', literally 'wife-man'.

Before the early feminist movement raised awareness about the unequal positions of women in society based on their gender, women in the Anglo-American context were historically disadvantaged. Scholars such as Wollstonecraft (1792); Stanton (1848); John Stuart Mill (1869) Harriet Taylor (1851) and Rich (1976) have significantly contributed to early feminist theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period, the subjugation of women was fuelled by patriarchy and the perpetuation of Victorian ideals into societies. According to Whelehan (1995: 7),

Gender roles were very much influenced by Victorian mythologies.

According to the Victorian model, the home, domesticity and the subordination of women to men was considered a 'dominant ethic' which defined women's role in society (Wolff, 1990: 15). Based on normative structures of the times, Victorian domestic ideology clearly differentiated the roles of men and women and while men dominated the public sphere, women were expected to remain within the realm of the private sphere. As Wolff (1990, 13-15) notes, women were expected to remain within the private sphere of domesticity and embrace the Victorian ideology which entailed being held accountable for the maintenance of the family as a whole. Mill (quoted in Pyle, 1995: xiv), agrees that every Victorian wife was no better than a slave.

In linking the unjust oppression of women to slavery, Mill classified it as a practice that must be abolished. Similar to the practice of slavery, Mill asserts that women became regularised⁶ to attend to the whims of their masters (men). In order for women to rise above the adverse

⁶ The notion of being 'regularized' is also represented in the Hollywood film *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont: 1994) in which elderly inmate Brooks Hatlen is released from prison after fifty years. At first, he tries to stay in prison by consciously committing illegal acts. Even so, the authorities eventually release him. By this time, he is so 'institutionalized' by the routine of his life in prison that he cannot even fathom a life outside in the real world. He then hangs himself. When all the other prisoners express shock at his behaviour, fellow inmate Ellis 'Red' Redding casually tells them "These walls are funny. First you hate 'em. Enough time passes, you get so used to them. So you depend on them. That's institutionalized." A similarity exists between institutionalisation and the notion of being regularised and like prisoners, women eventually became embedded in the normative structures of the societies in which they lived.

conditions under which they were living, both patriarchal structures and Victorian ideologies needed to be dismantled. However, these ideologies were already deeply entrenched in society. Mill's (2001: 218) views in this regard are of relevance,

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances of human improvement. It ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side; nor disability on the other.

Even though various scholars such as Wollstonecraft (1792); Taylor (1851) and Mill (1869) were focused on creating gender equality, existing structures which relegated women into subordinate positions needed to be overcome. Even though there was progress, because of earlier normative beliefs about the position of women in society and in the minds of women, the thought of venturing outside of their 'ordained' domestic spaces created fear and anxiety in women. This idea can be further explored through Harriet Taylor's *Enfranchisement* (1851), in which she argues that even women in harems would probably object to emancipation, not because they are averse to better conditions, but because they don't know any better (Pyle, 1995: xv). However, as Mill emphasises, 'once liberal principles are established, no woman will accept inferior treatment based on gender' (Pyle, 1995: xvi). Nevertheless, as the strong tenets of patriarchy rippled through societies, women were coerced into believing that passivity was the 'ideal' feminine characteristic to aspire to. Liberal principles were cast aside while patriarchal structures were firmly embedded within the mind-sets of men and women.

Despotisms of all kinds justify themselves always to the despot; and multitudes even those who are degraded by enduring it, hug the yoke. But no tyranny of king over subject, master over slave, has ever had so many roots of vitality as the rule over women by men⁷.

Patriarchal structures prevented women from realising their full potential. As Rich (1976, 57-8) argues,

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under a male ... Under patriarchy, I may live in 'purdah' or drive a truck;

⁷ Mill is quoted in Pyle (1995: 58) in which he examines the relation between women being subjugated through Victorian ideals and then goes on to compare this closely with the structures of slavery.

...I may serve my husband his early morning coffee within the clay walls of a Berber village or march in an academic procession; whatever my status or situation, my derived economic class, or my sexual preference, I live under the power of the fathers, and I have access only to so much of privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to accede to me, and only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval.

In reality, societal norms during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not afford women the same privileges as men. For example, parochial notions regarding the education of women were perpetuated in societies through conservative males who considered it a 'waste' of valuable resources to educate women. Instead, they deemed it appropriate to insist that every woman should naturally be groomed to be a traditional wife and mother (Pyle, 1995: xxvi). Johnson argues that this resulted in women's principle route to status and influence being centred on attracting the best possible marital partner (Rudman & Phelan: 2007:788). In a sense, women were being conditioned and thereby socialised to focus on attracting male attention in order to complete themselves.

Over time, women became accustomed to submitting themselves to the whims of men. It can be argued that women were restricted from accessing the public domain because gender politics were fuelled by patriarchal and Victorian ideologies. This, in turn, impacted upon their rights to education and free socialisation. Socialisation patterns were sequentially linked to essentialist notions of femininity. The use of femininity as a social construct that was influential in creating gender stereotypes, as well as 'conditioning' women into subordinate roles will be examined further below.

2.1.2 Femininity versus Education

Mary Wollstonecraft (1992) is perhaps the earliest feminist thinker to challenge essentialist notions of femininity⁸. Wollstonecraft (1929:75) argued that women were mainly educated to become 'fine' ladies. Based on her argument, it can be assumed that this specific type of

⁸ When Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of Rights of Women* was published in 1792, it helped shape the woman's rights movement (Whelehan, 1995:3-4). Wollstonecraft worked from a premise that criticised stereotypes of women and argued in favour of women enjoying social, legal and intellectual equality with men (Castle, 2007: 94). The most radical aspect of the *Vindication of Rights of Women* by Wollstonecraft is its central idea that femininity is an artificial construct, an imposition of patriarchal culture, yet is regarded as an immutably natural state (Rosemeyer, 2000:14). Wollstonecraft hoped to inspire women to embrace a fully human mode of existence in order to reach their full potential.

socialised education created a certain definition of femininity. As Wollstonecraft (1929:62) rightfully observes,

Prevented from exercising their intellects and energies in the public world outside the home, women are reared to place inordinate emphasis on their senses; confined in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. In exchange for their keep, they yield their liberty, health and virtue, treated like queens only to be deluded by hollow respect.

Instead of being educated in all spheres of life as men were, women's roles in life were regulated through the promotion of acceptable ideals which they had to aspire to. In a sense, women were conditioned to 'lock off' various possibilities for development due to having accepted the most basic assumptions about femininity that were created by men (Greer, 1971: 14). These acceptable ideals included spending large amounts of time on image and beauty, allowing themselves to be used as sex objects by men, living within the laws of male-dominated societies and thereby displaying a keen disposition towards the acceptance of Victorian ideals by being amenable to stereotypical notions of femininity. Based on these created ideals, Wollstonecraft (1992: xxxi-xxxii) promoted the need for women to receive an education in order to assist them in becoming autonomous individuals and argues,

A woman is a rational human being with virtues that are fundamentally the same as those of man. Reason is the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue and the key to independence. Education ensures the development of this reason and enables the individual to achieve independence.

In other words, Wollstonecraft was of the opinion that if women were 'correctly' socialised in the same manner as men, then they would be able to achieve autonomy and not be relegated a subordinate status. This is corroborated by Rudman & Phelan (2007:788) who agree that women have traditionally been socialised to occupy different family roles (such as domesticity and caretaking) as opposed to men who have been socialised to be the breadwinners of the family unit. The socialisation patterns of women have resulted in them surrendering their powers to males. Simultaneously, men have been socialised to take control of their women and economic priorities with regard to their families.

In order to effect change in existing socialisation patterns it becomes necessary to re-think these beliefs. According to Wollstonecraft (quoted in Wollstonecraft & Mill: 1929: 47-52), academic education is a core necessity for the growth of the individual, regardless of gender,

as is the need for women to ‘strive toward the attainment of personhood’⁹. However, social constructs that are deeply embedded in societies are often treated as norms. Therefore, even though the problems that added to gender bias were being identified, existing structures were firmly in place. As a result, the effects of patriarchal ideologies continued to be felt by women within their family environments and men continued excluding women from the public domain (Whelehan, 1995: 16). In continuously alienating women from public spaces, their access to education was also hampered. This in turn created a situation in which women’s access to economic power was also restricted¹⁰. This ideology can be understood through Moore’s (1988: 21, 13, 103) model of the ‘domestic’ versus ‘public’ in which she claims the following:

- The framework in which women are closer to the domestic than the public sphere can be used to explain their subordination;
- Women’s subordination is dependent on gender bias which has been embedded into societies through various cultures;
- Education is a key factor that determines women’s socio-economic status in relation to their role in the male/female hierarchy as well as their position in society.

Based on Moore’s model, the universal subordination of women can be attributed to a historical conditioning which has been perpetuated into societies through an emphasised cultural difference which is solely driven by gender. Even though the USA was hailed a free society by most people, the prescription of stereotypical gender roles was instrumental in allocating specific powers and demeanours to the respective sexes. In light of the above, Wollstonecraft (1929:66) argues,

A man when he enters any profession has his eye steadily fixed on some future advantage, and full of his business, pleasure is considered as mere relaxation; whilst women seek for pleasure as the main purpose of existence.

⁹ According to Wollstonecraft (quoted in Wollstonecraft & Mill: 1929: 51), the attainment of personhood was an urgent priority necessary to restore women’s sense of dignity. She (Ibid) argues, “It is time to effect a revolution in female manners – time to restore to them their lost dignity – and to make them, as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world.”

¹⁰ This is corroborated by Millet (quoted in: Eisenstein: 1984: 6), “In the United States, women were trained from early childhood to accept the division of male and female spheres and also to understand that each had specific allocated roles, with public power belonging to the male. From Millet’s (1977) observations, it can be argued that patriarchy was deeply entrenched within communities in the Anglo-American context and as a result, women fell prey to this institution through the acceptance of passive roles.

The seeking of pleasure as a purpose is a trait that has been embedded in women through both patriarchal structures and the perpetuation of Victorian ideologies. According to Freedman (2007: xiv),

Across cultures and centuries, education recurs in feminist thought as the key to creating virtuous and capable women who reject mere ornamental roles.

It is important to note that women's roles are not only confined to seeking pleasure and 'pruning', but also entail making certain that men are placed in superior positions in every respect. A practical example of the challenges faced by women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to be found in the writing of Sylvia Plath¹¹. After the birth of their first child, her husband began working/writing in someone else's home because of the distraction caused by the child. In response to this, Plath¹² wrote a letter to her mother,

It is impossible for him to work in this little place with me cleaning and caring for the baby, and when he is out, I have the living room and desk to myself and can get my work done ... I find my first concern is that Ted has peace and quiet. I am happy then and don't mind that my own taking up of writing comes a few weeks later ...

This letter illustrates the conditioned response of women to domesticity and in placing the needs of men before their own. In another letter to her mother, after her husband's book of poems was accepted for publication, Plath¹³ wrote,

I am more happy than if it was my book published! I have worked so closely on these poems of Ted's and typed them so many countless times through revision after revision that I feel ecstatic about it all. I am so happy "his" book is accepted "first". It will make it so much easier for me when mine is accepted.

From Plath's letters to her mother, it becomes clear that women placed themselves after their male counterparts in relation to significance, and this hierarchal structure was considered to be a norm in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Anglo-American context. Despite the prevailing ideologies and social constructs of societies, both Mill (quoted in

¹¹ Sylvia Plath was a young American poet and novelist, married to poet Ted Hughes. She was active in the women's liberation movement in the late 20th century (Rosemeyer, 2000: 32-33).

¹² A letter written by Sylvia Plath to her mother (quoted in Rosemeyer, 2000: 33).

¹³ Extract from a letter written by Plath to her mother (quoted in Rosemeyer: 2000: 32).

Wollstonecraft & Mill: 1929: 232) and Wollstonecraft (1992) championed the need for women to break through the existing norms of societies in order to attain their full potential.

The work of Wollstonecraft and other feminist scholars paved the way for other 'liberal' feminist thinkers. In the second half of the nineteenth century the first wave of feminism was born; the key concerns of first wave feminists in nineteenth century America were employment, education, legal inequalities and the issue of suffrage (Castle, 2007: 94).

Concluding thoughts

The first wave of feminism was successful in achieving equality for women on various levels such as enabling them to vote, raising awareness about the negative aspects of patriarchal systems and creating a movement through which women began to question their subordinate positions in relation to man. Even though the feminist movement achieved many successes, it was really not a victory for women because they were merely afforded rights and equality which should not have been taken away from them in the first place. From this perspective, first wave feminism should be considered as a consequence of the long history of man's subjugation and oppression of women based on a biological construct.

Pyle (1995: xv) notes the growing number of women in America who clearly resented their subordinate position to men. Yet, as Mill argues, women were victimised because of their gender and were forced to fit into societies in which the institution of patriarchy was universally accepted (Pyle, 1995: xvi). This was because Western societies of the times perpetuated the ideologies of sex-role stereotypes. According to Chesler, in order to conform to the stereotype of being 'feminine', women were expected to be weak, compliant and indecisive (Eisenstein, 1984: 59). In other words, the 'expected' behavioural patterns of women already placed them in disadvantaged positions and, at the same time, they were perceived as being essentially incapable of leading strong, independent and autonomous lives (Ibid).

According to Whelehan (1995: 7-8), women who expressed outrage at being subjugated, were frowned upon and perceived as being unnatural. A normal or 'natural' woman was expected to maintain the household as this was deemed proper and accepted as the only identity of the Anglo-American woman in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It can be

argued that the parochial socialisation patterns of societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were constantly being perpetuated into the psyches of women and this in turn, led to subordinate behaviour which eventually became a normative pattern for most women. In relation to the historiography of Anglo-American women, it seems as if patriarchal and Victorian ideals were instrumental in allocating a subordinate status to women by conditioning them to behave in specific ways. The lack of academic education can also be alluded to as a major contributing factor towards women's inability to articulate their needs for emancipation.

However, in a *positive light*, the first wave of the feminist movement did signal the beginning of a mass movement in the USA and even though all the issues were not solved, there was the *initiation of a collective action* in the fight for women's equality (Whelehan, 1995: 4, emphasis mine). Due to the collective voices of early feminist scholars, the feminist movement opened up a space for women to make the transition from the private to the public sphere.

2.2 Twentieth Century Feminist Thought

The first wave of feminism extended into the early twentieth century until the second wave of feminism was born. During the mid-1960s, second wave feminism foregrounded the views of early feminist scholars. As Whelehan (1995: 7-9) notes, women in the Anglo-American context increasingly deliberated upon their status and place in society. Even though the need for women's rights was the basis of the feminist movement, different types of feminism began to emerge during the twentieth century such as radical feminism, ecofeminism, social/Marxist feminism and eventually, third-wave feminism. Each of these feminisms had their own agenda because they were defined by individual challenges.

Due to diverse interpretations, the second wave of feminism was characterised by many unanswered questions, hurdles and challenges. Nevertheless, a growing body of work was becoming increasingly visible by scholars such as De Beauvoir (1949); Friedan (1963, 1981, 2000); Millet (1977); Greer (1971, 1999) Daly (1979) and Moi (1999). These scholars challenged the older norms of societies that stereotyped women based on gender constructs and thereby brought the problem of women's inequality to the fore again. According to

Wilson, (quoted in Whelehan, 1995:1), the challenge was embedded in the identification of a singular definition of the theory.

Feminism embodies many theories rather than being a single discrete theory, and rather than being a politically coherent approach to the subordination of women, is a political commitment – or in some of its forms more an *ethical* commitment – *to giving women their true value*. (Whelehan, 1995: 1)

The meaning of receiving ‘true value’ differed according to the individual needs of women. It was difficult to reach consensus because ‘value’ meant different things to different women. Based on the diverse views of both scholars and individual women, feminist theory spiralled into different directions. Hence, the second wave of feminism came to be characterised by both multiple and varied feminisms. During this period, many women chose to embrace careers (Davidson, 1988: 17). At the same time, during the second wave period, there were also many women who did not want to be called feminists (Davidson, 1988: 6). This could be attributed to the fact that this period was characteristic of a time during which individual women had the freedom to voice their subjective personal journeys. This in turn, created much confusion about the original¹⁴ purpose of feminism. This sentiment is echoed by Moi (1999: 9),

What we need today more than ever is a feminism committed to seeking justice and equality for women, in the most ordinary sense of the word. Only such a feminism will be able to grasp the complexity of women’s concrete, everyday concerns.

Even though women during the second wave of feminism had been afforded freedom of expression, there were still too many conflicting viewpoints regarding the purpose of feminism. The central question that continued to characterise the second wave of feminism was the dilemma of finding a single definition that would explain ‘what being a woman’ meant. This was challenging because ‘being a woman’ could mean different things to different women. In trying to find a definition, one must acknowledge and accept that women come from diverse backgrounds with different value-systems, cultural realities and therefore have various viewpoints. It is thus important to understand the cultural climate that pervaded during this period.

¹⁴ It is important to bear in mind that the original aim of feminists from all over the world was to establish equality between men and women and to eradicate the oppression of women by men.

2.2.1 Cultural Climate

Anglo-American feminist thought in the twentieth century was largely dominated by Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963); Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1977) and Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1971). The theory of biological determinism forwarded by French theorist De Beauvoir (1949) is important when trying to understand contemporary feminist thought processes during the twentieth century. The seminal arguments forwarded by these scholars guided the development of feminist theory during the second wave. While the theories of Friedan, Millet and Greer were instrumental in highlighting the notion of femininity as being a social construct, they also proposed varying and conflicting arguments. It is important to distinguish between the three different strands of feminist thought that these scholars represented. Briefly, Friedan can be classified a liberal feminist, Millet is a proponent of radical lesbian feminism and is candid about her hatred of men (Davidson, 1988: 18). Greer, on the other hand, is seen as a radical feminist. However, while she forwarded the idea of women focussing on reassuring themselves and thereby raising their levels of feminist consciousness (Greer, 1971: 14), she simultaneously argued the idea that essentially, Women have very little idea of how much men hate them. (Greer, 1971: 249)

The theories and contributions of each of these scholars will be briefly examined.

Diversity of Thought

The principle tenets of Millet's (1977) theorising were focused on societies being essentially patriarchal. She was also of the opinion that men hated women. According to Millet (1977: 31), male and female are socially constructed to represent two separate cultures, with the role of the male being considered dominant through patriarchal structures. Millet's (1977: 35-39) hatred of men was based on her belief that men hate women. She therefore proposed that women should avoid men. In a sense, her theory gave rise to a circular argument which inadvertently caused a faction between men and women. This extreme assertion of 'man-hatred' may have been instrumental in alienating many women¹⁵ from the feminist movement

¹⁵ Many women in America had good relationships with their husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, etc. Therefore, they did not want to be associated with a movement that labelled all men as being aggressive and exploitative. It is ironic that in trying to free women from being treated as unequal, the feminist movement was alienating all men as a form of retaliation by grouping them together as a collectivity. In essence, it was unfair to label all men as oppressors.

(Davidson, 1988:24-25). Millet (1977: 30) further argues that the notion of gender is 'learned' and therefore, distinctions between males and females should not be made based on the biological meanings which are used to differentiate between male and female bodies. Within a cultural context, Millet (1977: 31) claims that men are 'conditioned' to be aggressive, while women are taught that passivity is a virtue associated with femininity.

It is interesting that one of Millet's (1977: 33) main arguments originates from the sociological constructs of the patriarchal institution.

Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often those of murder and sale. (Ibid)

However, even though patriarchal structures were prevalent in America during the late twentieth century, not all women experienced male domination. There was a divide in the reactions and sentiments toward patriarchal structures by both men and women. Women who were not adversely affected by patriarchy did not want to be associated with the feminist movement. On the other hand, there were also women who were unhappy with the status quo of their lives. Greer's (1971:14) theory which concentrates on raising feminist consciousness is important in this regard. In *The Female Eunuch* (1971), Greer proposes that women should not begin by changing the world, but that they should rather focus on reassessing themselves. She further argues that there is no 'natural' distinction between the sexes (Castle, 2007: 95). In other words, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed ideas. The need to break free from moulds created by man is stressed by both Greer and Millet (Whelehan, 1995: 77).

In a sense, both Millet and Greer are proponents of the ideology that women should rise above constructed notions of femininity and thereby become more conscious of their own plight. Greer suggests that women should consciously make an effort to re-assess their situations and thereby take control of their own lives. Millet, on the other hand cites the prevalence of patriarchal structures as a fundamental challenge that needs to be overcome in order to prevent women from accepting men as their superiors in the line of hierarchy. Mary Daly (1979: 2) also supports the idea that women should rise out of the 'pit of patriarchal possession'. Since patriarchy was closely associated with the social construction of the male as dominant/the aggressor and the female as passive/the victim, in order to reject or move beyond patriarchal structures, women had to reject everything that contributed to them being perceived as feminine beings. As Davidson (1988: 37) argues,

Femininity was commonly described as a lower stage of evolution, to be left behind by the march of progress.

In other words, even though femininity is an artificially created social construct, over time, it came to be regarded as an inferior trait. The association of negativity with feminine constructs was also a result of the association of feminine characteristics being used to subjugate women under the structures of patriarchy. The social construction of femininity was identified as a pivotal factor that was instrumental in relegating women to a subordinate status. The stereotyping of gender roles was also instrumental in alluding negative characteristics to the notion of femininity. In a sense, as Davidson (1988: 45) notes,

The feminist perspective or *femininity* is thus the idea that men are collectively responsible for all the evils of history and for their perpetuation in the present.

Based on the linking of femininity with negativity as a result of patriarchal structures, men were inadvertently blamed or held responsible for the perception of femininity in a negative light. Even though the norms of masculine and feminine behaviour were dictated by social conventions, from women's perspectives, instead of appreciating femininity for its positive virtues, patriarchal structures were influential in creating distaste for the very notion of the word. As a result, many second wave feminist scholars (Friedan, Millet, Greer and Daly) were invested in challenging the notion of femininity as a social construct.

However, it is important to consider the idea that to a large extent men have been socialised into believing that they are superior to women in the same manner that women have become accustomed to being subjugated. According to Millet (1977: 26),

Women were trained from early childhood to accept a system which divided society into male and female spheres, with appropriate roles for each, and which allocated public power exclusively to the male sphere.

Clearly, constructed social conventions were creating disharmony between men and women. However, above social constructions are the distinctive biological constructions of men and women. Aside from social constructions, the biological make-up of women as well as the glorification of motherhood contributed to women's subordinate status. This will be examined below.

Biological differences

Biological differences are identified as another cause of anxiety for women, especially since their allegiance to motherhood was always a factor in determining their worth. Kinser (2004: 138) identifies the glorification of biological motherhood as a contributory factor of women's oppression. The glorification of domesticity and motherhood continued to be promoted as the acceptable ideal that women were expected to aspire towards. On this note, De Beauvoir (1988: 69) posed a question that characterised second wave feminism's dilemma with understanding why women were always considered 'the other'.

Biology is not enough to give an answer to the question that is before us: why is woman the other? Our task is to discover how the nature of woman has been affected throughout the course of history; we are concerned to find out what humanity has made of the human female.

In other words, as De Beauvoir argues, in using the biological composition of women to solely identify them, there are many gaps. The practice of always categorising women as lacking something and thereby preventing them from working toward attaining an identity based on their individual strengths and weaknesses strips them of their human rights. The challenge lies in the choice women make of allowing this biological fact to dictate the course of their lives, behaviour and general demeanour. In addition to social convention, De Beauvoir (1988: 19, emphasis mine) states that a biological construct should not be extended to influence socialisation patterns between men and women because 'the division of the sexes is a biological fact, *not an event in human history.*'

This implies that women should be classified as human beings instead of categorised as a subordinate group. De Beauvoir (1988: 65) further contends that the only kind of essentialism within feminist theory that should be rejected is biological determinism. While conceding that biological differences do exist¹⁶, the biological composition of an individual should not dictate their status. According to De Beauvoir (1988: 15), 'one is not born, one becomes a woman'. In other words, women are socialised into subordinate roles and behavioural

¹⁶ During the latter part of the 20th century, Simone de De Beauvoir challenged the idea that a woman's essence was distinct from a man's, that she was born with certain inherent potentialities and qualities that defined her personal, social and legal existence (Castle, 2007:95). It is true that gender is determined from sex. However to use the biological construct of a woman to relegate her to a subordinate status and thereafter to delineate various restrictions for women under the guise of laws of the state, traditions, culture and 'created' acceptable norms is questionable.

patterns. They are therefore not regarded as autonomous beings. As a result, man defines woman not as an entity herself, but rather, in relation to him. This results in women being reduced to mere sexual beings who are always defined in terms of and differentiated in regard to men.

Landmark feminists such as Wollstonecraft; Woolf and De Beauvoir also observed that 'women' in Western culture are defined only in negative terms by what they lack - status, independent income, education, history and most of all, the discrete qualities associated with masculinity (Whelehan, 1995: 9). De Beauvoir's (1988: 69) main point of contention was the typification of women as being 'essentially the representation of lack'.

It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life. (Ibid)

De Beauvoir's observation is in line with Greer's (1971) theory according to which she proposes that women should be responsible for the shape of their own lives. Since femininity had been reduced to an artificially created social construct, it had been replaced with another question, 'What is a Woman?' In response to this question, Moi (1999: 9) claims that there is no singular answer to this question and appeals for a redress of the concepts of seeking justice and equality in the most ordinary sense. It is essential, as Moi contends, to look beyond the definition of 'woman' in a narrow sense of the word. However, as De Beauvoir (1988:69) argues, the facts of biology must be considered in light of an ontological, economic, social and psychological context,

The enslavement of the female to the species and the limitations of her various powers are extremely important facts; the body of woman is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world. But that body is not enough to define her as a woman; there is no true living reality except as manifested by the conscious individual through activities and in the bosom of a society.

In a sense, Greer's (1971) claim that the sex of a person should not dictate positions of superiority supports De Beauvoir's theory. In *The Female Eunuch*, Greer (1971) argues that women are incomplete, damaged beings, or 'female eunuchs'. It can be argued that the very 'social constructed-ness' of femininity led to the conflict in gender discrimination.

The dogmatism of science expresses the status quo as the ineluctable result of law: women must learn how to question the most basic assumptions about feminine normality in order to reopen the possibilities for development which have been successfully locked off by conditioning. (Greer, 1971: 14)

As Greer argues, there can be no logic in discrimination based on biological differences between men and women. It seems as if over the years, the body of the woman has been wrongfully overused in various contexts: firstly as a source of created inferiority, secondly as a sex object and thirdly, as a means to define a woman based on a construct in which she had no hand. In trying to disengage from the restrictions imposed by women as a result of their biological composition, liberal feminist Friedan (1998:82) identifies the need to disengage from patriarchal structures and male-dominated societies.

New Beginnings

Friedan set out to actively encourage women to reject¹⁷ their status as housewives and assume the roles of men who were actively involved in activities outside the home. This idea was based on her inherent belief that all women who were housewives were unhappy. From this perspective, it can be argued that she was dealing with issues pertaining to the perception of women as one-dimensional beings. In other words, her idea of women abandoning their roles in the private sphere was based on her belief that all women who were housewives were unhappy. It is interesting, that within this assertion, is the acceptance of gender role stereotyping. In urging women to ‘assume’ the roles of men, Friedan (1963: 52) ironically accepted the social construction of gender roles and claimed that family life was a trap from which women in America needed to escape¹⁸.

At the time, consciousness-raising groups were being formed on an ad-hoc basis by women throughout America and the ideologies of Friedan, Greer and Millet were used as guidelines¹⁹ by these groups. Friedan (1963:13) underpinned the impact of American tradition on the actual lives of women who were constantly reminded that there was no ‘greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity’ and set out to actively promote the idea of women being more than housewives. Most women in America welcomed her stance.

¹⁷ It is important to note that Friedan was critiqued for limiting her perspectives to white, middle-class, heterosexual educated women who found the traditional roles of wife and mother unsatisfying (Tong: 2009: 28)

¹⁸ Friedan’s analysis of the alienation felt by many American housewives confirmed her as one of the pioneers of modern feminism (Whelehan, 1995:9).

¹⁹ These groups were being formed throughout America in an attempt to help women analyse what had gone wrong with their lives from a feminist perspective (Davidson, 1988; 54).

The problem that has no name: it was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the U.S. (Friedan, 1963: 13).

Friedan's (1963: 17, 27) efforts in finding a definition for a problem that 'has no name' exposed the helplessness that women in America felt in trying to describe a problem that entailed 'merely describing the daily domestic lives that they led'. During the second wave of feminism, there was an existing ideology in America that promoted and glorified the idea of the perfect 'housewife'. As Friedan (1963: 16) notes,

In the fifteen years after the Second World War, this mystique of feminine fulfilment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands good-bye in front of the picture window, depositing their station-wagons full of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor. They baked their own bread, sewed their own and their children's clothes, kept their new washing machines and dryers running all day. They changed the sheets on the beds twice a week instead of once and gloried in their role as women. 'Occupation: housewife'.

On the surface, women in America were living the 'American dream' and they had no reason to complain. As Greer (1971: 15) states, 'the myth of the eternal feminine or the stereotype is the dominant image of femininity which rules our culture and to which all women aspire to'. It is notable, that even though many women were influenced by and lived their lives according to this dominant image of femininity while aspiring to become one with this model, they did not find it satisfying. This picturesque life was not sufficient to feed their inner needs and desires, and as a result, many women started to voice their frustrations:

I feel empty somehow ...incomplete; I feel as if I don't exist; I feel like crying without a reason. (Friedan, 1963: 18)

Real life was when you married and lived in a suburban house with your husband and children. (Ibid: 135)

In reality, even if young women in America did go to college, this was regarded as an interval in their lives after which they were expected to get on with their 'real'²⁰ life. According to

²⁰ In the film *Mona Lisa Smile* (Newell: 2003), Katherine Ann Watson takes a teaching position at a conservative women's only arts college in Massachusetts, USA. The film is set in 1953 and traces the lives of young American women interested in studying art. It is interesting that these young women are all depicted as striving to embody the ideal of becoming 'perfect wives'. The female characters who do not prescribe to this ideal are depicted as 'fallen' women. Katherine actively sets out to change the mind-sets of her students by encouraging them to pursue careers of their passion instead of just settling to become housewives and mothers. She is challenged by both the institution and the students about her 'overly liberal' views. In the end, she does influence the thought-patterns and ideologies of her students, but not without an exhaustive battle.

Friedan²¹, women were experiencing an identity crisis because they were always identifying themselves in relation to others. For instance, 'I am Tom's mother, or Eddy's wife or I am pregnant.' These identities did not do justice to the autonomy of the woman. Instead they categorised her as a person who was always playing a specific role. There was no mention of individual goals or ideals or inner desires that needed to be fulfilled. As a result, American women no longer had a true sense of who they were. Instead, they found themselves fitting into roles that were available to them. Friedan²² identified a significant lack in American culture that did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role. This was problematic. According to Moi (1999: 120),

The modern world is steeped in sex: every habit, gesture, and activity is sexualized and categorized as male or female, masculine or feminine. On the transition to the two-sex model, man and woman emerge as two different species.

While it must be accepted that the biological constructs of males and females are most certainly different, it must also be accepted and forwarded that difference does not give any one gender type the right to oppress the other. These issues and the need to embrace a new dialogue about gender politics will be discussed as the consequences of the second wave of feminism.

2.2.2 Consequences of second wave feminism

The second wave was characterised by many challenges that various scholars attempted to address. Even though there was progress in terms of laws and the detachment from older patriarchal norms, there were still many unresolved issues that needed to be clarified. Nevertheless, during this period, while many women embraced the public sphere with fervour²³, there were also women who chose to become housewives, this time out of choice. However, many feminist scholars were averse to women embracing motherhood and

²¹ Friedan is quoted in Prince & Silva-Wayne (2004: 67). According to her discussion, this 'identity crisis' develops as a result of women not having been able to embrace their individual autonomy. This, she claims, was a result of women not having been afforded equal rights. Therefore, their place in society has historically been determined by their relationships to others.

²² Friedan's discussion of the lack of autonomy that affected American women is further explored in Prince & Silva-Wayne (2004: 71).

²³ In striving to attain full personhood as proposed by Wollstonecraft, Tong and Mill (Tong: 1992: 28), many Anglo-American women embraced the world outside of previously ordained domestic spaces.

marriage. In an article entitled *Sex, Society and the Female Dilemma*²⁴, De Beauvoir claims that no woman should be authorised to stay at home and raise her children. In the dialogue between De Beauvoir and Friedan, both scholars encourage women to forsake motherhood, the institution of family as well as femininity.

Since choice had become an option, the journeys that women embarked upon during the second wave of feminism were characterised by their own needs. Instead of accepting their roles as housewives, women questioned the level of fulfilment that they were experiencing by being housewives and this in turn led to them engaging with their inner psyches in search of their true identities. On the one hand, there was victory for women who could now rise above subservience, but at the same time, women experienced a sense of fear because the boundaries within which they were accustomed to living had now been suddenly removed. In the past, these very boundaries were perceived as ‘cages’ and women were not used to assuming responsibility, nor were they accustomed to the freedom of decision-making. Therefore, they were never held accountable for any decision. The drastic shift from a life without freedom or the right to exercise free-thought to a life of autonomy was overwhelming for many women.

The structured roles that women were forced to fit into previously had inadvertently ‘stripped’ them of their abilities to make decisions. In order for women to actually develop ‘personas’ of their own, they would have to rise to the challenge of having the courage to live with the consequences of their own actions. If women had not been stripped of their human rights of equality and freedom of choice, this hurdle would not have existed. The double standards by which societies were ruled in the past impacted substantially and significantly on the position and role of women in contemporary societies. Nevertheless, the feminist movement was in motion and its core focus was on the rehabilitation of the woman as an individual.

²⁴ “Sex, Society and the Female Dilemma: a dialogue between Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan” was first published in 1975 and extracts of this dialogue are cited in Davidson (1988: 17).

The Challenges of rehabilitation

Freedom is often riddled with anxiety. This sentiment is aptly expressed by the character of the slave woman in the film *Lincoln* (Spielberg: 2012). Shortly before President Lincoln is able to change the constitution with regards to granting slaves equal rights, he has a personal conversation with the slave woman who works in his home. When he asks her what her people will do if they are granted freedom, she is at a loss for words. She tells him that her son lost his life fighting for freedom. Clearly, she and her family were affected by the slavery laws of the times. Yet, in terms of the course of their lives after the battle is won, she admits that she has absolutely no idea what her people will do if they finally receive all that they have been fighting for, which is freedom.

In a similar context, for women who were previously accustomed to merely following males and attending to their whims and desires, the idea of assuming responsibility for themselves translated into a daunting task. Even though Wollstonecraft, Taylor and Mill all supported the idea of personhood for women which would elevate them to attaining full membership in the human community (Tong, 1992: 28), women feared stepping out of their previously ordained roles of domesticity and subservience. Before the attainment of freedom, there was a need to fight, but after freedom was granted, many women were suddenly content with the status quo. This resistance was articulated by Friedan (1988: 34-35) as fear of the unknown, in her argument,

It was our fear of risking ourselves in the world that made us cling to the trap.

In a similar light, Tong (1992: 16) argues,

Rather than assuming responsibility for her own development and growing into a mighty, although gnarled, redwood, she forsakes her freedom and lets others make of her a stunted, although beautiful, bonsai tree.

Even though debates had been generated by the first and second waves of feminism, ideas about women's roles in society were still essentially confined by older notions of masculine and feminine roles. Friedan, Firestone and Millet all argued that women's social position and powerlessness relative to man had little to do with female biology and much to do with the social construction of femininity (Tong, 1992:143). From this perspective, even though femininity is a constructed notion, it provided women with certain structures. In a strange way, these erroneously constructed and stifling structures provided a safety net for women. In

line with past patriarchal and Victorian ideologies, the structured role of 'housewife' which was characterised by the myth of the 'eternal feminine' was synonymous with being a 'good' woman.

While there is merit in both Friedan and Tong's arguments, it is also important to consider the possibility that many women did not consider family life a 'trap' (Friedan, 1963: 135) but at the same time, they also welcomed the role of the 'working woman' with fervour. Thus, many women chose to have both, family and career. As Whelehan (1995: 6-7) notes,

Women began performing the dual role of career and worker - roles which had previously been cast ideologically as mutually in conflict – and many women, having recognized a potential they were previously persuaded was biologically impossible, would be reluctant to return to the home full time.

On the one hand, Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* was successful in providing women with options. However, she failed to consider just how difficult it would be for even privileged women to combine marriage and motherhood with a career unless major structural changes were made within, as well as outside the family. One of the criticisms made against Friedan was that she sent women out into the public realm without summoning men into the private domain to pick up their fair share of slack (Tong, 2009: 28). Friedan's attack on the institution of family and the role of motherhood created disharmony within households and amongst family settings. Even though Friedan's arguments were critiqued, she did raise awareness about the possibility of women working outside their homes and not being confined to domestic roles exclusively.

Once again, women were at the crossroads. While they had the freedom to venture out into the public sphere, years of conditioning did not allow them to completely detach themselves from the home and domestic life. While the attainment of full personhood was within their reach, they were torn between allegiance to the private or to the public sphere. They were conflicted within themselves, but since they were free from past patriarchal structures, the time to work towards attaining a true identity had arrived.

A new identity

The search for identity has always been both universal and immemorial. According to psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, men in America constantly question themselves and seek an

image and purpose that truly recognises their human abilities (Prince & Silva-Wayne, 2004: 72-73). This was accepted as a cultural norm in America and young boys were always encouraged to conquer old frontiers and replace them with new challenges. These values were, however, not considered to be a norm for women too. Instead, the roles of women were broadly defined and there was never an acknowledgement of their individual needs and preferences.

In reality, it was the pressure of choosing one or the other that now caused the greatest conflict. It can be argued that by shunning the subordination of women, the feminist movement indirectly caused women to believe that their 'rightful' place was outside the home. As a result, many women in the West began to juggle the roles of 'working woman' and 'mother'. The idea of being a 'career woman' seemed more glamorous than their daily lives at home, and even though they struggled to maintain both roles simultaneously, they forced themselves to cope with both worlds. However, while feminist theories of the time had succeeded in allowing women to work outside of their domestic lives, they did not allow for any concessions within the domestic sphere. Men were not expected to share in the duties of the home, as it was not considered 'their responsibility' because of their genetic make-up. It was believed that since the woman carried the child in her womb, all nurturing and care giving duties fell into her domain. As women juggled both public and private domains single-handedly, men reaped the financial rewards of this cycle and women were left emotionally and physically exhausted. As a result, the quest for women's identity was cast aside and women were still dissatisfied and 'empty' inside.

As the second wave of feminism extended into the third wave in the mid-1990s, women's search for individual identity was intensified. Since past structures of male domination were dismantled to a large extent, it became necessary to rethink the category of woman/women. As Tong (2009: 9) argues,

Third-wave feminists, like postmodern feminists are eager to shape a new-millennium feminism by rethinking the category 'woman/women'. They have no intention of writing themselves and other women out of existence. Instead, they want to answer the 'woman question' – Who is she and what does she want? – in ways that it has never been answered before.

After the first two waves of feminism successfully brought women into focus as autonomous beings, the feminist discourse became blurred. Stated differently, rethinking the category of the word 'woman' became a priority. In line with this sensibility, Kinser (2004: 137)

observes that one of the important contributions of third wave feminism was its emphasis on how feminism informs and complicates one's sense of identity. As a result, questions of identity formation and the choice of how women decided to live their lives became open-ended discussions. According to Kinser (2004: 135),

In this twenty-first century, young women often conclude that gender equality is the norm and that therefore, feminists who argue for it are simply unnecessary.

In other words, the 'fight' for feminism had slowly receded into the background and feminism was now being defined and redefined by individual collectivities. Due to differing versions of feminism's definitions, Gillis & Munford (2004: 165) posit that third wave feminism is often used interchangeably with post-feminism. From this perspective, if it is assumed that feminism's journey has been completed, then the third wave of feminism exists as a mere derivative of the initial political movement that had a sense of purpose. Based on the historiography of feminist theory, feminism's initial battle with inequality, injustice and oppression in the Anglo-American context had been won. As Siegel (quoted in Gillis & Munford: 2004: 166, emphasis mine) observes,

In mainstream media, feminism after the second wave has often been described as movement when women's movements are, for whatever reasons, no longer moving, no longer vital, no longer relevant; the term suggests that the gains forged by previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those still *harping* about victim status are *embarrassingly out of touch*.

While there is truth in the statement that women in the Anglo-American context have been freed from patriarchal structures, this is not the case with women in the Indian context. Third-world²⁵ women experienced feminism differently and even though their trajectories often travelled parallel to the trajectories of Anglo-American feminists, their dilemmas, challenges and issues were also vastly different²⁶. It is interesting that within the Anglo-American context, 'the generational model of feminism required that each new contribution to feminism deal with the real, lived experiences of women' (Gillis et. al., 2007:168). As a consequence of this model, feminist consciousness was raised outside the scholarly academy during the third wave of feminism (Gillis & Munford, 2004: 169). This consciousness found visibility in the

²⁵ This study examines feminism in the Indian context as a category of third-world feminism and will henceforth be referred to as Indian feminism.

²⁶ Feminism in the Indian context will be examined in detail in the chapter, "Feminism and/within the Indian context."

subsequent rise of a 'girl'²⁷ culture. Groups of young women who were not academically or politically aligned with feminism were responsible for the rise of this idea. They were influenced by fashion magazines and popular culture which was perpetuated through the media. They adopted stereotypical feminine demeanours such as focusing on their appearances by paying close attention to their nails, hair and general grooming habits.

According to Heywood & Drake (quoted in Gillis & Munford: 2004: 169)-

Generally, third wave feminists often take cultural production and sexual politics as key sites for struggle, seeking to use desire and pleasure as well as anger to fuel struggles for justice.

Clearly, third wave feminism had perpetuated into the lives of everyday women who may or may not have been well-versed with the challenges of feminism from its point of origin. Many young women who were born during the third wave were uncomfortable with the identity politics of the first two waves. They were from a generation that had not travelled through the gender politics that characterised past feminist theory. Their responses to feminism were therefore varied, and they did not think it problematic to focus on beautifying themselves according to the latest fashion trends. By doing so, they rejected the views of radical feminists who were averse to any image of what they called stereotypical feminine appearances. In contrast, this generation of young girls was not interested in ideas such as 'bra-burning' because many of them were not able to identify with feminism on any level. They had not lived through its problematic trajectory, and after the two waves of feminism, many of the injustices had been ironed out and women's rights were acknowledged. As Walker (quoted in Gillis & Munford: 2004:172) notes, 'For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect histories'.

It can be argued that third wave feminism was decidedly individualistic and since the principles of this discourse had permeated into society and were embraced by young

²⁷ As Gillis & Munford (2004: 169) claim, some of the most boisterous followers of the 'girl' culture were young girls who were zealous followers of magazines such as *Bitch* and *Bust*. Essentially, these magazines captured the 'lost femininity' which was a consequence of second wave feminism. As Baumgardner & Richards (quoted in Gillis & Munford: 2004:171) argue, *A Girlie-girl can be a stereotypically feminine one – into manicures and hairstyles and cooking and indoorsy activities. Girlie is also a feminist philosophy ... Girlies are adult women, usually in their mid-twenties to late thirties, whose feminist principles are based on a reclaiming of girl culture (of feminine accoutrements that were tossed out with sexism during the Second Wave), be it Barbie, housekeeping, or girl talk.*

generations of women, feminism was once again being redressed and redefined. It was during this time that many women began to define feminist theory according to their own lives and, more specifically, based on their own intrinsic challenges. In conclusion, as argued by Sowards & Renegar (2004: 536-537), even though third wave feminism continues to be an ambiguous concept, within the context of current society, it should be understood as an area of emerging feminist thought which is often embraced by young women and men. However, at the same time, it is important to be cognisant that feminist concepts are constantly being re-defined in order to address the challenges of individual women. As a result, women became more visible as they boldly stepped out into the public sphere. As they endeavoured to assert their own identities through fashion and image²⁸ formation, the very idea of projecting a certain 'image' became a focal point in their existence. This will be discussed below.

2.3 Womens' image

Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal other. (Bartky: 1993: 110)

In placing much emphasis on their bodies and thereby trying to perfect their 'images', women allow themselves to become victims of patriarchal structures all over again. This is especially relevant to women who need male approval for their images. In this case, in surrendering their image formation to men by constantly needing their approval, they allow themselves to be guided by patriarchal opinions. This implies that that they are very aware of male scrutiny. In this regard, feminist theory objects to seeing the world through male eyes because it equates the male gaze with patriarchy (Devereaux: 1990: 337).

Bartky (1993: 116) argues that women have generally been socialised to groom themselves according to images of idealised women in magazines, films and other visual media. It follows that women who are completely influenced by the idea of emulating unrealistic versions of beauty which are projected in the media inadvertently place themselves under scrutiny. This is especially true when they do so for the sake of being 'gazed' at. In trying to

²⁸ In terms of image, there was an increase in female singers, women were more visible in films and on television and magazines were filled with women who were invested in their body images. Popular bands such as the Spice Girls are an example of the 'girl power' ideology of the third wave and the singer Madonna is representative of a 'feminine' woman who is confident in her public persona representing a woman who is not embarrassed to flaunt her femininity with her bright red lipstick, pantyhose and fancy hairstyles.

emulate unrealistic versions of beauty, women become fanatical about their skin, hair, weight and other superficial bodily concerns. By subconsciously pledging allegiance to a 'relentless self-surveillance' of their own bodies, women fall prey to another form of patriarchy (Ibid). In a sense, falling prey to this form of patriarchy is self-inflicted because women willingly place themselves under the scrutiny of others.

In focusing solely on image, women centre their attention solely on their body images. This leads to them allowing others to judge them and perhaps even objectify them based on their projected body images. According to Bartky (1993: 116), this preoccupation with youth and beauty is a notion that is fuelled by the visual media; for example, through the use of airbrushed images that are featured in popular magazines as well as in film. It can be argued that women are not in any way forced to compete with these unrealistic images. Nevertheless, not only do they often choose to compete with airbrushed versions of women in magazines and films, but, in their own capacity as judges, are never satisfied with themselves. This leads to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Bartky (1993: 117, emphasis mine) acknowledges the sentiments of Foucault that women have a 'strong need to present themselves as *perfectly groomed*'.

Women are so brainwashed about the physical image that they should have that they rarely undress with *éclat*. They are often apologetic about their bodies, considered in relation to that plastic object of desire whose image is radiated throughout the media. (Greer, 1971: 261)

The ancient feminist ideal, according to which it was crucial for women to always look their best, originated during patriarchal times. Greer (1971: 261, emphasis mine) believes that 'while women dwell in trying to *perfect themselves unrealistically* men demand in *their arrogance to be loved as they are* and ignore their own aesthetic imperfections because they exude confidence and have high levels of self-esteem. According to Devereaux (1990: 337), in terms of the social system of patriarchy, women depend upon men not only for status and privilege, but for their very identity. It can therefore be argued that even though many women successfully broke free from the impediments of economic dependency, patriarchal structures and constructed notions of femininity, they simultaneously thwarted their own progress and 'images' by opening themselves up to being judged, scrutinized and labelled according to superficial, outward appearances.

In pursuing full-time careers, women's 'image' often became an additional priority. The need to aspire to look like a fashion model was strong. Fashion magazines and cosmetic advertisements promoted the notion that a woman's individuality should be expressed by understanding and implementing the current aesthetic activities such as applying make-up and arranging hair (Bartky: 1993: 109). It is interesting that the idea of perfecting an image was not enforced upon women. Instead, it was adopted as a choice. However, the 'perfect' image of women's appearance was continuously perpetuated into society as an ideal through numerous visual representations in the media. Women who prioritised their images above all else inadvertently allowed themselves to become objectified.

It can be argued that a positive self-image is healthy, but if this image is perfected with the sole objective of pleasing the male desire, then women are instrumental in allowing themselves to become objectified. As Bartky (1993: 117) observes, the objectification of women's bodies causes them to fall under the 'dominating gaze of patriarchy'. Even though patriarchy has been deeply entrenched within Anglo-American society as a parochial force, in terms of the 'male gaze', women are once again subjecting themselves to or being subjected to patriarchy in another form. This is substantiated by Brownmiller (quoted in Whelehan, 1995:5),

Women in our society are forced daily to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous beauty standards that we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously and accept.

For example, Poulton (2012: 12) comments on the Helena Rubinstein campaign in which airbrushed images of the Hollywood actress Demi Moore 'bear almost no resemblance to her real face, with its laughter lines and deeper skin-tone'. This, she argues, is a result of specific societal pressures which create artificial obsessions with youth and unrealistic beauty ideals. The acceptable ideal of beauty for Western women according to Poulton (2012: 12) is 'slim, tall, blonde and fully able-bodied'. Image-conscious women then aspire to fit into these superficial moulds, which are essentially unrealistic because they are fictional. Modern technology allows images to be manipulated and changed according to the mandates received by advertisers. Nevertheless, many women are relentless in their pursuit of attaining perfection in terms of image. However, while image is associated with negativity in relation to falling under the dominating gaze of patriarchy, it is also necessary to explore image outside of the paradigm of the male gaze.

In the twenty-first century, image, fashion, style and persona merge into one powerful statement of confidence. This relates to women who adopt fashion and style as a means of creating individual personas without focusing on being acknowledged by male approval. They do not pursue fashion in an attempt to elevate their self-esteem in relation to being accepted by males or to toy with the male gaze. Instead, they approach the idea of body image in a mature and positive manner. For example, the first lady of the United States Michelle Obama now appears on the cover of *Vogue* (see Van Meter, 2014). Based on this fact, it can be inferred that image now represents a specific type of power. According to Givhan (2013),

Women who are viewed through the lens of fashion are not doomed to be declared frivolous.

On the other hand, it is important to concede that Anglo-American society is also largely responsible for stereotyping women based on their images. For example, blonde women who are well-groomed and dressed fashionably are often associated with being frivolous and uneducated. This is clearly depicted in the film *Legally Blonde* (Luketic: 2001) in which Elle Woods is blonde, fashion-obsessed and initially not in tune with any academic goals. As the film progresses, her character embodies academia and she graduates with a degree in law. At no point does she ever abandon her fashion sense. Instead, she attains recognition based on her intellectual abilities and by the end of the film is recognised as a sound individual. Her obsession with 'girlie' fashion becomes a secondary factor to her ambition and drive to succeed in her own right after her fiancé leaves her for a woman who he claims is less frivolous than she is. Through the film's narrative, the practice of stereotyping women based on their need to follow fashion is dismantled.

In contemporary society, fashion, style, image and persona are almost synonymous. As a result, women assert their individual personas through images which they create through their own choices of dress, style and very often, sound intellectual backgrounds. It seems as if in the twenty-first century, women do not have to choose between image, education and family life. First lady Michelle Obama²⁹ is a wife, mother, lawyer and fashion icon. Hence, the old stereotype of judging women based on their images is not relevant to contemporary society.

²⁹ This is just one example of a woman who manages to balance various aspects of her life. Within the Anglo-American context there are numerous examples of women who have positive self-images, families, careers and at the same time are educated and well-versed.

Image should therefore be viewed in an objective light and should not be used as a basis from which to judge and stereotype women. In a visual sense, while the media is largely responsible for the creation of unrealistic images of women, contemporary society is also heavily influenced by the representations of women in film. These aspects will be explored further in the section below.

2.4 Feminist film theory

Scholarship that engages with feminist film theory has existed since the onset of the second wave of feminism (Rabinovitz: 2006: 39). As Kaplan (2000: 1) notes, feminist perspectives on film developed in the context of the various women's liberation movements that emerged in the USA in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Film study is *enhanced* by feminist perspectives because the word feminist implies a particular stance vis-a-vis women: it implies a concern with gender difference in general, but takes up the perspective of women specifically. (Kaplan: Ibid, emphasis mine)

Scholarly feminist studies in relation to the media, or more specifically as applied to film studies, provide a platform for the exploration of the impact that changing feminist perspectives have had on the representation of female characters in films. In the 1970s, film studies theorized about films as purveyors of ideology with a particular focus on identity politics and sexual difference (McLean: 2009: 144). Sobchack (2006: 65) agrees that films do engage with concepts of identity and sexual politics particularly because a more liberated version of scholarly feminism has emerged due to the rapid growth of cultural studies in the United States. As a result, feminist film theory has grown to become a vast field of inquiry. According to Boggs & Pollard (2007: 95),

The power of film to evoke deep, emotional popular responses by means of deft screenwriting, directing, cinematography, special effects and acting performance was always one of its most seductive qualities.

Cognisant of the effects and power of film, this section will briefly explore the role of films as purveyors of different ideologies in relation to the representation of women. As Kaplan (1990: 15) notes, one of the reasons why feminist criticism has focused on interpreting texts can be attributed to the investment that the female critic has in understanding how she became to be positioned as she finds herself today. Film narratives are often written by drawing incidents from the lives of real people by incorporating various social realities and experiences and then writing them into the script. The coupling of literary narratives with

societal realities enables audiences to identify with protagonists and ideals that were encoded within definite ideological messages (Boggs & Pollard: 2007:95).

Various scholars such as Mulvey (1998); Doanne (1999); Kaplan (2000); Sobchak (2006); Flitterman-Lewis (2006); Rabinovitz (2006); McHugh (2009) and Sarikakis (2011) have contributed to feminist film theory in the Anglo-American context. This section will focus on two strands of thought; the development of psychoanalytical film scholarship and the role of filmmakers in the representation of female stereotypes:

- The development of the field of psychoanalytical³⁰ film scholarship and the manner in which the male gaze is associated with past patriarchal structures will be examined. This is important because many scholars such as Devereaux (1990); Kaplan (1990); Gabbard (1997); Metz (2000); McLean (2009) and Green (2010) have recognised psychoanalysis as a method of understanding the notion of the male gaze and the representation of patriarchal ideologies³¹. From a feminist perspective, the representation of both patriarchal structures and Victorian ideologies through film narratives visually illustrates the concepts and opens them up for further analysis. It is also notable that feminists in both the Anglo-American and Indian contexts have experienced patriarchy as a challenge that needed to be overcome. In relation to the notion of patriarchal structures as represented in film, McLean (2009: 144) rightfully notes, “The past seemed to matter mainly, then, as a set of images and narratives that supported and continually reaffirmed the status of women as objects under patriarchy.”

During the second wave of feminism, feminists such as De Beauvoir established that the material existence of women was viewed through religions, traditions, language, tales and movies (Thornham, 1999: 10). Therefore, patriarchal ideals as well as representations of women based on the accepted structures of societies of the times were often projected through film. In a sense, film became a theoretical tool that was used to question existing ideologies.

³⁰ Psychoanalysis has had a major impact on film scholarship. Academic departments of film studies have appropriated psychoanalytical thinking to understand and illuminate meanings in film and to elucidate the relationship between the spectator and the movies that take place in a darkened theatre (Gabbard: 1997: 244). It is also important to be cognisant, as Kaplan (2000: v) asserts, that feminist film theory first drew on anthropology. However, psychoanalytical theory was more useful to feminist film theorists because it focused on difference and at the same time, provided feminists with a larger platform for deconstruction of the representations in films.

³¹ The institution of patriarchy is common to both the Anglo-American context and the Indian context.

- Secondly, the role of filmmakers in the representation of female stereotypes will be considered. An important aspect that must be explored is the role of the auteur in promoting stereotypes. The term ‘auteur’ refers to a director whose major works can be defined by certain expressive styles of filmmaking (Mishra, 2002: 89). Due to the development of auteur theory, films that are produced by an auteur have a certain intentional structure and style of representation. It can be argued that the filmmaker consciously sets out to express his/her own ideologies or create social change or awareness. However, since perception and reception are subjective, both unconscious and new meanings can be extracted from the narratives by the spectators. The new meanings can either be in line with the filmmakers’ ideologies, or they can be very far-removed. Hence, even though auteur theory does in a sense initiate a specific structure, due to the diversity of individual responses, it remains fluid.

2.4.1 Psychoanalysis and Cinema

In appropriating psychoanalysis to better understand the link between feminist theory and film studies, it must be noted that there are various angles from which to approach this study. However, in relation to the representation of women in films, the analysis of spectatorship³² is most relevant because it focuses on the association between the male gaze and patriarchy. This section will focus on spectatorship from two angles: firstly, the identification processes that take place between the spectator and the images on screen will be explored; secondly, womens’ images in relation to the ‘male gaze’ will be examined.

2.4.2 The Identification Process

Kaplan (1990: 12) argues that psychoanalysis³³ should be used as a tool for analysing literature and anthropological texts. As a methodology, psychoanalysis promotes analytical thinking and generates discussion based on identification processes that occur between the audience and character representations. Green (2010: 341) notes,

³² The analysis of spectatorship is one of the most popular methodologies of psychoanalytical film criticism (Gabbard: 1997: 244). In this regard, research on the analysis of spectatorship derived from the works of Derrida and Lacan promotes the ideology of the spectator’s role in understanding the meaning of the film (Ibid).

³³ Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of human development in which he outlines the three phases that a child moves through, i.e., the Oedipal scenario, the castration complex and defence mechanisms such as penis-envy and projection/rejection is relevant to feminist film study (Kaplan, 1990: 12).

Sometimes we are consciously aware of the characters in our stories and sometimes we are not. The various identities we claim for ourselves are the multiple and densely particular characters with whom we identify in the on-going and dialogically unfolding storylines of our lives.

In a sense, audiences form a dialectic relationship with the on-screen characters. The idea of identification with fictional characters can be related to Lacan's³⁴ mirror-stage theory of early development in children. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis,³⁵ the mirror acts as a reflection to the spectator's inner desires. There is a great deal of symbolism involved in this process. On a simplistic level, the relationship between the actor and the spectator can be compared to the process of identification that a child goes through when he/she first sees his/her own image reflected by a mirror.

There are many scenarios that can result from the child's first view of him/herself in the mirror. The child can simply be entertained and amused by this new experience, or, as his/her inquisitive nature takes over, he/she may engage in a deeper process of identification. Even though a spectator is physically absent from the screen, processes of identification can take place and often do, at the discretion of the spectator. According to Metz (2000: 413),

The spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject.

The identification of the spectator with the screen very often takes place on a subconscious level. Similar to Lacan's mirror-image theory relating to children, the screen-spectator relationship can and often does operate on a subconscious level. This relationship between the spectator and the screen (or characters) is further substantiated by Boggs & Pollard (2007:106),

Media culture can be understood as furnishing a kind of mirror of the self, serving as an assemblage of 'mirrors' where audiences can reflect back on their supposedly 'real' selves and experiences in the midst of vocariously identifying with any number of fictional or imagined selves.

³⁴ According to Jacques Lacan's mirror-stage of early development theory, children learn to differentiate personalities by viewing the self as if in the reflection of a mirror, where in effect the self contemplates the 'self' (Lacan: 1953: 11-17).

³⁵ Lacanian psychoanalysis is relevant to the analysis of representation in film as his theory of the mirror phase lends itself to the analogy of the screen-spectator relationship (Kaplan, 1990: 10).

While Boggs & Pollard (2007: 106) agree with Lacan's mirror-image theory, there is also merit in examining the identification process in terms of the imaginary. Metz (2000:419) argues that cinema is an almost 'imaginary' signifier. When applied to the reception of the fictional film, it can be argued that identification is twice removed. In the first instance, an identification process occurs between the spectator and the image on screen. It is important to acknowledge that this very first interaction takes place in a created space of imagination which is represented by the darkened cinema. In a sense, the process of viewing a film can also be regarded as an imaginary act, for the spectator is immersed in a space created to view a fictional world. As Metz (2000: 419) further argues,

The imaginary of the cinema presupposes the symbolic, for the spectator must first of all have known the primordial mirror.

In other words, it can be argued that while identification processes in terms of Lacan's mirror-image theory do take place; these processes are based on imaginary narratives. Nevertheless, the manner in which the reception of film as a culture industry permeates into societies should be taken into consideration. Gabbard (1997: 2) supports this idea because he claims that the films that were successful at the box office were often perceived as tapping into the commonly held unconscious wishes and fears in the mass audience.

Often the entire atmosphere of a film beautifully captures common developmental crises that are vicariously experienced by audience members. (Gabbard: 1997: 2)

In line with Gabbard's views, Metz (quoted in Singer: 1988:5) contends that the 'imaginary' nature of film extends into the world of the spectator in his/her reception of film narratives. It thus seems as if over the years, films have been used as instruments; not only do they represent the realities of the masses, but they also act as active agents in initiating new realities and changing pre-existing mind sets.

In studying the representation of women in film, one is able to gain insight into the shifts that are taking place in gender relations. As Thornham (1999: 10) rightfully notes, 'feminist film theory begins as an urgent political act' and over the years, many filmmakers have depicted gender relations according to political and historical situations. *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright: 2005), based on Jane Austen's book of the same name outlines the era of courtship. *Love Story* (Hiller: 1970) and *Terms of Endearment* (Brooks: 1983) illustrate the pattern of women's lives in the past according to which suffering was considered a virtue. In

*Revolutionary Road*³⁶ (Mendes: 2008), the frustration felt by housewives as maintained by Friedan (1963), is depicted through Kate Winslet's character. Within the narrative, the female protagonist's frustration is so overpowering that she chooses to kill herself instead of living with her husband and children whom she loves. In taking her own life, she ignores the responsibility she has towards her family.

In *Sweet Home Alabama* (Tennant: 2002), Melanie Smooter shuns her simple, village life in Alabama when she sets out to pursue her passion of becoming a fashion designer in New York City. After she has succeeded in the corporate world, she returns home for a short while, only to discover that she still connects with her old, quiet, village-style life. Through the dialogues in the film, she is depicted as deliberating between the need to choose between her city life and her hometown life, which are in stark contrast to each other. She is casually informed by her husband that it is not necessary to choose either one or the other. It is possible to have both.

One Fine Day (Hoffman: 1996) deals with the dilemma of single mother Melanie Parker who attempts to juggle her career and her role as mother. The film's narrative reminds her that her life need not end because she has been divorced. In fact, her tenacity in making sure that her son is well taken care of and does not feel the lack of a father-figure in his life is noted as she goes out of her way to see to his every need. *The Wedding Planner* (Shankman: 2001) also focuses on romantic love, but the female protagonist Mary is very much in control of her own life and has strong career aspirations. In *The Proposal* (Fletcher: 2009), the female protagonist Margaret Tate is seduced by family values and while the theme of courtship and romantic love is vaguely depicted through the older generation of women in the film, romance is spontaneous. In the end, Margaret is able to continue with her job as an executive editor in chief of a book publishing company as well as engage in a romantic relationship and marry Andrew Paxton.

In *Something's Gotta Give* (Meyers: 2003), the notion of the male gaze is boldly confronted through the depiction of the naked female body. The script deviates from the generic convention of illustrating the female body as an object. In other words, instead of the female

³⁶ This film is based on the 1961 novel "Revolutionary Road" by Richard Yates. It is set in the late 1940's and focuses on a period during which women lived their lives according to the Victorian ideal which did not allow them much autonomy in relation to the path of their own lives.

being depicted as a victim of patriarchy/male gaze, she is depicted as a woman who is simply human and in search of companionship. The unusual representation of the female body as something other than an object of male desire suggests the need to modify existing viewing patterns. This is achieved through the narrative that intentionally attempts to re-shape cultural viewing practices/attitudes to the female form. From a psychoanalytical perspective, it is thus clear that various social structures are often reflected through film.

It is a powerful polemic, but its theoretical framework remains undeveloped. At times film representations appear to be the product of deliberate propaganda; at times they seem the result of unconscious fantasy. Film reflects social changes, but it also shapes cultural attitudes. (Thornham: 1999: 10)

While it is important to concede that the theoretical framework regarding film may be underdeveloped as Thornham suggests, it is equally significant that, over the years, films have been influential in delineating the realities of people's lives. Even though this is achieved through fictional narratives, these narratives are often faithful to social realities and cultural attitudes of the times. Additionally, the technological developments in film make it possible to re-visit the past³⁷. The world of cinema thus opens up an enormous platform for the definition and redefinition of existing and past ideals. As a result, in many films, when past societal norms are represented, present societies are able to reflect upon both the positive and negative aspects of these norms, for example, the practices of slavery and the oppression of women. In a sense, these films then become educational tools that enlighten societies and heighten awareness about practices of the past. In relation to filmmakers who intentionally set out to develop specific ideologies through the narratives of their films, it is important to briefly explore the role of the auteur in this process.

2.4.3 Auteur and Intent

The intent of an auteur in promoting certain ideals and stereotypes is an important aspect of film study. The role of the filmmaker is central to the process of filmmaking. As Mishra (2002: 89) notes, the term 'auteur' refers to a director whose major works can be defined by certain expressive styles of filmmaking. Gabbard (1997: 2) agrees that biographical material known about the filmmaker may shed additional light on the events and meanings of a

³⁷ Films depicting historical events are often referred to as epics or period films. However, many contemporary filmmakers also produce mainstream and art films that are either set in past eras such as *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes: 2008), or are re-makes of popular films which were produced earlier, such as *Titanic* (Cameron: 1997). In any case, these films cause audiences to reflect upon the social norms of the times in which the films were set.

particular film. As far back as 1943, Andre Bazin³⁸ declared, 'A film's worth stems from its authors ... it is much safer to put one's faith in the director than in the leading man.' These sentiments are in line with auteur theory. Andrew Sarris was one of the first significant critics of auteur theory in the Anglo-American context (Mishra, 2002: 90). He claimed that the way that a film looks and feels becomes a part of the author's signature style, through the director's exhibition of certain recurrent characteristic styles (Mast et al., 1992: 585-588).

In relation to the unconscious identification processes that take place as proposed by psychoanalytical theory, the notion of an auteur as filmmaker sheds new light on the interpretation of film on a subconscious level. According to auteur theory, the film is seen as an outgrowth of the filmmaker's intra-psychic conflicts and early history (Gabbard: 1997: 244). Robert Ray³⁹ also mentions that early Hollywood producers unwittingly served as cultural anthropologists. From this perspective it can then be argued that even though viewing takes place on a subconscious level, if the director of the film is an auteur, then his/her narratives are written consciously and with purpose. This is due to the conscious autonomous thought process that is involved in the auteurship of filmmaking. According to Mishra (2002: 92),

The meaning of the film - and the role of the author behind the manifest text – is to be located at the level of 'film work', which is analogous to 'dream work'.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, there are multiple processes at play through the medium of cinema. On the one hand, multiple identification processes take place between the audience and the worlds created on screen which include affiliation and associations with situations, characters and settings. Of course each individual will engage in his/her own processes based on their own cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, auteur filmmakers construct their narratives and character representations after careful thought in order to convey the messages that they believe should be conveyed through their films.

In an Anglo-American context, various filmmakers have made their mark as 'auteurs'. For example, Sofia Coppola is well-known for her focus on internal character development and for using the female as an object of desire in films like *The Virgin Suicides* (1999); *Lost in*

³⁸ Bazin is quoted in Bordwell (1991: 45) for his contribution to auteur theory.

³⁹ Robert Ray is quoted in Gabbard (1997: 2) as believing that filmmakers are influential in articulating cultural mythologies of the era. See also Ray, R.B. (1985) *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930 – 1980*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Translation (2003); and *Marie Antoinette* (2006). Steven Spielberg uses the USA as the centre of the world and focuses on realistic male/female relationships and happy endings in films such as *Jaws* (1975); *E.T.* (1982) and *War of the Worlds* (2005). Baz Luhrmann on the other hand, uses music and dance to develop his signature style in films such as *Moulin Rouge* (2001), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1996). Therefore, as Mishra (2002: 92) argues, ‘pushed to its logical conclusion, auteur theory locates the auteur in the spectator’s field of analysis. Based on the control that an auteur possesses in constructing narratives in line with his/her ideologies, there is merit in using film as a tool that can assist women in their evolutionary processes⁴⁰’.

While both Lacanian psychoanalysis and auteur theory support identification processes, Metz (2000) forwards the notion of the spectatorial gaze. The gaze of the spectator or the ‘male gaze’ that is associated with patriarchy is important to this discussion. The notion of the ‘male gaze’ from a feminist perspective will be discussed.

2.4.4 Feminism and the male gaze

When studying the representation of women in cinema in relation to the ‘male gaze’, it is important to be aware that within the Hollywood film, there is a long tradition of women performing for the camera. As Devereaux (1990: 341) notes, women sing, dance, dress and undress, all before the steady, often adoring, gaze of an implied spectator. It can be argued that while feminist theory attempted to eradicate patriarchy⁴¹, cinematic representations have revived it, albeit in a different light. Within this new patriarchal culture, the woman becomes an image or object through which the male is able to live out his fantasies. According to Mulvey (1975), the eroticisation of women in Hollywood films is structured around three explicitly male looks or gazes: firstly, the gaze of the camera/filmmaker, secondly, the gaze of the male characters within the narrative as they make the female characters the objects of

⁴⁰ These evolutionary processes refer to the journeys of women who have struggled through dark periods before the early feminist movement created awareness about gender discrimination. It is also important to note that the Victorian ideals that were considered to be normative in relation to women, have been exposed through various epic films such as *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming: 1939); *Cleopatra* (Mankiewicz: 1963) and *King of Heaven* (Scott: 2005).

⁴¹ Patriarchy as the ‘power of the fathers’ has been established as the accepted social construct of past societies (Rich: 1976: 57-8).

their gaze and lastly, the look of the male spectator. All of these gazes fall under the broad umbrella of scopophilia⁴².

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Freud originally associated scopophilia as a sexual drive that exists independently of the erotogenic zones (Mulvey: 2000: 37). When applied to the cinematic experience, scopophilia objectifies the actors from the viewpoint of the spectator. This process is aided by the technical aspect of viewing during which the spectator is immersed in darkness and thereby separated from the projections on the screen. Mulvey's seminal text, *Visual Pleasure and narrative Cinema* (1975), supports the relationship between psychoanalysis⁴³ and film. In this article, Mulvey (1975: 6) explores the manner in which the unconscious patriarchal society has structured film form in terms of the male gaze. According to classical Hollywood cinema structure, the spectator is placed in a masculine subject position while the figure of the woman is projected on screen as an object of desire (Ibid). Even though criticism against Mulvey's article claims that it only accounts for a perspective that is confined to a specific, patriarchal order in which the male is a heterosexual man, she does highlight the objectification of women from a feminist perspective. In this regard, Mulvey (1975: 9) contends the following,

Within mainstream Hollywood cinema, the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film; yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.

Hence, by representing women on screen as figures that are the central focus of the frame, audiences are able to indulge in scopophilic pleasure. In addition to scopophilia, Metz (2000: 409) believes that cinema's signifier is essentially perceptual. In other words, cinema evokes in its audience, both visual and auditory perceptions.

The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually profoundly stamped with unreality, from its very beginning. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary. (Metz: 2000: 410)

⁴² Scopophilia or the pleasure of looking is one of a number of pleasures offered by cinema (Mulvey: 2000: 37)

⁴³ The psychoanalytical constitution of the cinema in terms of its function as a signifier contains many panels and is an extensive field of study (Metz in Stam & Miller: p. 433). For the purposes of this study, both Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic apparatuses are relevant. However, it is important to differentiate between the two. While Lacan's psychoanalytic apparatus is textual, Freud's method is biographical (Kaplan, 1990: 5).

Cinematic representations do create imaginary worlds. However, it is perception that attributes meaning to these fictional worlds. Instead of being confined to viewing women as objects, it is necessary to accept that cinematic representations of women are imaginary and should thus not be viewed as real. If audiences can change their perceptions of representations of women on the screen, they may be able to rethink the notion of the 'male gaze' (Devereaux: 1990: 344). It is necessary to re-define the notion of the 'male gaze' because it has become a controversial concept that is often discussed within the context of feminist film theory.

Representations of women are changing and are in a constant state of flux. Therefore, just as the three waves of feminism have initiated the need to move beyond past injustices, in relation to feminist film theory, feminist media studies should not be limited to studying the media from a feminist perspective alone (Sarikakis: 2011: 1200). Instead, it is important to view films as providing new perspectives. These views are in line with the opinion of Rabinovitz (2006: 43) who posits that feminism is about effecting social change. It is crucial, as Rabinovitz (Ibid) claims, that we understand the following,

Our task is formidable but the most exciting one imaginable – to change the intellectual, social and material cultures in which we participate through constructing and championing new ways of thinking about our relationship to cinema.

In focusing on changing the way in which we perceive various representations in films, the notion of the 'male gaze' in relation to the objectification of women is relevant. Both Devereaux (1990: 343) and Mulvey (1988) contend that in comparison with women, men function less as eroticised objects for female (or male) desire. However, over the years, there has been an increase in the exhibitionism of the male figure on screen as represented in the bodies of actors such as Dwayne Johnson, Vin Diesel and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Clearly, these male actors allow themselves to become the focal point in the spectatorial gaze when they perform in roles that posit them as objects of desire. It seems as if not only women are objectified in cinematic representations.

In contemporary society, image has become a strong part of identity and as advertising and 'branding' become synonymous with the celebrity status of men and women, both are being objectified and commodified. Hence, it seems fair to assume that both men and women in today's society have choices and are not forced to be projected on screen as sex symbols.

From this perspective, it is safe to come to the realisation that today, the notion of the ‘male gaze’ is not exclusive to representations of women only.

2.5 Concluding thoughts

The main focus of this study is the manner in which transnationalism has impacted on the representation of women in popular Bollywood cinema. However, before studying women in an Indian context, it was necessary to briefly trace the history of feminism in the Anglo-American context in order to establish a baseline from which to explore feminism in the Indian context. This was necessary, because feminism in India often conceives itself as emerging out of a Western modernity (Shohat: 1998:20).

It has been established that Anglo-American women of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were victims of patriarchy. As a result of the work of various reformers and scholars as explained in this chapter, the parochial nature of patriarchy was exposed. Early feminist theory in the Anglo-American context challenged ‘essentialist notions of femininity’ (Whelehan, 1995:30) and promoted the idea of women as autonomous individuals. However, as Johnson argues, the socialisation of women into traditional roles of domesticity and motherhood was constantly being perpetuated into societies by conservative males (Rudman & Phelan: 2007:788). Additionally, in the Anglo-American context specifically, the lack of education has been cited as a factor that places women in disadvantageous positions (Whelehan, 1995:29-30).

Nevertheless, early feminist theory successfully paved the way for ‘liberal’ feminist thinkers and in the late nineteenth century, the first wave of feminism was born. The first wave signalled the beginning of a collective women’s movement that was successful in addressing women’s rights to employment, education, legal inequalities and the issue of suffrage (Castle, 2007:94). It then extended into what is known as the second wave of feminism during which there was the initiation of a collective action in the fight for women’s equality (Whelehan, 1995:4). The challenge lay in identifying a singular definition of feminism. This was problematic because the second wave of feminism was characterised by a ‘sense of collective female disillusionment’ (Koedt as quoted in Whelehan: 1995:5).

In response to the many dilemmas of second wave feminism, the problem of women's inequality was brought to the fore by a growing body of feminist scholars such as De Beauvoir (1949); Friedan (1963, 1981, 2000); Millet (1977); Greer (1971) and Daly (1972, 1979). The central question that characterised the second wave of feminism was the dilemma of defining 'what being a woman' meant. The notion of femininity as a social construct was foregrounded.

The second wave was characterised by many issues such as the need to be faithful to older traditional norms according to which women were brainwashed into believing that there was no 'greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity' (Friedan, 1963:13). There was also a great deal of emphasis placed on the separation of the public and private spheres. In the past, women were expected to remain within the private sphere of domesticity and embrace the Victorian ideology which entailed being held accountable for the maintenance of the family as a whole (Wolff, 1990: 13-15). However, over time, as they became aware of the injustices with which they were living, the world that they were accustomed to living in was destabilised. This awareness disrupted the previous status quo. As Mill emphasises, 'once liberal principles are established, no woman will accept inferior treatment based on gender' (Pyle, 1995: xvi). However, regardless of this new consciousness, the attainment of freedom from unjust societal norms within communities was a struggle for women during that period.

Despite the numerous challenges, due to the feminist movement, the rehabilitation of American women as individuals had become a priority. In addition, the awareness created about stereotypical gender roles during the second wave of feminism resulted in women enjoying more mobility outside domestic spaces. The foray of women into the public sphere of life was an achievement for second wave feminists, but in the same way that colonisation leaves its mark on its victims, the older patriarchal structures and the need to adhere to Victorian ideologies had left their mark on women in America.

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Simone de De Beauvoir challenged the idea that a woman's essence was distinct from a man's, namely that she was born with certain inherent potentialities and qualities that defined her personal, social and legal existence (Castle, 2007:95). She further challenged the idea of always defining a woman in relation to a man (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005:29). Landmark feminists such as Wollstonecraft and Woolf also observed that 'women' in Western culture are defined only in negative terms by what

they lack- status, independent income, education, history and most of all, the discrete qualities associated with masculinity (Whelehan, 1995: 9). This resulted in women experiencing an identity crisis which was created by two factors: firstly, it was a result of complete liberation after subordination; and secondly, it was the subconscious desire within women to 'prove' to the world that they could 'do it all'.

As women tried to juggle both public and private domains, men reaped the financial rewards of this cycle and women were left emotionally and physically drained. As a result, the quest for women's identity was cast aside and women were still dissatisfied and 'empty' inside. According to Friedan (1998: 33), women were 'locked' in reaction'. In other words, even though many advances in their lives in terms of what they could and could not do were made, they were still conditioned to believe that they had to fight for their successes.

In striving to break free of patriarchal structures, many women had developed distaste for everything associated with the home. However, the need for familial belonging, marriage and children could not be swept away so easily. In reality, it was the pressure of choosing one or the other that now caused the greatest conflict within women. In a sense, by shunning the subordination of women, the feminist movement indirectly caused women to believe that their 'rightful' place was outside the home. As a result, American women no longer had a true sense of who they were. Instead, they found themselves fitting into the new roles that had become available to them.

Since the management of both public and private domains was proving to be mentally and physically exhausting, they felt that they had to choose one or the other. However, as Daly notes, women were at a point where the pendulum of difference swung to its outer limit (Eisenstein, 1984: 107) i.e., women in the Anglo-American context had become politically, economically, traditionally and sexually free. It was just a matter of them firstly realising the successes of the feminist movement and then accepting and embracing new patterns of life. From a social perspective and in the work force, women were becoming increasingly visible in the public sphere. The mingling and interaction between the sexes in the public sphere led to women wanting to look their best.

In terms of body image, women who had boldly stepped out into the public sphere became aware of male scrutiny. Without realising it, they stepped out of the restricted zone of

domesticity and into a trap of self-surveillance. This preoccupation with youth and beauty, a notion that was created by man was fuelled by the visual media (Bartky: 1993: 116). In trying to emulate unrealistic versions of beauty, and by subconsciously pledging allegiance to this 'relentless self-surveillance' of their own bodies, women fell prey to another form of patriarchy (Ibid). This time, they were not confined by notions of domesticity. Instead, they had 'trapped' themselves inside their own bodies.

The objectification of women's bodies caused them to fall under the 'dominating gaze of patriarchy' (Bartky: 1993: 117). In an article entitled, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey (1975: 6) explores the way the unconscious patriarchal society has structured film form in terms of the male gaze. In other words, within a patriarchal culture, the woman becomes an image or object through which the male is able to live out his fantasies. The woman as a human being or entity in her own right ceases to exist. Therefore, in reality and as represented on screen, women had been 'moved' from the 'cage' of domesticity to being imprisoned within the 'cage' of an unrealistic image or ideal.

As has been established, there is a strong link between the media and feminist film studies. In a sense, feminist film studies have fuelled the liberation of scholarly feminism. As Thornham (1999: 10) observes, film is a 'powerful polemic'. In using films as theoretical tools to re-define various stereotypes and structures, new knowledge is created. At the same time, through various representations in films, societies are able to look at themselves critically.

The technological nature of film also allows ideologies to be dispersed to audiences internationally. Similar to the manner in which the ideologies of the Anglo-American feminist movement filtered into India in the nineteenth century, films and media provided for the filtering of visual images. In a broader context, it can be contended that Anglo-American feminism was instrumental in creating awareness about the plight of women to societies outside of the U.S. It is therefore essential to understand feminist theory as a project that encompasses various elements and diverse groups of women, instead of a single, narrow field of analysis. As historian Gerda Lerner notes,

The key to understanding women's history is in accepting – painful as it may be – that it is the history of the majority of mankind. (Eisenstein, 1984: 75)

For the purposes of this study, discussion surrounding the filtration of ideas from the West into India will be provided. It is, however, important to be aware that feminism in India was

experienced vastly differently from feminism in the West because the history of women in colonial settings presents additional challenges. According to Cudd & Andreasen (2005:8), second wave feminism in the Anglo-American context was largely represented by middle-class white women who tended to focus on the commonalities among women and their experiences of oppression without taking social circumstances into account. While the key concerns of Western feminists were individualistic, feminists in India had to deal with oppression and subjugation in the direst forms.

The first historical accounts of feminism in the Indian context date from the nineteenth century and are a product of the colonial experience (Forbes: 1996: 1). Even though various parallels can be drawn between feminism in the Indian context and in the Anglo-American context, the following must be acknowledged,

Colonial histories have narrated the civilizing mission of the British as rescuing Indian women from their own culture and society. (Forbes: 1996: 2)

There was clearly an influx of ideas and criticism from the 'West' regarding the treatment of women in India. Sir Herbert Hope Risley was pessimistic about the reform movement in India and criticised the Indian intelligentsia for being interested in intellectual and political ideas, while disregarding the reformation of society (Forbes: 1996: 13). The struggle that ensued between Western philosophies and patriarchal Indian ideologies caused much confusion in establishing a suitable path forward for Indian women who were trying to break free from subordinate and oppressive lives. While there was resistance to 'Western' thought, there was also a need to break free from an Indian culture that imposed various restrictions upon the women in India.

Even though the flow of ideas and notions of feminism between the two cultures overlap constantly, a diverse culture and the history of women in colonial settings add additional challenges to the understanding of feminism. As Kristeva rightfully contends,

The women's movement is deeply rooted in the socio-political life of nations. (Warhol & Herndl: 1997: 864)

In order to fully locate Indian feminism within the context of the discipline as a whole, it is important to understand that the issue of women's emancipation in India was fuelled by British colonial rule (Jayawardena: 1986: 73). Thereafter, feminism in India was influenced by its close association with the Western women's movement (Kishwar as quoted in

Chaudhuri: 2004: 2). Cognisant of the influence of Western feminism on Indian feminism, feminist theory within the Indian context will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3:

3 Feminist theory within the Indian context

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has established that according to the history of feminism in both the Anglo-American and Indian context, the position of all women in society must be redressed (Kumar: 1989: 20). When studying feminism in India, it is imperative to locate this feminism in the historical context of the Indian nation because India is a nation that was culturally embedded within the dictates of colonialism and imperialism (Jayawardena, 1986:73). This chapter will incorporate the various critical perspectives regarding India; more specifically, it will examine India as a postcolonial nation. Even though India has emerged from the dictates of colonialism as a postcolonial society, it is still characterised by strict patriarchal regimes. As Biswas (2012) observes,

There is deeply entrenched patriarchy and widespread misogyny in vast swathes of the country, especially in the north. And the state has been found wanting in its protection of women.

Both the historical trajectory of women and their position and role in Indian society has been and continues to be controversial. The study of women in India becomes even more essential in light of the atrocities that continue to be perpetrated against women in India currently. As Dwyer (2010: 381, emphasis mine) claims, even though in this twenty-first century, ‘India emerges as one of the world’s largest growing economies with *unstoppable momentum*’, it has simultaneously been ranked as the ‘worst G20 country in which to be a woman’ (Biswas: 2012). One incident can be used as an example to demonstrate this statement, namely, the gang rape of a young woman on a moving bus in Delhi, India in December 2012. This is not the first assault of this nature and, based on the continuing violence against women in India it certainly will not be the last. However, this single incident, or more appropriately, heinous crime, sparked outcries from the world at large and is being treated as a landmark case. As Delhi correspondent for BBC news, Biswas (2012) states,

When the unidentified woman died in a Singapore hospital early on Saturday, the victim of a savage rape on a moving bus in the capital, Delhi, it was time again, many said, to ask: why does India treat its women so badly? Female foetuses are aborted and baby girls killed after birth, leading to an appallingly skewed sex ratio. Many of those who survive face discrimination, prejudice, violence and neglect all their lives, as single or married women. TrustLaw, a news service run by Thomson Reuters, has ranked India as the worst country in which to be a woman.

This crime has been classified as an act that has ‘shocked the collective consciousness of the people’ (Gummow: 2013). As a result, a national and international dialogue on the treatment of women in India was ignited. On Friday, September 13th, 2013, an Indian court sentenced the four rapists to death (*BBC News India*: 2013e). However, whether or not this sentence will be carried out is debatable because, as Colvin & Kotoky (2013) reveal,

Indian judges hand down an average 130 death sentences every year, but India has executed just three people in the past 17 years.

Clearly, there is a need for stringent law enforcement. Even though India is a strong global economic power, within the country, intensively obsessive traces of deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and mindsets are prevalent, and as a result, women continue to be victimised. As Colvin & Kotoky (2013) further note, ‘sex crimes are commonplace in India, and social commentators say attitudes towards women have not been diluted by rapid economic growth’. In order to understand where these crimes originate from, it is necessary to examine the history of the position and role of women in India from a historical perspective. Women’s roles and positions have evolved over the centuries. . However, in light of the violent crimes that continue to be committed against women, it can be argued that this evolution has been imaginary. The following headlines in newspapers worldwide bear testimony to this statement:

How India treats its women (Biswas: 2012);
End culture of rape in 2013 (Wolfe: 2013);
India’s bitter culture of rape and violence (Hundal: 2013);
Is Delhi gang rape India’s ‘Rosa Parks’ moment? (North: 2013);
Indian acid attack victim fights for justice (Udas: 2013);
Delhi Conviction won’t end India’s rape epidemic (Choudhury: 2013);
Does the Delhi gang rape sentence bring closure? (Biswas: 2013);
The Economic case against rapes in India (Tulshyan: 2013).

Reading these articles closely, one can argue that in India, rape has almost been adopted as a cultural practice. It is important to note that rape is not only a concern in India, but throughout the world. Greer’s (1971: 251) views on rape and the sentiments of men toward women are pertinent to this discussion,

It is a vain delusion that rape is the expression of uncontrollable desire or some kind of compulsive response to overwhelming attraction. Any girl who has been bashed and raped can tell you how ludicrous it is when she pleads for a reason and her assailant replies, ‘Because I love you’ or ‘Because you’re so beautiful’ or some such rubbish. The act is one of murderous aggression, spawned in self-loathing and enacted upon the hated other.

Greer's views lend credence to the fact that rape is an issue and crime that affects women across the globe⁴⁴. Due to the wide media coverage of the Delhi gang rape, numerous activists, feminists, celebrities, government officials and even members of the general public have come forward and voiced their views on this matter. As a result, it seems as if this incident has initiated a global call for the end of violence/rape against women. Muslim academic Ashgar Ali Engineer argues that it was not God but men who barred women from mosques. He is quoted as follows,

There's something wrong with men, if even in the presence of God they cannot control their desires. (North: 2013)

In support of Engineer, American philosopher Michael Sandel calls for a debate on 'attitudes toward rape and moral parallels between the sexual and the communal violence India sees so much of' (North: 2013). In addition to the above factors, the representation of women in Bollywood films has also been identified as contributing to the increased violence against women. The manner in which Bollywood cinema contributes to the ongoing dialogue on women's position in India will be examined in the following chapter⁴⁵.

There is general consensus that India is in need of an urgent societal mind-set change. This sentiment comes to light in response to the worldwide dialogue that was ignited by the Delhi rape case. As Tulshyan (2013) reports, since that 'fateful day in December 2012 when a student was assaulted on a moving bus, there have been countless other such incidents. From as far back as 1953, sexual crimes in India have increased close to 900 percent'. Subsequent to this high-profile rape case, a twenty-seven year old female student⁴⁶ has come forward after being silent for ten years to report on how three men threw acid on her, leaving her blinded (Udas: 2013). As a result, she has undergone twenty-seven intensive surgical procedures because the acid melted her eyes, eyelids, nose, lips, scalp and chest. Instead of

⁴⁴ According to a report on *IBN Live* (2012), rape statistics in New York, Los Angeles, Britain, Belgium and France are much higher than those of Delhi. However, for the purposes of this study, rape within the Indian context will be the focus.

⁴⁵ Even though Bollywood filmmakers have been profiled as contributing to the acts of gender violence, it is important that we consider/view Bollywood cinema as a unique repository of India's public imaginings, shaped by fantasy, nostalgia and desire (Dwyer: 2010: 384). As Dwyer (Ibid) further argues, it is one of the most productive arenas for us to discern clearer patterns of India's social imaginaries, so we can learn how India sees itself today, how it hopes to see itself in the future, and how it views its past. In a sense, Bollywood cinema can be located as both a national and transnational cinema (Dwyer: 2010: 382).

⁴⁶ It is of importance that when this student was attacked and violated, she was only 17 years old.

receiving sympathy from her community, she has been alienated from society because of the way that she looks. Her perpetrators were freed from jail after only two years in prison. In August 2013, a photographer was gang-raped in Mumbai (Tulshyan: 2013). These are just the reported cases. Clearly, the time for change has come. In an interview with *BBC's* Kirsty Wark entitled, 'Film star Shabana Azmi on why India rape sparked outcry,' Bollywood film star and women's rights campaigner Shabana Azmi observes,

Women are in top positions in politics and business and the arts and all of that, but on the other hand, female foeticide is also being practiced, so it is essentially a country that is living in contradictions and trying to come to terms with it. Having said that, without any doubt, India is a patriarchal society and we have an internalized patriarchal mind-set in which the girl-child is not given the value that she deserves. (*BBC News*, 2013c)

In her capacity as an Indian woman who understands the nuances and challenges that women in India must deal with on a daily basis, Azmi acknowledges the need for attitudes to change. While this particular case has been catalytic in exposing embedded patriarchal mind-sets in India, Indian males will have to undergo a radical mental change if there is to be progress at all. In line with these views, the founder of Delhi-based NGO Jagori⁴⁷ notes,

Even though there is a growing awareness and reporting of sexual violence, men are not able to accept women's increasing assertiveness and use heinous ways to punish them. India is full of brave, independent female icons, but they have *succeeded despite cultural norms*, not because it encourages them to be independent. This epidemic won't end until this mentality is challenged to its core. (Hundal: 2013)

Within an Indian context, even though the feminist movement travelled to India from the West and was embraced as a discourse that promised freedom from subjugation and oppression, it seems as if even today, the rhetoric of theory is far-removed from reality. This is substantiated in a survey conducted by *The Wall Street Journal* (2013) in which the following reasons for the continuous culture of rape in India came to light:

- Women in India are raped and tortured because men in India find this to be entertaining.
- Westernization in terms of women wearing short skirts and dating has been blamed as a reason for rape.

⁴⁷ Jagori means 'awaken women' and was founded in 1984. It aims to create a space for women to express themselves and also spreads feminist ideologies to women in small towns and rural areas.

- Poor law enforcement as well as a lack of respect for women.
- Bollywood cinema.

As a consequence of media exposure, the perils of being a woman in India are being candidly brought to the fore. Clearly, internalised patriarchal mindsets in India will have to change if there is to be progress in terms of the manner in which women living in India are treated. As Wright (1993: 115) notes, if there is to be feminism at all, it is necessary to look beyond gender differences and focus on the lives of actual women. In reality, there are reports of women, who claim that to this day, ‘men in India rape you with their eyes and grope you whenever they are in close proximity (Singh & Kapur: 2013). There seems to be a divide between women who are living in India under the ideologies of the nationalist project and Indian women who are living outside of India. In searching for better lives, these women have embraced a new identity and are often referred to as women of the ‘Indian diaspora’⁴⁸.

3.2 The Indian diaspora

Although much younger than the other two major diasporas of colour (the African and the Chinese), the Indian diaspora is one of the fastest growing diasporic communities in the world. (Mishra, 2002: 235)

In relation to the classification and categorization of the Indian diaspora, there are a few factors that need to be clarified. Firstly, as Mishra (2002: 235) points out, it is important to be aware that the Indian diaspora has grown out of two distinct moments in history. These moments can be further divided into two movements:

- The migration of indentured labourers to various colonies (South Africa, Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, etc) for the production of sugar, rubber and tin for the growing British and European markets.
- The post-1960’s movement during which migrants willingly moved into metropolitan centers such as the US, UK, Australia, etc.

The first group of Indian diaspora (indentured labourers) were working class immigrants whose main aim it was to survive in the foreign countries that they migrated to (Mishra, 2002: 236). The post-1960 Indian diaspora are the more affluent emerging middle-class people who transcended international borders out of choice. Even though the word diaspora was indicative of particular groups of people (specifically Jews and Armenians), since the

⁴⁸In this context, the women of the ‘Indian diaspora’ are those women who have ventured beyond the borders of India, or, as Jain (2011: 46) posits, people of Indian origin who are born outside India.

late 1970s, the term diaspora has ‘experienced a veritable inflation of applications and interpretations’. As Mishra (2002: 236) notes,

The Indian diaspora of today is very different from the traditional nineteenth and early twentieth-century diaspora of classic capital which was primarily working class and connected to the plantation culture.

Today’s Indian diaspora is re-defining itself within the realms of Western culture. It is also of relevance that these migrants have not been uprooted or traumatized into leaving India. Instead, they have left of their own accord, often in search of employment⁴⁹. Within this context, the Indian diaspora can be identified as communities that attempt to reconstruct and redefine their identities in foreign lands. As Sahoo (2006: 89) notes,

Diasporic Indians share among themselves and with the next generations not only the history of their dispersion but also the history of the people in general, including myths, legends and traditions that constitute an integral part of their contemporary identity.

Since the early 1990s, transnationalism has become one of the fundamental ways of understanding the contemporary practices taking place across borders, especially in relation to immigrants (Dahinden: 2010: 51). In other words, it is important to take note of the socialisation patterns of Indians. Even as they emigrate from their homeland, the nature and essence of their distinctive Indian identity, be it individual or part of a community, is something that they often treasure. These migrants then become members of transnational communities. The issue of Indian diasporic identity is therefore an important issue in a transnational context. According to Sahoo (2006: 90) the Indian diaspora participate and take pride in various cultural practices such as traditional Indian dance, cuisine, music, clothes and the viewing of Bollywood films. It can be argued that collectively, these cultural practices aid the Indian diaspora in retaining their personal and individual ethnic identities. At the same time, within this space, interaction also takes place in a ‘transnational space’ that allows for the creation of new expressions of belonging. According to Carling (2008: 1452), migrant transnationalism is ‘built on interpersonal relationships across borders’. It is thus essential to acknowledge the link between the Indian diaspora and transnationalism.

As a consequence of such transnational processes, many Indian women have ‘broken away’ from the traditions, rituals and strict patriarchal regimes that are enforced upon women who

⁴⁹ The post-1960 Indian diaspora includes an increasing number of professional migrants who moved to places such as the U.K., Canada, Australia, the U.S. and other European countries (Jain, R.K.: 2011: 46).

are living in India. According to Roudometouf (2005: 113) the transnational experience should be conceived as 'involving several layers ranging from the construction of social spaces to the formation of transnational communities'. The 'nation' in transnational usually refers to the territorial, social and cultural aspects of the nations concerned (Kearney: 1995: 548). For the purposes of this study the 'nation' is India, and by using the transnational approach, Indian migrants who go beyond the borders of their nation-state (India), become classified as the Indian diaspora. The processes of transnationalism allow for the development of these communities. In turn, these communities keep the 'old' India alive without the burden of patriarchy. When addressing the impact of transnationalism on Indian society, one also has to consider the Indian/Western dichotomy.

The influence of the West on Indian society has been a point of contention for centuries. As Prakash (quoted in Chaturvedi: 2000:165) notes, the Indian/Western dichotomy emerged because of colonial dominance,

Of course, the two essential entities, the spiritual India and the materialistic West, made sense only in the context of each other and the traces of each in the other, which suggested that heterogeneity and difference lay beneath the binary opposition, although the process of rendering India into an object external both to its representation and to the knower concealed this difference.

In other words, culture is destabilised by the emergence of new value-systems. As Loomba (1993: 271) argues,

In India, I am shaped by a political ethos where the terms 'Indian' and 'Western' are often made to signify a series of binary opposites: authenticity and false consciousness, 'real people' and 'upper class', indigenous and colonized. While such a dichotomy was obviously shaped during nationalist struggles, it has increasingly been invoked in contemporary India too for defining 'the nation' in ways that exclude certain class, gender, or caste positions and interests.

In an article dealing with the tangled histories of Anglo-American feminism and Indian feminism, Loomba engages with the ongoing debate about the West being regarded as a disruption to the spirituality and wholesomeness of the East, or in this instance as represented by the Indian nation. As Chaudhuri (2004: xiv) argues, 'for us, our very entry to modernity has been mediated through colonialism'. Clearly, the colonial encounter was influential in fuelling the feminist movement in India.

In a transnational context, however, it is necessary to understand gender relations within the geography of location. In other words, since migration from India increased, female identities became 'fluid' in the context of the greater global world. Cognisant of the various factors that affect women in India, this chapter will be structured as follows:

- A brief overview of ancient India and its traditional structures will be provided. This discussion will be guided by aspects such as diversity, various myth and personal laws;
- Within the context of ancient India, an analysis of the role of Hindu women in Indian society will be forwarded; firstly because the Hindu people constitute the majority of the population of India and secondly because it is primarily the journeys of Hindu women that Johar focuses on in his narratives. However, it is important to bear in mind that Muslims are the largest minority in India and within the narratives of his films, Johar also grapples with various aspects of Hindu/Muslim issues. Therefore, a brief discussion of Muslim culture and religion will also be given.
- The period of cultural revival that ensued from the early 19th century in India will be discussed.
- The role of British colonialists in relation to the emancipation of women in India will be examined.
- The theories and ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and his role in the women's liberation movement will be considered;
- India as a postcolonial space, will be examined by taking the following into consideration:
 - Postcolonial feminist discourse;
 - The role of subaltern studies within postcolonial feminist discourse will be discussed, taking into consideration Spivak's (1988) notion of the subaltern as well as Bhabha's (1994) theory of cultural hybridity.
 - Lastly, the role of transnationalism in aiding the Indian diaspora with processes of change will be discussed.

3.3 Ancient India

In the Indian context, over the years, various scholars such as Jayawardena (1986); Mohanty (1988, 1991); Kumar (1989); Tong (1992); Loomba (1993); Whelehan (1995); Chatterjee (1993,1997); Bagchi (1996); Dasgupta (1996); Forbes (1996); Spivak (1988, 1993, 2003);

Hashim (1999); Ray (2000); Rosella (2002); Mullally (2004); Kishor & Gupta (2004); Chaudhuri (2004), Jamal (2005); George (2006); Niranjana (2006); Roy (2006); Shome (2006); and Gangoli (2005, 2007); Rudman & Phelan (2007); Tong (2009); Dwyer (2010); Jain, Jasbir (2011) and Bhattacharya (2005, 2011) have contributed to the body of literature that encompasses feminist theory in India.

In ancient Indian society, women were forced to mould themselves according to the expectations of their social roles. As Bhattacharya (2011: 5) notes,

Women were led to believe that their only aim in life was to prepare themselves for marriage and marital life and duties. Traditionally, they had a dependency syndrome. Women have always been misled by the imposed ideal of womanhood.

It is important to take note that this ‘imposed ideal of motherhood’ was one that women in both the Anglo-American and Indian contexts were expected to embrace. In an Indian context, according to the social order as depicted in a Marathi⁵⁰ street verse, an Indian woman must measure up to the following:

Do not abandon the vow of womanhood taken by you;
You have to mind the hearth and children;
Do not ask questions; do not exceed the boundaries,
Do not get out of control,
Do not abandon the vow of womanhood,
Do not speak with your face up, be inside the house,
Wash clothes, clean utensils, cook and serve food,
Observe the fasts and perform Vratas,
Bend your neck downwards, look downwards,
Walk without looking up; do not let your eyes wander⁵¹.

Roy (2006: 118) argues that this image of femininity (as depicted in the above verse) is imposed on young girls before they are old enough to realise that there are two sexes. In other words, differences in relation to sex-roles are created through the various demeanours that are mentioned in the verse above. This in turn, leads to sex-role stereotyping which has, in general, been a norm within the Indian family system. The discussion that follows must therefore be read with the above verse in mind, because for Indian women, these images are

⁵⁰ Marathi literature is closely associated with the religious reformation movements of the 11th and 12th centuries. The Marathi literature of independent India is characterised by the interweaving of various currents and styles, and has an interest in social and moral problems.

⁵¹ This particular Marathi street verse is entitled, “A girl is Born.” (Roy: 2006:117-118).

consistently proffered by means of religion, personal laws, tradition and Indian mythology. Indian women who have any link to their Indian heritage are always subconsciously aware that their place in Indian society is 'under' men, be they fathers, brothers, husbands or sons.

3.3.1 Traditional Structures

Jayawardena (1986: 73) notes that the traditional religious structures of ancient India rested upon Hinduism, which can be traced back to 2500BC. The religion of Hinduism grew and evolved from a variety of cults and beliefs (Thapur as quoted in Jayawardena: 1986: 73). The Vedic religion was one such cult that was practiced by many Indians. During the Vedic age which spanned from 2500 – 1500 BC., Hindu society, had a flexible social structure according to which women shared an equal status with men (Roy, 2006: 35).

In terms of the social and religious standing of women, Rossella (2002) notes that during this Vedic age, according to particular Indian religious life, in social and religious gatherings, women occupied a prominent position; women had an absolute equality with men in the eye of the religion. Roy (2006: 35) substantiates this claim and notes that Indian women during the 'Golden' Vedic age shared a responsible position with men and played an important role in evolving a definite culture and tradition. Women were not considered to be impediments and their roles were deemed to be an absolute necessity in religious services. According to Cormack (quoted in Roy, 2006: 34), in ancient traditional India, women were accorded equality with men. Even so, society during the Vedic Age was patriarchal. Yet, within this male-dominated society, women were not subjugated (Rosella: 2002).

Through the progression of time, subsequent to the Vedic Age, there are records up to the 13th and 17th centuries of many Indian women who made their mark in Indian history of their own accord (Roy: 2006: 37-39). These strong women included warrior queens Sultana Razia, who succeeded to the throne of her father, the King of Delhi, in the 13th century and led her troops into battle, and Nur Jehan who exercised real power and led the army to war in the early 17th century during the reign of her husband, the Emperor Jehangir (Ibid). In 1857, the legendary Lakshmi Bai, famously known as the Rani of Jhanis⁵², rode on horseback in fierce battles and died in combat (Jayawardena: 1986: 78). From these historical records of Hindu

⁵² This legendary queen was known for leading her troops into battle dressed in military uniform which made it impossible to determine her sex (Madhavananda & Majumdar: 1953: 397)

and Muslim women, it can be assumed that within both Hindu and Muslim societies, there were women who enjoyed a certain amount of freedom.

Subsequently, over the years, barbarous practices developed which forced both Hindu and Muslim women to be relegated to a subordinate status (Singh: 1981: 75). Roy (2006: 125) notes that the oppression of women was further fuelled under the banner of traditional patriarchal law, according to which women are regarded as slaves to society, tradition and male domination. As time progressed, these injustices became cemented within society as traditional structures and norms. According to De Souza (quoted in Roy: 2006:51), this resulted in women being denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields.

The literature of ancient Indian history regarding the 'true' status of Indian women is both contradictory and conflicting. According to Jayawardena (1986: 78), through the progression of time, the status of women in India varied in different historical periods and in different regions of the country. Essentially, the implementation of Indian mythology and the enforcement of personal laws⁵³ upon Indian women were major factors that contributed to the status and position of women in India. This will be discussed in the section below.

3.3.2 Indian Myths/Mythology

There have always been people, in every age and in each tradition, who have fought the modernity of their day. (Armstrong, 2001: xiii)

Modernity arises in stark contrast to ancient and past belief systems. Even though Western civilization was progressing, in India, there was a firm belief in mythology. Many Indian myths were translated into tales that were used to subjugate women. It is interesting that these various myths were embodied in rituals and traditional ceremonies and Indian women were expected to place themselves within the paradigms of these stories in the real world. As Armstrong (2001: xvi) observes,

Myth only became a reality when it was embodied in cult, rituals and ceremonies which worked aesthetically upon worshippers, evoking within them a sense of sacred significance and enabling them to apprehend the deeper currents of existence.

⁵³ Personal law in this context refers to the practices of specific communities enforcing their own laws upon Indian women and thereby separating them from the universal laws of the state.

In the pre-modern world, people who believed in myth had a deep faith in spirituality. When these myths were then embedded within their respective belief-systems, often through religion, they did not need rational or scientific proof as substantiation. Instead, they immersed themselves into these created worlds and believed in the mythological tales that were not only embedded within religion, but also within their own psyches. Indian mythology, more specifically, Hindu-Indian mythology is filled with various tales. Two popular tales that are often represented by female characters in films are those of 'Draupadi' and 'Sita', the goddesses who represent the glorification of female suffering. Through these tales, suffering is portrayed as being equivalent to purification and is further endorsed by Indian nationalists as a fate that is both inevitable and highly recommended for women (Katrak: 1992: 398).

The figure of Sita, the respected Hindu goddess is hailed within mainstream Hindu tradition as an example of the 'ideal' wife. Sita's story is part of the Hindu epic Ramayana, a text that Hindu's revere. She was the consort of Lord Rama and she underwent a number of trials and tribulations, which included her willingly following her husband in a nomadic and penurious life when he was unjustly exiled for fourteen years. She was then abducted and after her husband rescued her, he accused her of being unfaithful. To prove her chastity, she underwent a 'trial by fire'. This entailed walking through fire and because she emerged unscathed, it was assumed that she was still pure and chaste.

Several years later, when Sita fell pregnant, her husband doubted her again and banished her from his home. According to Indian mythology, instead of protesting against this injustice, she happily carried her children to full term and gave birth to twins. She raised them into fine men and then waited until they were finally acknowledged and accepted by their father. Then she asked Mother Earth to swallow her as a sign of her virtue. According to the myth, not at any point did Sita doubt her husband or question him. According to Jayawardena (1986: 96), it is through the propagation of this myth that Indian nationalists promote the notion that a woman is the 'ideal woman' if she is without any purpose of her own, except to 'worship her husband and continue to constantly prove herself worthy of him. Interpretations and reverence to epics and myths such as these resulted in Indian women being coerced into emulating the lives of goddesses such as 'Sita' as closely as possible in order to be considered 'good' and 'pure'.

'Lakshmi' is another goddess that Hindu-Indian mythology idolises. Historically, the status of women in India has fluctuated drastically, and even though Hindu culture has afforded women the title of *Lakshmi*⁵⁴, and *Mother*⁵⁵, the same culture has forced women to climb onto the funeral pyres of their dead husbands and accept self-immolation or *sati*⁵⁶ as a symbol of virtue (Roy: 2006: 33-39). *Sati* is an upper-caste Hindu custom in India in which the widow is burnt to ashes on her dead husband's pyre. This woman is then described as a virtuous woman (Gangoli: 2007: x). In past nationalist discourse, as Niranjana (2006: 78) rightfully notes, *sati* was perceived and accepted as a norm.

Social customs based on mythology were a common practice during various points in the history of India. For example, in Hindu culture, a widow who willingly and happily ascends the funeral pyre of her dead husband in order to be burned alive is revered. However, if, for some reason, the widow did not ascend the funeral pyre of her dead husband, strict Hindu law codes immediately became effective according to which 'a widow should lead a chaste⁵⁷ life' (Roy: 2006: 44). As Roy (2006: 45) further observes, Indian women were often subjected to intolerable situations and lived through dark periods during which they were abused and treated unfairly. The strict adherence to myth can be explained by Armstrong's (2001: xiv) observation,

Myth could not be demonstrated by rational proof; its insights were more intuitive like those of art, music or poetry.

Since belief in myth did not require scientific or rational proof, and because many people were content to follow intuition instead of science, Indian mythology was and is to this day, central to Hindu culture. Based on prevailing belief-systems of the times, 'the notion of female suffering was glorified through the use of mythological models' (Katrak: 1992: 398).

⁵⁴ Lakshmi means 'goddess of wealth and prosperity. According to ancient Hindu tradition and culture, a woman is the best gift of God to man. If she is properly treated, she brings prosperity (Roy: 2006: 33).

⁵⁵ 'Mother' in India is a highly respected and revered entity.

⁵⁶ *Sati* is the practice of women being coerced into ascending the funeral pyres of their husbands to be burned alive alongside them.

⁵⁷ From as far back as the 1st century, it was considered a 'condition of blame and religious sin' to be a widow (Rosella: 2002). This, Rosella (Ibid) argues, is based on the notion in the Hindu religion that the satisfaction of the husband should be the sole joy in the woman's life. In line with this notion, it is deemed appropriate for the woman to renounce all the joys in her life. This self-punishment includes consciously going through the motions of life as a living corpse, dressing only in white, withdrawing from society, eating left-over food, suppressing her sexual needs and not partaking in any joyous festivals. This is the fate of the widow who does not allow herself to be burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre.

In addition to being subjugated through myths, both Hindu and Muslim women were also subjugated by personal laws.

3.3.3 Personal Law

India is a country characterized by diverse cultural and religious groups. The major religious groups in India are Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi and they are all governed in family matters by their respective '*personal laws*'⁵⁸ (Narain: 2007: 499, emphasis mine). It has been established that Hindu women in India were subjugated in the past through the application of various myths that form an inherent part of Indian mythology in Hindu culture. On the other hand, according to Narain (2007: 501), Muslim fundamentalists emphasised the institution of family and Islamic religion as markers of a collective identity that needed protection from state intrusion and the imposition of the norms of the rest of the non-Muslim society.

A parallel can be drawn between the myths of Hindu culture and Islamic personal law. While Hindu women were being subjugated through myth and tradition, Muslim women were being subjugated through the notions of the institution of family and religion itself. Both myth and personal laws placed Indian women in disadvantaged situations. On the one hand, myths promoted an unnatural 'idealised' vision of what 'ideal' women ought to be. On the other hand, Islamic personal laws strategically posited women into 'private' spheres through the enforcement of discriminatory laws of marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance and succession (Narain: 2007: 501). As Spivak (1993: 162) notes,

The essentialized notions of home as a basis for woman's identity locate the woman within a space in which she is almost exiled by her male owner.

As a result, when women in India (both Muslim and Hindu women) were subjected to the oppressions of a patriarchal, cast-bound society, the patriarchal joint family system further fuelled the deterioration in the status of women as did enforced widowhood and the *pardah*⁵⁹ system⁶⁰ (Roy: 2006:52). Even though this system was more specific to Muslim women,

⁵⁸ *Personal laws* in India are laws that have been modified by the state based on a combination of religious laws, customs and practices (Narain: 2007: 499). These laws serve the function of discriminating against women and endorse them being located within the private sphere of life as a result of which they suffer from gender inequality under the jurisdiction of a created law.

⁵⁹ *Purdah* is the system which coerces women to 'veil' themselves by covering their heads with a scarf and wearing loose clothing that does not reveal their curvaceous bodies.

⁶⁰ It is interesting that during the time known as the Mughal period, both Hindu and Muslim women, after having adopted the practice of wearing *pardah*, were restricted in movement (Roy: 2006: 48).

Hindu women also adopted the *purdah* (Roy: 2006:47). It is interesting, Armstrong (2001: 165) notes, that the habit of veiling women (the *purdah* system) was not a religious duty, but rather a mark of status because it was worn by women of the upper classes⁶¹. The Muslim peasants of the time (1870-1900) did not wear *purdah*. It can therefore be argued that the *purdah* system, like the practice of *sati* could be categorised under personal laws that were created to subjugate Indian women.

According to Indian belief-systems, culture honours the interests of family above individual self-interest (Chaudhuri: 2004: 31). Krueger (2004: 3) argues that within the context of traditional structures, both Hindu and Muslim religions place family as the fundamental reference point of reverence. From this perspective, it can be assumed that family conflicts are often the result of differences in opinion about the social structures and belief systems of traditional societies as opposed to western belief-systems (Krueger: Ibid).

With regard to Muslim women, it is notable that in general, the religion of Islam does not encourage women to step outside of the private sphere. Narain (2007: 501) believes that this is achieved by alienating women from society by shunning the intrusion of the state and all non-Muslim society at large. Narain (2007: 502) further identifies four specific major discriminatory aspects of an enforced Muslim personal law, which are instrumental in subjugating Muslim women,

- Firstly, Muslim women do not have equal inheritance rights. They are entitled to only half the share of the male heir;
- Secondly, a mother can never be the legal guardian of her young children, but she can physically look after them;
- Thirdly, Muslim women do not have the right to a monogamous marriage, because polygamy is permitted for men;
- Lastly, while men have a unilateral right to divorce, women's rights of divorce are limited and subject to several constraints.

It can be argued that both personal laws and mythology were instrumental in stripping both Muslim and Hindu women of their basic human rights, thereby reducing them to mere objects. Indian culture propagates the notion of the husband as being equivalent to God. As

⁶¹ It is important, according to Armstrong (2001: 165) to be aware of the fact that the Quran does not command all women to cover their heads, and that the *purdah* system only became common as many as three generations after the death of Prophet Muhammed (S.A.W.). In a sense, it seems as if the veiling of women was a retaliation to modernisation. As a result, over the years, the *purdah* or veil has become representative of Islamic authenticity in response to Muslim women who choose not to veil themselves. The 'true' authenticity of this practice remains debatable to this day.

Forbes (1996:18) notes, in Hindu culture, the husband is regarded as the supreme 'God among all Gods' and must be served accordingly. It is interesting, that through the enforcement of personal laws as mentioned by Narain above, Muslim women were also placed lower in the hierarchy, with men holding positions of power.

Essentially, prescriptive role playing for all women in India demanded that women carry out their duties as devoted wives and mothers in order to maintain an ordered universe (Forbes, 1996: 19).

Therefore, most young girls were 'groomed' for arranged marriages after which they were expected to adapt and conform to the customs and traditions of their husbands. As a result, within the context of the Indian family social system, women became victims who perceived themselves as incompetent and helpless creatures. This caused them to go through life with low levels of self-esteem. As a result, they could not voice their opinions or desires. In accepting inferior treatment from their husbands, they were looked down upon by others and had very little regard for themselves.

Over the years, mythology, customs, traditions and the enforcement of unjust personal laws resulted in a host of chain reactions. In ancient India, child marriages to older men resulted in an increase in the number of widows. Child marriages also resulted in women being married before their characters were fully developed. By transferring these young individuals from the loving homes of their parents' homes to the hostile atmospheres of their parents-in-law's houses, the characters and personalities of women were stifled. According to Dube, women in India were reduced to puppets that merely moved when someone decided to pull their strings (Roy: 2006: 52). It seems as if unjust archaic and social customs like child marriage and sati reduced the status of Hindu women to the level of cattle, and Muslim women were secluded through the purdah system and polygamy (Ibid). As Bhattacharya (2011) posits, the following of traditions and rituals became embedded as expressions of culture that were often accepted without argument.

There is no doubt, that in the history of India, both Hindu and Muslim women experienced total injustice, were subjected to intolerable situations and lived through dark periods during which they were abused and treated unfairly (Roy, 2006: 45). While Hindu women were subjugated through the use of mythological models that glorified the notion of female suffering, Muslim women were relegated to a subordinate status through created personal laws. Since the use of mythology has been discussed in detail in the previous section, it is

important to take note of the manner in which the arguments between right and wrong in relation to the rights of Muslim women become muddled in the debates between personal laws and secular law. An interesting case that is worthy of mention in order to understand the distinction between secular law and Islamic personal law is the Shah Bano case.

The Shah Bano Case

The Shah Bano case is a true story which took place in 1985. Even though this case did not take place during ancient times, the actual events and reactions from Islamic leaders are reminiscent of ancient and 'backward' modes of thought. Therefore, this case underpins the reality of the plight of Muslim women who are constantly being subjugated and disadvantaged in different ways.

Shah Bano was a Muslim Indian woman who was divorced by her husband when she was 73 years old. The Indian Supreme Court awarded her maintenance under secular law (Pathak & Rajan as quoted in Narain: 2007: 503). However, her husband, Mohammed Ahmed Khan claimed that his own personal Muslim law did not compel him to pay spousal support. The decision of the court in favour of Shah Bano caused 'an unprecedented furore and pushed the nation to the brink of a constitutional crisis over the question of spousal support for divorced women (Ibid). The Supreme Court further held that the question of spousal support for Muslim women must be decided in accordance with financial need and that religious personal law cannot override the secular law in matters of social welfare and public policy (Narain: 2007: 503).

Islamist leaders were not in favour of the idea of an exclusively Hindu court choosing a more egalitarian Islamic law over Muslim personal law and thereby pronouncing a verdict that deviated from their interpretations of the Quran (Mullally: 2004: 672). According to Hasan (quoted in Lindquist & Handelman: 2011: 99), they interpreted the decision of the Supreme Court as an assault on Muslim personal law. Once again, the personal subjectivity of man overpowered not only religious doctrines, but the power of the state.

The spectacle of an exclusively Hindu Supreme Court determining the scope and content of Muslim personal law provoked an outcry from conservatives within the Muslim community. (Mullally: 2004: 681)

Due to the pressure from the community, Shah Bano disassociated herself from the judgement of the Court and withdrew her claim for maintenance (Ibid). Eventually, against the protests of progressive Muslims, feminists and women's groups, the government passed a new law called 'The Muslim Women's Act'⁶² (Parashar as quoted in Narain: 2007: 504). Briefly stated, the new law or act *excluded* women from the application of the *secular law* of spousal support applicable to all other Indian women and maintained all male privileges (Narain: 2007: 504, emphasis mine). Men's rights to extrajudicial, unilateral divorce were reaffirmed; their duty of spousal support was limited to a three month *iddat*⁶³ period, and their right to polygamy remained unchallenged (Ibid).

In claiming to protect divorced women, this new 'act' symbolised a triumph of religious rights over Muslim women's rights in India (Rahman: 1990: 481). This act limited spousal support to a period of 3 months after which the woman was to sustain herself or rely on the extended family for support. According to Narain (2001: 35),

Personal law has become the terrain on which authentic Muslim identity is constructed as well as defended. However, the experience in India demonstrates that although personal law has come to signify authentic tradition, in fact, tradition has been selectively reinvented and discursively created.

The Shah Bano case highlights the tensions that arise when the 'pursuit of gender equality comes into conflict with the religious claims of a minority group' (Mullally: 2004: 672). Years later, Shah Bano's lawyer Danial Latifi challenged the 'Muslim Women's Act' (Narain: 2007: 507). As a result, The Supreme Court⁶⁴ passed a judgement that recognised the diversity of traditions within Islam and concluded that the duty to make provisions for divorced women, as provided for under the Code of Criminal Procedure, applied equally to the Muslim community (Mullally: 2004: 672). This is a landmark decision for Muslim women's equality rights, because it reaffirmed the Shah Bano decision and rules that the 'Muslim Women's Act' be broadly interpreted to ensure that Muslim women are not

⁶² Ironically, "The Muslim Women's Act" was a new law which was supposed to protect women's rights with regard to spousal support after divorce (Parashar as quoted in Narain: 2007: 504). However, within this law, women were still subjugated because their claim to maintenance was limited.

⁶³ In Islam, *iddat* refers to the period delineated by three menstrual cycles which is roughly calculated as three months. According to the new "Muslim Women's Act" women were not entitled to spousal support beyond the three month *iddat* period (Mullally: 2004: 678).

⁶⁴ The Supreme Court was presented with a case called the Danial Latifi & Anr v Union of India in 2001. In this case, the Supreme Court made a ruling more in line with secular law (Mullally: 2004: 672-682).

excluded from the same rights of other women (Narain: 2007: 507). In both the Shah Bano and Danial Latifi cases, the Supreme Court drew on egalitarian strands within Islam, attempting to ensure a continuing respect for Muslim women's claim to equal treatment, regardless of religious membership (Mullally: 2004: 673).

Regardless of the court rulings, and as a result of Muslim personal laws, Muslim women are continuously forced to choose between their rights or their culture (Narain: 2007:507). As far back as 1772, the Warren Hastings Plan⁶⁵ was given legal sanction by the government according to which Hindu and Muslim people in the Indian sub-continent were to be governed by their own laws in disputes relating to inheritance, marriage, caste and other religious usages and institutions (Mullally: 2004: 675). As Mullally (Ibid) further notes, this plan provided for Hindu and Muslim experts to instruct the courts as to the nature of the Hindu or Muslim law, whenever a situation arose. As a result of this practice, women in particular were placed under the jurisdiction of the respective 'experts' in their communities. These leaders were not bound by affiliation to any universal principles. Instead, each group relied on its own scriptures and interpretations thereof. It must be noted that there were no formal processes in place for the testing of the interpretations as such. In fact, the Warren Hastings Plan was instrumental in creating a further divide between the public and domestic spheres and thereby placed women in a restrictive space.

Concluding thoughts

Clearly, the plight of both Hindu and Muslim women in India has been delineated by man-made laws and traditions that supersede logic and humanity. Women are categorically placed into moulds created by men without correct interpretation of the religious texts that should essentially have been used as constructive and peaceful guides towards leading a balanced life that should not discriminate based on gender. Calls for change from Muslim women themselves are viewed by community leaders as a challenge to the community, as a betrayal of the group, and as an assault on religion, thus erasing the lived experience of Muslim women and ignoring their claims to equality and personal law reform (Narain: 2007:501).

⁶⁵ While the Warren Hastings Plan of 1772, was afforded legal sanction from the government in relation to individual religious groups being responsible for various aspects and issues, it is notable, as Mullally (2004: 675) argues, that the courts in India followed British models of adjudication and procedures. Nevertheless, despite the prevailing legal system, the Warren Hastings Plan (1772) made provision for both Hindu and Muslim laws to be decided on according to their personal views.

Hindu women on the other hand are constantly reminded about the need to emulate characters like Sita in myths that have become integrated into Hindu religion and culture.

The implementations of created personal laws in both Hindu and Muslim cultures have contributed to the grave deterioration in the status of women in India. Parashar notes that all of these personal laws are discriminatory to women in varying degrees (Narain: 2007: 500). The reason for the discrimination is based on multiple factors such as the integration of religious laws based on personal interpretations, customs and traditions that have been passed down through the generations. As Roy (2006: 34) rightfully argues, over time, the 'ideal' was worshipped and given more significance while the 'real' was neglected. Culture then permeated into societies under the guise of religion. As a result, oppression and injustice have been translated into traditional norms. The myths and laws that have been translated into examples of normative behaviour patterns that must be followed by women have caused gender discrimination and have resulted in the oppression of women⁶⁶.

Subsequently, in response to the continuing debates about the need to be faithful to personal laws and myth, a period of cultural revival ensued through the efforts of various reformers in India (Jayawardena: 1986: 76). This movement of reform gained momentum when the British conquered India in 1858.

3.4 Cultural Revival

The issue of women's emancipation in India should be evaluated by keeping in mind two important movements: one, a political movement of challenge and resistance to imperialism, and the other, a social movement to reform traditional structures (Jayawardena: 1986: 73).

Reform in India was already in motion when the British came to India, but it was progressing at a snail's pace.

Women were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational and political fields. They were assigned a subordinate status. The marriage ideals, power and authority exercised by the joint family and caste system, combined with illiteracy, age old traditions, seclusion within the four walls of the house, made it difficult for them

⁶⁶ It is important, however, to be aware that not all myths, traditions and rituals should be viewed in a derogatory light. There are positive aspects that can be attributed to various traditional practices as a result of which families gather together in peaceful situations. At the same time, various myths, like folk tales, provide valuable lessons for coping with life. The problem arises when these structures are used to gain power, manipulate or oppress others. Inevitably, it is when cultural beliefs and religion are falsely interpreted and then enforced as laws and traditions that injustice occurs.

to seek fuller personality development. They had scant personal identity and few rights. (De Souza as quoted in Roy, 2006:51)

It can therefore be argued that feminism in India emerged as a response to the inhuman subjugation and oppression of women dictated by false interpretations of culture and religion. The main distinction in Muslim personal law and Hindu personal law in the late 19th century was that Muslim women were allowed to remarry after being widowed; they were entitled to request a divorce and were also entitled to a share of parental property. Hindu women on the other hand, were still disadvantaged with regard to the above aspects. However, both Hindu and Muslim women were fighting for equality and the right to an education. Therefore, as Jayawardena (1986: 73, emphasis mine) notes, it seems as if even though “the *need* for the emancipation of women was recognised by Indian feminists and reformers, the *issue* of emancipation in India was fuelled by British colonial rule”.

When the British conquered India in 1858, they joined the Indian feminist struggle for the emancipation of women. According to Handa (quoted in Prince & Silva-Wayne: 2004:174), British colonialists used women as a yardstick to measure the extent of modernisation in India: the low status of Indian women indicated to the British the backward condition of the entire country. In line with these observations, as reformist ideologies were set into motion by colonial domination, James Mill (1968:309-10) notes,

Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women ... They are held, accordingly, in extreme degradation.

According to Mill (1975: 225-226), it was necessary to bring a rather barbaric nation (India) under a benign and reformist administration of the British Empire. However, it is important to note that from the early nineteenth century, many Indian reformers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Syed Ahmad Khan, Pandita Ramabai, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi were already focused on the revival of Indian culture and the emancipation of women (Jayawardena, 1986: 82-98).

Rammohun Roy, a Bengali who had been influenced by Western liberal thought was considered one of the greatest male reformers of 19th century India because he attempted to revitalise Hinduism (Jayawardena: 1986:80). His stance against the treatment of women was clear and is substantiated by his sentiments criticising the oppression of women in his writings,

At marriage, the wife is recognized as half of her husband, but in after-conduct they are treated worse than inferior animals. For the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house ... to clean the place ... to scour the dishes, wash the floor, to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food for her husband, father, mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and friends and connections. (Ibid: 81)

Roy was influenced by the thinking of James Mill and his arguments on women's status were compared with those of Mary Wollstonecraft. He championed women's rights on *sati*, polygamy, women's education and women's property rights. As a result, in 1829, the system of *sati* was declared a criminal offence (Jayawardena: 1986: 81). The injustices perpetuated against women in the name of religion became a vital issue for liberal thinkers and scholars in India. Jayawardena (1986: 81-82) emphasises the sentiments of Roy,

Amongst the lower classes, and those even of the better class ... the wife, on the slightest fault, or even on bare suspicion of her misconduct, is chastised as a thief. Respect to virtue and their reputation generally makes them forgive even this treatment. If unable to bear such cruel usage, a wife leaves her husband's house to live separately from him, then the influence of the husband with the magisterial authority is generally sufficient to place her again in his hands; when, in revenge for her quitting him, he seizes every pretext to torment her in various ways, and sometimes even puts her privately to death. These are the facts occurring every day, and not to be denied. What I lament is, that, seeing the women thus dependent and exposed to every misery, you feel for them no compassion, that might exempt them from being tied down and burnt to death.

Within the same context, male reformer Rabindranath Tagore focused on the revival of Indian culture and art and spoke strongly against traditional customs and practices that were used for the denigration of women. His vision is expressed in these words,

If the human world becomes excessively male in its mentality, then before long it will be reduced to utter inanity. For life finds its truth and beauty, not in any exaggeration of sameness, but in harmony ... it is their instinct to perform their services in such a manner that these, through beauty, might be raised from the domain of bondage to the realm of grace. (Jayawardena: 1986:85)

Tagore recognised the dominance of patriarchal societies all over the world. Forbes (1996: 6) agrees that patriarchal systems offer women few opportunities until men decide it is time for change. It must be noted that while early agitation for social reform came from Hindu males, Muslim males were also active in trying to eradicate unprecedented orthodox opinions that were unfair to Muslim women (Jayawardena: 1986: 92). Syed Ahmed Khan was regarded as one of the most prominent Muslim reformers and in the late 19th century, he pioneered Muslim higher education, opposed polygamy and challenged the tenet that forced women to wear *pardah* (Ibid).

While Indian activists focused on reform, the British, after conquering India in the mid-nineteenth century, introduced a new type of economy, state structure and educational system, and they began passing new social legislations (Roy: 2006:52). However, despite the oppressive conditions that women in India were subjected to, liberal reformers in India were not in favour of being 'colonised' by British imperialism. Nag and Burman's views of the conflict between the Indian and the British are expressed in Jayawardena (1986:82),

While Rammohan Roy and the liberals challenged the interpretation of Vedic texts on the question of sati, they were also eager to counteract the missionary view that Indians were barbarous and uncivilized, and referred to 'cruel murder' under the cloak of 'religion' which had led to Indians being regarded with contempt and pity... by all civilized nations on the surface of the globe.

On the one hand, there was resistance to British imperialism, and on the other hand, the traditions that were enforced upon women in the name of religion were simultaneously identified and acknowledged as beyond the realm of the humane. In his book, *The History of British India*, Mill (1975:225-226, emphasis mine) disputed and dismissed practically every claim ever made on behalf of Indian culture and its' *intellectual traditions*, concluding that it was totally primitive and rude. The sentiments of Mill were congruent with the reform that was already taking place in India.

In a sense, feminism in India was fuelled by the 'civilising mission' of the British and the abolition of *sati* was generally understood, as Spivak argues, as a case of 'white men saving brown women from brown men' (Morris: 2010: 50). It can be argued that it may have not been necessary for all 'brown women' to be saved by 'white men'. In line with this point of view, it is interesting to relate the views of Lord Cromer, a typical colonialist and ruler of Egypt during the period of 1882 (Armstrong, 2001: 161). During his administration, he looked down upon the Egyptians as being inherently backward and therefore parochially believed that they 'needed' to be colonised for their own good. Armstrong (2001: 161) argues that he failed to realise that the then evolved countries such as Britain and France had also once been as 'backward' as Egypt. The difference was that they had already evolved, while his own country (Egypt) was merely 'imperfectly modernized' as it needed to catch up with the evolutionary processes that European countries had clearly journeyed through.

In a similar context, it is important to be aware that within India, there were women who lived within the Indian family social system in which they were not oppressed. Instead, they enjoyed security and comfort under the jurisdiction of a patriarch who acknowledged his

superior rank in the hierarchy, but did not take advantage of his position. Nevertheless, the political movement of resistance against imperialism and the social movement within India became conflated. As a result, the status quo was challenged and older norms of Indian society were not as easily accepted or enforced anymore. The conflation of the two movements inevitably resulted in change.

While there was resistance to British imperialism, women in India who were being oppressed and unjustly victimised, welcomed a regime that promised to eradicate unjust treatment. Essentially, all feminists seek to resolve inequality, but the challenge for feminists in India was more daunting for they had to first overcome various forms of violence before attending to any other issue. As a result of the efforts of the reformers in India and British imperialism, the pattern of women's lives in India was being transformed to allow them more freedom of movement outside of previously ordained domestic spaces. It is interesting to note that the first wave of feminism in the West was also born in the late nineteenth century and colonial histories have narrated the civilizing mission of the British as rescuing Indian women from their own culture and society (Forbes: 1996: 2). However, the reasons for change were not the primary focus for women in India. Instead, women in India welcomed the fact that this change translated into a choice of options for them.

3.4.1 Transition from the Private to the Public Sphere

The political movement that stemmed from the British conquest of India, coupled with the advances made by reformers in India resulted in women taking advantage of opportunities for education by the end of the nineteenth century. With increased urbanisation and the growth of new professions associated with colonial domination, work was increasingly separated from the home. As a result, there were significant changes in what women could do. In trying to break free of restrictive roles and patriarchal structures, women in India found support in the country's reform agenda, which, Forbes (1996: 6) notes, included educating and socialising women. Education afforded women new-found knowledge in the sense that the acquisition of social skills empowered them to detach themselves from within the 'household'. This was because they had discovered a sense of purpose for themselves and within themselves which was not restricted to focusing on being obedient to their husbands.

As women experienced increased opportunities for the expression of their individualities under the British regime, the 'new' Indian woman was born. Kishor & Gupta (2004: 649-712) observe that this 'new' woman was not content to accept the notion that a man is justified in beating his wife if she does not fulfil the accepted gender roles of cooking and caring for their common home. This created conflict because the status quo of well-established social systems which were fashioned on traditional structures was being dismantled. According to Mohanty (quoted in Waller & Marcos: 2005: x),

Wherever the struggle for a dominant frame has been an issue over the past several decades, there have been conflicts and frictions, such as that between 'Western feminism' and 'third-world feminism'.

During the course of the nineteenth century, the concept of the 'ideal' Indian woman was being redefined (Forbes, 1996: 28). In seeking to eradicate discrimination against women in India, the views of feminists varied. According to Niranjana (2006: 53), in colonial feminist discourse the Indian woman is often defined in opposition to the European woman. This leads to Indian feminists always being confronted with allegations of being 'Westernised' both from the state and from sections of civil society (Gangoli: 2007:1). The allegations of being 'westernised' also implies that these women are not aligned with the idea of aspiring to become 'ideal women' in a traditional and perhaps even ancient Indian context. Bell & Klein argue that these allegations are in turn intensified and fuelled by the manner in which the media continuously portrays feminists as radical man-haters (Rudman & Phelan: 2007: 788). The label 'feminist' was frowned upon by Indians because for many it implied autonomy, selfishness and a desire to renege on commitments and duties that are central to the figure of a woman in Indian culture. In defence of these assumptions, Roy (2006: 31) argues,

The attacks on feminists are misguided. Feminists do not hate family, men, sex. They hate only exploitation, oppression, subordination and discrimination done against them on various grounds. They want that women should be given autonomy to shape their own life as they like. They should not be treated as property, but as individuals.

Based on the above realisations⁶⁷ of women, the private sphere as the 'rightful' space of the woman was not easily accepted by them anymore. Despite criticisms and conflicting viewpoints, the women's movement was progressing and modifications in the appropriate activities for females at different stages of their lives were being made (Forbes, 1996: 28). From a social perspective, as a challenge to traditional structures, the shifting position of

⁶⁷ These realisations can be referred to as a growing awareness of the state of feminist consciousness.

women from the private to the public sphere created uncertainty. While women gained confidence as they stepped out into the public sphere, they still returned to the household where they fell back into their traditional prescribed roles as homemakers. These behavioural patterns of Indian women were in line with the nationalist agenda that based its vision of women on certain assumptions about femininity.

Datta (2000: 78) agrees that the use of nation as a family paradigm places women in subordinate positions where they are 'confined to domestic, motherly roles, under the sway of husbands'. Many women in India were not willing to assert their rights in a way that would estrange them from their families and communities. Although 'there is a level of subordination' within the context of the Indian family social system, there are also codes of honour (Datta: 2000:78). According to these unwritten codes, while women are located in the private sphere, they are to be protected from harm. The hierarchy of the Indian family social system dictates that males should be afforded the sole responsibility of providing for their entire family unit, while females (wives and daughters) are given responsibility for the household.

A space is thus created where family then becomes the top priority of both males and females. While the males attend to monetary concerns, females attend to all priorities within the home which include, but are not limited to feeding, clothing and nurturing the entire family unit. Therefore, unless there is abuse of either male or female within this constructed Indian family paradigm, there should not be subordination, especially if both parties are playing their assigned roles. While this paradigm is supported by a notion of Indian ideology that places the interests of family above individual needs, it is equally important that within this setting, there is no room for subjugation, oppression or gender inequality (Chaudhuri: 2004: 31). It can therefore be assumed that Indian women who were averse to feminism did not see the logic in fighting for equality as they were 'actually content' to reside within the paradigm of the Indian family system where they enjoyed comfort and peace.

The challenges, however, began when this comfortable family paradigm was used by Indian nationalists who then manipulated the notion of 'national identity' by infusing a strong dose of patriarchy into a previously fair and happy space. This led to the development of an 'imaginary paradigm' which was then used to promote the return to an ancient status quo. Hence, national identity became synonymous with a created 'imaginary paradigm'.

3.4.2 National Identity / 'Imaginary Paradigm'

There is no doubt that within the context of Indian culture, the Indian family social system is highlighted as the core of the woman's being. As Uberoi notes:

Indianness is defined with reference to specificities of family life, the institutions of courtship and marriage in particular ... whether at home or abroad, it is the 'Indian family system' that is recognized as the social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian. (Punathambekar: 2005: 160)

Within this structure, the woman assumes the role of wife or daughter and, regardless of her role, she is essentially placed in a position of subordination. As has been discussed earlier, there is a difference between forced subordination and a hierarchical arrangement⁶⁸ according to which both genders thrive in their own delineated spaces. According to the project of nationalism, patriarchy is embedded in and has come to be accepted within Indian society.

Within this traditional, patriarchal familial context,

Women have varying degrees of power depending on the relationship role in which they are positioned. With regard to the role of wife, they are positioned as subordinate and subservient. (Ram: 2002, 30)

In the nineteenth century, a model of 'Indian womanhood' was created in response to colonisation struggles (Virdi, 2003: 62). This model, which was in line with the principles of the nationalist project, positioned the 'ideal' Indian woman as one who sacrificed everything in order to attend to the needs of her husband, his extended family and her children.

Essentially, the nationalist project aimed to perpetuate notions of women who would always be, as Ram (2002: 30) observes, 'supplicants in a male-ordered universe'. Stephens (1989: 92-93) agrees that Indian nationalists who promote conservative Indian ideologies glorify Indian women who are subservient, sacrificial and submissive⁶⁹.

In order to further coerce women into powerless positions and relegate them to a subordinate status, Ram (2002: 30) claims that the nationalist project also drew upon tales from Hindu mythology. According to Pande (2006: 1646), 'the India of the 1920's was a society where sexes were firmly segregated'. The nationalist project was thus instrumental in continuing to

⁶⁸ This difference can also be compared to the difference between forced marriages and arranged marriages. While in both cases, the prospective partners are pre-selected, in the case of the latter, there is space for the expression of opinion. Even though arranged marriages are often perceived in a derogatory light, there are various merits to the arrangement, but the most important of all is that both partners have the freedom of choice. In contrast, forced marriages can be regarded as oppressive structures.

⁶⁹ These women, according to Roy (2006: 118) are located within this structured Indian family social system and are expected to 'fulfil all their duties without question'.

promote 'traditional' ideas of femininity as the 'true' and 'correct' attributes that women must adhere to. While there is truth to Pande's statement, it can also be argued, as Datta (2000: 71) suggests, that nationhood or the idea of a nation state is a concept that exists only in fiction. This is corroborated by the earlier discussion on the implementation of various myths and personal laws as a means of creating gender inequality. It is thus the idea of the nationalist 'imaginary' that Indian nationalists use to maintain the subordination of Indian women to men and society at large.

The woman's question within nationalist discourse can be better understood in relation to the dichotomy between the private and the public, or as Chatterjee (1993: 121) claims, the distinction that this creates between the 'home' and the 'world'. The 'home' signifies the true essence of authentic Indian spirituality while the 'world' represents the material domain which in turn is associated with the 'corrupt' West. As Chatterjee (1993: 120-121) contends, the nationalist project that arose in retaliation to colonisation, promotes the idea of retaining the spiritual and traditional culture of the Indian people as superior to the influences of the West.

It is interesting that Indian nationalists also deemed it necessary to adopt and cultivate the material techniques of the West. They believed this was necessary for the progress of their country, but at the same time, they drew an 'imaginary line' between the West and India in relation to the adoption of Western ideals for women within the personal spheres of their lives. This was because they regarded the 'debauched west' as an influence that would corrupt the spirituality of traditional and morally superior values of Indianness (Punathambekar: 2005: 159). The engagement of Indian nationalists with the West can therefore be described as being paradoxical. According to Chatterjee (1993: 121, emphasis mine), the *justification of this paradox* was to be found in the ideals of the nationalist project. On the one hand, they asserted that the essential identity of the East lay in its distinctive, and superior, "spiritual culture" (the home) which had not been and did not have to be colonised, and on the other hand, they also saw keeping abreast with the modern material world as imperative (1993: 121).

Even though Indian nationalists deemed it necessary to 'learn the modern sciences and arts of the material world from the West (in order to match their strengths and ultimately overthrow the colonizer)', the paradigm of the nationalist project did not allow 'encroachment by the colonizer' within the home or private sphere. This created a situation in which women who

followed Western norms in relation to their lives at home were accused of *annihilating* their very distinctive, *Indian identity and spirituality*. (Chatterjee: 1993: 121, emphasis mine).

The retention of a distinctive Indian/Hindu identity was further fuelled by Hindu fundamentalism (Gangoli: 2007). According to Gangoli (2007), women who were already split between allegiances to the home vs. the world were confronted with ideals of restrictive conceptualisations, such as being either 'wives of men' or mothers of sons'. The main focus of such constructed paradigms originated from the obsession with promoting the idea of the West as a symbol of corruption and immorality that would eventually lead to the corruption of Indian women. As Chaudhuri (2004: xiii) notes,

A great deal of feminist theorizing, therefore, has interrogated the imagining of a nation that conflated itself with a sanitised image of Hindu upper-caste women.

During the period in India's history when nationalists opposed imperialism, women became conflicted about the realities of their lives. Since they had been disadvantaged and oppressed in the past, they were accustomed to accepting many injustices as normative structures. On the one hand were nationalist principles according to which women were led to believe that their rightful position was one of subordination. On the other hand, imperialist structures not only promoted education for women, but also proposed the end of primitive rituals like *sati*. Based on these diverse systems, Anagol (2005: 77) observes that many Hindu women in India questioned the authenticity of customs and practices that were used to subjugate them in the name of religion, as well as man's created subordination of them which they were expected to accept as a norm. Muslim women simultaneously became aware that they too, were being coerced into seclusion through the compulsory act of wearing *purdah* (Anagol, 2005: 15). As Anagol (2005: 15) further observes, these practices of subjugation were generally accepted as norms that were common to the whole of India.

Hence, due to the historiography of women in India which is very much underpinned by India's colonial past, even though patriarchal structures were being dismantled and opportunities for women were increasing and due to the creation of the nationalist 'imaginary' paradigm, true internal emancipation for women was still a struggle. The nationalist project was also instrumental in promoting the continuous perpetuation of the Indian/Western dichotomy.

3.4.3 The Indian / Western Dichotomy

When studying the role of women in the West and in the Indian context, it becomes apparent that both dichotomies, no matter how diverse they may seem on the surface, share similar notions of motherhood and commitment to the husband. In religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism, patriarchy is traditionally granted to the father, including total ownership over wives and children (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 42). This includes powers of physical abuse, murder and sale (Ibid). It is the misuse of these patriarchal powers that becomes problematic and results in women becoming prey to the restrictions imposed upon them by patriarchal societies. For both Western and Indian feminists, the following is true,

All feminist positions are founded upon the belief that women suffer from systematic social injustices because of their sex and therefore, any feminist is, at the very minimum, committed to some form of reappraisal of the women in society (Evans et. al: 1986:2: In Whelehan: 1995:25)

Even though all women share the general agency of feminism, Indian women inherit a complex relationship with the West. As a result their identity and place within the greater global world is always conflicted. Therefore, when attempting to define feminism in an Indian context, the reality that Indian feminism has to be located within the broader framework of an unequal international world must be considered (Chaudhuri: 2004: xv). This unique definition is necessary because the identity of Indian women is often split between retaining the Indian culture that has been passed down through generations and the lure of the 'other' world, which represents autonomy at every level. It is the temptation of the 'new' or 'other' world that creates discord in the identity of Indian women and it becomes necessary not only to redefine feminism within an Indian context, but more specifically, to redefine the role of Indian women in a society that is not faithful to the ideals of Indian nationalism. It is notable, that if they try to step out of this preordained role, then they are immediately accused of 'crossing the line' and the Indian/ Western dichotomy is brought to the fore. As Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 76) note,

Women who seek to live by traditional norms find happiness, while those who dare to transgress them are punished and victimized.

This occurs because according to both nationalist ideals and patriarchal structures (which have both been influenced and fuelled by nationalism), it is crucial for Indian women to assume subordinate roles. As Chaudhuri (2004: xx) argues, the conflation of Indian women with the Indian nation and culture is a framework that was constantly being propagated by

Indian nationalists. This propagation/propaganda by nationalists created a situation that bound women to false ideals of an 'imaginary' paradigm that restricted them in all aspects of their lives, more specifically, it 'forced' them to always be cognisant of the burden of the nation and family that they were brainwashed into thinking was theirs to carry. For Indian women, this dichotomy translates as a paradox, for they are constantly struggling to prevent alienation and estrangement from members of their families while striving for their own independence. For this reason, Indian feminist Kishwar ⁷⁰(2004: 53) claims that she would not call herself a feminist because feminism is too tied up with western origins. Many Indian women supported the ideologies of Kishwar (2004: 30) based on their perceptions of Western feminism being an offshoot of individualism and liberalism. These perceptions are corroborated by Indian nationalists who propagate that 'being westernized is a mark of a social contamination' (John: 2004: 53).

Instead of becoming enmeshed in arguments over the Indian/Western dichotomy, Kishwar (2004: 31) proposes the need for women in India to become more aware of dealing with issues on their own terms. She claims that this is necessary because women in India would not be able to identify with a sense of extreme individualism that is often associated with feminism in the West, especially since the main concern of Indian feminists was to firstly escape from subordination. In a positive light, Bartky notes that as a result of 'a great deal of feminist theorizing in terms of feminist consciousness', an awareness of the unjust positions of women has been raised (Tuana & Tong: 1995: 399-400). This theorising has in turn allowed women to question their allegiance to structures which left them voiceless in the past. In questioning and theorising about past normative structures, many Indian women welcomed the freedom to follow their own passions. However, at the same time, they also felt the need to continue with their lives as mothers and wives within the paradigm of the Indian family social system. Once again, due to the projections of the national project, Indian women who asserted their needs to be more than 'mothers and wives' were accused of wanting to renege on their family commitments which are regarded as the highest priorities. This concept is understood by Indian feminists in particular because of their genealogy.

⁷⁰ Kishwar's (2004) seminal text, "Why I do not want to be called a feminist" deals with the Indian woman who is content within the paradigm of the Indian family social system. She acknowledges the difficulties that Indian women experience when trying to alienate themselves from the Indian family social system and embrace Western feminism, which they view as both too individualistic and liberating.

The position of the Indian women in contemporary society is a type of enigma. On the one hand, they strive for independence from past belief-systems. On the other hand, they are constantly plagued by the actuality that they might be alienated and estranged from their families because they will be considered to be 'too westernized'. This scenario is supported by Jain (2011: 3), who argues that identities of Indian women are often fixed in images of sacrificing mothers, supportive wives and young virgins. The Indian /Western dichotomy can be seen as yet another construct created to trap them in the midst of social structures, for as Bhattacharya (2005: 3) argues,

Women in India, defined by a set of relationships and models of conduct within the framework of a created society, have over the years, learned to live under the twin whips of heritage and modernity.

Indian women have had to develop yet another coping mechanism in order to deal with this additional structure. The crucial points in Bhattacharya's argument are the 'created society', and the 'twin whips of heritage and modernity'. Firstly, it is essential to understand that the 'created society' is the Indian family system which is loyal to patriarchal structures. Within these patriarchal structures, women are not independent individuals. Instead, they are dependent on males and dominated by them to the point that they do not have the right to their own hopes, dreams, desires or ambitions. Over the years, Indian women have been judged according to their allegiance to this created structure. If they step out of this paradigm, then they are, as Bhattacharya argues, faced with dealing with the 'twin whips of heritage and modernity'.

Since the West is regarded as the place of moral corruption, if Indian women become 'conscious' of their individual autonomy, and begin to re-shape their ideals, then they are accused of following western ideals. It is assumed that in following western ideals, they will become liberated and will 'lose' their Indian culture. Of course, they must then choose between remaining 'Indian' or adopting western ideals. Since the Indian family system is fashioned on nationalist and patriarchal structures, any deviation from this course is regarded as insolence on the part of the woman. 'As feminists and other critics of nationalism have pointed out, discourses of tradition are never gender neutral' (Mankekar: 1999: 740). Essentially, the home is the place that has been 'ordained' as suitable and proper for the woman, while it is the man's duty to explore the world outside of the home. It is this normative belief that must be challenged in order to eradicate the differences and challenges that are caused by the Indian/Western binary. As Samantha Sacks argues,

Feminism is about change, about a redistribution of power. It is about challenging the status quo. It is a call for the redefinition of the family, the mosque, the temple, the church, the synagogue and of love. Change is threatening to those of us who wield power and those who do not. And because it is threatening, it is electric and alive and powerful. (Prince & Silva-Wayne: 2004:116)

Regardless of these challenges, both Hindu and Muslim women in India began to actively participate in life outside the home. Many women joined the *satyagraha*⁷¹ and other non-cooperation movements in an attempt to make their foray into political activities (Jayawardena: 1986: 93). Colonial India was now in its postcolonial phase and change had become inevitable. As John (2004: 64) aptly notes,

It should not, after all, surprise us to discover that the sphere of culture is made not found, that traditions are in flux, and, in general, that a selective – and patriarchal – historical process is always at work (rather than some cultural truth about women).

In the early 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi attempted to assist women in India with their situation. There is no doubt that Mahatma Gandhi, known as the ‘father of India’, was the chief architect of India’s independence movement (Lal: 1995: 27). After India was emancipated from British rule in 1947, Gandhi officially developed a programme for women in which he advanced his principles. His vision for India envisaged a society in which both sexes could reside in harmony. The theories and principles of Mahatma Gandhi are in line with the views of Tong (1992) and other liberal feminists such as Wollstonecraft (1792); De Beauvoir (1949); Friedan (1963); Niranjana (2006); Roy (2006) and Gangoli (2007). Gandhi’s vision and principles for women in India will be examined in the following section.

3.5 Mahatma Gandhi and Women in India

Mahatma Gandhi was an Indian reformer and politician well known for the establishment of the *satyagraha* movement and his philosophy of non-violence. He was simultaneously devoted to the dream of an Indian nation, in which Muslims and Hindus lived peacefully and is quoted as saying,

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. (Gandhi: 2008: 241)

⁷¹ Satyagraha means peaceful resistance. This movement of peaceful resistance was initiated by Mahatma Gandhi.

This section will deal specifically with Gandhi's role in the women's reform movement in India. Gandhi began his journey of women's emancipation by linking the moral, social and political position of women in India. Morally, he shunned subjugation, socially he advocated women's foray into the public sphere and politically, he encouraged them to join the nationalist struggle in order to build a new social order (Kishwar: 1985:1691). Gandhi was an influential leader who was revered for saying that there was no place for the oppression of women in India anymore. Through his non-violent Indian reform movement, he facilitated the peaceful transition of women from the private to the public sphere.

3.5.1 Paradoxical Ideals

It is noteworthy that while Gandhi strongly believed that a woman's real sphere of activity was the home, he actively encouraged them to step out of the private sphere (Kishwar: 1985:1691). From this perspective, he was often criticized for his paradoxical ideals. With regard to the position and role of women in society, Gandhi was simultaneously liberal, culture-bound and patriarchal.

It is important to highlight that Gandhi did not support discrimination against women in any form (Lal: 1995: 28). With regard to women in India; his stance is articulated as follows,

Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she has no hand. Man has not realised this truth in its fullness in their behaviour towards women. They have considered themselves to be lords and masters of women instead of considering them as their friends and co-workers. (Jayawardena: 1986:95)

Gandhi's vision for women in India allowed them to enjoy free spaces outside of oppressive conditions. In the 1920's, Gandhi wrote,

The female sex is not the weaker sex; it is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. (Jayawardena: 1986:95)

Based on the inherent characteristics that Gandhi believed women possessed, he actively and consciously promoted their foray into the public sphere. Ashis Nandy notes that 'a major element in Gandhi's philosophy was his rediscovery of womanhood as a civilizing force in human society' (Lal: 1995: 29). To explain this further, it is necessary to unpack the subtleties of this ideal. On the one hand, there was a call for the end of oppression. From a civilising perspective, this was deemed necessary. On the other hand, there was a call for

women to venture into the public sphere. However, this call was conditional, and therefore superficial in a sense. This is because, according to Gandhian principles, women were to step out into the public sphere 'only' for the nationalist cause. Thereafter, as Katrak (1992: 400, emphasis mine) notes, they were *expected* to return to the private sphere in the home where they belonged. It is interesting, that even though Gandhi facilitated women's movement into public spaces, he was still a proponent of the Indian family social system.

As an individual, Gandhi categorised the spiritual as central to the essence of Indian cultural identity. Since the spiritual is intertwined with the home as 'sanctuary', it becomes incumbent upon the Indian woman to guard and maintain this sanctuary. In support of this belief, he drew from Indian mythology. The model of the ideal role model for women according to Gandhian principles was to be found in mythological figures like Sita and Draupadi, goddesses who embodied traditional ideologies of wifeness, motherhood and domesticity (Katrak: 1992: 396-7). In addition, these goddesses represented the glorification of female suffering while suggesting that women were inherently stronger than men. Gandhian principles, Kishwar (1985: 1692) argues, proposed that Indian women exemplify a certain type of moral force in society. Through this notion, Gandhi stressed the superiority of suffering and self-sacrifice as a noble trait in women (Ibid). It is interesting that this ideal dates back to the tales in Indian mythology in which goddesses were portrayed as self-sacrificing in order to promote the model of the 'ideal woman' in Indian culture (Jayawardena: 1986: 96). Based on these tales, Gandhi advanced the idea that if women who were faithful to Indian mythology could emulate the examples of goddesses, then women in India could use these qualities constructively for the benefit of the nation.

Stemming from his belief in Indian mythology, Gandhi agreed with the notion advocated through various myths that women must be 'controlled' and bounded through social custom, primarily within marriage (Katrak: 1992: 398). He believed that women's noble and inherent sacrificial nature could be mobilised for a revolution against colonial rule. According to Gandhi, women were best suited to symbolise civil disobedience, because they 'optimally embodied ... a dual impulse for obedience and rebellion against authority primarily within the family' (Ibid). These qualities were glorified as the standard that women should uphold against the nationalist struggle (Katrak: 1992:396). Gandhi also firmly believed that due to the nurturing nature of women, they were prone to non-violence in both conduct and thought

(Lal: 1995:29). Therefore, by encouraging them to join the nationalist struggle, he believed that he was strengthening the cause of the nation. As Lal (Ibid) further notes,

Gandhi had the unique gift of finding the heroic within the trivial, and of eliciting the poetic from the prosaic, so he found in the daily lives of women the most salutary lessons on how to run a country.

Even though Gandhian principles did not completely solve the problem of ‘identity’ for Indian women, they did initiate a step forward. While this step allowed women access to the public sphere, it can be argued that it was not an entirely liberating space for them because of the imposition of conditions. Nevertheless, his ideals created a culture in which women were able to venture freely outside of the home. In a positive light, his principles were not perceived as a threat by both the British and Indian governments because he did not attempt to completely ‘overthrow’ women’s existing subordinate position in the patriarchal family structures that were in place (Katrak: 1992: 400). Instead, he implemented his own political strategy which allowed women freedom from the oppressive structures of the nationalist agenda. He achieved this by limiting the exposure of women in the public sphere to participation in the nationalist struggle.

Even though there were mixed responses to Gandhian principles, especially since he supported Indian mythological tales that promoted notions of female suffering, it is possible that in order to free women from restricted spaces, he was compelled to have some interest in the nationalist project. In line with this point of view, he did not support the oppression against women in any form. At the same time, he was also of the belief that men and women were inherently predisposed towards different ‘spheres of expertise’. These will be discussed in the next section.

3.5.2 Spheres of Expertise

Gandhi maintained his stance on men and women being suited to different roles or ‘spheres of expertise’. Similarly, Parsons (1951: 35) claims that men and women are predisposed to behave in different ways and learn different sets of roles based on their natural instincts. Through these ideals, both Gandhi and Parsons excuse inequality. In response to these views, feminist writer Joan Smith argues that the nature of femininity in society is influenced by the fact that men and women are treated differently, especially in terms of restrictive moral

judgements that prevail in societies according to which women are 'expected' to behave (Kidd: 2002: 179).

Gandhi was a proponent of androgyny; he did not believe that any vocation was exclusively reserved for any particular sex. At the same time, he maintained that people of different genders were specialists in different fields, and supported the notion of 'spheres of expertise'. In other words, he believed that while women were capable of expertise within the sphere of domesticity, men should assume the role of being the principal breadwinners. He did not demean the value of housework in any sense, but acknowledged its significance in a positive light as contributing to good standards of housekeeping, nutrition, sanitation and hygiene (Lal: 1995: 28). As an individual, he had no qualms about being perceived as feminine. He was often criticised for 'presenting' himself as female by performing 'feminine roles' like spinning cloth, but this did not deter him from his philosophies (Katrak: 1992: 397). He believed that men had a great deal to learn from nature and spirituality, which in his view were virtues that women were born with. Based on these beliefs, he considered the 'home' a stabilising force that was vital for the creation of a wholesome family life. Therefore, he constantly appealed to women to nurture their 'female' virtues such as chastity, self-sacrifice and suffering (Ibid: 398).

It can be argued that had Gandhi not supported the importance of women being sacrificial as advocated by the nationalist project, he might have been completely ostracised as a leader by the nationalist party. Therefore, in order to maintain his position as a powerful leader and icon, he may have attempted to be perceived as being 'politically correct' by appealing to women to nurture qualities of being self-sacrificial. It must be acknowledged that at no point did he actively promote the idea of women sacrificing themselves, nor did he insist that practices such as *sati* and child-marriages be brought back as customs. It is thus plausible that in initiating movement for women through participation in the nationalist project, he facilitated their transition from the private to the public sphere.

3.5.3 Embracing Gandhian principles

Many Indian women found logic in Gandhian principles on balancing the private and public spheres of their lives and welcomed his stance on oppression. Gandhian principles also

absolved women in India from feeling inferior to men if they participated in domesticity, as long as this participation was voluntary and not enforced. Once again, women in India were in conflict regarding their roles. While newly emerging feminist ideals encouraged them to step out of their roles of domesticity, the 'father of the nation' advocated that there was no shame in being domesticated. However, one of the major points of difference that Gandhian principles promoted was that men should be held accountable for misconduct and accordingly, women should not be forbidden from stepping out of the spheres of domesticity.

It is interesting, that in contradiction to his own ideologies, Gandhi insisted on the sexual division of labour and on the home as the major sphere of activity for women. At the same time, as Kishwar (1985: 1692-3) observes, he 'actively created conditions which would help women break the shackles of domesticity.' While Gandhian principles afforded Indian women freedom from oppression, the notions of women being the primary and more suitable caregivers of the family remained. They were still 'expected' to return to the home and carry out their duties in order to provide a strong support base for both men and the nation. Katrak (1992: 395) argues that Gandhi's independence movement mobilised women before subordinating them again.

In Indian society, certain behaviours have been manipulated and are firmly embedded in the name of culture and tradition with regard to women. According to Gandhian principles, women must be 'controlled', either through marriage or by the nation. Therefore, even though women do not have to tolerate violence and oppression in a physical sense, the underlying tenets of what is 'expected' of them haunt them wherever they go. The reasons for this can be attributed to centuries of conditioning, the implementation of personal laws, customs that continue to be passed down through generations, myths that are central to Indian culture and the notion of the 'ideal' woman that is perpetuated by Indian society.

Even though Gandhian principles proposed that women's foray into the public sphere should be subject to their participation in the nationalist struggle, this was merely an ideal. This impacted on the role and position of women significantly because women gained entry into the public sphere without being forcefully bound to limit this freedom to the nationalist struggle exclusively. Through the nationalist struggle, the women's movement progressed and modifications in the appropriate activities for females at different stages of their lives were made (Forbes: 1996: 28). By embracing Gandhian principles, women in India found

solace in the fact that they would not be punished if they chose to venture out into the public sphere. However, at the same time, years of conditioning made them want to return to the private sphere. The difference this time was that they understood that they had the power of choice. They stepped out of a constructed way of life and chose to venture toward a space that might set them free from paradigms of accepted behaviours. According to Tong (2009:3),

In order to be liberated, women must reject femininity as it has been constructed for them and give it an entirely new meaning. Femininity should no longer be understood as those traits that deviate from masculinity. On the contrary, femininity should be understood as a way of being that needs no reference point at all.

The shift from living a life bound by restrictions to living a life that is free from any rules is overwhelming, especially for women who were previously conditioned to behave in a certain way. According to the model of functionalist sociology forwarded by Parsons, women are predisposed to behave in different ways and learn different sets of roles based on their natural instincts (Kidd: 2002: 177). It is interesting to note the emergence of similar thought patterns and beliefs in both the East and the West. Both Parsons and Gandhi have been criticised for their views that promote certain patriarchal ideas, however, both maintain that women are naturally more expressive and emotional and men are more task-oriented (Kidd: 2002: 178). Based on this premise, Gandhi glorified housework and only endorsed a foray into the public sphere by a woman if she was associated and dedicated to national service.

Nevertheless, Gandhian principles had succeeded in allowing women to step outside of the 'home' without fear. Even though this freedom was 'conditional' according to true Gandhian ideals, women who did not dedicate themselves solely to the nationalist struggle were not reprimanded in any way. Therefore, it can be concluded that Gandhian principles allowed for the smooth transition of women's roles from the restrictive private sphere to the non-restrictive public sphere without fear of punishment. Even though these women felt the 'shadows' of traditional/ancient times hovering over them, their present situation was less restrictive and therefore liberating. India was now in its postcolonial phase. The next section will examine the status and role of Indian women in postcolonial India.

3.6 India: A Postcolonial Space

Postcolonial is a broad but critical rubric, including in its fold conjoint yet contending perspectives - unravelling the prior presence of colonial apprehensions within

contemporary knowledge; questioning the projection of the West as history and destiny; probing the conditions and possibilities of modernity; and interrogating the limits and stipulations of the modern state and the Indian nation. (Dube: 2004: 2)

This section will examine India as a 'postcolonial space' and the impact that colonial rule and domination have had on the lives of Indian women. India's postcolonial history has been extensively explored by writers such as Ranajit Guha (1989); Partha Chatterjee (1993, 1997); Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1996); Mohanty (1991); Dube (2004); Sen (2005); and Homi Bhabha (1994,1997). Since India attained political independence from the British in 1947, discourses of tradition have existed simultaneously and contradictorily (Thapan: 2001: 359). When studying India as a 'postcolonial space', it becomes evident that it is difficult to detach this study from India's cultural history, colonialism, nationalism, and the community and state that remain faithful to personal laws, customs, traditions and rituals. As Sen (2005: 139) notes, postcolonial India has been deeply affected by the power of colonial structures and their forms of thought and classification.

Third world women have always been engaged in postcolonial feminist studies in an attempt to re-define the term according to their own challenges, which are delineated by various traditions, cultures and the prevalence of patriarchal structures. Indian women fall into this category given the strict patriarchal nature of Indian society as a result of which they have been subjected to oppressive traditions, high illiteracy levels, rural and urban poverty and religious fanaticism (Mohanty et al.: 1991:5-6). They have also experienced independence and freedom from subjugation as a challenge instead of as a relief. Therefore, as George (2006:211) notes,

Postcolonial feminist theory's project can be described as one of interrupting the discourses of postcolonial theory and of liberal Western feminism, while simultaneously refusing the singular 'Third World Woman' as the object of study.

Clearly, the figure of the Indian woman has been deeply imbricated within nationalist discourses. Various reform movements as well as the effect of the British colonizers impacted on women in India. Within a historical context, as discussed, there are a multitude of factors that have contributed to the perception of the postcolonial third world Indian woman as an oppressed and individual constituency. The challenges that postcolonial feminists faced were to be found within debates and struggles against colonialism, imperialism and gender bias (Mohanty et al: 1991:4). Over time, women's liberation movements became more active and the term 'feminism' was becoming extremely controversial, especially in an Indian context.

It has been established in the previous chapter that women in India had to first overcome oppression and subjugation in the direst forms before dealing with their rights on an individual level. In other words, as Jasbir Jain (2011: 3, *emphases mine*) notes, in order to free women from the ‘underpinnings of past ideologies associated with feminism’, the issues of identity, space and freedom must be *re-evaluated* and *defined*.

Even though the second wave of feminism, fuelled in the West by scholars such as Friedan and De Beauvoir, was also filtering into India in the early twentieth century, Indian women, as subjects under a patriarchal and oppressive nation, did not experience the same challenges that Western women did⁷². However, upon closer introspection, it can be argued that the challenges of Indian and Anglo-American women are not that different. The life of Sylvia Plath⁷³, an author and martyr of the women’s liberation movement in the West can be used as an example (Rosemeyer: 2000:34). Throughout her life, she struggled to balance her own individual personality as an author against the expectations that were made on her to be a devoted wife, good mother and efficient housewife. Similar to the ideology in India, the ‘glorification’ of motherhood was also considered one of the most important aspects of feminist ideology in the West (Rosemeyer: 2000: 57). It seems as if essentially, women’s personalities, self-perceptions and feminine ideals, no matter which cultural group or ethnicity that they belong to are formed as part of a male-dominated culture (Rosemeyer: 2000: 61).

Clearly, both Indian and Anglo-American women were coerced into believing that the private sphere was the ‘correct’ place for them to be, as Friedan (1963: 293) states,

The feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of American women alive. There is no way for these women to break out of their comfortable concentration camps except by finally putting forth an effort – that human effort which reaches beyond biology, beyond the narrow walls of home, to help shape the future.

However, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, women in America were eventually afforded the luxury of choice. They were able to decide how they wanted to lead their lives in terms of

⁷² It is important to be cognisant, Jain (2011: 4) argues, that feminism in India cannot be treated in the singular, for there is not one but several feminisms that are rooted in social conditions, religious conditions and cast backgrounds.

⁷³ Sylvia Plath was a young woman with an impressive scholastic record who was a writer/poet. She received a Fulbright scholarship to study at Cambridge University. She later married poet Ted Hughes (Rosemeyer: 2000: 31).

being domesticated, the role that they wanted to play in raising their children if they decided to have a family, or to be financially independent. In a similar manner, Indian women also became more visible in the public sphere, but due to their ongoing struggle with patriarchal structures under an oppressive nation, they continued to be challenged by various factors. It is on this basis that postcolonial feminist discourse attempts to chart a way forward for Indian women whose challenges are very different from their western counterparts. This will be discussed below.

3.6.1 Postcolonial Feminist Discourse

The clash between colonialism and imperialism afforded women in India relief by freeing them from enforced domination from both the state and patriarchy. In her book, *Feminism in India*, Chaudhuri (2004) argues that the feminist movement has failed to develop an Indian woman's definition of freedom. Even though women in India were afforded the 'luxury' of freedom from past belief-systems like their Western counterparts, their foray into the world as individuals was laced with challenges. According to Mohanty (Mohanty et al.: 1991:3), the accumulated histories of colonial women translate into cartographies of struggle because of political animosities and differing cultures. For the Indian woman in particular, there is a need to reconceptualise ideas of resistance, community and agency in daily life. Unlike women in the Anglo-American context, women in India constantly need to balance private and public spheres of life.

Chatterjee (1993: 6) attempts to clarify this internal dilemma through his engagement with the realm of the material versus the realm of the spiritual. These two specific 'categories' are often used as a baseline when trying to understand the position and role of women in India.

As Chatterjee (1993: 6) claims,

The material is the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proven its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture.

Based on this very precise understanding of the nationalist culture that disseminates through Indian society, the challenge of finding a sense of balance between these two domains translates into an arduous task for Indian women. According to Anagol (2005:82), Indian

traditionalists promoted the idea of the ideal education for women focusing on equipping them with the skills to manage a household. As Chatterjee has established, a substantial amount of importance is placed on the distinction between the 'material' and the 'spiritual'. Indian nationalism has played a dominant role in keeping these notions alive and Indian nationalists constantly promote the 'spiritual' as superior to the 'material'. Therefore, before even attempting to search for a definition of 'self', the Indian woman must first break through the cultural and traditional barriers that are imposed upon her by society.

This is challenging because Indian women are often at risk of being labelled as outsiders to the ideas of spirituality if they choose to align themselves within the 'wrong' domain. They must therefore first dismantle centuries of rigid structures before dealing with their own identities. Only after they have understood the impact that the domains of the 'material' and 'spiritual' have on their lives will they be able to begin to shape their lives as individuals. Simultaneously Indian women must understand their position as 'implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems' (Mohanty et al.: 1991:57). As colonial rule ended and India moved into its postcolonial space, an implicit conviction did develop. George (2006: 212) argues that according to this conviction, anti-colonial national struggles and postcolonial literary discourse were deemed to have the potential to change both social and political reality.

From the early 1960s onward, there was the rise of a US-based women of color multifaceted movement that focused on equal rights for all women in all spheres of life (George: 2006: 220). It is interesting that this struggle emerged alongside the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s that were taking place in India (George: 2006: 220). By the late 1980s and 1990s, post colonial feminist theory in the Indian context was being articulated through the publication of many essays by scholars such as Spivak (1985, 1988); Mani (1998) and Mohanty (1991). The publication of Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985) was considered an inaugural moment of post-colonial feminist literary criticism in the West (George: 2006: 214). By focusing on Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*,⁷⁴ Mani's analysis of the custom of *sati* raised awareness about the barbaric nature of this ritual. In Mohanty's (1991: 53) essay entitled, *Under Western Eyes*,

⁷⁴*Jane Eyre* was one of the "cult texts" of Western academic feminism. In this novel the female characters are stripped of humanity because of the politics of imperialism (George: 2006:214).

she explores the connections between women as historical subjects and the realities that they encounter during the course of their lives.

The publication of these essays coupled with the role played by reformers and activists in India, transformed feminism into a movement that acted as a catalyst because it influenced the lives of women in India. However, while women in India were afforded the 'luxury' of freedom from past structures, they were simultaneously placed into another type of social construct which had a new set of boundaries. As a result, a different style of social construction now limited the search for 'self'. For Indian women, the quest for 'self' is wrought with challenges that have no name. This problem is difficult to evaluate, for it cannot be articulated into a simple question. As Mani (quoted in George: 2006:214-215) notes, there is difficulty in uncovering a true understanding of the internal dilemma that these women actually deal with. There are deep-rooted origins, myths, traditions and the notion of 'acceptable' behavioural patterns that must be considered.

Even though the effects of the Indian patriarchal state should have been eradicated over the centuries, a shadow of this old belief-system continued to hover over the Indian woman. In 1982, the appearance of the first volume of 'subaltern studies' heralded a new school of history through which Spivak articulates the problem of writing about and understanding the history of colonial women. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.6.2 Spivak and the 'notion' of the Subaltern

Subaltern studies (Spivak: 1988; Guha: 1989; Dube: 2004) provide a platform for voices that have not been heard previously and focus on the subaltern in terms of class, caste, gender, race, language and culture. The first volume of Subaltern Studies that was published in 1982 focused on all non-elite colonial subjects (Forbes: 1996:3). These studies were presented in the format of a series of journal articles published by the Oxford University Press in India.

The term 'subaltern' was drawn from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist and Communist who declared that the 'subaltern' was the subjected underclass in society on whom the dominant power exerts its hegemonic influence (Prakash: 1994:1477). Ranajit Guha (1989) was the primary leader of subaltern studies in India and Spivak is one of the leading scholars of this school of thought. Spivak is considered a pioneer in literary theory of

non-Western women and has produced one of the earliest and most coherent accounts of that role available to us (Said as quoted in Smith: 2002: 2).

Through the subaltern project, Spivak published the article, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). In this article, she articulates the problem of writing the history of colonial women. In this text, which is considered a founding text of post-colonialism, Spivak (1988: 271-313) focuses specifically on the Indian woman as being representative of the 'other'. Spivak (Ibid.) further observes,

As object of colonial historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.

Many women in India fit into this category. For women in India, the main obstacle that needed to be overcome was how to be able to speak and represent themselves. Spivak highlights the notion of the 'subaltern' as a blemish on the persona of the Indian woman that should be eradicated in order to make space for the development of a woman who is not restrained in any form. In *The Subaltern Cannot Speak*, Spivak argues,

If the subaltern were able to make herself heard – as has happened when particular subalterns have emerged, in Antonio Gramsci's terms as organic intellectuals and spokespeople for their communities – her status as a subaltern would be changed utterly; she would cease to be subaltern. (Landry & Maclean: 1996: 5-6)

To this day, the Indian woman grapples to find a space for herself which is free from the restrictions of 'roles' that she is expected to fulfil. Spivak's engagement with the subaltern must be read against the backdrop of the history of the Indian woman before India gained independence in 1947. It is in the 'ceasing' of the subaltern that the Indian woman may ultimately be able to break free from the imposition of all the traditional norms. It seems as if in highlighting the existence of the subaltern, Spivak wishes to expose the farcical role that Indian women have become accustomed to playing as a matter of habit that excludes rational thought processes. This will be explained in the next section that deals specifically with the taciturn nature of the subaltern woman, who has 'no voice'.

3.6.3 The Subaltern Has No Voice

A defining characteristic of the subaltern woman according to Spivak is that she literally 'cannot' speak. The emphasis on the negative illustrates the restrictions that are imposed

upon the woman which cause her to be silent. This ‘vow’ of silence is not voluntarily taken by the woman as such, but becomes embedded as a natural characteristic of the Indian woman who has been conditioned by a patriarchal society into maintaining silence for the greater good of man. As Spivak iterates,

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization.(Morris: 2010: 104)

The silencing of the subaltern women, Spivak argues, marks the limit of historical knowledge (Prakash: 1994: 1487-1488). Even after the spread of imperialism and colonialism in India afforded women more freedom by freeing them from domination from both the state and patriarchy, they were still silently bound to traditions of the past. There is a big difference in the position of the woman in reality and the manner in which she is represented. Spivak (1993: 284) argues that both representations are complicit by nature and cannot be separated when applied to the notion of the subaltern. In fact, for Spivak, subalternity is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed (Morris: 2010: 8). She acknowledges the lack of both authenticity and virtue in the position that the Indian woman holds in Indian society. She further emphasises the necessity for the disavowal of subalternity and advances this as an ideal that must be attained (Morris: 2010: 8).

In trying to illustrate the need to comprehend the severity of the notion of the subaltern, Spivak draws on the realities of the manner in which Indian women abuse their bodies in order to be heard. She expands this notion through the example of two “suicides” (Morris: 2010: 4). The first example of suicide is apparent in the process called *sati* or widow immolation in which a woman ‘agrees’ to be burned to death on a pyre with her dead husband in order to be declared ‘chaste’. As Niranjana (2006: 78) notes, *sati* was seen as a norm in nationalist discourse.

The second example of suicide cited by Spivak is found in the tale of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, a teenager who killed herself in 1926 because she was unable to perform an assassination (Morris: 2010: 6). The assassination was required of her because she was part of a group of young people who were fighting for independence. The assassination was supposed to be used as a tactic to get the attention of higher authorities. Even though this task would have overwhelmed any individual, her inability to carry out her part of the mission caused her to

doubt herself. Instead of voicing her opinion and acknowledging that she was not prepared to take the life of another human being even if it was for a cause, she took her own life. In committing suicide, she used her body to demonstrate that she was not unworthy. It was later revealed that she had taken the trouble to wait for a menstrual cycle so that her death would not be interpreted as an act of shame for an illegitimate pregnancy (Morris: 2010: 6).

Through the interpretation of these two examples, Spivak highlights the extent to which historical circumstances and ideological structures conspire to efface the possibility of being heard for those who are variously located as the 'others' of imperial masculinity and the state (Morris: 2010: 6-7). Even though these women were not physically incapable of speaking, their voices were not to be heard, for the importance of 'blindly' following traditional norms and thereby fitting into the constructed moulds created for them by a male-dominated society, overpowered common sense. In Bhaduri's case, the example is a paradox, for the act of aligning herself with a political reform groups was already, according to Indian nationalist ideology, an act of rebellion. However, this mission was being carried out silently, behind closed doors. The assassination would have also taken place secretly, so that even for the sake of the 'cause', the figure of the woman would have remained invisible. By committing suicide, Bhaduri revealed herself. Sadly, she did not have the courage to reveal herself while alive. Instead, she allowed her body to 'speak' on her behalf.

In her essay on the 'subaltern', Spivak raises questions about the manner in which Indian women use their bodies to speak for them. Clearly illustrated in the above two examples, both Indian women seek to 'cleanse' themselves by perpetrating abuse upon their physical bodies. However, for the Indian woman, even the sacrifice of life is not enough, for before she takes her own life, she must ensure that even after death, she is not labeled unchaste. There was no need for Bhaduri to wait for her menstrual cycle, but this was done so that no one would accuse her of having killed herself because she was carrying an illegitimate child. As Spivak iterates,

So strong is the social presumption of female unchastity in death-by-suicide that she fails even in this attempt: a failure that becomes, in Spivak's reading, the fullest measure of her gendered condition, the veritable 'proof' of the subaltern's inability to speak. (Rajan as quoted in Morris: 2010: 126)

In relation to the subaltern woman, there seems to be no recourse, for even if the subaltern woman is found to be 'chaste' and innocent after her death, she has still ceased to speak

because she is by then a corpse. Hence, the subaltern woman is not only powerless in death, but throughout life, her voice is not to be heard. Through her work on the 'subaltern' identity, Spivak develops a feminist perspective sensitive to the political and cultural conditions of colonial and post-colonial societies (Castle, 2007: 246). However, as Sen (2005:139) notes, the influence of Western images on internal identities are not straightforward. Nevertheless, the 'self-identity' of postcolonial societies is deeply affected by the power of the colonial structures and their forms of thought and classification (Ibid). From this premise, the process of separating the journey of the Indian woman from the effects of colonialism is challenging. As a result, while there is a positive aspect to post-coloniality, there is also a tendency to retain and hold onto the Indian culture of the past.

Regardless of these individual sentiments, transnationalism has taken the pressure of abiding by past norms away from the Indian woman. However, while the allegiance to these norms is not enforced anymore, there are still memories of the past. These memories in turn, are kept alive by older generations of women and communities that have not embraced change or prefer to hold onto the baggage of the past. In this regard, Desai (2004: 27) refers to Spivak's views,

The disenfranchised women of the diaspora – new and old – cannot, then engage in the critical agency of civil society – citizenship in the most robust sense – to fight in the depredations of 'global economic citizenship.' This is not to silence her, but rather to desist from guilt-tripping her. For her struggle is for access to the subject-ship of the civil society of her new state: basic civil rights. Escaping the failure of decolonization at home and abroad, she is not yet so secure in the state of desperate choice or chance as to even conceive of ridding her mind of the burden of transnationality. But perhaps her daughters or granddaughters – whichever generation arrives on the threshold of tertiary education – can.

In a sense, Spivak believes that the 'baggage of the past' is so firmly rooted within older generations, that it is nearly impossible to escape colonial memories. Bhabha, however, takes a completely different stance toward the effects of colonialism. He stresses that colonialism should not be interpreted as something locked in the past (Huddart: 2006: 1). In order to be progressive, women must actively transform their understanding of expected behaviours into challenges that must be conquered. In other words, the feelings or notions of inferiority and insecurity that stem from a colonial past must be overcome. Tong (1992: 3) also supports the re-thinking of old constructs, and claims that the grouping together of women under the banner of 'femininity' has been created by men for patriarchal purposes. According to Tong, 'femininity' is a mere social construct that restricts women.

3.6.4 Beyond Subalternity

According to Bhabha's (1994: 1) framework, the need to recognise, resist and move beyond the past structures of colonial relations of power is emphasised. In line with this belief, Bhabha (Ibid) asserts the necessity to move beyond the past and to live in the present. George (2006: 212) agrees that postcolonial feminist theorising translates into a methodology especially invested in examining culture as an important site of conflicts, collaborations, and struggles between those in power and those subjected to power. At some point, it is necessary to accept that it is more constructive and conducive to live in the present and let go of the memories of the past. However, when trying to move beyond the past, Indian women have always been accused of trying to emulate 'Western' ideals.

Migration from India inevitably results in the integration of various 'Western' ideals into their own lives. Sen (2005: 73) argues that the 'nature' of the Indian identity is significant for the very large Indian diaspora population across the world. Within the vast transnational world outside India, the Indian woman must now choose her affiliation. Transnationalism has been a driving force in propelling women from their roles as homemakers to newer roles that are not restrictive. As Bhabha (1994: 170) observes,

People emerge in the finitude of the nation, marking the liminality of cultural identity, producing the double-edged discourse of social territories and temporalities. In the West, and increasingly elsewhere, it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced.

It can be argued that while migration allowed for the adoption of new cultural practices, transnationalism fuelled and created new socialisation patterns for the Indian diaspora. Migration allowed Indian women to look to newer pastures and embrace the 'Western' way of living, which was individualistic (compared to Indian social structures) and therefore, liberating. As Bhabha (1994: 9) notes, in postcolonial India, the borders between the home and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. It is this space that has not been defined and for the Indian woman translates into a space without any clear delineation or boundary. Immediately there is the imposition of the Indian/Western dichotomy and the Indian woman must either affirm her loyalty to the Indian culture which has been regimented by Indian nationalists and past patriarchal structures or detach herself from these created spaces.

According to the historiography of the Indian diaspora, their roots stem from a colonial past. Within this context, Dube (2004: 235) argues that ‘subaltern pasts’ are like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric. While the ‘knots’ are stubborn, migration forces individuals to re-evaluate their existing value-systems. As Hirji (2005: 5) notes, ‘it is almost naive and restricting to attempt to avoid altogether the dictates of a dominant culture.’ Simultaneously, when the Indian diaspora adopt various Western traditions, there are challenges because of the diversity in cultural patterns and belief-systems. Bhabha (2011: 1) refers to Julia Kristeva’s views on the challenges that foreigners face in this regard. Kristeva observes the emergence of a paradoxical community which is made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognise themselves as foreigners. When applied to the Indian diaspora, they are faced with a similar dilemma of remembering their original culture and then putting it in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side-by-side, but also alternate with others’ culture. According to Bhabha (2011:2-3),

When theoretically re-tooled for our times, the paradoxical community contributes an essential element to the problem of recognition as an ethics of neighbourliness and hospitality.

In other words, Bhabha is of the opinion that new experiences can be used as stepping stones towards carving out new identities. However, both Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988) agree that the influences of the past, culture and childhood experiences cannot be wiped clean with a broad brushstroke. People are what they are because of their individual history and this history must be integrated into their present and future if they are ever to realise their full potential. It is in the integration of the old and the new that a myriad of choices become available. Life for women in the Indian diaspora is always confusing. In the beginning, many years ago, as iterated by Spivak (1988), women ‘had no voice’. However, as Appadurai suggests, transnationalism has splashed colours of opportunity onto the landscape or ‘terrain’ (Kavoori & Punathambekar: 2008: 38). Even though Indian diasporic women have made great strides in their lives after emigrating from their homelands, the majority of women living in India are still under constant threat of their basic human rights and continue to be violated.

3.7 Concluding thoughts

The feminist movement that originated in the 19th century began as a movement that was determined to end oppression against women. Since the onset of the first wave of feminism in

the Anglo-American context, women from all walks of life and from diverse creeds and backgrounds have joined the struggle for the emancipation of women across the globe. In an Indian context, as has been established, patriarchs and Indian nationalists harboured the fear that their version of a 'rich' Indian heritage would fade into oblivion if they were not diligent about guarding the idea of women staying within the confines of the private sphere where they would be protected from the corruptive forces of the West. They viewed increasing migration patterns as a threat to the paradigm of the Indian family social system because more generations of diasporas were being born outside the motherland and would therefore have no way of experiencing their culture. This fear was further compounded by the threat of feminism itself because the discourse had acquired a negative connotation through its association with 'protest and resistance' (Jain, J., 2011: 2-3).

When the feminist movement began, it was committed to granting women equality. These days, feminism has become a more perplexing ideology. Many scholars have declared that feminism is either dead, obsolete, or that it has failed (Davidson: 1988; Gillis & Munford: 2007; Redfurn & Aune: 2010). We are thus compelled to ask whether feminism can still assist women with their current challenges. More specifically, it seems crucial to locate the position of feminism in this century.

As a consequence of transnationalism, many Indian women who were initially entrenched within the dictates of patriarchal, Victorian and oppressive regimes, broke away from these traditions. This resulted in an increase in transnational communities (Roudemetof: 2005: 113), and the ongoing dialogue of the Indian/Western dichotomy was brought to the fore. In light of this dialogue, Indian women were forced to choose between loyalty to Indian culture as defined by nationalism and patriarchy or detachment from these created spaces. The problem with detachment, however, is that it sets into motion the ongoing debate about modernity being representative of a break from cultural identity. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998: 76) warn that, 'Women who seek to live by traditional norms find happiness, while those who dare to transgress them are punished and victimised'.

Nevertheless, contemporary society has been influenced by the feminist movement. Many women today do enjoy more freedom than they did in the past, and many women are not oppressed and forced to live under patriarchal structures. The keyword in this instance is 'many'. Perhaps feminism is dead and obsolete to women who are privileged to be living in

societies where they are not objectified or treated inferiorly. The societies in which these fortunate women live allow them to exist as human beings. However, for women who continue to be victimised and oppressed, it seems as if the feminist movement is failing them.

Based on the current position of women in India, it seems as if after all the theorising and ‘advancements’ that feminist theory proposes to have made, progress is slow. This is substantiated by the fact that women in India⁷⁵ continue to be victimised. When atrocities as grave as rape take place, societies at large stand up and protest and government bodies often offer monetary compensation to the families of victims. The questions are, which amount is suitable for the loss of an innocent life and where does one begin to lay blame for a barbarous act such as the pinning down of one defenceless woman against the strength of six males, equipped with steel poles on an abandoned, moving bus?

During the international uproar of the 2012 rape case, people have pointed fingers at the evils in society, at the objectification of women in Bollywood films, at women themselves for wearing Western clothing, and the list continues endlessly. The truth is, no matter how many collective fingers are being pointed in the world at large, the victim has suffered and ... she is dead. This is not the first time that a woman has been gang-raped, and from the statistics, it will not be the last. Debates about the position of women in India have become circular again. As a result, in relation to the historiography of women in India, it seems as if nothing has changed. Perhaps it is time to re-define feminism once again, but this time, to send out a call for the socialisation⁷⁶ of men who commit unholy crimes against women. This project should include an agenda according to which societies receive education that focuses on the urgency to cultivate mutual respect between men and women according to which transgression of personal spaces should not be allowed and if breached, then punishment should be enforced.

⁷⁵ It must be noted that rape is an international problem, not only committed against women in India. Across the globe, men, women and children are being raped. However, since this study focuses specifically on the evolution of women as represented in Bollywood cinema, it will concentrate on the treatment and victimisation of women in India.

⁷⁶ The idea of ‘socialising’ men should be considered in a serious light as a very realistic possibility. This can be explored through the narrative of the film *Tarzan* (Buck & Lima: 1999) in which a human child is socialised with the mannerisms of an animal. Even though the story is fictitious, it can be used as a reference when studying the manner in which habits and mindsets are formed based on early socialisation. When Tarzan comes into the human world, he is then ‘taught’ the acceptable normative behavioural patterns of humans.

Men and women are inherently born with different physical qualities. Based on this fact, it is imperative to differentiate between sexuality and sensuality. It can be argued that while men possess an inherent male sexuality or 'magnetism' as is often coined in the media; women exhibit an inherent sensuality which is often misread as sexuality. As Moi (1999) notes, 'the modern world is steeped in sex'. In line with this sensibility, biological differences should be acknowledged and accepted as natural, universal truths. On the other hand, it is also important to accept that social differences between men and women are created by cultures, societies and man-made interpretations of religion and myth. In the world at large there have always been negative influences. However, the human being is an evolved animal, or should be, for humans have been blessed with the power to rationalise, think, evaluate and most importantly, choose how he/she wants to behave.

Essentially, men are not evil; neither are women. It can therefore be argued that there is no space for evil in societies because they are made up of collectivities of both men and women. What then, are the roots of the causes for evil behaviour? The root causes can be debated by examining the choices that individuals make, such as choices that result in inflicting pain and atrocity against others. Cruelty is a vice which cannot and should not be tolerated under any circumstances. Nevertheless, tyrants have historically oppressed the less fortunate, and political activities have led to wars where innocent people have been massacred. Blame should not be placed upon man, woman, collective society or political party. Blame should rightfully rest upon the lap of the individual who transgresses beyond the realm of the humane. Individuals must be held responsible and accountable for their actions. It is within the individual that rot manifests initially and if this rot is not eradicated but left to fester, the unthinkable and unimaginable takes place. After the damage, there are outcries. If the outcry leads to a positive solution, then justice is being served in the right way, but if societal ills such as oppression and rape continue to breed and history keeps on repeating itself, then 'evil' has won and 'good' sinks further away from our grasp.

The media has insinuated that the practice of gang-raping women is fuelled by the representation of women in various Bollywood films⁷⁷. Why then, do women not gang rape men after watching male bodies on screen? The questions that arise in response to this observation are, 'Are women more evolved than men?' or 'Do women have more self-control

⁷⁷ The representation of women in Bollywood films will be discussed in the next chapter.

over their primal urges?’ The modernity of societies all over the world has led to the creation of liberal spaces in which social constructs and individual behaviours are often negotiated. ‘Choice’ has become the buzzword of the twenty-first century and due to transnationalism, national boundaries and the allegiance to both religious and ritual practices and traditions have become blurred. If we are to blame anyone for the continuation of heinous crimes and abrogation of personal spaces that are being carried out through the acts of rape and the general victimisation of women in India, then blame should rest on the transgressors themselves. The transgressors are however, individuals in society. On that note, in an attempt to offer a possible solution to aid third-world women in retaining their dignity and human rights, this study suggests that feminist theory be classified as a clearly defined global cause. The reasons for this are as follows,

- To this day, there is no singular acceptable definition of feminism that encompasses the challenges of all women across the globe⁷⁸.
- Based on the realities of women across the globe, each woman perceives feminist theory in a different light based on her personal experiences, cultural background and socialisation patterns.
- Despite women’s engagement with liberation and equality, the raping and victimisation of women in India continues.

Based on the above, it becomes imperative to retrace the origins of feminist theory in an attempt to redefine it based on the flaws and shortcomings of the movement. Bearing in mind that feminist theory’s original goal was to eradicate the oppression of women and reinstate gender equality; it can be argued that, in light of current events, the feminist movement has failed many women all over the world. One of the reasons for this failure could be attributed to the lack of a universally accepted definition. Women experience gender relations vastly differently based on various factors such as cultural patterns, socio-economic conditions, patriarchal and national structures. Therefore, feminism cannot function universally. Instead, the discourse is adapted to fit into each society’s created version/vision of gender relations.

⁷⁸ It is important to acknowledge and accept that feminist theory has made significant contributions to the lives of actual women. In its capacity as a theory committed to affording women their true value and freedom from oppression, feminist theory has achieved various successes over the years.

Due to the colossal space for negotiation that exists within feminist theory, it seems as if it is now time for the world to unite and integrate the law of humanism and the idea of androgyny into the feminist discourse. The theories of Gandhi and Friedan support this idea. Based on the ongoing gender violence against women in India, it is clear that feminist theory has not been sufficient to alter embedded patriarchal mind-sets and misogynistic attitudes. This could be due to the negative reception of the feminist movement by many Indian males who were of the opinion that women should be resigned to their historical subordinate positions within society. It is necessary then, to remind these males that in an Indian context specifically, there are male reformers who are committed to fighting against gender violence/discrimination.

Even though the feminist movement has had many successes and has been both influential and necessary as a medium of initiating change in the past, it is no longer sufficient to deal with the grave atrocities that continue to victimise women. The backlash to feminism in India was greater than it was in the Anglo-American context because of prevailing misogynistic attitudes toward women. It is relevant that these attitudes prevail in India to this day. In order to move forward, it is thus necessary and appropriate to involve both genders in the fight for women's dignity and human rights. At the same time it is important to understand that within an Indian context, challenges such as socio-economic factors, poverty, the large population, societal problems and inherent belief-systems all contribute to the continuous gender violence against women in India. Taking these aspects into consideration, it seems as if it is time to implement a type of well-planned educational and socialisation programme that is not perceived as a threat by the males in India. Instead, such programme should encompass both males and females into its mission. The goal of this programme should envisage a space that promotes a peaceful environment for both genders. In addition, it is suggested that a single equation that impedes violence against women be integrated into each state's legal system. Any abrogation of this suggested programme should be punishable by law.

Finally, with regard to the tension that exists between many men and women in India, it is important to always be cognisant that men are responsible for the birth of sons and *daughters*, with the *emphasis on daughters*; and in the same light, women are responsible for the birth of daughters and *sons*, with the *emphasis on sons*. Where then, as Greer (1971) argues, is there room for all men to hate women or as Millet (1977) argues, is it necessary for women to avoid men because of patriarchal structures that place them in positions of superiority? At the end of the day, men and women belong to one species with different

biological compositions. Should that really be a basis for all the hate that manifests between genders? Perhaps it is time to celebrate difference instead of using it as a platform from which to play power games.

In light of the recent rape case that has become the focus of world attention, Bollywood cinema and its portrayal of women has come under the spotlight. Since this study has identified Bollywood cinema as a transnational cultural role player, it is essential to trace the engagement of Bollywood filmmakers with the evolution of women in India. More specifically, in light of current events, it is necessary to re-look at the representations of women in popular Bollywood films in order to establish how the audience interprets projected images of women on screen.

Chapter 4

4 Bollywood Cinema: A Transnational/Cultural Role Player

4.1 Introduction

Bollywood is a tongue-in-cheek term created by the English language press in India in the late 1970's. It has now become the dominant global term to refer to the prolific and box-office oriented Hindi-language film industry located in Mumbai. (Ganti, 2004: 2)

Bollywood films have been examined as cultural texts from as far back as the mid-1980s (Dudrah & Desai: 2008: 1). Over the past two decades, academic interest in Bollywood cinema has increased and scholars have studied Bollywood cinema from various angles (Bagchi: 1996); (Dasgupta:1996); (Nandy:1998, 2008); (Uberoi:1998); (Mankekar:1999); (Chaturvedi:2000); (Allesandrini:2001); (Chakraborty: 2003); (Viridi:2003); (Krueger:2004); (Rajadhyaksha: 2003); (Raheja & Kothari:2004); (Desai: 2004); (Ganti:2004); (Gokulsing & Dissanayake:2004); (Hirji:2005); (Dudrah & Rai:2005); (Gangoli: 2005); (Hansen:2005); (Kaur & Sinha:2005); (Ramamurthy: 2006); (Mishra:2002, 2008); (Brosius & Yazgi:2007); (Sarrazin:2008); (Dudrah & Desai:2008); (Kavoori & Punathambekar:2008); (Bandyopadhyay:2008); (Dwyer: 2005, 2010); (Rao:2010); (Gooptu:2011); (Pugsley & Khorana:2011); (Varia:2012) and (Ganti:2002, 2004, 2012). A study of Bollywood films provides a fascinating account of Indian history and cultural politics (Viridi: 2003: 1). Even though the history and politics may not be depicted entirely accurately since the narratives of most Bollywood films are fictional, a general understanding of the cultures and practices in India are realised in these films. As Kavoori & Punathambekar (2008:2) observe,

Cinema in India has been studied as a profoundly important national-popular domain that has negotiated various transitions and conflicts in the socio-cultural fabric of India from the early twentieth century.

Over the years, a growing number of studies have supported the idea that there is a link between India's social and political history and Bollywood cinema (Uberoi: 1998); (Rajadhyaksha: 1998, 2003); (Prasad: 2000, 2003); (Viridi: 2003); (Tejaswini Niranjana: 2006); (Rachel Dwyer: 2005, 2010). This chapter should therefore be read with the understanding that there are often various politics that affect representations in popular Bollywood films. This section will be structured as follows:

- A brief overview of the conventions used in earlier Bollywood films will be provided by linking them with the origins of theatre in India.

- The reception of audiences in India will be discussed in relation to the post-1947 period in India during which Bollywood filmmakers were faithful to patriarchal Indian ideologies. The manner in which Bollywood films play out various aspects of India's social and historical context will be discussed.
- Bollywood cinema's role in constructing and defining dichotomies such as tradition/modernity, Indian/Western and spiritual/material will be considered. The role of Bollywood cinema in the formation of national identity which was in turn informed by the nationalist project will also be considered (Therwath: 2010: 1).
- The period of economic liberalisation post-1991 during which Bollywood cinema became a cultural role player for the Indian diaspora worldwide will be examined. As Larkin notes, 'the diasporic Indian's engagement with Bollywood is a significant and intensifying phenomenon' (Shohat & Stam: 2003: 175).
- The role of the Indian diaspora in relation to the emergence of diasporic Bollywood films will be examined.
- The impact of transnationalism on the narratives and female representations in diasporic Bollywood films will be discussed through Bhabha's (1994) theory of cultural hybridity.
- The growth of diasporic markets will be discussed in relation to various changing representations in contemporary Bollywood films.
- In light of the allegations against Bollywood filmmakers, the objectification and commodification of women in popular Bollywood films will be discussed, with specific reference to the space occupied by the song and dance sequences which form an integral part of the Bollywood narrative.

4.2 Brief overview: origins of Bollywood films

When studying Bollywood cinema, it is essential to be aware of the causal relationship that exists between popular Bollywood films and Indian society. Based on the understanding of this relationship, Bollywood cinema has, to a large extent, been shaped by various cultural practices in India. An understanding of the origins of Bollywood cinema is necessary to be able to comprehend the various conventions, strategies and representations that are seen within the context of many Bollywood films. According to Gokulsing & Dissanayake (2004: 98), both classical Sanskrit theatre and Parsi theatre have impacted on representations in Bollywood films. While Sanskrit theatre is known for being 'highly stylised with an emphasis

on spectacle' (Ibid), it is from Parsi theatre that the content of many older Bollywood films was derived. As Pande (2006: 1646) notes,

From Parsi theatre, Hindi cinema also inherited its audiences and many of its histrionic traditions.

Historical sources indicate that the Parsi community migrated from Iran to Mumbai, India (Cohen: 2001: 316). This minority group practiced the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia and was very much influenced by European culture (Ibid). According to Kulke (quoted in Cohen: 2001: 316), the Parsis studied European classical music, enjoyed ballroom dancing, established literary clubs and were involved in dramatic performances. Parsi theatre was therefore largely influenced by mid-Victorian stage conventions. Since theatrical conventions of the times encouraged the display of over-the-top performances, Parsi theatre was celebrated and welcomed by local audiences and became a thoroughly commercial affair.

When drawing a comparison between the representations in Bollywood films that were influenced by various aspects of Parsi theatrical conventions, it is essential to understand the basic characteristics of Parsi theatre. As Cohen (2001: 316) briefly outlines,

- Performances were generally long; they often began at around nine or ten o'clock in the evening and continued into the early hours of the morning (between two a.m. and dawn).
- Performances contained a mixture of elements such as song, dance and comedy.
- Content was drawn from diverse sources such as Sanskrit epics, Shakespeare, local legend and history.

For the audiences of the times, Parsi theatre was a wonderful form of art that they thoroughly enjoyed. Based on the audience's reception of Parsi theatre, many Bollywood filmmakers integrated various conventions of this popular theatre into their on-screen narratives (Prasad, 1998: 30-31). One of the main reasons for this emulation of style could be attributed to the positive reception /tastes of audiences in India in relation to Parsi theatre. However, while Parsi theatre was successful (Prasad, 1998: 30; Cohen: 2001: 318), films that adopted this style of representation were criticised. As Thomas (2008: 1) argues, 'these films were ignored within the context of first world culture and society'. Clearly, films that adopted the conventions of Parsi theatre were viewed with mixed responses by different audiences. While many Bollywood filmmakers to this day often integrate the conventions of early Parsi theatre

into their narratives, others have broken away from this method of representation. The discussion that follows highlights the major changes that have been made in terms of representations in Bollywood films over the years. It is interesting that many representations have been inadvertently shaped by the tastes of audiences in India.

4.3 Audience Reception/tastes

Ganti (2004, 24) differentiates between three eras of filmmaking in India: post-1947 after India attained independence, the early 1970s during which there was widespread political and social unrest and post-1991, which was a period influenced by economic liberalisation. According to Hemphill (1998: 177), during the post-1947 period, the general masses in India accepted a certain formulaic representation of film which was fashioned on certain stereotypical narratives⁷⁹. In other words, the format of these films were fashioned upon older conventions of ancient theatre forms and included the following,

- A version of a romantic narrative,
- A comedy track;
- An average of six songs per film;
- A range of familiar character types;
- Narrative closure in which a threatened moral/social order is restored by the hero.

(Prasad, 1998: 31)

The combination of the above elements created a film which adhered to a specific format of representation. This format has come to be referred to as the *masala*⁸⁰ film. Nandy⁸¹ (2008: 77) provides a more comprehensive reading of the *masala* film,

The popular Bollywood film has to have everything from the classical to the folk, from the sublime to the ridiculous, and from the terribly modern to the incorrigibly, traditional ... an average 'normal' Bombay film has to be, to the extent possible, everything to everyone. It has to cut across the myriad of ethnicities and lifestyles of

⁷⁹ The audience in India is made up of millions of people and its choice of which films are worth repeat viewing has a significant influence on the type of films made. ***There are preferences for particular stereotypes and particular relationships.*** (Hemphill: 1988: 177, emphasis mine)

⁸⁰ Literally, the term masala means 'mixture'. Within the context of categorising Bollywood films, it refers to the all-encompassing genre which features drama, comedy, song and dance and action that have been characteristic of much popular Hindi / Bollywood cinema (Dudrah & Desai: 2008: 279) or formula films (Ganti: 2004), and were characterised by a preference for visual and non-verbal modes of address.

⁸¹ Nandi's observations date back to the mindset of Indian audiences from the mid-1990s.

India and even of the world that impinges on India. The popular film “is” low-brow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naivete and vulgarity.

It is notable, that of India’s 900 million people, an average of 10 million moviegoers buy tickets every day, and many of these people ‘often pay a whole day’s earning to sit in the dark for nearly three hours’ (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004:12). Interestingly, this format gained popularity due to the economic depression of the 1930s during which countless numbers of rural peasants moved to the cities. These audiences enjoyed and appreciated simple and colourful repetitive stories with archetypal characters. This form of escapism is common to the general population of India. As Pendakur observes,

These audiences are mesmerised by the slick imagery that carries them into another world where men with superhuman qualities successfully conquer all odds, including bad landlords, greedy industrialists, corrupt politicians and sadistic policemen. Women generally are the icing on the cake – upholding traditional virtues of virginity, devotion to God and family and service to men. (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004:12)

Therefore, based on the tastes of audiences, the majority of Bollywood films produced in earlier years were characterised by the repetitiveness of scenarios, songs and dances without any dramatic innovation (Raheja & Kothari:2004: 11). It seems as if there is indeed a very strong link between *masala* films and audience preference. As a result of this relationship, the emphasis on ‘emotion and spectacle rather than on tight narratives’ has become a ‘formula’ that filmmakers followed and which was accepted as a norm by audiences (Dudrah & Desai: 2008: 29). In a sense, the characters that were created in these representations became ‘imagined’ figures that were being idealised by audiences of the times. For many years the masses of India were content to consume these sub-standard fantasies because they served as a form of escapism from their own lives. It is notable that even though India had attained independence from British rule in 1947, filmmakers were catering to a demographic with an 18% literacy rate (Ganti: 2004: 25). This was probably one of the chief reasons for the popularity of the *masala* film amongst audiences of the times.

In addition to the *masala* format of representation, between 1947 and 1990, there was a constant perpetuation of the ideas of the nationalist project into Bollywood narratives. As Viridi (2003) notes, Bollywood cinema pre-1990 was largely driven by a central pre-occupation with the nation. From as far back as the late nineteenth century, Indian nationalists argued the following,

As long as India takes care to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of its culture, it could make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt itself to the

requirements of a modern material world without losing its *true identity*. (Chatterjee, 1993: 120)

In this regard, within the context of the nationalist movement in India, Bollywood cinema played an important role in constructing and defining dichotomies such as tradition/modernity, Indian/Western, and spiritual/material (Ganti: 2004: 3). Based on the construction of these dichotomies, India was projected as being superior to the West. In other words, these structured oppositions were used to divide India from the West and were fuelled by discourses of nationalism in colonial India. This resulted in the creation of a space that was deemed superior. As Indian nationalists aligned themselves within the geographical space occupied by India, an imaginary ideal was born.

4.4 India – an imaginary space

The retention of Indianness was the main focus of the nationalist project. The nationalist imaginary is represented in many Bollywood films as the home (India) which is an idealised paradise with its moral, ethical and spiritual traditions projected as being superior to that of the West (Pugsley & Khorana:2011: 360). This is particularly relevant to this discussion because Bollywood cinema has been identified as having certain attributes, which makes it the key arbiter (and for some audiences, the sole arbiter) of the national filmic imaginary (Gooptu: 2011: 767). Virdi (2003: 7) agrees,

Hindi cinema is unique in using the family as trope to negotiate caste, class, community, and gender divisions, making for complex but decipherable hieroglyphics through which it configures the nation and constructs a nationalist imaginary.

The construction of the nationalist imaginary within the context of Bollywood narratives has clearly been informed by the historiography of India coupled with the ideals of the nationalist project. As Virdi (2003: 7) argues, the imagined nation was constructed by promoting specific ideas about family, patriarchal regimes, notions of ‘ideal’ subservient women and loyalty to ancient traditions. These tropes were then used to create an imaginary paradigm through which loyalty to the ideals of the nationalist project was promoted. It is relevant that the ideals that were given importance within the created paradigm are rooted in the patriotic and culture-bound traditions that were practiced in ancient India⁸². The role of women within this space is particularly important. As Virdi (2003: xiii) argues, the journey of Bollywood

⁸² It has been established that many of the patriarchal structures and traditions that perpetuated into Indian societies were often based on misinterpretations of religion and myth.

cinema in relation to the representation of women must be considered in correlation with its position as a 'carrier of nationalist and patriotic regimes'. According to the principles of the nationalist project, the strength of a 'powerful Indian nation' depended upon them being relegated to powerless positions according to which they were expected to always maintain a demeanour of acquiescence (Ram: 2002:30; Guha: 1989: 9).

The constant references to the distinctions between constructed dichotomies were instrumental in fuelling the ideas of the nationalist project according to which tradition triumphed over modernity, Indianness was depicted as superior to the adoption of Western habits and finally, the spiritual space (as represented by India) was deemed to be far superior than any space in the Western world. Based on discourses of the nationalist project, Bollywood cinema became a national cinema that played out utopian ideals (Virdi: 2003: 9). In a sense, India became a constructed space that was shaped by the imaginations of the nationalist project.

According to Pugsley and Khorana (2011: 360), through various representations in Bollywood films, the 'on-going struggles with India's post-colonial identity and its relations with former colonisers and the West in general are often played out in the visual geographies of contemporary Bollywood films. In films of earlier years that were driven by the nationalist project, characters that were not Indian were always represented as breaking the laws, displaying signs of immorality and therefore, they were always in conflict with traditional Indian values. The West was thus always represented as a marker of negativity in films that were influenced by the nationalist project (Pugsley & Khorana (2011: 360). It can therefore be argued that it is not the nation, but the *construction of the Indian nation* that is represented in popular Bollywood cinema - one that draws upon myth and history and 'encapsulates India's trajectory of transition from the colonial to the post-colonial' (Gooptu: 2011: 768, emphasis mine).

Clearly, Bollywood cinema played and *continues to play* an important role in state discourses relating to development, nationhood and modernity in post-independence India (Ganti: 2004: 47, emphasis mine). However, in this regard, the views of Nehru and Gandhi differed. While Gandhi dismissed cinema as 'sinful technology', Nehru believed that cinema was a powerful tool that should be used to educate and socialise the masses (Ganti: 2004: 46-47). Gandhi's view of maintaining traditionalism was in direct opposition with Nehru's inclination toward

modernisation. Nevertheless, despite these conflicting views, the Indian state made the transition from the era of being bound by representations of 'high nationalism' to becoming more liberal (Rajadhyaksha: 2003: 32). As Ganti (2004: 50) notes,

Since the late 1900's, instead of perceiving cinema as a vice, the Indian state began perceiving it as a viable, important, legitimate economic activity that should be nurtured and supported.

Over the years, and especially since 1991, after India became economically liberated, the country experienced rapid social change (Dwyer: 2010: 381). This also impacted on the consumption of Bollywood films in the international arena. As Fetscherin (2010: 461) notes, during this period, the Indian film industry became more receptive to multi-nationals and foreign investments. Indian and multinational companies such as MTV India and Sony television were allowed more flexibility in terms of content as opposed to screenings of films which were largely censored and driven by nationalist themes in the past (Punathambekar:2005; Govindan & Dutta:2008; Dwyer:2010). According to Ganti (2004: 48), this was fuelled by the agenda of elected officials and bureaucrats who, subsequent to the economic liberalisation in India, urged filmmakers to make "socially relevant" films which will "uplift" the "masses" as a means of contributing to the popularity of Bollywood films in the international arena. Thus pressure on directors to make films that embodied all the tropes of the nationalist project as well as the integration of the masala format in every film was relieved.

As a result, Bollywood filmmakers were no longer compelled to engage with notions of the 'imaginary' nation (Kavoori & Punathambekar: 2008: 2). The relief from previously imposed sanctions allowed them more flexibility and autonomy in relation to the construction of their narratives as well as the representation of characters. Initially, there was difficulty in overcoming the several decades of discourses that had dismissed Bollywood films as mere entertainment or 'time-pass' for the illiterate masses (Dudrah & Desai: 2008:3). These challenges were embraced by filmmakers who understood the need to cater to the demands of audiences who were not content to accept sub-standard entertainment. Even though all Bollywood filmmakers did not completely eradicate the masala format of representation, the tendency toward a new format driven by a new manifesto was becoming increasingly evident. In addition to open markets, the emergence of the Indian diaspora was instrumental in fuelling the popularity of Bollywood films globally. As Rajadhyaksha (2003: 28) notes, since

the early 1990s, Bollywood cinema exists for, and prominently caters to a Diasporic audience of Indians.

4.5 Bollywood and the Indian diaspora

The role of Bollywood cinema in the lives of the Indian diaspora is important. As has been established, the Indian diaspora is one of the fastest growing diasporic communities in the world (Mishra, 2002: 235). More specifically, it is the post-1960 affluent emerging middle-class diaspora that have been identified as important markets for the production of Bollywood films that cater for audiences outside India. As Puglsey & Khorana (2011: 359) observe, when filmmakers began catering for the emerging middle-classes and diasporic audiences, Bollywood narratives were received in a more positive light globally.

Research reveals that the Indian diaspora's imagination of India is strongly informed by Bollywood cinema (Bandyopadhyay: 2008: 79). Bandyopadhyay (Ibid) distinguishes between three generations of Indian diaspora and the manner in which they perceive India after watching Bollywood films. He upholds the idea that the viewing of these films directly affects their imagination of the 'ideal' homeland. According to Bandyopadhyay, the first generations of Indians want to travel to India as a result of the nostalgia that they experience when watching Bollywood movies. The motivation for second generation Indians is to experience the 'modern' India that is depicted in many Bollywood movies. Finally, the third generation of Indians who have no links to India (i.e. those who were born outside India to Indian families) are motivated to visit the India that is romanticised in Bollywood movies⁸³.

⁸³ As a diasporic Indian and in my capacity as a freelance feature-writer for *The International Indian* (Ayob: 2012: 70-74), I wrote an article entitled *India ... a Paradox and a Miracle* under the heritage travel section. I began the article with the following sentiments, "India is exoticized from the media-hype to the way in which it has become synonymous with the glamour of popular Bollywood cinema, from its interesting history to its outlandish adherence to ritual and custom. As an Indian woman brought up in South Africa and New York, I have always wanted to visit India to learn about my culture, to touch the soil where my ancestors came from and to try and understand the roots of my identity. While negotiating with my thoughts about the idea of India as an 'exotic' destination based on representations in popular Bollywood films, I continued with the following, "Despite all the adversity, Indians are proudly patriotic. *Meraa Bhaarat maan, Meri Dharti* (my honourable country, my soil). Perhaps those 'backward classes' that scholars write about do not know any better. Or perhaps they possess a deeper contentment than anyone else. Perhaps they are so brainwashed by the notion of national pride and religion that they cannot rise beyond their plight. Perhaps it is faith and a belief in 'someone up there' who is watching over them that keeps them going." And finally, after describing my experiences in India, I conclude my article as follows, "India is hailed and condemned simultaneously. Every year, migration from India increases and gives rise to a new population categorised as the Indian diaspora. I also fall into this category, except that I was born outside of India, but then categorised as Indian. After visiting India, I do not feel Indian at all. Why am I classified Indian? I have not had to endure the hardships and daily trials and tribulations of these resilient people that force themselves out of their shacks everyday so that they can go to

Regardless of the generation, it seems as if the consumption of Bollywood films has become a way of life for all of these immigrants (Raheja & Kothari: 2004: 10). As Dudrah & Desai (2008: 68-69) note, Bollywood films produced post-1990 deal with many of the sensibilities which constitute the diasporic subject: displacement, new beginnings and issues of belonging and alienation. Within this context, Bollywood cinema becomes a type of cultural mediator for the Indian diaspora because Bollywood narratives often negotiate with the construction of Indian diasporic identity in foreign lands.

One of the reasons for Bollywood's success globally could be attributed to representations according to which 'past articulations of Indian *national identity* are no longer tied to location' (Malhotra & Alagh: 2004: 28, emphasis mine). In other words, through the emergence of Bollywood films that cater for diasporic audiences, notions of national identity become unstable because of the adoption of new cultural processes which have been facilitated by migration away from India. As Viridi (2003:205, emphasis mine) notes, through the representations of east versus west and the national versus the transnational within the narratives of these new Diasporic films, the *nation (India)* is constantly *re-secured* and *re-imagined*.

4.6 Diasporic Bollywood films

Over the past two decades, Indian diaspora audiences are increasingly engaging in processes of identification with the themes and content of Bollywood films. As Gokulsing & Dissanayake (2004:11) observe, diasporic Bollywood films promote modernisation, westernisation, urbanisation, new ways of living, a sense of pan-Indianism, secularisation, the emancipation of women and the rights of minorities; and in particular, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims. In its role as a transnational cultural product, Bollywood cinema has created a cultural social space for the analysis of routine practices, rituals and traditional perceptions in the daily lives of the Indian diaspora. In catering for diasporic audiences, the narratives of these films also present distinct variations and introduce new structures of representation that feature Indian Diasporic characters dealing with issues of displacement from their homelands. As a consequence of the diverse themes and content in

work for one meal. Race classifications are man-made. We are not American, South African, Indian or British, we are all just humans.”

these films, Bollywood cinema develops a new language as it travels outside India. This new language involves a change in modes of representation.

Over time, Bollywood filmmakers began modifying earlier representations which were strictly faithful to Indian nationalism into innovative storylines in varied settings. The transformation in content and theme was translated into a positive and empowering form of culture that gave rise to a new global vision. At the same time the themes of various diasporic Bollywood films allowed the Indian diaspora to re-address their inherent commitment to traditional values while negotiating the inclusion of global cultures in their lives. Due to the transformation of Bollywood narratives and a decline in the *masala* format of representation, Bollywood cinema acquired a global audience. This is substantiated by the fact that Warner Brothers joined forces with Bollywood for a star-studded West End opening of *Asoka* (2001: Santosh Sivan). The film was simultaneously launched at the Venice International Film Festival and then released in Tokyo (Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 17). In her book entitled, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film*, Desai (2004:41) notes that popular films released post-1990, have consistently appeared in the annual list of top twenty most popular foreign-language films in Britain; thus, not only luring British Asians, but also white British to the theatres.

According to Mishra (2008: 1),

‘Bollywood’ has finally made it to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The 2005 edition defines it as: ‘a name for the Indian popular film industry, based in Bombay. Origin 1970s -blend of Bombay and Hollywood.

Bollywood cinema has clearly become increasingly visible on an international platform. The origin of Bollywood being defined as a ‘blend of Bombay and Hollywood’ is both interesting and true. For years, Bollywood has been ‘borrowing’ plots from Hollywood films and then adapting them to conform to the conventions and cultures of Bollywood cinema (Ganti: 2007: 440). From this perspective, similar to the feminist movement that flowed into India from the West, Bollywood filmmakers have also been integrating various western representations into their narratives. It is this exchange or flow of ideas that has contributed to the reception of Bollywood cinema as a transnational/ cultural role player.

Based on various box-office successes across the globe, Bollywood audiences continue to grow (Dasgupta: 1996; Rajadhyaksha: 2003; Ganti: 2004; Fetscherin: 2010; Novak: 2010; Varia: 2012). Bollywood films are now distributed to South Asia, South East Asia, East

Africa, Mauritius, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Britain, Canada, Australia, the US and parts of the Soviet Union (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004: 10). India not only produces over 900 films annually, it is the largest film-producing country in the world (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004: 12). Fetscherin (2010: 461) agrees that Bollywood produces more films and sells more tickets than any other film industry in the world and adds that its revenues are 'second only to those of the US film industry'.

In the U.K., cinemas specialising in Bollywood films are among the most successful in the independent market and these films often make it to the box-office top ten (Raheja & Kothari: 2004:10). As a consequence of the rising statistics, Thomas (2008:21) argues that in a global context, by virtue of its sheer volume of output, Bollywood cinema dominates world film production. Based on the increase of Indian diaspora communities globally, the Bollywood film industry has become a global phenomenon (Dudrah & Desai: 2008:1). As a result, nationalism is being replaced by transnationalism and the older notions of patriarchy and adherence to the agenda of the nationalist project are now being substituted by notions of a re-defined Indianness. Transnationalism has thus opened up a space within which Indianness is constantly being re-defined within the context of societies outside India.

4.7 Transnationalism

Transnationalism allows a space to be created between the older ideologies of India and the formation of a new Indian identity away from the homeland. From this perspective, the diasporic Bollywood film is an important role player in the creation of new meaning as it provides a platform upon which to analyse the changes that are taking place in the real lives of the Indian diaspora. As Dhareshwar and Niranjana (2000:195) observe,

In a sense, then, these individuals come to inhabit an entirely new space constructed to meet their layered needs, and as part of that process, the films can be seen as creating a new space of signification.

In the creation of this new space, the nature of the Indian identity or the notion of Indianness emerges as an important factor that many scholars have examined (Prasad: 2003:2; Rajadyakshya: 2003:34; Sen: 2005; Pugsley & Khorana: 2011:359). As Sen (2005: 73) notes,

The nature of Indian identity is significant for those who live in India.

It is important to be aware that India's diverse religious communities such as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist amongst others make defining a singular identity problematic since this vast group is not homogenous. Due to the diversity of religion, custom and traditions in

the various regions of India as well as the multitude of languages and dialects, it is difficult to group together any community as being similar. Even though many of the cultures and customs of Indians overlap, there is no stable, undisputed form of reference. Yet, despite this diversity, Bollywood cinema emerges as a nationalist force that constantly enforces various traditions, myths and cultural practices that are central to India.

It seems as if in terms of identification and engagement with Bollywood cinema, it is in effect, the geographical landscape of India that many Bollywood filmmakers post-1990 use as a stage from which to create new identities and to question past traditions and rituals. In a sense, as Mehta argues, 'Bollywood has become an emblem of a *unified* India because of its global presence (Mishra: 2008: 3, emphasis mine). It can be argued that a part of the reason for the success of films that catered for diasporic audiences could be attributed to the sensibility of Bollywood filmmakers who recognised the need to provide Indian audiences with a frame of reference. When engaging with the importance of Indian identity for those Indians who have emigrated from India, Sen (2005: 73) argues,

As is frequently the case with immigrants in general, the Indian diaspora is also keen on taking pride – some self-respect and dignity – in the culture and traditions of their original homeland.

Based on Sen's views, it seems apparent that there is no escaping the idea of representing India as a place of significant reference. One substantial change that has occurred in relation to the perception of the Indian diaspora who have left India in search of greener pastures is that they are no longer looked upon as having deserted their motherland (Brosius & Yazgi: 2007: 358). Instead, through the narratives of Bollywood cinema, they are being re-invented as superior by fellow Indian nationals for having 'made it' in the West. Therefore, as Kao & Rozario (2008: 314) argue,

Diasporic consumption of Bollywood films thereby becomes not only a method of establishing community ties and maintaining a distinct cultural identity in a foreign land but also a reflection of diasporic pride in the homeland, one which can now be proudly displayed to the new countries they inhabit.

It is interesting that the 'distinct cultural identity' is based on the imagination of an imagined nation. From a distance it is alluring. In other words, when trying to find stability or a sense of belonging in a foreign land, the notion of 'culture', albeit imagined, provides a sense of relief and creates a type of identification which is comforting. Within the context of the larger global world, the Indian diaspora becomes a 'new' section of a larger society. This 'new'

section of society often has no links to the genealogy of the Indian, except as belonging in a geographical sense. As Desai (2004:20) notes:

Diasporas and homelands are produced and constructed through narratives, because diasporas, like nations, evoke a time of belonging and wholeness.

In other words, as Indians integrate into societies all over the world, they simultaneously also experience a need to uphold certain customs and traditions from their own heritage. The Indian diaspora are always trying to balance inherited culture with new cultures that they are exposed to outside their homeland. Since notions of ‘cultural’ identity are problematic for the Indian diaspora, diasporic Bollywood films serve as ‘mediators’ between the lifestyles of the Indian diaspora and the Indian state. In a sense, while the population of the Indian diaspora represent the ‘greater’ audience of Bollywood cinema, the films often still represent the ‘imaginary’ attachments to India.

It is interesting that even after the processes of transnationalism absolve individuals of maintaining loyalty to past normative structures, Bollywood filmmakers often ‘cling’ to the old traditions and cultures of India, even if it they are only portrayed in a few short scenes throughout the films. This could be due to Sen’s (2005:73, emphasis mine) observation that even though migration absolves many individuals of a need to be patriotic to their homelands, the *nature* of the Indian identity is *still* important for the estimated population of twenty million Indian diaspora people scattered all over the world. At the same time, it is important to be aware that the Indian diaspora live in different countries, speak different languages, and are engaged in different vocations. What gives them their common identity is their Indian origin, their consciousness of their cultural heritage, and their deep attachment to India (Chaturvedi: 2005: 141).

Bollywood filmmakers recognise the relationship between the Indian diaspora and India and it can therefore be argued that Bollywood cinema, in its role as cultural mediator between India and the Indian diaspora attempts to develop a bond with the expatriate Indian community. According to Rajadhyaksha (2003: 34), the ‘new’ diasporic Bollywood films occupy a crucial presence in the lives of the Indian Diasporic audiences and assume the role of ‘cultural unifiers’ and ‘keepers of the flame’⁸⁴. The flame is a metaphor for the ideologies

⁸⁴ Since the 1990s, Indian Diasporic audiences have become increasingly important and influential (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004:2).

of the nation and gender that are foregrounded in the narratives of popular diasporic films. However the main point of difference is the representation of both India as well as the engagement with gender politics outside India which are being re-defined within Bollywood narratives.

This re-definition takes place through an engagement with the various dichotomies that were constructed during the period of colonisation in India. Of all the dichotomies, it is the Indian/Western binary that features in most films. However, in relation to the representation of women, the binary of tradition/modernity is also relevant. The following two sections will consider Bollywood filmmakers obsession with the notion of Indianness and the representation of women against these constructed binaries.

4.7.1 The notion of Indianness

Many of the films produced in the 1990s, such as *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Chopra: 1995); *Pardes* (Ghai: 1997) and *Taal* (Ghai: 1997) all highlighted Indianness as a superior trait. The difference in the construction of the narratives of these specific films was that while they promoted Indianness, they did not simultaneously depict the West as immoral. In the three films mentioned above, notions of the Indian/Western dichotomy are addressed on neutral ground, and it is of relevance that they do not subscribe to past notions of right and wrong.

Through the representations of diasporic characters in these films, notions of culture and identity are also questioned. Narratives in these films are structured to present a 'loss of traditional values and culture' and then the re-invention of a 'new' set of values and culture. These representations often coax the Indian diaspora to question their identities and their place in the new worlds that they have adopted as their own. In a sense, as Prasad (2003:2) observes, 'Bollywood cinema has brought the Indian diaspora decisively into the centre of the picture, as a more stable figure of Indian identity than anything that can be found indigenously.' At the same time, it is interesting that Bollywood filmmakers still attempt to avoid complete conflation with the West and struggle to maintain their own versions of Indianness within their narrative structures and representation of characters.

The notion of Indianness will be examined through a brief discussion of the film *Dilwaale Dulhania le Jayenge* (Chopra: 1995). This particular film is important to this study because it has been identified as being instrumental in actively bridging the gap between Bollywood cinema and the West. It is popularly referred to as *DDLJ*⁸⁵. This film made its mark in the Bollywood film industry as a film that would resonate with viewers long after its release. It is one of the largest earners in Indian film history and continues to be screened, drawing in audiences even a decade after its release. According to Mishra (2002: 250),

DDLJ was Bollywood's first full-blown reading of the narratives of migrancy and displacement.

Kapur (2009: 222) argues that the popularity of this film could be attributed to the fact that it shaped a particular genre of glossy 'family-centred feel good' film focused on a romantic story which emerged in the 1990s and crossed over into North America and the UK. It is a film that has established itself within the realms of popular culture as a cultural text that resonates strongly with viewers in India as well as abroad. It is the manner in which the notion of Indianness is dealt with in this film that is of relevance to this discussion. A brief overview of the film is provided before addressing the diverse representation of Indianness through the constructed Indian/Western dichotomy within the film's narratives.

Brief Overview

Briefly, *DDLJ* deals with two second generation Indian diaspora characters living in Britain, Simran and Raj. Simran is the elder daughter of convenience store owner Baldev Singh; a traditional Indian male who yearns to be back in his homeland: Punjab, India. He has a conservative outlook toward life and is content in the belief that his two daughters and wife have maintained their ritual prayers and connection to India, albeit living in Britain. The hero is Raj, the only son of Dharamvir Malhotra, a wealthy businessman. In contrast with the Singh family, Raj and his father Dharamvir Malhotra do not candidly display any affiliation to India or its culture.

When Baldev receives a letter from his childhood friend asking for his daughter's hand in marriage (a union that was informally agreed to when they were children), he informs his

⁸⁵*DDLJ* is the shortened name given to the film *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. The names of many popular Bollywood films are often shortened by using the first letter of every word in the title for ease of reference. For the purposes of this study, the acronym *DDLJ* will be used.

daughter that she will marry his best friend's son Kuljeet, who lives in India. Simran is wary, having cherished fantasies of a mysterious knight in shining armour whom she may one day fall in love with, but being a 'dutiful' daughter, she agrees to marry the man her father has chosen for her.

However, before the wedding, she begs her father to allow her to go on a trip to Europe with her friends. She views this experience as her last chance to see the world before her marriage to a complete stranger and before her relocation to India takes place. It is during this trip that Simran and Raj meet and fall in love. The moment that Simran's father discovers that his daughter is in love with Raj, he relocates the family to India in an attempt to disengage himself with both the 'immoral West' and the character of Raj whom he classifies as insolent and 'too Western'. When Raj and his father follow Simran's family to India, Simran's 'Indian' fiancé Kuljeet is exposed as an immoral, lustful and opportunistic individual. After recognising Raj as a decent man, Baldev allows his daughter to marry him.

Diverse forms of Indianness

The important point of difference in the representation of the 'Indian/Western' dichotomy in *DDLJ* is the narrative structure which highlights the diasporic male protagonists adherence to Indian family values as he shuns the idea of eloping with the woman he loves (Dwyer: 2005: 76-78). Simultaneously, the national Indian male is depicted as having loose morals and behaves inappropriately in his interactions with his prospective bride. As Dwyer & Patel (2002: 217) note, in *DDLJ*, it is the diasporic male who is more determined to uphold traditional Indian values than his elders or the local Punjabi men. In earlier Bollywood films, the diasporic male would have shunned Indian culture and traditions. This representation suggests that change has taken place within the stereotypical assumptions that locate the West as a marker of corruptness.

According to Dudrah (2006: 45), these films are intentionally produced for Indian diaspora audiences. Due to the changes in perception of the new generation of youth, as well as the heightened profile of the South Asian immigrant community in Britain, Europe and North America, Indian commercial and regional cinemas are now even more popular outside the subcontinent. Desai (2004: 40) contends that Bollywood films are made to attract audiences outside India because of the Indian diaspora. Since new generations of Indians are being born

outside India, they have no affiliation to India, its rich heritage or its customs. The diasporic Bollywood films that are increasingly being produced post-1990 cater for these emerging diaspora communities. *DDLJ*, together with other diasporic films released in the 1990s such as, *Pardes* (Ghai: 1997); *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998); *Taal* (Ghai: 1999) and *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Chopra: 1997) created a global euphoria for Bollywood films and its actors (Desai & Dudrah: 2008:1). At the same time, as Raheja & Kothari (2004: 121-122) argue, they also expressed ‘an enraptured romantic temperament, but operated within the safe parameters of tradition’.

Even though the Indian diaspora have emigrated from India, the constructed Indian/Western dichotomy continues to present a challenge to their identity formation in foreign countries. It can be argued that the ‘genealogy of Indian migration and its strong links to the colonial experience’ play an important role in preventing the Indian diaspora from completely breaking free from past structures (Pugsley & Khorana: 2011: 363). It can also be argued that the films of the 1990s initiated a positive conflation between India, as represented in Bollywood films, and the West, which in the past, was always represented as a marker of immorality. On the other hand, the constant negotiation with these very dichotomies within Bollywood narratives can also be viewed as processes that assist the diaspora in assimilating with other cultures. The reality that contemporary Bollywood filmmakers project through the narratives of these films is that there will be a re-negotiation of adherence to older norms and cultures as exposure to new cultures increases. Hence, there is the initiation of a new dialogue that justifies a deeper analysis into the reasons for these changes and the changing philosophies.

4.7.2 The representation of women

The representation of women in Bollywood cinema is an integral part of this discussion since they have also been affected by the colonial experience. Similar to the manner in which diasporic identity in general is being reinvented through Bollywood narratives, it is of relevance that the agency of the female character in Bollywood films has evolved in parallel to the changing position and role of women in India. In relation to the plight of women in India, the following has been established: in the 18th century, Indian women were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields (De Souza: 1975: 78-81); the 19th century witnessed a change in women’s roles from subjugation to

greater emancipation from male domination (Roy: 2006:55). While the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation initiated further changes (Ross: 1961:117), it was the 20th century that brought about dynamic changes and new concepts for Indian women affording them status with “a fresh dignity and importance” (Roy: 2006:55). Taking this trajectory into consideration, Bollywood filmmakers have integrated the plight of women in India into the context of their narratives. Female representation in popular Bollywood films is therefore central to this discussion. In this regard, in line with the project of nationalism, Gangoli (2005: 148) observes,

The ideal Indian Hindu woman, represented by the heroine, the hero’s mother and /or sister is quintessentially Indian and is compliant with the wishes of the hero, embodying the male/patriarchal view. In contrast, the vamp is Anglo-Indian or ‘westernized’, most often sexually promiscuous and knowing as opposed to the ‘innocent’ heroine. Thus, the vamp is located as being the outsider to ‘Indianness’ and to Indian norms and traditions.

While stereotypical representations of women were common fare in earlier Bollywood films, over the years, Bollywood filmmakers began negotiating with the various constructed dichotomies such as Indian/Western and tradition/modernity. This became evident in the changing narratives and tendencies of Bollywood filmmakers to be less faithful to older modes of representations, specifically in relation to women. The changes that were represented through the depiction of female characters in popular Bollywood films can be linked to the evolution of women’s role in Indian society.

When women in India were victims of the traditions that were imposed upon widows, then films such as *Prem Rog* (Kapoor: 1982) and *Baabul* (Chopra: 2006) echoed the plight of these victims. When women were being subjugated due to the prevailing norms of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, films such as *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (Dutt: 1962), *Biwi Ho to Aisi* (Bihari: 1988) and *Ek Din Bahu Ka* (Gautam: 1983) exposed the dominant patriarchal nature of such relationships. Similarly, many of the traditions that were practised in ancient India were constantly being exposed by filmmakers in India who understood and sympathised with the plight of women which was the result of a blind following of culture, tradition and myth. As Viridi (2003: xiv) so aptly observes, Bollywood films are now ‘deeply imbricated in social transformation.’ In this regard, it is necessary to understand the clear division in the representation of women in Bollywood films pre-1990 and post-1990. Films made post-1990 are important because they locate the female character as an autonomous being on various levels.

In the past, the figure of the mythological Sita was representative of the ‘ideal’ woman in Bollywood cinema. Thereafter, when the ‘modern’ woman was introduced in films such as *Thodisi Bewafaii* (Shroff: 1980), she was painted in a negative light in order to maintain the older ‘status quo’ of traditionalism. As Sen (quoted in Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 144) notes, in earlier Bollywood films, modern representations of women projected them as being sexually promiscuous and disrupting the colonial agenda by being projected as ‘pathetic victims of displacement and boredom’. Through such diverse representations of women, the Indian/Western binary was focalized and it insinuated that modernity was synonymous with negative traits in women.

In response to these modern representations of women, the centrality of the mother-theme was perpetuated through films like *Mother India* (Khan: 1957) and *Deewar* (Chopra: 1975). The mother-theme was influential in mobilising women into subordinate roles within which they were depicted as either mothers of sons or wives of men. In highlighting the role of women as always being relatives to men in this manner, women were pigeon-holed into specific roles. Subsequently, as nationalist sanctions against representations of women were lifted, Bollywood filmmakers were able to depict women in a variety of roles.

For example, within the narratives of the ‘new’ Diasporic Bollywood films, the burden of motherhood has been taken away from the female character. In both *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Advani: 2003) and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (Johar: 2006) the single mother (Jennifer) and the widow (Kamaljeet) live with their respective family units. Both women work outside the home and are depicted as independent individuals. There is clearly no element of subordination in their lives, and they are not depicted as secondary individuals in terms of their relation to men. This formula of representation in relation to the depiction of women is gaining momentum and films like *Salaam Namaste* (Anand: 2005), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Johar: 2001) deal with the changing realities of a world that is fuelled and influenced by transnationalism. It seems as if Bollywood filmmakers are continuously attempting to delineate women’s challenges through the medium of cinema. In relation to both the nation and gender politics, many popular diasporic films produced post-1990 suggest

the possibility of cultures being able to meet on neutral ground positively. This in turn, dismantles the nationalist paradigm of women having to choose between two worlds⁸⁶.

4.8 Cultural hybridity

The idea of cultures meeting on neutral ground is dealt with in many contemporary Bollywood films. This significant space of neutrality can be examined by means of Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, in which he forwards the notion of the third space of enunciation. As Bhabha (1994:37) notes,

It is that third space, though un-representable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew.

In line with the representations of diasporic characters in Bollywood films, it seems as if a third space of enunciation has been created through which the authority of the old culture as a solid foundation is being questioned. This has been facilitated by transnationalism and the merging representations of various cultures in diasporic Bollywood films. As a result, the old 'flame' is being redefined. Bhabha (1994) argues that it is necessary to let go of colonialism and view it as something locked in the past, otherwise our collective histories and cultures will intrude on the present. In doing so, we will be able to transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. However, at the same time, it is important to accept that acquiring understanding in terms of different cultures will be laced with challenges because the reality of one culture may be the fiction of another. This is where cultural difference comes into being. According to Bhabha (1994:34),

The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation.

Due to transnationalism and the merging of representations of various cultures in diasporic Bollywood films, the authoritative idea of culture having a solid foundation has been significantly unsettled. In line with Bhabha's theory of hybridisation, the narratives of certain Bollywood films also question controversial issues while challenging perceptions of older stereotypes. In a sense, Bollywood filmmakers are using Bhabha's model in their representations which are becoming increasingly culturally integrated.

⁸⁶ These two worlds have been discussed in chapter 3 according to Chatterjee's (1993: 121) theory in which he claims that the nationalist project clearly distinguishes between the inner world (home/spiritual and the outer world (Western/material).

However, according to Bhabha's argument, in order to meet on neutral ground it is vital for the Indian diaspora to let go of their 'colonized roots' and thereby make the transition from the past to the present. Interestingly, this is precisely the notion that Bollywood filmmakers are working into their storylines through both dialogues and the representation of characters from different cultural backgrounds. Appadurai's observation (quoted in Kao & Rozario: 2008: 314) in relation to the processes that occur between audiences and film is also relevant,

The lines between the realistic and fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that, the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to create imagined worlds which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world.

It is also important to be aware that Bollywood films, like other films, have an escapist dimension. Through realistic and fictional landscapes, evolutionary processes emerge. The evolution that is taking place within the Bollywood film industry can be related to Bhabha's (1994: 141) notions of hybridity and the elements of fluidity for he notes,

If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricity of the peoples of imagined communities – migrant or metropolitan – then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic.

These types of metaphors are repeatedly utilised in the narratives of Diasporic Bollywood films. There is a constant engagement with issues of past 'imagined communities' versus the adoption of new cultures in foreign lands. The tendency of Bollywood filmmakers to evolve and venture beyond traditional modes of representation is proving to be successful. The increase of migration from India also had an impact on both the narrative structures, as well as character representations in Bollywood films. In reality, the audience for Bollywood films is not limited to the masses of India anymore, but extends to various parts of the world to include not only the Indian diaspora, but people of all cultures and religions. As Gokulsing & Dissanayake (2004: 13) note, Indian cinema, like most other cinemas evolved over time responding to various political contexts and challenges. Films which cater for emerging diaspora audiences/markets are proving to be economically viable.

4.9 Growth in diasporic markets

Emerging diasporic markets have added considerably to the revenue generated by contemporary Bollywood films. As Basu (2010:49-50) notes, from the perspective of revenue there has been formidable growth in revenue,

In 1982, the Indian film industry as a whole earned about 14.6 million rupees from overseas markets. By 1998 this figure had risen to 4 billion rupees; and by 2003 was expected to be approaching 7 billion. The crucial difference was the entry of “Bollywood” into first world sectors like the US, Canada, UK, Germany and Australia.

According to a poll in *Newsweek*, the following three films which focus on the Indian diaspora made distribution history: *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Chopra: 1995); *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Chopra: 1997); and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998). These films were instrumental in increasing the revenue of India’s movie exports from \$10 million to \$100 million within the span of a decade (Dudrah & Desai: 2008: 191-192). More specifically, in 1998, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998) was the top-grossing foreign-language film which earned almost 1.5 million pounds (Desai: 2004:41).

In March 2009, *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge* set yet another world record by completing ‘700 weeks’ of continuous play in Mumbai’s Maratha Mandir theatre (Paavan: 2009). Based on its uninterrupted continuous screening in India, *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge* has been hailed as the cultural icon of a globalising India (Kapur: 2009: 222). In 2001, it broke the continuous-exhibition record of five years established by the film *Sholay* (1975, Ramesh Sippy) at the Minerva Theatre (1975 – 1980). In February 2011, the film completed 800 weeks of being screened (Lalwani: 2010). On October 20th, 2012 the film completed a screening of seventeen years (Kirpalani: 2012) and has been credited as representing a ‘cult classic for an entire generation’.

According to Gokulsing & Dissanayake (2004: 3, emphasis mine), films such as *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* have **profoundly** affected the imagination of diasporic audiences. At the same time, it can be argued that the processes of transnationalism coupled with a ‘powerful Indian diaspora’ have provided Bollywood filmmakers with the opportunity of setting their films in various international locations (Pugsley & Khorana: 2011:359). These locations have in turn allowed Bollywood filmmakers to focus on the assertion of an alternate Indian nationalism in their narratives. As a result they have been able

to create specific new representations in order to expose the fallacies of the older created imagination.

Films such as *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (Barjatya: 1994); *Dilwaale Dulhania le Jayenge* (Chopra: 1995); *Hum Tum* (Kohli: 1997); *Namaste London* (Shah: 1997); *Salaam Namaste* (Anand: 2004); and *Ta Ra Rum Pum* (Anand: 2007) reflect the aspirations of the emerging middle classes in India and at the same time, boost the popularity of Bollywood cinema amongst younger audiences in the diaspora (Varia: 2012: 26). These films inspired a 'feel-good' factor and eradicated most of the *masala* format from their narratives. This resulted in an increase in both Indian middle-class and diasporic audiences (Dudrah & Desai: 2008: 12). Clearly, narratives that were less faithful to 'imagined' Indian ideologies and more in line with contemporary sensibilities were proving to be successful. As a result, the formation of Bollywood which was once entirely Indian has now become cross-cultural (Kao & Rozario: 2008: 313). As Raheja & Kothari (2004: 10) note, the consumption of Bollywood films has become a way of life for second generation immigrants living in the US, Europe and the UK.

Through new representations, it seems as if Bollywood cinema's re-creation of an imagined space (India) has become central to its narratives because it inadvertently aids its diasporic audiences with their processes of displacement and identity. According to Raheja & Kothari (2004:146),

The latest shifts in Hindi cinema reflect its inherent nature. For all its seeming homogeneity, it is constantly evolving, morphing and mutating.

Evolution is apparent and hybrid, cross-over films such as *Bollywood/Hollywood* (Mehta: 2002); *Monsoon Wedding* (Nair: 2002) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (Chadha: 2002) have also been influential in fuelling the popularity of diasporic Bollywood films. This is because the division between India and the West has been blurred by the portrayal of characters in these films. The 'gap' between India and the West seems to be getting smaller and has led to the promotion of Bollywood cinema as a transnational entity, not merely a local alternative to Hollywood. According to actor and global ambassador of Bollywood Amitabh Bachchan, Bollywood cinema is poised on the brink of deterritorialization on a grand scale (Desai: 2004: 35).

Novak (2010: 40) argues that in the U.S. particularly, from the 1990s, in addition to the ‘unprecedented interest’ in Bollywood films, there has also been an increase in interest in Bollywood song and dance sequences. According to Allesandrini (2001:322), as Bollywood became a transnational product, its new formula of success involved using ‘increasingly sophisticated and highly choreographed musical sequences, taking the influence of MTV on board. Films such as *Ta Ra Rum Pum* (Anand: 2007); *Kaho Na Pyaar Hai* (Roshan: 2000); *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Advani: 2003), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Johar: 2001) integrated into their storylines elaborate song sequences that combined dance styles from across the world. These sequences were sold separately and became part of the pop culture of the youth in India. They were also integrated into the culture in the Indian diaspora. In this regard, the location of song and dance sequences within the context of Bollywood narratives will be considered.

4.9.1 The location of song and dance in Bollywood films

Musically, Indian cinema is differentiated from other world cinemas due to its enthusiastic inclusion of film songs, with five to seven in each film, and their extra-cinematic popularity as the top-selling, independent popular music genre in South Asia. (Sarazzin: 2008: 201)

Song and dance sequences have been used in Bollywood films for various reasons. In earlier Bollywood films, issues of censorship forced Bollywood filmmakers to use song and dance sequences as a means whereby the characters (actors/actresses) could express various emotions (Dwyer & Patel, 2002: 37). According to Rao (2010: 10), these sequences also allowed for the display of sexual fantasies and eroticised communication between the characters. In order to emphasise specific emotions many Bollywood filmmakers also relied heavily on *rasa*⁸⁷ theory. In most Bollywood films, various *rasas* are woven into the narrative structure as well as integrated into song and dance routines in order to emphasise specific emotions. The integration of *rasa* within song and dance sequences creates a melodramatic mixture which contributes to the narrative coherence of the film. According to Dwyer & Patel (2002: 30),

⁸⁷ *Rasa* means ‘aesthetic pleasure’. *Rasa theory* is a unique Indian theory of emotion according to which the principles of *rasa*, are played out through various body movements, gestures, postures, musical notes, song and dance (Rao: 2010: 13-14). Cuddon (1991:769) defines *rasa* as a Sanskrit term for one of nine specific flavours of a work of art. These are: the erotic, heroic, furious, piteous, comic, fearful, repulsive, marvellous and peaceful.

The main attractions for audiences included sets, costumes, action scenes, grandiloquent dialogues, song and dance sequences, comedic interludes and special effects.

To this day, many Bollywood filmmakers have retained most of these elements within the context of their films. Of all the above conventions, the song and dance sequence is considered to be one of the most important aspects of the narrative (Rao: 2007: 69). This is because the inclusion of song and dance sequences in Bollywood films is a histrionic tradition associated with the importance of music in India's cultural heritage. From the beginning, Bollywood films have celebrated Indian folk and classical traditions in their song and dance sequences (Allesandrini: 2001: 319). As Rao (2010: 10) notes,

In the early days, the *mushaira*, *ghazal* and *qawali*⁸⁸ traditions dominated film music.

These forms of music were written according to the rhymes of poetic verses and often formed a language of their own through which the narrative of the film was both developed and advanced. The poetic verses in the songs could very easily stand on their own without the dance sequences because within Indian society, poetry was a form of high art and was very much a part of the cultural traditions of the times. In a sense, poetry was entrenched within music. As a result, Bollywood filmmakers used musicality as a form of expression. At the same time, they also used music and poetic lyrics as a means of adhering to the cultural traditions of the times which were in sync with the importance of music within India's cultural heritage.

The use of song and dance within Bollywood narratives should be understood within the cultural context of the Indian family social system. As Dudrah (2006: 56) observes, through the Bollywood film, the spectator is a part of the communal singing, dancing and praying that is projected on screen. These events are often presented in a montage through song and dance sequences. According to Gokulsing & Dissanayake (2004: 101), these sequences were perceived as natural by Indian audiences because 'music, song and dance have traditionally played an integral role in the daily lives of Indian people, whether for religious and devotional purposes or for celebrations such as birthdays and weddings'. In a sense, song and

⁸⁸ *Mushaira* is a gathering of poets who recite their poetry in accordance with specific tradition. *Qawali* is a well-known form of singing in which singers perform in tandem and create waves of rhythm and lyrics. *Ghazal* is also a form of song infused with poetry and is often performed at gatherings. The words of all three forms of song are poetic and convey meaning.

dance routines function as components of a bigger picture, which is the narrative coherence of the film (Rao: 2010: 10).

It is interesting that such sequences are also common in many Western films/productions. The Hollywood musical was popular from the 1930's to the 1960's and the Western entertainment industry employed similar routines in their stage musicals such as, *Moulin Rouge* (Luhmann: 2001); *Chicago* (Marshall: 2002) and *Phantom of the Opera* (Schumacher: 2005). In terms of genre classification, Hollywood always maintained a clear distinction between the 'musical' genre and other genres. While Hollywood has negotiated with music on its own terms⁸⁹, Bollywood has 'used music and dance within almost every film to this day' (Kao & Rozario (2008: 313). According to Sarazzin (2008: 217),

Film music at its most basic level, is used to create culturally meaningful codes that ensure emotional intensity for the audience while stretching to sustain traditional values for one type of audience as it satisfies the curiosity of another.

This statement is important in light of Bollywood's foray into the international arena. It can be assumed that the original idea of song and dance sequences was to celebrate Indian traditions, cultures and above all else foreground a sense of Indian identity. Even though earlier song and dance sequences were harshly criticised by scholars and the general public, they are still hailed as 'one of the most striking features of the Bollywood film tradition' (Dwyer & Patel, 2002: 37). Basu (2010: 159) agrees that these representations have inherited a contentious status. This could be due to the earlier combination of the *rasa* and *masala* format of representation in which actors/actresses 'ran around trees and burst into song at the most unlikely opportunities' (Dwyer & Patel, 2002: 37). As a result of such representations, song and dance sequences have been 'repeatedly castigated as escapist or fantastic or simply unreal' (Gopal & Sen: 2008: 151). Within these sequences there are many costume and location changes that are not supported by the narrative in any way. In a sense, the sequence follows a liminal fantasy that is not even loosely connected to the logic of the narrative. Varia (2012: 40) classifies the use of these sequences as liminal spaces of fantasy, for he notes,

The dream sequence is a liminal space where the erotic fantasies of both the characters and the audience are displaced and presented through a meticulously imagined *mise-en-scene*.

⁸⁹ While the majority of Hollywood films do not employ song and dance routines within their narrative structures, there has been a return to the musical film in *High School Musical* (Ortega: 2006); *Hairspray* (Shankman: 2007); and *Mamma Mia* (Lloyd: 2008). These stage plays have subsequently been made into feature films which have fared well economically.

The *mise-en-scene* or 'staging of the event' is an important component of film style in India, particularly relevant to representations in Bollywood cinema. Dwyer & Patel (2002: 42) break this representation style down into four components. The *mise-en-scene* is the first and foremost component which involves everything that happens in front of the camera such as the setting, lighting, costume and performance. The other three components are the shot itself, editing processes and sound. It is through all the elements of the *mise-en-scene* that the female character is placed under an intensive spotlight in which everything about her is highlighted. This includes her facial expressions, movements, dress (which is designed according to the latest fashion trends with attention to detail), hair, etc. In other words, within the culture of the Bollywood film, these spaces of musicality are accepted spaces within which transgression for both the males in the audience as well as the male protagonists within the narrative can take place (Varia: 2012: 40). Over the years, these sequences have become foregrounded within the narratives of Bollywood films as familiar conventions and as a result are now rooted within the visual culture of Bollywood films.

Similar to the manner in which narratives were adapted to cater for emerging diaspora audiences, song and dance sequences have also been significantly changed in order to keep pace with changing trends in music and choreography in the global world. In keeping pace with the rest of the world in terms of visual aesthetics, many Bollywood filmmakers are now increasingly incorporating 'sophisticated musical sequences' into the context of their dance sequences (Allesandrini: 2001: 322). In contemporary society, these musical sequences have come to be known as *item numbers*.

4.9.2 The Item Number

In simple terms, an *item number* is a type of song and dance sequence which is more focused on the performance of the heroine as the focal attraction as opposed to the traditional song and dance sequence in which the performance is a communal affair. In earlier Bollywood films, *item numbers* were provocative dance sequences which were specifically choreographed for women who played the roles of courtesans, or played sexually promiscuous characters. These characters were seen as 'outsiders' in comparison to notions of acceptable Indian culture. Their display of eroticism within the context of these musical spaces was therefore legitimised. It was forbidden for characters that played the roles of mothers or 'good' girls to be cast as dancers in *item numbers*. Very often these sequences

were set in places that were off-limits to good women/girls such as brothels and nightclubs. As Viridi (2003: 64) argues, the earlier version of the *item number* was exclusively reserved for performances by dancers/vamps⁹⁰.

The use of dress code signifiers within this context is also important. According to Dwyer & Patel (2002: 87), in older movies that contrasted the heroine with the vamp, the heroine almost always wore a sari as an emblem of her chastity and goodness. This is because 'the sari is heavily laden with a cultural meaning of nostalgia, tradition, womanhood, nationalism and social status' (Ibid). Gangoli (2005: 155) argues that visual representations of women are crucial elements which are constantly used by Bollywood filmmakers. However, in this regard, as a result of the processes of transnationalism, it seems as if contemporary heroines have been 'allowed some of the vamp's prerogatives' (Wilkinson-Weber: 2005: 143).

Kasbekar (2001: 298-300) agrees that song and dance sequences in earlier films employed dancers/vamps in roles of transgressive⁹¹ women in order to justify open displays of sexual desire on screen. However, over the years, 'the figure of the vamp was replaced by the female protagonist who then adopted the dance movements of the *item girl* together with her role as heroine within the narrative' (Nijhawan: 2009: 111, emphasis mine). Viridi (2003: 170) argues that as 'the scope of female sexuality became bigger in India, the figure of the vamp disappeared'. In line with this sentiment, Bhandari (2010) observes that these numbers have acquired a new position within the context of Bollywood films because within contemporary society, *item numbers* elevate the status and position of Bollywood actresses on an international level. This is substantiated by the common practice of filmmakers to recruit A-list actresses to do guest appearances in their films by performing *item numbers*. As a result, the revenue and popularity of films in which A-list actresses perform *item numbers* is boosted. The actresses use their performances in *item numbers* to 'add another stone to their caps' (Ibid).

⁹⁰ The dancers or vamps that performed highly eroticised dance numbers in earlier Bollywood films were used as symbols of the 'corrupt' West, They were always scantily clad in clothing that was considered taboo according to Indian cultural dress codes and they were overt in their displays of affection.

⁹¹ Transgressive women in this context are women who are completely removed from having any affiliation/connection to Indian ideologies within the context of the Indian family social system.

According to Rao (2007: 70), actresses such as Malaika Arora and Sameera Reddy have become highly paid stars through their performances in popular *item numbers*. As a marketing strategy, *item numbers* are often released before the film in order to boost ticket sales. These routines can be compared to the MTV music videos of female singers in the Western world such as Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez and Beyonce. As Rao (2007: 70) notes,

The dancing style, choreography, and wardrobe for these *item numbers* are largely influenced by MTV music videos and American hip-hop, salsa and pop music.

It is interesting that music videos in the Western context are focused on the promotion of songs without any connection to a larger narrative except for the one within the context of the song performance itself. In contemporary Bollywood films, *item numbers* are being largely fashioned according to the styles and aesthetics of western music videos. As a result, the traditions that were equated with Bollywood song and dance sequences are being replaced by performances that focus more on western/ modern choreography. Over the years, within the context of a transnational world, *item numbers* 'have become distinct cultural products separated from the films into which they are inserted (Rao: 2007: 70).

It is interesting that when Bollywood filmmakers created song and dance sequences according to the *masala* format of representation, they were criticised. In light of Rao's observation, it seems as if even today, the contemporary society finds the separatist nature of the *item number* to be problematic. It can be argued that representations in past sequences were merely a progression of the film culture which was invested in providing entertainment for the masses. From this perspective, the *masala* format of representation could be considered legitimate, especially because within this old culture, there were still traces of meaningful poetry and traditional representations. Audiences identified with the music and lyrics because they were an extension of their familiar cultural practices which they enjoyed as families.

In contemporary films, within the context of the *item number*, the focus rests solely on the movement and body of the actress. Older traditions that audiences resonated with have been replaced with a representation that is inspired by global music trends. As Nijhawan (2009: 99) observes,

Item songs are big-budget dance sequences in Bollywood and arresting examples of how bodies of dancing women in Bollywood, with fusion of traditional and contemporary dance genres construct new sites of sexual desire and identity in India.

The *item number* has become a controversial convention, especially since Bollywood filmmakers have been profiled as contributing to violence against women in India. Yet, the obsession with these film songs has become a worldwide trend because this music is redistributed on Western-produced compilations and sampled on DJ remix CDs. ‘Bollywood dancing’ is now available on YouTube and classes are offered in India, Australia, South Africa and the U.S. (Novak: 2010: 40). As Bollywood *item numbers* are played out in the real world similar to the manner in which aerobic classes are offered as a form of exercise, the lines between fantasy and reality become even more blurred. It seems as if today’s society is integrating *item numbers* into their ‘real’ spaces.

The manner in which audiences of Bollywood films engage with and interpret *item numbers* in Bollywood films is aptly depicted in the award-winning Bollywood film, *Dirty Picture* (Luthria: 2011). This film is based on the true story of South Indian actress Silk Smitha, who was well-known for the erotic roles that she played. Within the narrative of *Dirty Picture*, the character of Silk Smitha secures a role in a Bollywood film. She is depicted as a prostitute and the *item number* that she does in the ‘film within the film’ requires her to perform sensually for the benefit of the male audience. Within the narrative of *Dirty Picture*, when the character of Silk Smitha has completed filming for the movie in which she represents a ‘fallen’ woman, she buys a ticket to watch herself on the big screen. While she is seated in the audience, she finds it strange that even though she was told that her movie was ‘sold-out’, there is not a soul in the audience. She becomes disheartened, but suddenly, a flock of male viewers pile into their seats, just in time to watch the *item number*.

The reactions of the male audience while watching this song reveal the pleasure they derive from watching a sensual woman depicted on screen as she goes through the choreographed movements in which the focus of the main frame of the camera lens are her gyrating hips and heaving bosom. It is notable, that as soon as the *item number* is finished, the male audience leave the cinema without following the film’s narrative at all. Clearly, they are engrossed and immersed in the idea of viewing women as objects who should perform for the pleasure of males.

It can be argued that women who subject themselves to this type of direction should also be held accountable for indulging men and their carnal pleasures. However, it is important to bear in mind that *Dirty Picture* (Luthria: 2011) was produced by Ekta Kapoor - a female director. In illustrating, through the strategy of representing a 'film within a film', Kapoor brings to the fore, the internalised patriarchal mind-set of the male audience in India who thrive on viewing women as objects. It is interesting that Bollywood filmmakers justify their narrative, dramatic and aesthetic choices according to what they believe audiences will accept and reject (Ganti: 2007: 442). This explains the increasing number of films that feature women as objects, particularly through *item numbers*.

While in one sense *Dirty Picture* caters to the fantasies of the male audience, it simultaneously exposes the ludicrous nature of male audiences who pay the full price of a ticket and walk in only to view the section that objectifies and commodifies women. Perhaps producer Ekta Kapoor's agenda deliberately included creating awareness about the wrongful objectification of women by providing a mirror for both male and female audiences. She achieves this by using the strategy of representing a 'film within a film'. In employing this method of representation, she highlights the male gaze through the actions of male characters who simply walk in and out of the movie house to gaze at the figure of the female body on screen in an erotic manner. This scenario sheds light on the manner in which the objectification of women caters to the demands of the male audience. It is thus necessary to examine the *item number* in relation to the commodification and objectification of women in Bollywood films.

4.9.3 Commodification and Objectification

Suggestive lyrics, gyrating moves and pelvic thrusts, along with figure-hugging skimpy outfits are the USP's (unique selling points) of many popular Bollywood films today. (Rai: 2012)

Within these sequences, eroticism is largely contained within the narrative of the song and dance sequence itself, together with numerous costume changes, gestures (*rasa*) and movements (Ibid). In a sense, as Kasbekar argues, these song and dance sequences 'sanction areas of heightened transgressive pleasures' (Dwyer & Patel, 2002: 38). According to Kasbekar (2001: 286), this is achieved because according to the narrative structure in Bollywood films, scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) takes priority over epistemophilia (the desire to know or find out). As a result, female characters are reduced to being 'mere erotic

spectacles' (Ibid). Based on these representations, even though song is considered as a form of cultural expression in India, the manner in which this expression has taken on a new identity within *item numbers* has become controversial.

Editorials in *The Times of India* and *Outlook India* have spoken of the nausea some cinemagoers feel when watching *item numbers* in Bollywood films – musical sequences where scantily clad females sing and dance around large groups of men. The elaborate sequences, once bashfully flirtatious, have in recent decades edged towards X-rated misogyny, occasionally toying with fantasies of humiliation and rape. (Wazir: 2013)

Based on the above observations which reflect the representations of women in many *item numbers*, Bollywood as an industry is being criticised and accused of fuelling the objectification and commodification of women in India. It is not only the idea of women in skimpy outfits that is being criticised, but also the lyrics of various songs that are being attacked. In an Indian context, songs with erotic lyrics such as 'Chikni Chameli'⁹² in which the female protagonist with skimpy clothing swings from a chandelier above a room full of lustful men and lip syncs the lyrics, 'My evenings are free to be shared with you; come break-in to steal the treasures I possess inside'; and 'Jalebi Bai'⁹³ in which the scantily-clad actress also performs an erotic dance number for a room full of men, have been identified as corrupting the moral fabric of society. As Rai (2012) observes,

While conservative groups across India have raised red flags in the past at the increasing number of filmmakers who use popular Bollywood actresses in item numbers which they classify as 'cheap publicity stunts', Bollywood is facing a firing squad over its alleged irresponsibility towards fuelling the objectification of women.

In light of these accusations, in an interview with CNN, Bollywood actress and activist Shabana Azmi claims that 'there is a very thin line between the celebration of sensuality and allowing the objectification and commodification of women' (CNN: 2013). It seems as if the 'legitimate spaces' in which transgression was allowed for various reasons⁹⁴ have spiralled away from both *rasa* theory and the traditional music culture of India which was socially accepted. Instead, *item numbers* are increasingly being fashioned according to the aesthetics of Western music videos (Varia: 2012: 41).

⁹² 'Chikni Chameli' is an *item number* that is featured in the film *Agneepath* (Malhotra: 2012).

⁹³ 'Jalebi Bai' is also a very provocative *item number* that is featured in the film *Double Dhamaal* (Kumar: 2011).

⁹⁴ The reasons which have been discussed earlier take into consideration Indian society's attitudes towards open displays of affection as well as representations of eroticism.

Kao & Rozario (2008: 313) argue that this imagined space ‘exists outside the parameters of realism, and these musicals generate a completely new, unique space constructed from generic conventions and inventions in choreography, sound and cinematography’. This is problematic because the original purpose of the song and dance sequence within the context of Bollywood film tradition was not intended to follow in the footsteps of Western representations. They had their own space according to which they were deeply embedded within the narrative as cultural signifiers of traditions and rituals that are important within Indian society. Regardless of earlier cultural practices which were visually played out through song and dance sequences, in contemporary society, *item* numbers are fully exploited by filmmakers and producers because of their substantial economic value (Varia: 2012: 39). Rai (2012) agrees that the revenue of films in which female protagonists perform the *item* number is boosted substantially.

The question is, “Should Bollywood filmmakers be held responsible for fuelling the objectification of women through the representation of key female protagonists in *item* numbers?” Before answering this question, it is important to keep in mind that female protagonists are willingly performing these dances. From this perspective, even though processes of objectification are taking place, then one must take into account the idea that there must have been consensus between the filmmaker/choreographer and the actress in creating or executing the performance. Therefore, it may be incorrect to place blame solely on Bollywood filmmakers. It can be argued that the so-called objectification of women in this century within the context of representations on screen is not objectification at all. This is because these actresses are not oppressed or forced to perform in songs that heighten sexual desire. They do so out of their own choice.

In a panel discussion with Rajdeep Sardesai on IBN Live (2013b), Azmi points out that within the broader structure of the Bollywood film narrative, the body of the actress is violated in two ways; firstly through the movements of the camera that specifically zooms in on all of her body parts as a result of which ‘heaving bosoms and swivelling navels’ are projected as fragmented images on screen, and secondly, through the lyrics of the songs in which the woman projected on screen ‘literally’ invites the man to come and attack her. It is almost as if the body of the woman is being double-objectified because the camera that

'zooms' in on her is an object too⁹⁵. Nevertheless, in spite of torrents of criticism, *item numbers* continue to be used in the narratives of many Bollywood films. In reflecting upon these issues, it becomes necessary to examine the notion of the male gaze in Bollywood films - particularly in relation to *item numbers*. As Viridi (2003: 146) notes,

The focus in song and dance sequences is particularly on the heroine; the fetishized female sexualized through close attention to costumes, graceful body movements, and carefully angled shots that heighten scopophilic pleasure. Whether the heroines lie languorously across the screen, roll down hilly slopes, or frolic playfully with the hero, they feign an unawareness of their sexualized bodies and the camera's voyeuristic gaze.

While these representations feed the male gaze and do objectify women, in many films post 1990, male actors experience the same treatment from both the camera and Bollywood filmmakers. As Dwyer & Patel (2002: 84) contend,

The male at the end of the twentieth century is groomed, maintained, exercised and dressed in the clothes of consumer society, an object of his own narcissistic gaze while inviting the gaze of the audience on his often fragmented body in a way traditionally associated with women.

It seems as if the representation of males is becoming conflated with the representation of females in terms of the 'gaze' in twenty-first century song and dance sequences. Even though Mulvey (1975: 6) claims that 'an unconscious patriarchal society has structured film form in terms of the male gaze' according to which the figure of the woman is projected on screen as an object of desire, contemporary society projects the figure of the male on an equivalent platform. As Nijhawan (2009: 109) points out, the trend of male protagonists showing off their dancing skills in the *item numbers* that were once reserved exclusively for females is increasing. This is substantiated by the performances of popular Bollywood actors such as John Abraham, Hrithik Roshan and Salman Khan. As Nijhawan (Ibid) further argues, while Bollywood heroes of the past such as Amitabh Bachchan and Shammi Kapoor danced to specific choreographed songs in which the main focus was still on their characters as part of the film's narrative, the new generation of actors present themselves as bodies, similar to the manner in which the new generation of actresses have no qualms about being represented as vamps within the context of the song sequence. In a sense, it can be assumed that both male

⁹⁵ It is interesting that even in Western music videos, the dances and costumes are both provocative, but these videos are well integrated and accepted within the culture of Western society and viewers may or may not view the women as objects. However, in a similar light, when young actress/singer Miley Cyrus released a music video in which she used a rubber hand to make obscene gestures, the world at large protested.

and female characters are working within the norms of representation that are offered to them. These offers are in turn being fuelled by the increase in revenue based on the integration of 'spicy' *item numbers* in contemporary Bollywood films.

4.10 Concluding thoughts

Due to the causal relationship that exists between popular Bollywood films and Indian society, it becomes clear that Bollywood cinema has, to a large extent, been shaped by various cultural practices in India. It has been established that Bollywood cinema has played an important role in constructing and defining various dichotomies within the context of the nationalist movement in India. In this regard, representations in Bollywood films have to a large extent been guided by the reception/tastes of audiences in India.

Over the years, the popularity of the *masala* film has waned for many middle-class and diasporic audiences. Post-1991, since India became economically liberated, Bollywood filmmakers have focused their attention on catering for Indian diaspora audiences across the globe. This has been made possible by processes of liberalisation as a result of which Bollywood filmmakers were not relieved from depicting specific articulations of national identity in their films. In a sense, transnationalism has led to the creation of an 'empty canvas' upon which Bollywood filmmakers are able to construct narratives and situations that do not need to be faithful to older Indian ideologies.

As communities split up and people venture out into the realm of the 'beyond', which is in spaces that are unfamiliar to them, they are forced to associate with people of other cultures. Hence, the language of uniformity that once defined them as a result of being integrated into a specific society or community ceases to exist. Nationalism becomes a political term. The present then becomes a new experience and the future represents unknown, 'foreign' promises. Within this new created space, Bollywood cinema assumes the role of a cultural role player or mediator for the Indian diaspora.

Bollywood's role within Indian society is further endorsed through its rising popularity. Proof of this is substantiated by various box-office successes throughout the world. It seems as if the processes of transnationalism combined with a powerful Indian diaspora have created a new significant space for Bollywood films. Yet, as many scholars (Prasad: 2003;

Rajadhyaksha: 2003; Pugsley & Khorana: 2011) have observed, even though Bollywood cinema has become a global phenomenon, the nature of Indian identity is still important for those who have affiliations with India. Bollywood filmmakers are therefore constantly engaged with notions of Indianness as well as the constructed dichotomies which are largely played out through the representations of women.

The narratives of the 'new' Diasporic Bollywood films address the challenges of the women of the Indian diaspora as they make their transition from 'beings' controlled by the nation state to liberated individuals. As Kastoryano (2011: 1) observes, the boundaries between India and the West have become blurred as 'transnational actors interact in a space where cultural specificities of multiple national societies are combined with emerging multilevel and multinational activities'. This is noteworthy, for within the context of the Indian state, the notion of 'traditional' versus 'modernity' has always been a point of contention, especially in relation to women. More specifically, as Chatterjee (1993:121) has argued, the need to choose between the home and the world with the home representing traditional Indian belief-systems and the world representing 'modernity' is a concept that women of the Indian diaspora grapple with on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the diasporic film journeys with female migrants into foreign lands, mirroring their challenges and attempting to find meaning in the formation of new identities, while trying to salvage a piece of the 'Indian heritage' of yesteryear.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha suggests the re-thinking of nationalism, representation and resistance that above all stress the 'ambivalence' or 'hybridity' that characterises the site of colonial contestation. As Bhabha further contends, cultural differences articulate and produce imagined 'constructions' of cultural and national identities. Bhabha is a firm believer in using theory to effect social change for the betterment of societies and the upliftment and attainment of self-definition for individuals. In line with this idea, the crossing of borders has initiated the opening of new spaces and allows for the formation of new identities. The relationships between Indian women and the societies that they were once bound and faithful to are thus not fixed anymore.

However, despite the leaning toward the adoption of 'Western' ways of living, Bollywood filmmakers find it problematic to completely 'break away' from notions of Indianness or Indian behaviour which are specific to Indian women. While Hall advances the idea of the

Indian diaspora as a cultural identity that should be enacted through *difference* rather than through an emphasis on return to roots (Desai: 2004: 2, emphasis mine), Dube (2005: 8-9) associates the tendency to cling to cultural identity as a subaltern past that is inextricably weaved into the psyche of the Indian diaspora like ‘stubborn knots’. Regardless of the challenges, it is apparent that the formula of representation has clearly changed. Diasporic Bollywood films are often more character-driven and deal with issues of the displacement of women from homelands and their identity-formation in Western states.

Shifts in cultural politics have clearly taken place and female characters are no longer bound by earlier ideologies of the state. This is largely due to the processes of transnationalism. As Fluck (2011: 376) argues, transnational spaces are of special interest because they can be considered privileged spaces for unsettling stable identities. Fluck’s argument is particularly relevant when applied to the representation of heroines in *item* numbers. This is seen through the complete alienation of female characters from having any affiliation with Indian tradition or culture within the context of many *item* numbers. As Gangoli (2005:157, emphasis mine) notes,

The Indian woman of the 90’s is now *both* Western and Indian, sometimes more Western than Indian and often located geographically in the West.

In addition to this change, there has been a change in the attire of the 1990s heroine.

According to Dwyer & Patel (2002: 97),

In the 1990’s the heroine can wear Western clothes which no longer carry any negative implications, but now represent a facet of her character, namely her ability to be at home anywhere in the world. However, the Western clothes do mark her as modern and cosmopolitan.

It can be argued that the liberties that are being afforded to female characters in terms of dress and representation are being facilitated by the dismantling of overpowering patriarchal structures of the past. This in turn has been made possible by a detachment from the nationalist project and censorship. As a result of these processes, the dialogue dealing with the Indian/Western dichotomy is brought to the fore once again. In line with this sentiment, Varia (2012: 1) observes, ‘Bollywood is constantly in tense negotiation between tradition and modernity’. This negotiation becomes more intensive in light of the representation of women in certain *item numbers*. It seems as if overt displays of scantily-clad females who provoke the male gaze within the context of the song and dance sequence serve no purpose other than

to fuel carnal desires. From this perspective, *item numbers* can be viewed as a modern version of the *masala* format of representation.

The difference is that while the *masala* film with all its conventions was created to cater for illiterate masses, the *item number* caters to the needs of a section of society that seems to thrive on viewing an objectified female character. While the nature of the *masala* film can be justified and understood within the socio-political atmosphere that prevailed at the time of its inception, the *item number* seems to be a consequence of economic liberalisation and lack of censorship. Through the combination of both provocative lyrics and body movements and gestures, the media has insinuated that female characters 'invite' the objectification and commodification of themselves as mere bodies. Even though these representations cannot be blamed for the continuous acts of violence against women in India, they should not be encouraged. This is because they negate the positive aspects of Bollywood cinema as a transnational and cultural role player for Indian audiences nationally and internationally.

Amidst the many changes and evolutionary processes that Bollywood has journeyed through, the importance of the Indian family social system has been maintained in a positive light⁹⁶. Indianness can thus be located as an integral part of the Indian family social system. Within this space, respect and adherence to various rituals and customs are important. Song and dance sequences form a colourful part of the Bollywood film tradition through which various rituals and customs are illustrated. Within this context, the random display of eroticism through *item numbers* translates as a violation of the family viewing process. This is particularly relevant to audiences in India because it is a society that is characterised by widespread misogyny and deeply-entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

It can thus be argued that provocative representations of women in certain *item numbers* may compound and even fuel such negative attitudes and mindsets. In response to the Delhi gang-rape, many Bollywood film stars and directors have come forward to express their concern for the dire plight of women in India. However, unless a collective effort is made to change the mind sets of perpetrators in India, situations of gender violence will continue to occur.

⁹⁶ Bollywood filmmakers' obsession with the notion of Indianness has been examined within the context of many popular films and it is notable that these films that engage with notions of Indianness have been box-office successes.

In light of the discussion on Bollywood cinema and the manner in which it has evolved over the years as well as its increasing visibility internationally, it can be assumed that it has become an extension of Indian society. Therefore, one can argue that Bollywood has advertently or inadvertently assumed the responsibility of having the power to affect social change. It becomes clear through discussion of various films that Bollywood films have in a sense assisted women in Indian with their processes of re-definition. It is thus important to maintain Bollywood cinema's position as a cultural role player for Indian nationals and the Indian diaspora.

At the same time, Bollywood filmmakers should seriously re-consider their depiction of women in *item numbers*. And, more importantly, the actresses who agree to perform these numbers should consider their social responsibility, particularly because of the centrality of the Indian family social system to Indian culture. Even though patriarchy and nationalist ideals were previously embedded within this system, family is central to notions of Indianness and therefore an important structure for Indians worldwide. If patriarchy and nationalist ideals which have in the past been used wrongfully are removed, then the Indian family system becomes a strong platform from which identities can be discursively re-invented.

By virtue of its success in the overseas market, Bollywood cinema has cemented its fluid nature as well as its ability to evolve. As a result of the flexibility and fluid nature of Bollywood cinema, a new set of normative values have been introduced by the integration of new themes and the representation of various generations of female characters in the narratives of the 'new' diasporic films. After having been categorised as third-world entertainment in the past as Desai (2004: 43) contends, Bollywood cinema has now become embedded within its particular nexus of the local, national and transnational. As a result, Indian women have been assisted in their evolutionary processes by both transnationalism and the advent of diasporic films. As Gangoli (2005:144, emphasis mine) observes,

While in the 1970's, the West and East were projected as polarised oppositions; contemporary films such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* ***locate the East and the West in the same person.***

The next chapter will examine the manner in which various filmmakers have made their mark globally by conflating the created dichotomies instead of treating them as oppositions. The representation of female characters from the perspective of redefinition of the Indian/Western

dichotomy, particularly as represented in diasporic Bollywood films will be examined through a close analysis of the films of writer/director Karan Johar.

Chapter 5

5 The Films of Johar

Karan Johar is well known as one of the most successful young diasporic filmmakers in Bollywood (Pillai: 2006). Johar made his directorial debut with the film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* in 1998 and admits that he has been heavily influenced by the Yash Chopra school of filmmaking (Pillai: 2004:2). The late Yash Chopra⁹⁷ was the man at the helm of *Yash Raj films* and is regarded as the most successful veteran filmmaker in the history of Bollywood films (Pillai: 2004:1). *Yash Raj films*, formed in 1970, is the 27th biggest production house in the world and the only Indian company which is featured along with global media companies such as Sony, Warner Brothers, Fox, Paramount, Miramax, Dreamworks and many others (Pillai: 2004). As Pugsley & Khorana (2011: 359) rightfully note, *Yash Raj films* is one of India's most successful film production studios with a global market.

Over the years, *Yash Raj Films* has been influential in projecting representations of the Indian diaspora into the global world through the release of films such as *Dilwaale Dulhania le Jayenge* (Chopra; 1995); *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Chopra: 1997); *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998); *Taal* (Ghai: 1999); *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Johar: 2001); *Hum Tum* (Kohli: 2004); *Veer-Zaara* (Chopra: 2004); *Dhoom* (Gadhvi: 2004); *Salaam Namaste* (Anand: 2005); *Chak De! India* (Director: 2007); *Roadside Romeo* (Hansraj: 2008); *New York* (Khan: 2009); *Ladies vs. Ricky Bahl* (Sharma: 2011); *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (Chopra: 2012) and *Ek Tha Tiger* (Khan: 2012). According to Ganti, as a result of the success of films that cater for Indian audiences outside India, diasporic markets have been established as vital sources of revenue (Kavoori & Punathambekar:2008: 5).

Yash Raj films specialise in representations of the Indian diaspora and thereby provide these Indians with a cultural frame of reference. This is achieved because the narratives of these films are written against an Indian backdrop. Even though they are shot in various locations worldwide such as the U.K., Australia and the U.S., the characters are Indian and are often immersed in negotiating their affiliation and loyalty to Indian culture after they have migrated

⁹⁷ The late Yash Chopra died from dengue fever on Sunday, 21st October 2012 (BBC News – India: 2012). In a career spanning over five decades, Yash Chopra won many Filmfare awards. According to *The Times of India* (2012), he was the first Indian to be honoured at BAFTA; he received a lifetime membership to BAFTA for his contribution to the Indian film industry.

to foreign countries. A common characteristic that flows through the narratives of *Yash Raj films* is the manner in which Indian characters maintain their culture within their home setting. The world is then encountered when Indian characters come into contact with non-Indian people. The interaction with people of other cultural affiliations leads to choices which often cause these characters to adopt various global cultures into their lives while they try to maintain their inherent Indian identities (Basu, 2010: 89). In an interview conducted in 2002, Yash Chopra says, 'Indian films teach in a subtle way, they teach social conventions and a sense of duty' (Therwath: 2010).

When watching *Yash Raj films*, it becomes apparent that they are foregrounded in their portrayal of loyalty to Indian culture. From this perspective, while providing audiences with narratives that explain Indian cultural practices in an entertaining manner, various social conventions that are central to Indian culture are disseminated. *Yash Raj films* are thus very popular in both India and abroad because they speak to both local (India) and global audiences. As Basu (2010: 82) observes,

The phenomenon of freely merging textures of the home and the world is part of an overall cinematic-spectacular style largely identified with veteran filmmaker Yash Chopra.

Chopra depicts the Indian diaspora in his films as affluent characters who embody the national ethos of India while living affluent lifestyles abroad. The world in his films is portrayed through settings in countries outside India. Within this space, he promotes imported brands on screen. Vemireddy (2011: 199) advocates the idea of an auteur being associated with a particular visual style which he terms as 'branding'. In this regard, Chopra's characters sport popular name brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Nike and Adidas. 'Branding' adds to the development of an auteur's signature style, especially when it is carried through in all his films. In *Yash Raj films* these representations are then extended into the real world through the international product placements of the actors/actresses. Many of the actors/actresses in his films are brand ambassadors for various products worldwide.

In a sense, Chopra's style of representation showcases a 'designer India' (Punathambekar: 2005: 158). According to Kaur & Sinha (2005:27), the new formula of representation in these films which combine changing characterisations, plots and multi-cultural aesthetics 'meet a new imagined global audience consisting of diasporic communities and a growing pool of mainstream audiences in the West'. As a result of the embodiments of both textures of the

home and the world, diasporic Bollywood films which follow this formula have come to occupy a significant cultural space in the lives of Indians across the globe post-1990 (Kaur: 2002: 208). The cinematic style of *Yash Raj films* has influenced other popular directors such as Sooraj Barjatiya, Subhash Ghai, Sanjay Leela Bansali and Karan Johar.

This chapter will focus on the work of Karan Johar as an auteur director because he has developed a niche area within Bollywood by specialising in representations of the Indian diaspora. More specifically, his films focus on the representation of women in relation to changing feminist perspectives. These representations will be closely examined within the individual analysis of the films selected as case studies.

5.1 Johar as Auteur

According to the Merriam-Webster (2010) dictionary, auteur theory is defined as, ‘a view of filmmaking in which the director is considered the primary creative force in a motion picture.’ While a literary author has control over his/her text and can assume copyright for the content of the work in the form of copyright, it is difficult to assign the same title to a single person in the process of filmmaking because there are numerous agencies involved.

According to auteur theory, the idea of author as owner of intellectual property should be granted to a figure in the complex apparatus of cinema who could be said to be identical with the author of a literary text (Mishra, 2002:90). Through the adherence to a specific style of filmmaking, a signature style begins to develop and audiences often begin to identify with the director’s styles of representation as they become immersed in his/her work.

Chapter two has mentioned various filmmakers as auteurs in the Anglo-American context. Similarly, in an Indian context, various directors such as Mehboob Khan, Rajkumar Hirani, Farhaan Akhtar and Karan Johar are identified as auteurs. Mehboob Khan is considered an auteur because of his specific expressive styles of filmmaking (Mishra, 2002: 89). Rajkumar Hirani is well-known for the *Munna Bhai* (Hirani: 2005, 2006) series of films in which he capitalises on comedy as a strategy to educate people about the manner in which good will always prevails over evil. Farhaan Akhtar is another young director who focuses on close male relationships and the evolution of Indian males as they venture outside India and assume the roles of the Indian diaspora. Johar’s unique style of filmmaking incorporates romance, drama and representations of the Indian diaspora in a manner which echoes the cinematic-

spectacularity associated with *Yash Raj films*⁹⁸. These aspects will be discussed through a careful study of his auteurship in relation to the three films which he has written and directed: *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998); *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001) and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006).

A similarity in the marketing of Johar's films through a characteristic abbreviation of titles is noted. In all three films, the letter 'K' forms part of the title. According to Khan (2006), the use of the letter 'K' is based on Johar's strong belief in numerology, a practice that is central to Hindu culture. After watching the acclaimed *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Hirani: 2006) in which the negative aspects of superstitious beliefs associated with numerology are exposed within the narrative⁹⁹, Johar confessed to 'dropping' his obsession with this practice (Khan: 2006). However, the titles of the films selected for this study were already abbreviated and marketed accordingly. Henceforth, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) will rightfully be referred to as *KKHH*; *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001) will be referred to as *K3G* and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* will be referred to as *KANK*.

Since the release of his popular debut blockbuster *KKHH*, Johar has, through the narratives of his subsequent films, engaged with issues concerned with tradition and modernity (Indian/Western dichotomy), gender constructions/stereotypes, family, religion, traditions, rituals and loyalty to the Indian state. Before commencing with the individual analysis of each film, Johar's unique representational style will be briefly discussed under the following headings,

- *media res* and the third space,
- the placement of actor Shah Rukh Khan as a protagonist in all three films,
- representations of tradition and culture,
- modernity and the Indian/Western dichotomy,

⁹⁸ Before gaining credit as a writer/director in an individual capacity, Johar assisted Aditya Chopra (writer/director and son of Yash Chopra) with the blockbuster *DDLJ* (Chopra: 1995).

⁹⁹ In *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Hirani: 2006), a young Indian woman is at the altar on her wedding day and is about to get married when her prospective father-in-law (a staunch believer in numerology) discovers that she manipulated the numbers in her numerology reading. As a consequence of her manipulation, the Astrologer declares that the readings are wrong. The groom's party is about to leave when the protagonist takes a stand and holds one of the wedding guests at gunpoint. He then orders the Astrologer to 'predict' the fate of the man who is being held at gunpoint. Through this scene, the negative aspects of superstitious beliefs which are often integrated into normative cultural practices in the name of religion are exposed.

5.1.1 Media res and the third space

The unique representational style of Johar's films begins with his point of departure. In all three films, he begins his narratives in *media res*. As defined in Encyclopaedia Britannica Online (2013), *media res* is a Latin word which means 'in the midst of things'. In narrative technique, it is the recommended practice of beginning an epic or other fictional form by plunging into a crucial situation that is part of a related chain of events; the situation is an extension of previous events and will be developed in later action. The narrative then goes directly forward, and exposition of earlier events is supplied by flashbacks. The key phrase in this definition in relation to Johar's narratives is 'related chain of events'. Johar's technique of writing his narratives in *media res* involves beginning his stories by assuming that his audience is well-versed in the traditional structures of the Indian family social system¹⁰⁰. This strategy then allows him to navigate between past and present Indian ideologies that form a chain of events through which he establishes an old familiarity/nostalgia with his diasporic audience.

As an auteur with an Indian genealogy, he has a clear focus and understanding of the manner in which aspects such as the ongoing dialogue about the Indian/Western dichotomy, gender politics and the notion of Indianness¹⁰¹ affect the Indian diaspora. Based on these factors, he draws upon the traditions and rituals that were practised in ancient India by assuming that his audience will identify with them. Johar does not provide exposition about numerous Indian cultural rituals and traditions; instead, he simply presents them as part of a natural flow of events within the narrative. Johar's use of *media res* is interesting. He constructs his narratives to speak to an audience whose challenges he fully comprehends in terms of their loyalty to India as an imagined space, the importance of maintaining Indianness in foreign lands as well as the various traditions and rituals that are central to Indian culture.

In relation to the construction of character profiles, he sets them up from the very beginning as explicitly incongruent with the traditional stereotypical characters that are often seen in

¹⁰⁰ According to Uberoi, Indianness is defined with reference to specificities of family life, the institutions of courtship and marriage in particular ... whether at home or abroad, it is the 'Indian family system' that is recognised as the social institution that quintessentially defines being Indian. (Punathambekar: 2005:160)

¹⁰¹ The notion of Indianness is particularly relevant with regard to the maintaining of Indianness in foreign lands through the practice of remaining loyal to the various rituals and traditions that have become embedded within Indian society as expressions of culture.

many Bollywood films. Thereafter, his narrative structure navigates from the present to the past. He subtly drops hints about the truths of the past and at the same time displays that these truths are not necessarily factual. He achieves this by using traditional festivals as a backdrop in order to highlight the manner in which Indian society adheres to these structures. Through the depiction of various traditions and rituals, he introduces new realities that have been created as a result of transnationalism and the re-definition of the identity of the Indian diaspora; more specifically, women of the Indian diaspora.

In line with the manner in which films produced by Yash Raj studios contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the Indian/Western dichotomy, Johar also challenges Indian stereotypes and uses the West as a space of interrogation. According to Bhabha (1994:36),

The production of meaning requires that two places be mobilized in the passage through a third space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is ambivalence in the act of interpretation.

Within the context of this study, the third space is represented by Johar's novel narrative structures and diasporic character representations that constantly challenge stereotypes. The diasporic character undoubtedly brings with it a host of new ideologies and opens up a platform for new experiences and the questioning of current and past norms (Ayob: 2011:20). The two spaces that are mobilised in Johar's films are India and the West. Even though he remains faithful to various myths, traditions and rituals, his narratives promote the idea of a positive synthesis between tradition and modernity. The combination of narratives written in *media res* coupled with the depiction of modernity in a positive light may have led to Johar's decision to use actor Shah Rukh Khan as the focal male protagonist in all three films. This will be discussed below.

5.1.2 Shah Rukh Khan / Parallel Text

The placement of Shah Rukh Khan¹⁰², a Muslim male, in pivotal roles as a male Hindu character in Johar's films is important to this discussion. As has been discussed in Chapter three, the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 created animosity between Hindu and Muslim people. According to Dwyer (2010: 391), it was 'a period of the worst communal

¹⁰² The actor Shah Rukh Khan is well known in the media by his initials, SRK or as King Khan. Henceforth, he will be referred to as SRK.

conflicts in Indian history, which saw the largest movement of people in history, when ten million people migrated as Pakistan was created alongside the secular republic of India'. In spite of this reality, Johar has not only worked closely with Shah Rukh Khan, but he has afforded him roles in which he plays a Hindu character, which the actor in turn has graciously embodied. The pair has been seen together in numerous interviews and their friendship as well as relationship as Director/Actor clearly indicates that they have not internalised the politics of partition.

As part of Johar's auteurship in relation to writing his stories in *media res*, by placing a Muslim actor to play the role of a quintessential Hindu male, it can be argued that he simultaneously makes reference to and attempts to dismantle the conflict that exists between Muslims and Hindus as a result of the partition of India in 1947. Even though his narratives do foreground a cultural Hindu identity, at no point does he undermine other cultures. Instead, he creates situations through which people from different cultures associate with each other amicably. Interaction between different cultures is also represented by the experiences of the Indian diaspora as they venture into foreign lands in contemporary society.

While Johar's employment of SRK as a character is important, it is also crucial to understand SRK in his own right in relation to his star image. As Singh (2008: 10) observes,

Shah Rukh Khan is considered as the star par excellence, and is often considered the embodiment of 21st century India. He has been labelled as a one-man industry capable of articulating and representing the zeitgeist of the billion people who constitute the nation.

According to Dwyer & Patel (2002: 184), the star image of an actor is 'cumulatively constructed' by the star, the actor within the narrative and the audience or public. The image of the actor is further expanded through marketing campaigns which include massive portraits and pictures of the star in key locations, and the attendance of the star at the box office (Ibid). In a sense, the star becomes a 'melodramatic figure known beyond the films' and is then lauded and accepted in the real world as a type of iconic figure (Dwyer: 2010: 387). In addition, interviews and fan magazines also play a role in bridging the gap between the actor and the star in order to create an image that eventually becomes, as SRK has, a worldwide phenomenon.

In his position as auteur, Johar capitalises on the star image¹⁰³ of SRK by strategically placing him in pivotal roles. As Singh (2008: 3) argues, the star image of SRK ‘seamlessly blends, especially post-1995, his personal life and screen persona’. This particular construction of image is a result of public appearances, interviews, product endorsements, commercials and the films themselves. Johar’s positioning of SRK in his blockbusters has in turn fuelled the popularity of the actor and has created an international euphoria around him.

There is something symbolic and emotional, a form of an aesthetic relish in the materiality of the star, something resonating deep in Indian psychology that explains the initial moment of conjunction of star and spectator. (Mishra, 2002: 147)

Through his continued presence in the media and his presence in some of the most acclaimed diasporic films as a pivotal character, SRK’s persona assumes a mystical nature, which is in keeping with the mystical allure of Bollywood cinema. As Singh (2008: 2) notes, SRK’s narrative occupies the interstice of myth and national icon of desire, in addition to embodying multiple sites of contested identities in modern India – of language, region, caste, and religion. Hence, as SRK appears onscreen as a pivotal male protagonist, he is also seen in the real world outside the space of the constructed film. In line with this sentiment, Dwyer & Patel (2002: 32) contend,

Bollywood films draw on images of the star in other films and in other media to give them roles as national icons of beauty and desire, presenting them as Utopian¹⁰⁴ beings. This is also encouraged by viewing practices in India, where repeat viewing is the norm and the audience has an incredibly detailed knowledge of the life of the star and other personnel involved in the film.

While SRK embodies the traits of the characters that he plays within the context of film, his star image or persona becomes extended into the real world. In this regard, SRK assumes the role of an actor who is perceived as a parallel text. According to Kapur, the theorising of the idea of an actor as a parallel text takes place through the ‘use of gestures and emotions’ which are often replicated in real life appearances in the daily media in which the actor constantly references the roles that he plays (Mishra, 2002: 125). Dyer & Ellis agree that the

¹⁰³ It is notable that when *KKHH* was released, SRK had already attained a cult status in his role as the ‘quintessential’ Hindu, Indian male in the blockbuster *DDLJ* (Chopra: 1995).

¹⁰⁴ SRK as a pivotal male lead is important in the utopian sense because in his narratives, Johar dispels issues between Hindu and Muslim characters by portraying them as being able to associate with each other harmoniously. This representation is in direct contrast to the creation of partition between India and Pakistan which has resulted in fuelling animosity between many Hindu and Muslim people. By placing a Muslim male in his films as the lead character, it can be argued that he is trying to initiate new beginnings for people from different religious backgrounds.

sequential appearances on and off screen allow the actor to accumulate his own 'symbolic biography' through which he is able to 'generate industry deals' and as a result of which he becomes an 'iconic star' who is internationally visible (Mishra, 2002: 126-127). As Mishra (Ibid: 127) rightfully observes, post-1990, and especially since the release of the acclaimed DDLJ (the longest running film in Indian history),

Shah Rukh Khan has become the representative face of the Indian diaspora globally.

SRK's presence in the endorsement of a variety of global brands, his real-life appearances as the owner of the IPL cricket team 'The Kolkata Knight Riders' and his role as host of the Indian version of the popular television game show, 'Are you Smarter than a fifth grader?' position him as a parallel text within the context of Bollywood films. According to Mishra (2002: 127), while Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan was the dominant figure in Bollywood from 1973-1990, it is SRK who embodies the role of an actor with a modern agenda (Mishra, 2002: 147). Other actors who function as parallel texts for the Indian diaspora are Salman Khan, Aamir Khan and Hrithik Roshan (Ciecko: 2001:129). Based on various endorsement deals, Bollywood actors become visible to the general public.

Mishra (2002: 126) argues that 'Bollywood cinema has become the cinema of the star more than the cinema of the director or studio.' In today's contemporary society, fans of Bollywood stars look forward to seeing their stars outside the cinema. According to Ciecko (2011: 130), this audience expectation is satisfied because 'the Bollywood star is constructed as being everywhere at once with private lives exposed via fan-culture. From this perspective, the dynamics of SRK's star image together with his persona as a parallel text contribute to the popularity of Johar's films. In a sense, due to SRK's star image, his persona extends into the world beyond the narratives of the films in which he performs. As a result, Johar's films are catapulted beyond the realms of their cinematic limitations as fictional texts. SRK's star image coupled with Johar's innovative narratives blur the lines between fiction and reality and thereby contributes to the notion of the 'filmic imaginary' of Bollywood cinema.

5.1.3 Representations of tradition and culture

It has been established that in colonial India, various dichotomies were constructed in response to colonisation processes and an effort was made to project India as superior to the corrupt West. Even though Bollywood filmmakers continue to engage with India as the

imagined nation post-1990, the imagined construct has changed significantly. Instead of promoting patriarchal regimes within which subservient women are to be regarded as the 'ideal', Bollywood filmmakers constantly challenge these created notions.

Johar's narratives reinforce India's rich cultural heritage which is embedded in various traditions and rituals such as marriage ceremonies, karwa chaud¹⁰⁵ (the ceremony during which the bride breaks her abstinence from food and drink after having sighted the moon), mendhi celebrations (the practice of using henna to trace decorative patterns onto the hands of the bride and the guests), the donning of the elaborate red wedding sari (the red sari is a marker of a woman who is married) and the painting of the bindi on the bride's forehead. Through these representations, national identity is upheld in a positive light. In all of his films, the wedding is a colourful event and within this celebration, various rituals are authentically displayed and thereby provide a frame of reference for the audience. As Kapur (2009: 221) notes, in the last decade of the 20th century, the Hindu wedding has become a core attraction in popular Bollywood cinema.

The big Bollywood wedding – its conspicuous consumption dictated by the need to individuate oneself, to package and present oneself as a globalized Indian who flamboyantly embraces 'tradition' as a matter of choice – is symptomatic of a neoliberal subject governed by a regime of consumption where, in order to show that one has 'arrived', every event, including something as conformist as a wedding, must be presented as uniquely individual. (Ibid: 222)

It seems as if Johar's elaborate depictions of various traditions translate into positive expressions of culture which tap into the nostalgic desires of the Indian diaspora. On the other hand, before the period of cultural revival in India, traditions which were considered as norms included practices such as *sati* and notions of 'ideal' Indian women affording their husbands a status equivalent to God. While Johar's representations of selected traditions echo positive sentiments, they also cautiously remind the audience of the times when ancient traditions were used for the denigration of women. Therefore, when discussing tradition and culture in relation to Indian audiences, it is important to understand the clear distinction between the traditions that they 'choose to embrace' (such as weddings and prayer ceremonies) and the traditions that were enforced in ancient India (such as *sati*).

¹⁰⁵ This religious festival is important because according to Hindu culture, if the woman abstains from food until the sighting of the moon, then her husband will be guaranteed a long life span. It is interesting that in films produced for diasporic markets; both husband and wife observe the fast as a couple.

The 'embracing of tradition as a matter of choice' is an important theme that flows through the narratives of Johar's films. As has been established in Chapter three, the long history of India coupled with the effects of colonisation have impacted on the identity of the Indian national. In an Indian context, perhaps in reaction to colonisation, individuals cling to certain norms and traditions in order to salvage their sense of identity. Ironically, the need to cling to traditions is so strong that the authenticity or logic of these traditions is not questioned by individuals. As a result, these traditions then become firmly entrenched as cultural signifiers that define various communities. After a while traditions are accepted as norms and come to occupy a space of cultural significance.

Within the context of Johar's films, it is common to find 'diasporic characters hold onto nationalist discourse through Indian prayer hymns, the Indian anthem and the Indian flag' (Therwath: 2010: 12). Characters in Johar's films are forthcoming about positive aspects of upholding traditions such as these. At the same time, the narratives in his films also allude to and acknowledge the negative aspects of nationalist discourse. For example, while past rituals within the paradigm of the nationalist project were focused on depicting practices such as the subordination of women through *sati* and polygamy, Johar rejects these rituals through representations of rehabilitated widows who need not succumb to the patriarchal structures of ancient India. He initiates new realities by rejecting ancient rituals through candid dialogues and overt representations. These concepts are evident in Johar's style or representation and are further facilitated by the employment of the third space of enunciation. As Bhabha (1994: 37) argues,

The intervention of the third space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people.

It has been established that tradition and culture are integrated concepts which are an inherent part of the Indian family social system. This system is characterised by a distinctive Indian identity which in turn influences the individual's association with and loyalty to notions of Indianness. According to Ganti (2004:43),

Films portraying elements relating to religious rituals, elaborate weddings, large extended families, respect for parental authority, adherence to norms of female modesty, injunctions against premarital sex, and intense pride and love for India automatically signify Indian identity.

While Ganti's observations neatly sum up the notion of Indian identity within the context of the Indian family social system, Bhabha's argument is particularly relevant to the manner in which Johar constructs his representations. Important Hindu religious rituals and festivals such as Diwali, Raakhee-Bandan and Karwa Chaud are adhered to by the characters in his films. Through these representations, he creates fictional worlds that both Indian nationals and the Indian diaspora can identify with. His narratives speak to a diverse audience¹⁰⁶ because he foregrounds the religious practices and rituals of Hindu people within the context of his films. Therefore, even though the settings of his films are modern because they showcase the lives of the affluent middle-class diaspora, there is an ongoing negotiation with issues of loyalty to tradition and culture within the context of the Indian family social system. In this regard, Johar's engagement with modernity¹⁰⁷ in relation to the representation of women is important.

5.1.4 Modernity and the Indian/Western dichotomy

Johar's engagement with modernity can be linked to the Indian/Western dichotomy. It has been established that in relation to the role of women in Indian society, there is a clear distinction between the home (spiritual) and the world (public sphere). However, as Redfern & Aune (2010: 159) argue, religious arguments are often used to oppress women across the globe. Religion is closely linked to tradition. Modernity on the other hand, represents a type of disruption to notions of Indianness as well as loyalty to Indian traditions. Many popular Bollywood films reflect social conflicts between tradition and modernity. It is noteworthy that all of Johar's films are overtly faithful to specific representations of religious festivals and notions of cultural identity. As Srivastava (2002: 78-79) argues,

The idea of a unified nation consisting of the construct of public ceremonies, symbols, institutions and discourses is of recent origin. It is paradoxical ... that traditions are used to justify the current social arrangements of a modern nation.

¹⁰⁶ It is interesting that while these films serve as cultural signifiers for Indian diaspora audiences through the representation of Indian Diasporic characters, they are also appealing to non-Indian audiences because they disseminate various aspects of Indian culture through their narratives. As a result, non-Indian audiences learn about Indian culture and are introduced to the various traditions and rituals that are associated with Indian society.

¹⁰⁷ While Indian culture is firmly guarded as a cultural signifier in one sense, depictions of characters such as Anjali in *KKHH*, Poo in *K3G*, and Rhea in *KANK* suggest the creation of new identities that challenge previous stereotypes. These character representations will be discussed within the case studies of the films.

The use of tradition should however, not be seen as paradoxical, but rather as a means of providing a frame of reference for Indian migrants who experience anxiety and loss when they relocate to foreign lands. Cognisant of the historiography of women in India as well as the evolution of Bollywood cinema over the years, Johar's films initiate a new reality in relation to the conflicts between tradition and modernity in relation to the representation of women. However, as Mazumdar & Rao observe, he does not altogether abandon the Indian family's basic character of adhering to traditional patterns of life (Krueger: 2004: 4). According to Krueger (Ibid: 5), the dialectic conflict in perceptions of Western modernity and Indian traditions are emphasised through the heroine's engagement with rituals in Johar's films. More importantly, in line with the views of Redfurne & Aune, Johar's narratives emphasise the need to stop stereotyping emancipated women.

Johar seems to be aware that 'feminism in India has been greatly influenced by feminism in the West' (Kumar: 1989: 20), as well as by the history/legacy of colonialism. As Kaur (2010: 208) observes, 'the belief that popular Indian cinema is removed from reality is misplaced'. Therefore, when constructing female characters, Johar writes *real issues* into the subtext of his films because he is aware that the 'entry of the Indian woman into the Western world or modernity has been mediated through colonialism (Chaudhuri: 2004: xiv, emphasis mine). From this perspective, Johar suggests the re-thinking of older modes of thought in relation to female characters. As Gangoli (2007: 1) remarks,

Indian feminists are always confronted with allegations of being 'Westernized' both from the state and from sections of civil society, as well as by right-wing Hindu fundamentalists as being alienated from the 'Indian' realities of family structures.

The unique representations of female characters in Johar's films create a divide between nationalism and feminism which, according to Chaudhuri (2004: xxi) were always linked. As Chakravorty & Uberoi opine, 'liberalization impacts upon concepts and projections of the Indian woman and in the 1990's and the early 21st century, she is ideally modern, yet moral and chaste' (Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 157). In this regard, an important marker of Western identity that Johar uses in his films is the dress code of female characters. In earlier Bollywood films, the outfits of actresses were historically laden with a 'cultural meaning of nostalgia, tradition, womanhood and nationalism'¹⁰⁸. In contrast to this style of dress is overtly

¹⁰⁸ The sari is the orthodox form of Hindu dress, some temples refusing admission to women not wearing them (Dwyer & Patel, 2002: 87). It is notable, that Johar's version of the sari is modern and fused with Western dress styles.

Western clothing such as short skirts and tight pants, which was represented through the attire of non-Indian women who personified the urban and modern tastes of society. In a sense, as Wilkinson-Weber (2005:138) notes, ‘the temptations and corruptions of anti-Indianness where being Indian meant identifying with, and committing to, constructions of tradition and virtue’. In challenging the notions of associating dress codes with commitment to ‘tradition and virtue’, Johar’s narratives invert the older social codes of ‘purity’ associated with various types of clothing. The Indian/Western dichotomy in relation to the representations of women in the films of Johar will be discussed in detail in the individual case studies.

In the next three sections, Johar’s auteurship will be examined through a detailed analysis of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar: 1998), *Khabi Khushi Khabi Gham* (Johar: 2001), and *Khabie Alvida Na Kehna* (Johar: 2006). Each case study will be presented as follows:

- A brief plot summary will be provided;
- Analysis will be done according to the aspects that are specific to each film’s unique narrative structure;
- The representation of female characters will be examined, taking into consideration feminine perspectives and the influences of transnationalism on female character representations.
- Lastly, findings and conclusions will be presented.

5.2 Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (KKHH)

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998) translates as ‘some things sometimes happen’ and was Johar’s directorial debut film. Even though *KKHH* is set entirely in India, it will be examined as a diasporic film because of the inclusion of two diasporic characters and Johar’s engagement with the Indian/Western dichotomy.

On the surface, *KKHH* appears to be just another diasporic film, following in the footsteps of *DDLJ* (Chopra: 1995), *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Chopra: 1995) and *Pardes* (Ghai: 1997), but Johar’s unique engagement with the third space opens up an area for analysis on various levels. In *KKHH*, tradition is used as a backdrop from which Johar explores notions of culture, modernity and religion. Within this space, Johar engages with notions of cultural identity through the interaction of Hindu and Muslim characters.

5.2.1 Brief Overview

The film deals with themes of love, loss and transformation. Rahul and Anjali are best friends in their final year at St. Xaviers College in Mumbai. Anjali is depicted as a free-spirited, 'tom-boyish' young woman who is 'unfeminine' in dress and mannerism. Her main goal is to defeat her best friend Rahul at basketball and she is more like 'one of the guys' in the sense that she dresses in track pants and T-shirts and enjoys playing sports with her male friends as opposed to socialising with her female friends. The arrival of Tina from Oxford University creates a stir in the college. Tina is the daughter of college Principal Mr. Malhotra and is sexy and ultra- feminine. While Rahul is immediately attracted to her, he simultaneously claims that she is 'not Indian enough' to take home to his mother. Hence, the first engagement with the Indian/Western dichotomy is introduced very early in the film.

Tina is surrounded by the students of St. Xavier College as Rahul challenges her to sing a cultural Indian song in order to 'prove' her 'Indianness'. This, he claims must be done because she has lived in London all her life and therefore may have 'forgotten' her Indian heritage. During this exchange, Rahul mocks Tina's life in London through a contrived imitation of a British accent in order to highlight Tina's alienation from India. In response, Tina surprises everyone by singing *Om Jai Jagdish Hare*, a Hindi prayer well established as a marker of cultural identity. It is only after Tina sings this devotional song that Rahul develops a new-found respect for her as an individual as opposed to his initial sexual attraction to her. The narrative highlights the need to test Indian identity through commitment to religion and understanding of 'Indianness'. As Viridi (2003: 9) has argued, Bollywood films play out utopian ideals. When applied within the context of this particular scene, the insinuation is that Tina can only be considered as 'Indian' enough after she has proven that she is well versed with her religion through the recital of the devotional song. Representations such as these create an almost utopian memory of Indian culture and as Rajadhyaksha (2003:34) has claimed, position Bollywood films as 'keepers of the flame'. On the one hand, there is a shift towards modernity which is represented by the main characters in *KKHH* who sport well-known and trendy Western-branded clothing. On the other hand, the narratives of this film, 'constantly reinforce the need to remember traditions in foreign lands' (Kaur: 2002: 202). This idea is stressed through Rahul's constant references to the notion of the 'ideal' woman

who must dress in cultural Indian clothing¹⁰⁹. It is only after Tina ‘fits in’ with his image of a girl who is suitable to ‘take home’ to his mother that Rahul decides to marry her.

When Anjali realizes that she is in love with Rahul, she leaves the college heartbroken, without disclosing her feelings to him. However, Tina dies soon after giving birth to a daughter and it is revealed that she was warned about the risk of carrying a child to full term due to various complications. Of her own accord, Tina keeps this information to herself and carries her child to full term because she knows how much her husband Rahul wants a child. She sacrifices her life in order to give her husband the gift of a child. Before she dies, she asks Rahul to name their daughter Anjali. In a touching scene between Tina and her mother-in-law (Dadi¹¹⁰), Tina entrusts the older woman with eight letters for her daughter to read, one on each birthday. Hence, the young Anjali is destined to be raised by Rahul and Dadi (Rahul’s mother).

The film then cuts to eight years later when the young Anjali reads the eighth and final letter on her birthday. The letter gives the young Anjali detailed information about the relationship between her father and his best friend - Anjali. In the letter, Tina asks her daughter to re-unite her father with the friend who loved him and who will ‘complete’ him in return. However, the older Anjali is now engaged to Aman, a diasporic character from London. The young Anjali then conspires with Dadi and her maternal grandfather Mr. Malhotra to re-unite her father with the other Anjali. In the end, Rahul and Anjali are married, but only after Anjali’s fiancé Aman graciously steps aside and gives them his blessing.

5.2.2 Religion and tradition

Religious traditions and rituals in Johar’s films establish a Hindu/ Indian identity. The temple is established as a place of worship and Rahul admits to visiting it every Tuesday because he has been told by his father that a man should bow his head before three women, his mother,

¹⁰⁹ While both Anjali and Tina wear Western clothing after marriage, Tina is seen wearing salwaar-khameez (traditional Indian-style pants with a long top and a scarf draped loosely around the neck) and saris. Dwyer & Patel (2002:87) also note that in recent films, even though the heroine wears Western clothing before marriage, she wears salwaar-khameez and saris after marriage.

¹¹⁰ ‘Dadi’ is the respectful name used by grandchildren to address their paternal grandmothers in Indian culture. In KKH Anjali’s grandmother is referred to as ‘Dadi’ by all.

*Durga Ma*¹¹¹, and his wife. The importance of the prayer *Om jai Jagdish Hare* is first seen through its use as a ‘test’ of cultural authenticity for Tina when she arrives from London and later as a daily practice in the home when Rahul and Anjali sit beside Dadi as they pray.

The Hindu religion is further perpetuated through Dadi when she is seated on the floor surrounded by a group of women as she teaches them the importance of the *Gayatri Mantra*¹¹². The reference to modernity and a break from cultural practices is demonstrated when one of the women admits to having forgotten how to recite this auspicious prayer. In the midst of Dadi’s discussion with the woman during the prayer session, the young Anjali bursts into the room and confronts her grandmother, “Why do you look so sexy today?” Dadi replies, “Who taught you to ask me that?”

Anjali proudly announces, “Papa”.

In the background, a well-groomed and playful Rahul is seen going up the stairs to his bedroom. This scene illustrates the shift in relationships between different female generations. In earlier films, the young Anjali would not have been able to interact so playfully and openly with her grandmother. Even though Dadi is invested on retaining her culture through her initiative of organising a prayer group, she does not at any point insist that Anjali be a part of it. Instead she allows her granddaughter the freedom to develop her own interests which include enjoying the activities at the summer camp that she attends as well as fulfilling her dream of practicing to be a talk show host one day.

There is however, a strong emphasis on retaining culture as depicted through the character of Dadi. This is illustrated through her prayer rituals and the manner in which she uses her spare time to educate younger generations of women on the importance of religion through traditional practices such as reciting the *Gayatri Mantra*. Within this space, there is also an influence of modernity in the outcry of the woman who has forgotten this religious text. Nevertheless, through the diverse representations of both tradition and modernity, various

¹¹¹ Durga, known as Ma Durga or Durga Ma is a goddess in Hindu mythology and is worshipped as the supreme power of God.

¹¹² The Gayatri Mantra is a revered Hindu religious text that is addressed to God and should ideally be recited at sunrise and sunset.

Hindu traditions are foregrounded within the narrative such as the importance of prayer, the Hindu wedding ritual of *phere*¹¹³ and the practice of cremating the deceased.

Malhotra and Alagh (2004) have noted that many films with diasporic characters from the 1990s onwards often conflate Indian identity with the practice of Hinduism, and in doing so, alternately erase or marginalise other religious identities. In *KKHH*, Johar does explore the various traditions and rituals of Hinduism. However, in doing so, he does not necessarily place Hinduism as being above any other religion. Instead, Johar constructs trusting and loyal relationships between Hindu/Muslim characters. As Madhava Prasad argues:

Films produced post-1990, ***have produced yet another variation of the nationalist ideology of tradition and modernity***, and, most interestingly, they have relocated what we might call the seismic centre of Indian national identity somewhere in Anglo-America. (Bhattacharjya: 2009:58, emphasis mine)

According to Malhotra and Alagh (2004: 20), in many Bollywood films, the diversity, multiplicity and secular constructions of Indian identity are being systematically narrowed into monolithic portrayals of rich, Hindu, and patriarchal cultural identity. It is this cultural conflation that marginalises and often erases the experiences of religious minorities and the poor who do not fit this constructed norm. This is clearly not the case in *KKHH* and the universality or open structure of the narrative is highlighted through the Muslim character of Rifat Bi. Contrary to the claims of Malhotra & Alagh (2004) about the manner in which popular domestic dramas attempt to ‘erase’ the experiences of religious minorities, in *KKHH*, Johar posits Rifat Bi as a strong spiritual character who assists Mr. Malhotra and Dadi in reuniting Rahul and Anjali. Islam is not presented in a negative light, nor is the Muslim character marginalised. This is illustrated below.

The younger Anjali, after receiving her last birthday letter when she turns eight, has been instructed by her deceased mother to bring her father’s childhood friend Anjali into his life again. She enlists the aid of her maternal grandfather (Mr. Malhotra) and Dadi. They visit Rifat Bi in order to find out where the older Anjali now resides. When they arrive at her

¹¹³ In a traditional Hindu marriage, the ‘*phere*’ are the rounds that are taken around a holy fire place by the bride and groom together. Seven rounds are taken and each round symbolises a certain promise. *Phere* refers to the 7 circumambulations that the bride and groom make around the sacred wedding fire which signifies their souls becoming one (Selwyn: 1979: 686).

house, they wait patiently, because she is busy praying *namaaz*¹¹⁴. This immediately strengthens the notion of respect between Muslims and Hindus. When Rifat Bi completes her prayer, she explains to them that Anjali is already engaged to be married. The younger Anjali cannot bring herself to accept this and while the elders are speaking, she puts on Rifat Bi's burkha¹¹⁵ and sits down on the prayer mat in the exact manner that the older woman was seated and lifts her hands up to make *dua*¹¹⁶, copying Rifat Bi's pose when they came in.

Muslim audiences who are fiercely patriotic to their religious beliefs may find the idea of a person of Hindu faith sitting down on a prayer mat and mimicking the act of making *dua* in a typically Muslim manner very offensive. Similarly, Hindu audiences may not be open to the idea of a Hindu child imitating a Muslim woman in prayer. In this scene, Anjali prays fiercely and all three adults, Mr. Malhotra, Dadi and Rifat Bi are stunned to see this young child engaged in making *dua*. It is pertinent that at no point, do any of the adults stop her from sitting down and offering prayers as a Muslim, even though she is of Hindu faith. Furthermore, the narrative firmly posits Dadi as a 'staunch' Hindu character and Rifat Bi as a staunch Muslim character. However, the loving gaze of the three elder characters in the scene and their acceptance of this act suggest harmony despite religious and cultural differences. Through this brief scene, Johar subtly demonstrates the idea of the universality of supplication.

Rifat Bi's phone then suddenly rings and she is informed that the older Anjali cannot be married before December based on the readings of the family astrologer. Interestingly, the astrologer's struggle to set a definitive wedding date for Aman and Anjali takes place at the exact moment that Anjali is engaged in making *dua*. It is the narrative structure of the film that allows for the timeous phone call that interrupts the flow of events. Whether this is coincidental or a result of the child's prayer is left to the audience's imagination. However, through Rifat Bi's dialogue ("I had always heard about the miracles of *Allah*, but today I am

¹¹⁴ Muslims pray five times a day as part of their religious beliefs. Namaaz is the term used to describe these prayers which are always offered by sitting on top of a prayer mat on the floor.

¹¹⁵ '*burkha*' is a large scarf designed to cover the head and falls loosely over the bosom). While many Muslim women wear this scarf as part of their daily attire, others wear it only when praying.

¹¹⁶ *Dua* is an act of supplication offered by Muslims at the end of every prayer in which they bring both hands together and raise them to be in line with their chest as they 'ask' Allah for their deepest desires and submit themselves to his will simultaneously.

witnessing the power of a child's prayer" - translated), the idea of miracles can be associated with the element of myth. Within this specific context, the element of myth, or 'miracle of Allah' as Rifat Bi exclaims, is represented by the coincidental/timeous phone call through which Rifat Bi is informed that the wedding is postponed. Since this interruption takes place in the midst of religious/cultural practices such as praying namaaz and then fiercely making dua, myth, religion and cultural practices are juxtaposed. This in turn, raises questions about the relevance of strict adherence to practices such as making life decisions based on numerological¹¹⁷ readings.

The use of mythology and the element of the supernatural are common fare within the popular fairy tale genre and are often seen in Bollywood films. Similar to the narratives of fairy tales, Bollywood films also engage with elements of the mystical and happily-ever-after endings. The Hinduisation of Indian identity, as forwarded by Malhotra and Alagh (2004) is questioned in this scene. The young Anjali, who is seated beside her father and Dadi while they recite *Om Jai Jagdish Hare* as they pray for her deceased mother, looks equally comfortable seated on a prayer mat with her hands raised as she makes *dua*. Through these prayer rituals, the homeland (India) is celebrated and constantly remembered. In addition, Johar's narrative structure conflates the religions of Islam and Hinduism through the representation of little Anjali. As Thussu observes,

India has a long tradition of a composite culture; and with a few exceptions, mainstream Bollywood cinema has projected a positive picture of Islam. (Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008: 111)

In line with this sentiment, it is clear that Johar's narrative is focused on promoting harmony through religious and cultural practices. More specifically, the scene does not marginalise Islam in any manner. In using the character of a child (Anjali) as a pivotal figure within this scene, he creates a sense of impartiality with regard to religion. A correlation is drawn between the purity of the child in relation to the perception of religion. Anjali clearly sees no difference between her own and Rifat Bi's religious rituals. From this perspective, Anjali (the innocent/pure child) serves as a metaphor for peace. As a result the scene is governed by the innocence of the child and her intense desire to fill the void of a deceased mother's love. This takes precedence over all else. Religion then, is side-stepped in favour of the attainment of

¹¹⁷ Numerology is a practice that many Hindu's believe in. Before they get married, they call upon an astrologer to 'read' their future and set a date for their wedding that will be auspicious. In this case it is the date for the wedding of Anjali and her fiancé, Aman and in Hindu culture; this is called the "kundali match".

the final goal, which is to unite Rahul with Anjali so that the young child can have the stability of a traditional mother/father/child family structure. Love will conquer everything. The centrality of love within the narrative is an important factor because it allows for the re-definition of past beliefs which were based on ancient traditional norms. In *KKHH*, culture is thus laced with notions of modernity.

5.2.3 Culture and modernity

While the need to adhere to cultural norms and practices in *KKHH* are emphasised, they are simultaneously questioned. There is no doubt that through the death of Tina, *KKHH* subtly references the sacrifices made by the mythical Sita from the Hindu epic Ramayana. According to Chakravorty, the construction of the Indian nation as represented by popular Bollywood cinema draws upon myth and history (Gooptu: 2011: 768). Even though these references are cloaked by modernity, and the text is layered, the narratives of Johar's films are laced with notions of loyalty to this myth as well as older mythologies of India.

Throughout the narrative, Johar reconstructs familiar situations and then carefully plants subtle seeds of change within previous constructs. He implements this technique through Rahul's character. Rahul's dress code is not Indian at all. Instead, he projects a "John Travolta" style image in terms of dress and proudly wears a chain with the letters c-o-o-l around his neck. Interestingly, he secretly¹¹⁸ visits the temple regularly and confesses to only marrying a woman who is suitable to 'take home to his mother'. The 'imaginary' paradigm within which Rahul bases his romantic pursuits is based on the notion of a specific cultural ethnic and national identity promoted by Indian nationalists (Handa as quoted in Prince & Silva-Wayne, 2004: 172). According to this belief-system women who were perceived as being *westernised* were accused of attempting to annihilate their *correct* Indian identity and spirituality (Chatterjee: 1993: 121, emphasis mine).

Within the context of *KKHH*, Tina proves that the 'imaginary' paradigm constructed by Indian nationalists is incorrect. As the film progresses, she not only becomes a loving wife, but she even sacrifices her life so that she can give her husband the gift of a child. It is of relevance that Tina sacrifices her life out of love and not as a compulsory deed that would

¹¹⁸ When Rahul accidentally meets Tina at the temple, he swears her to secrecy. The reason, he explains, is that 'cool' guys should not be seen at places like the temple.

have deemed her an 'ideal' woman according to ancient Indian ideology. In the opening scene of the film, Rahul stands alongside the burning pyre of his wife's body. Through a series of flashbacks, the audience becomes aware of Tina's sacrifice. In keeping with the ideologies of ancient India, she 'chooses' to sacrifice her life so that her husband can become a father. Johar's narrative depicts this sacrifice swiftly at the beginning of the film. Since Rahul is unaware that his wife might die during child-birth, he is absolved from any blame. Simultaneously, Tina is depicted as a modern woman who is happy and in love as opposed to being oppressed and victimised as was the plight of women in ancient India. As a result of this representation, the Indian/Western dichotomy according to which the West is always seen to be a negative influence on Indian traditions is dismantled.

Modernity is also perpetuated into the narrative through the use of contemporary song and dance routines in the film. For example, the first item in the film takes place at St. Xavier's College and is similar to the song *Summer Days* from the musical *Grease* (Kleiser: 1978). Rahul's movements and the sleeking back of his hair with a comb is very similar to the character played by John Travolta in the musical, *Grease*. In contrast, Anjali is bold and playful, while Olivia Newton John's character was much more feminine and reserved. By drawing from films such as *Grease* and thereby incorporating and integrating ideas from the West into Bollywood narratives, Johar's films break away from the format of being exclusively 'patriotically' Indian. However, at the same time, they are not 'patriotically' Western either.

The song that is played while Rahul rushes to his daughter's camp is also of relevance with regard to the re-definition of past notions of culture and modernity. This is because the lyrics and the enactment of the song function on multiple levels. Firstly, the song *Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram* was a favourite prayer of Mahatma Gandhi (Malhotra & Alagh: 2004: 22). The Indian flag is raised at the beginning of this song/prayer and the portrait of Queen Elizabeth is replaced with a portrait of *Durga Ma*. This enactment is reminiscent of the British conquest of India. The switching of portraits can be viewed as a suggestion that eventually, India triumphed over colonial structures. In a sense the portraits are metaphorical objects that bear testimony to the political history of India. Thereafter, the song is inter-cut between Rahul's journey to the summer camp with a young 'hippie' group of people travelling in a truck and the beginning of a prayer ritual at the camp in which both the old and young Anjali are present.

Through the song sequence, Johar abolishes the notion of the 'West' as immoral by portraying the 'hippie group' as good Samaritans who are happy to give Rahul a lift to his destination. In the past, 'westernized hippie groups' were perceived as being problematic drug addicts and amoral individuals (Malhotra & Alagh: 2004: 23). Through the representation of harmonious song in which the 'hippie group' lovingly embrace Rahul into their fold and assist him in his time of need, Johar challenges the notion of the West always being perceived as negative.

Simultaneously, the older Anjali, seated on the floor praying with the camp children, sings, *IshwarAllah Tero Naam*¹¹⁹. This is relevant because by referring to God through two religions in one phrase, the essence of one universal God is suggested. Hinduism and Islam are thus conflated through the interrelation of words within a single phrase in the lyrics of the song. It is however interesting, that the main focus of the song is on the Hindu religion. This is established through the authentic manner in which Anjali performs the prayer ritual, seated on the floor looking up at the statues of the Hindu Gods with her hands together. She is joined by Dadi, the young Anjali and the children of the camp. The modern beats of the song coupled with the swift inter-cuts contribute to the idea of diversity that is perpetuated through the lyrics. Through this strategy, even though Johar's narratives are constructed within a 'Hindu space', a third space of reflection is opened up by the lyrics of the song. This could be the reason why *KKHH* was the top grossing foreign-language film in the UK (Rajadhyaksha: 2008: 18).

In this case the global audience includes the Indian diaspora who are living in the West while trying to retain some sense of the culture that they 'imagine' they should uphold. In relation to their sentiments about life in the West, Kabir relates, 'I can have everything offered by modernisation and still hold onto family values and tradition at the same time' (Hirji: 1999: 95). While Kabir's observation is correct, it is also important to understand that regardless of the interspersion of tradition, culture and modernity, memories of colonisation also exist within the psyches of Indians. Johar deals with these memories through representations of characters such as Mr. Almeida and Ms. Briganza.

¹¹⁹*Ishwar Allah Tero Naam* is directly translated as "God, God, your name." Hindus refer to God as Ishwar and Muslims refer to God as Allah.

5.2.4 Memories of a colonial past

Both Mr. Almeida and Ms. Briganza represent characters who struggle with the projection of their inherent Indian identity (Malhotra & Alagh: 2004:19). Johar constructs Mr. Almeida as a comical Indian Christian character who is portrayed as being ridiculous in his longing for a colonial past (Malhotra & Alagh: 2004: 23). This is illustrated in the scene when Dadi insists on replacing the portrait of the Queen with one of a Hindu goddess. It is interesting that Mr. Almeida allows Dadi to discipline him while feigning a confused allegiance to the idea of the Queen's portrait being taken down.

His allegiance is confusing because he does not at any point stop Dadi from switching the portraits. At the same time, he professes that he 'loves England' and also proudly tells everyone that his father was a 'tailor of the British people'. His dress is also western and he wears a Union Jack T-shirt. Nevertheless, as the film progresses, Mr. Almeida falls in line with Dadi's prayer rituals and does not stop her from integrating Indian cultural prayer rituals at the camp. He is often seen taking part in the older woman's ritual performances and by observing his body language it becomes evident that he seems to be content to be guided by Dadi. Through the colourful interactions between Dadi and Mr. Almeida, the differences between colonial and post-colonial identity are highlighted. Dadi continuously attempts to show Mr. Almeida the error of his ways, namely, his affiliation to Britain.

Post-colonial anxiety is further highlighted through the character of Ms. Briganza, a teacher who is portrayed as being overtly sensual and flirtatious. Her contrived accent and demeanour locate her as almost 'unredeemable in a negative sense'. As Gangoli (2005:159) notes, both Mr. Almeida and Ms. Briganza are depicted as 'Anglo-Indian' and it is this characterisation that makes them figures of ridicule. Their 'ridiculous behaviour' could be affected by the anxiety experienced as a result of colonial processes. In this particular context, anxiety can be associated with the effects of colonialism as a result of which many Indians were made to feel inferior. In order to overcome these feelings, they felt that they needed to project a 'westernised' demeanour. This resulted in them trying to adapt to western dress codes as well as speaking with refined accents so that they would not be seen to be inferior. They believed that these behaviours elevated them to be on par with the mannerisms of the dominant pervading culture.

In comparison to Tina who demonstrates that she is both Indian and Western, Ms. Briganza consciously makes an effort to project a Western demeanour which is evident in her dress code and her contrived imitation of an Anglo-American accent. Johar's representation of both Mr. Almeida and Ms. Briganza thus highlights the effects of colonialism that seem to become embedded within the psyches of individuals. Johar also draws upon memories of the past through the representation of Dadi.

In line with Gandhian principles, Dadi is patriotically and traditionally Indian. She expresses a nurturing instinct towards both, her son and granddaughter. Her free-spirited nature is reflected when she accompanies and assists the young Anjali with her matchmaking plan. Once at the camp, she urges Mr. Almeida to be more 'Indian' and more religious. Dadi is always dressed in white because she is a widow¹²⁰. Based on her attire, one would expect Dadi to be more subdued as her dress code symbolises submission. It is therefore surprising to note that despite her seemingly traditional behaviour, especially as illustrated through the white clothing that she wears, she is not subjugated at all. She playfully sets out to find a wife for Rahul with her granddaughter.

As Hansen notes, a part of *KKHH*'s success was due to the 'supposedly' Indian form of modernity that many audiences identified with (Kaur & Sinha: 2005:250). Johar's engagement with modernity, especially in relation to the heroines in his films will be discussed further below.

5.2.5 The Representation of Female Characters

Johar's portrayal of the two heroines as antithesis to each other is a technique that he has constantly maintained in the three films selected for analysis in this study. In this section, the representations of the two heroines, Tina and Anjali will be discussed, specifically examining feminist perspectives of the character depictions. Discussion regarding the depiction of other female characters in the film will also be provided.

¹²⁰ In ancient India, widows were subjected to the practice of *sati*. The women who were spared from ascending onto the funeral pyres of their dead husbands were forced to wear white clothing as a symbol of their fate.

Anjali Sharma

Anjali is portrayed as a 'tom-boy' who is oblivious to the need to present herself as a traditional, feminine woman. She wears branded track suits and plays basketball with the boys. Her persona is in fact anti-feminine. It is interesting to note that despite being born Indian, Anjali is not presented as being 'Indian' at all. Neither the students nor the principal seem to have a problem with her persona as she jumps around the field playing basketball with Rahul and the other males at the college. Ideally, according to Indian belief-systems, a girl who attains a marriageable age should have been standing over a hot stove cooking and keeping house for the males in the household until a prospective suitor comes along. Essentially, Anjali's personality/behaviour is depicted in stark opposition to the demeanour that is expected of 'respectful' Indian girls according to Marathi literature in ancient Indian society¹²¹.

The change in the expected behaviour of a young Indian woman is established with ease by Johar as he sets Anjali up from the very beginning as a raucous individual without much femininity. She shares a deep, uninhibited relationship with Rahul and when in close proximity with him, does not hesitate to ruffle his hair or touch him. There is seemingly no sexual attraction between the two of them and they seem to be platonic friends. At no point in the first half of the film does Rahul consider Anjali romantically.

When Anjali realises that she is in love with Rahul, she tries to win his affections by mimicking Tina's feminine mannerisms and style of dress. Even though Anjali is thus at first secure in her mannerisms and style of dress, she is stunned when she realises that Rahul is attracted to Tina because of her femininity. In an attempt to get his attention, she tries to 'feminise' herself by putting on make-up and dressing as she says, 'like Tina'. However, because this is not in keeping with her personality, she is unable to carry herself in Tina's style of dress and as a result is ridiculed by her fellow students. Through this scene, Johar highlights the tendency of the gender stereotype of the Indian woman needing to 'please' the male. Simultaneously, the importance of self-identity is emphasised through the 'ridiculous' portrayal of Anjali as a 'feminine' woman as opposed to her true identity as a 'tomboy'.

¹²¹ The position and role of women in India as described in a verse from Marathi literature has been discussed in Chapter three.

While highlighting the need to change, Johar also illustrates the effect of a change that is unnatural.

In the second half of the film, Anjali is transformed from a 'tomboy' to a version that is more in line with an 'ideal'¹²² Hindu woman. She wears silky saris', her hair is long and she is always adorned with Indian jewellery. This portrayal of Anjali seems to have taken place as a process of evolution, for she is clearly depicted as comfortable in her appearance and new 'look'. It is during this time that she is also engaged to Aman. While Anjali honours the various traditions and rituals that take place during her engagement to Aman, he merely goes through the motions.

In a scene with his future mother-in-law, he says he won't leave Anjali's side 'until we do those circles ...you know, what do you call ... take place?

In response, his mother-in-law replies, "Phere."

'Ya, that.'" He answers casually.

This exchange takes place in a relaxed manner as both mother-in-law and son-in-law are browsing through the engagement album of Aman and Anjali. The significance of the sacred *phere* is simply treated by Aman as a set of motions that he must go through so that he may continue with his life. According to Mishra (2002: 260),

The diaspora (and presumed narratives about them) function as the ideal space for the Indian spectator as well. It is not that the diaspora is always at the centre of the narrative, but the experience of it functions as a site where, against all odds, Indian values are triumphantly maintained.

In this particular scene, it is clear that Aman does not feel the need to conform to cultural Indian traditions. Yet, because of his Indian genealogy, he does understand their importance in relation to the norms of Indian culture. The manner in which the Indian values are 'triumphantly maintained' is thus questionable. It seems as if he is simply honouring these traditions on a superficial level. He is not invested in the belief-systems that the rest of the family follow. Aman's future mother-in-law's quick grasp of his 'mockery' of the wedding

¹²² The 'ideal' Hindu woman is represented in Bollywood films through her attire. The sari and the adornment of jewelry are both laden with cultural meanings of tradition, womanhood and nationalism (Dwyer & Patel, 2002: 87).

ritual underpins Johar's engagement with questions about tradition and adherence to culture through the representation of diasporic characters.

There are many other Bollywood films that use diasporic characters to highlight the need to 'maintain Indian values' against all odds¹²³. Johar deviates from this type of stereotypical representational strategy. Instead, he employs a unique style that acknowledges tradition, but then immediately interrogates its relevance. This style of engagement or 'interrogation' of tradition is one that runs throughout the film.

In another scene, Aman expresses his disinterest in waiting for the astrologer to decide which day is suitable for their wedding. Anjali, on the other hand conforms to these traditions and he goes along with her, even though he does so out of a sense of obligation and not as a follower of tradition. It is apparent that he simply goes through the physical actions in order to appease the extended family. The negative aspects of being rooted to differing cultural practices are also highlighted in the two *Munna Bhai* (Hirani: 2003, 2006) films together with the promotion of Gandhian principles. Johar also makes subtle references to Gandhian principles in *KKHH*. The difference in his representation is that his references are carefully etched into the scenes as subtexts as opposed to the open mantra of Gandhian ideologies presented in *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Hirani: 2006).

According to Gandhian principles, the model of the ideal role model for women was to be found in mythological figures like Sita and Draupadi, goddesses who embodied traditional values of wifehood, motherhood and domesticity (Katrak In Parker et al.: 1992: 396-7). It is interesting then, that in the first half of the film when Anjali is depicted as a 'tomboy', Rahul does not notice her as a woman who could be considered 'marriage-material'. It is only after she has been transformed into a 'feminine' woman that he considers the idea of marrying her. It is also notable that Rahul's mother gives him her blessing when she sees the older Anjali interact with the younger Anjali and 'proves' her worth as a prospective bride and mother-figure. The subtext of *KKHH* reinforces a certain male perspective which foregrounds the idea that a female character must inevitably go through a process of transformation (feminisation) before she can be 'noticed' by the male.

¹²³ It is notable that many Diasporic Bollywood films such as *HANK* and *PARDES* highlight the maintenance of Indian values above all else and faithfully promote the notion of Indianness.

Tina Malhotra

Tina is portrayed as seductively feminine. In the past, female characters who dressed like Tina in miniskirts and 'Western' clothing would have been characterised as 'vamps'. However, even though Tina is depicted as Western in terms of dress, the notion of her being a vamp is challenged in the film. Gangoli states,

The globalized Indian remains Hindu, and the ideal woman combines the sensuality of the vamp that has always been seen as a western characteristic with the chastity of the wife figure. (Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 161)

Within the context of *KKHH* while Tina seems to assume the persona of the vamp figure, she inherently embodies the virtues of an 'ideal' woman. As Gangoli argues, even though she is not depicted as traditionally Indian according to Johar's innovative dress codes, she is not condemned because aspects of her affiliation to notions of Indianness are prevalent through her characterisation. Transnationalism allows for the re-definition of past ideologies, especially in relation to the manner in which women dress. Rahul is attracted to Tina from the very beginning of the film. Her style of dressing is very 'polished' in terms of Western fashion aesthetics. She stands out from other female students at St. Xaviers College because her clothing is much more revealing and provocative than theirs. Interestingly, the other Indian students are not necessarily overtly Indian in their dress codes at all. However, when Tina arrives, her style of dress is highlighted, not because it is vastly different from the other students, but because she is perceived as the 'immoral other'.

Tina is portrayed as both Western and Indian and it is this duality that the male protagonist Rahul is attracted to. Her dual nature is evident in her understanding of 'symbols' which is illustrated when she puts on the 'friendship' band that Rahul gives her as soon as she realises its significance to him. When she holds up her hand to show him the band tied around her wrist, he is clearly pleased and while her adherence to the importance of symbols is highlighted, the need for a woman to 'please' her man is also accentuated.

The band that she wears is reminiscent of the traditional '*raakhee- bandan*',¹²⁴ ceremony and serves as a metaphor for tradition. Within the same scene, she is dressed in a mini dress and

¹²⁴ In Hindu culture, once a year, a sister ties a 'raakhee', or colourful band around the wrist of her brother as a token of their relationship. In return, the brother gives her a gift. The 'raakhee' is not necessarily tied around a blood brother's wrist. Very often, females who consider men to be like their brothers are also honoured with this band. In this case, Johar has replaced the brother-sister relationship with a friendship band. In doing so, he keeps the notion of tradition alive.

comes onto the stage playing a guitar. Rahul is clearly consumed by her presence, but almost immediately, the guitar is slung around his shoulder and Tina and Anjali dance alongside him as he assumes the role of the lead performer in the song sequence. Kaur & Sinha (2005: 160) comment on Nandy's views regarding the image of women in relation to modernity:

Modernization includes the divided image of a woman that has at its basis a fractured concept of femininity which is similar to the fractured image of the world: the old and the new, the good and the bad.

The adherence to and understanding of important traditions within the context of Indian culture are juxtaposed with a choice of dress and mannerisms that are non-Indian. In this instance, the guitar represents a move toward modernity. If read in relation to Johar's construction of narratives that are written in *media res*, the image of a woman standing up and taking the lead in performing on stage is far-removed from the image of a woman who is confined to solely attending to the needs of her family and looking up to her husband as though he were a God. This representation thus suggests that it is possible for old and new images to be combined.

The differences highlighted by the consciously constructed appearances of Tina and Anjali question the notions about the physical appearance of the 'ideal' Indian woman that have been forwarded by various scholars (Chatterjee: 1993; Viridi: 2003; Gangoli: 2004). In *KKHH*, even though Tina's attire is archetypally 'vampish', she also embodies the role of the 'ideal' woman. This is made possible by the initiation of new realities in diasporic films. Nevertheless, while Johar negotiates with cultural values and norms through his narratives, he remains faithful to certain structures of representation in terms of loyalty to Indian belief-systems.

For example, Tina is at first introduced as the westernised, sexy and ultra-feminine woman. There is an aura of mystery and uncertainty surrounding her because she was raised in London. At the very beginning, Rahul makes his stance clear when he tells his friends that she is not Indian enough to take home to his mother. He only considers marrying her after she proves herself worthy of him by singing the devotional song. Even after her death, she fulfils her obligations to him as his wife through the series of letters which she leaves for their daughter Anjali. This reinforces Gandhian principles according to which it is necessary for women to be committed to their sacrificial nature (Parker et. al: 1992: 398). Tina thus

becomes the embodiment of the virtuous goddess Sita in her decision to sacrifice her life for the sake of her husband.

The visual representations of both Tina and Anjali force one to draw immediate comparisons between the two characters. Yet, even though they are dissimilar in every way, they both prove to be quintessentially 'ideal' wives. In a sense, both women undergo transformation. Tina abandons the mini skirt after marriage and wears *salwaar khamis* and *saris*. Anjali, even though she has grown up in India, is not all Indian. Both her mannerisms and style of dress can be classified as 'Western'. However, before she can even be noticed by Rahul, her persona and appearance must undergo a radical transformation. It must be noted that Rahul only notices her as a prospective bride when this transformation has taken place fully as opposed to when it only took place on a superficial level in the beginning of the film.

Dadi

Dadi is an archetypal grandmother who is committed to her son and granddaughter. She has been widowed and has no ambitions or desires of her own except to care for her granddaughter and to try and find a suitable stepmother for her, as well as a wife for her son. She spends her spare time 'educating' younger women on the merits of prayer. She is the embodiment of women from colonial times in terms of appearance and her unflinching devotion and loyalty to her son and granddaughter. In colonial times, the woman's primary and only duty was to care for her family. At the same time, she was expected to be subservient and self-sacrificial in order to be deemed an 'ideal' woman. This notion was further extended through the practice of *sati*.

In *KKHH*, while Dadi is devoted to her family (son and granddaughter), she is also a widow. However, while Johar's narrative does not address this facet of her life, Dadi does dress in white throughout the film. Through the use of this dress code, Johar subtly reminds the audience of the past fate of widows. A new reality for Indian widowhood is thus projected through the character of Dadi. Even though she adheres to the dress code of widows in ancient times, she is not inherently unhappy. Instead, she is content to teach religious rituals to younger women and shares an endearing relationship with her family. In contrast to the fate of widows in the past, she does not live on leftover food and she is clearly not blamed for the death of her husband.

It is interesting to note Dadi's relationship with her daughter-in-law Tina which is based on trust and respect. This is highlighted in the scene in the hospital when Tina hands her baby over to Dadi and entrusts the older woman with the letters that she leaves for her daughter. In previous Bollywood films a great deal of conflict and tension in the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law was depicted. Dadi's relationship with her granddaughter Anjali is also refreshing. This is demonstrated in the scene when the young Anjali sets out with Dadi to visit the Summer Camp where they plan to set up a meeting between the older Anjali and Rahul. The older woman's willingness to 'play' matchmaker is colourfully represented in the film and the scenes between grandmother and granddaughter are endearing.

Ms. Briganza

The tension that exists between the West and India is highlighted through the character of Ms. Briganza. Ms. Briganza's 'acting out' is reminiscent of a deep-rooted colonial anxiety. This anxiety dates back to the processes of colonisation during which many Indian women experienced a loss of identity. As has been established, one of the key agendas of the nationalist project included keeping women in the domestic sphere. Within the context of *KKHH*, Ms. Briganza is depicted as a woman who has stepped out of the domestic sphere and into the outer domain. She therefore struggles with the projection of her identity and in trying to 'fit into' the outer domain which was previously forbidden to her, she emulates a 'western' accent and mimics a 'western' style of dress. It seems as if her insecurity compels her to adopt 'western' characteristics, in order to feel less inferior. Since these characteristics are not an inherent part of her persona, they come across as superficial and contrived.

As both Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (2000) have argued, the influences of the past cannot be erased. Therefore, in trying to emulate a 'Western' accent and mimicking a 'Western' style of dress, Ms. Briganza is posited as a character that is insecure and needs to adopt 'Western' characteristics in order to feel 'superior'. These are the effects created by the legacy of colonisation. This idea is further explored through her interactions with school Principal Mr. Malhotra. In various scenes throughout the film she is depicted as overtly flirtatious.

While on the one hand Johar 'mocks' this character by portraying her, as Gangoli (2005:159) notes, 'as an irredeemable figure of ridicule', he simultaneously highlights the effects of post-

coloniality in relation to the challenges that Indian women deal with when they make the transition from the private to the public sphere. In relation to the notion of *media res* (as Johar navigates from past to present norms within the context of the narrative), many Indian women, both in India as well as those women who are settled across the globe as members of Indian diasporic communities, will identify with this representation.

Rifat Bi

Rifat Bi is the loyal ‘den mother’ of St. Xaviers College’s girls’ dormitory and is always advising the older Anjali on how to be more feminine. She thus serves as a mother-figure to Anjali. Rifat Bi is a Muslim woman who constantly references *Allah*¹²⁵ in her dialogues and is depicted as a nurturing and caring individual. Even though she is depicted as traditional in her sense of dress, her mannerisms and her personal ideas about gender relations¹²⁶, she appears to be living life on her own terms. In other words, she is not living under any form of patriarchal hierarchy.

She is dedicated to guiding the young students who she refers to as her progeny into finding male companionship. Even though her views on male/female relationships are reminiscent of a bygone era, she is content within herself. While she plays a small part in the film, her character is important. Through brief scenes in the film, Rifat Bi’s pivotal role as a Muslim woman and the manner in which she interacts with people of Hindu faith, conflates both religions in the sense that it erases differences.

5.2.6 Concluding thoughts

Through the representation of female protagonists Anjali and Tina, Johar challenges the notion of emancipated women not being religious. Even though both women are emancipated in their own way, neither one of them overtly petitions an unflinching devotion to either religion or the Indian state. While Anjali is content with her sense of self as a ‘tom-boy’, Tina is equally content with her sense of self as a ‘sultry’ woman.

¹²⁵ Muslims refer to the Almighty as *Allah*.

¹²⁶ In one scene, Rifat Bi is advising the female students on how to ‘win’ a man over. She speaks of using feminine wiles and superficial beauty in order to attract the attention of males. She believes that the male species is weak when confronted with the beauty of females.

Within the film's narrative, both women are projected as religious and the act of worship is represented as a natural part of each of their lives. Despite their differing personalities and opposing characteristics, both women attend to prayer rituals regularly. In light of these behaviours, it is safe to contend that religion and prayer should not just simply be associated with tradition and modernity. There is no logic in fearing, as the project of nationalism maintains, that independent women will abandon their religious values or traditions. This is simply a myth that has invaded society based on a construct that was created without any factual foundation. Johar's depiction of female protagonists within the narrative of *KKHH* supports this statement.

In relation to their domestic lives, both Anjali and Tina are not inclined to surrender to the idea of marriage. It is only after they realise that they are in love with Rahul that there is a suggestion of marriage. It is interesting that love and romance take place spontaneously, there are no family impositions on the women to get married to suitors 'selected' for them as was the case in older Bollywood films. Through the construction of this particular narrative structure in *media res*, Johar sidesteps the patriarchal influence that is often prevalent in Indian families in relation to marriage. Love is firmly established as a theme in the film.

In terms of feminist perspectives, there is no forced sign of subjugation to men in either of the female characters. At the very beginning of the film, the death of Tina is of relevance because it highlights the 'sacrifice' of Tina through a series of flashbacks that reveal her decision to risk her life in order to give her husband the gift of a child. This act might be seen as subjugation by some audiences. Even though Johar deals with this situation speedily, a correlation can be drawn between the sacrificial nature of the goddess Sita and Tina. A hint of Hindu mythology is thus woven into the narrative of the film.

The role of women in society and the positive influence that they can have on various situations is highlighted through the actions of the three female characters: Tina, young Anjali and Dadi. While Tina initiates the idea of Rahul re-marrying through her letters, young Anjali and Dadi are constructive in re-uniting Rahul and his childhood sweetheart. It is relevant that this is made possible because all the women in *KKHH* live in a modern society that is free from the imposition of old Indian patriarchal structures.

The manner in which Aman allows Anjali to marry her childhood sweetheart is also important especially since the astrologer's date had been specifically set for Aman and Anjali's wedding. By beginning the wedding ceremony with Aman standing at the altar (this date was 'ordained' as suitable by the astrologer), Johar clearly establishes the importance of the astrologer's role in the actual wedding ceremony. However, when Aman steps aside and allows Anjali to marry Rahul, the importance of the astrological reading becomes insignificant because the theme of love becomes the overriding force in the narrative.

According to the work done on the subaltern identity by Spivak (1988), in earlier Bollywood films, a character like Anjali would probably have married Aman and then silently died without ever having voiced her true feelings to anyone. In this film, both Rifat Bi and Anjali's mother are aware that she loves Rahul and will always love him. This bond that Anjali shares with her mother and 'den mother' is endearing. It is particularly relevant that Anjali's den mother is of Muslim faith and is as protective of her as her biological mother. This representation highlights the notion that love is a universal language that transcends religious differences that are often used to divide people. In the end, after Anjali and Rahul are married, an image of the deceased Tina is seen giving her daughter a thumbs-up sign to indicate her approval. This adds to the mythical allure of Bollywood cinema.

On the surface, *KKHH* does not engage in political or religious debates about the authenticity of traditional practices. Upon deeper reflection, however, there are various aspects that are dealt with in the narrative through innovative dialogues and visual representations of characters. Marriage is a central theme of the film and this is clearly set up at the very onset through the character of Rahul, who is looking for the 'perfect' wife. According to Krueger (2004:3),

In a traditional understanding of the Hindu religion, marriage is an indispensable event of life. Hindus perceive marriage as a holy and sacramental tie and not only as a contractual union: it is considered as a necessary sacrament for begetting a son, for discharging the husband's debt to his ancestors and for performing religious and spiritual practices.

In keeping with the religion and culture of Hinduism, Rahul expresses his desire to find a wife who will be suitable to 'take home to his mother'. He then falls in love with Tina. Both Rahul and Tina do not follow the traditional format of an arranged marriage, and they are married without any real objections from their parents. A shift in cultural practice is subtly indicated through the self-selection of marriage partners. The change is further perpetuated

through the discussion that Tina has with her father in which he asks her if she has told Rahul about her feelings for him. In this scene, father and daughter are seated side-by-side on a piano bench in a relaxed and loving manner. This is a clear departure from patriarchal times when the father-figure dictated the terms of marriage to his daughter. In this instance, while the union of marriage is realised, the tradition of arranged marriages is cast aside and a shift away from the old patriarchal structure is highlighted.

In *KKHH*, a new set of normative values emerge that effortlessly erase the older 'imagined' normative values that existed as a result of both historical and traditional perceptions of religion and culture. Reformers such as Roy, Tagore and Gandhi were influential in overthrowing the various traditions that were being carried out in the name of religion. According to Gandhian principles women were regarded as 'optimally embodying a dual impulse for obedience and rebellion against authority, primarily within the family' (Parker et al.: 1992: 396). The rebellious nature of the young Anjali as she defiantly goes to the summer camp against her father's wishes is noted. Dadi's role as her accomplice is endearing and cements the camaraderie that prevails between the two women of different generations. In the song, *Ragpati Raavan Sita Ram*, Rahul is seen running breathlessly while Dadi and both Anjalis (young Anjali and older Anjali) are seated serenely around the statue of *Durga Ma* praying. The scene has been orchestrated by Dadi and the young Anjali as female upholders of tradition and can be read as stemming from Gandhian principles. Rahul then, becomes a pawn in their 'master-plan' and even though there are several hiccups along the way, the women in the film are successful in their plan. The diasporic character Aman is 'guided' by the young Anjali into understanding that he should step aside.

All four women prove to be strong upholders of tradition. Tina, after having decided of her own accord to sacrifice her life in order to give her husband a child, leaves letters that outline the fate of her husband. The older Anjali graciously steps aside from the love triangle so that Rahul can be united with Tina. The young Anjali plots with her grandparents in order to restore her family situation. Dadi plays her part in assisting her granddaughter with her matchmaking scheme. As soon as the young Anjali approaches her grandfather with the notion of finding another bride for her father, his immediate agreement with her and his willingness to assist her also signal a change in the pro-active and positive behaviour of the patriarch of the family. In the past, mourning for the loss of a daughter would have consumed

the father, but in this case, Mr. Malhotra is depicted as being positive about the idea of his granddaughter gaining a stepmother and his son-in-law a new wife.

In this film, Johar breaks through stereotypes, challenges fixed religious ideas and through it all, remains faithful to the fairy tale genre by weaving sprinklings of ‘magic dust’ throughout the script in an entertaining manner. From the very beginning of the film, there is a mystical ¹²⁷ allure to Tina’s death. The association with the mystical is depicted through the scene just before Tina dies in which she is kept alive long enough to hand over the letters that she has written for her newborn daughter to her mother. The Gynaecologist is forthcoming in her explanation to Rahul about his wife’s prognosis. She says, “Tina knew there would be complications in her delivery, I had warned her about them. But she also knew how much you wanted this child and she also wanted to become a mother, but her internal bleeding has progressed.” From a medical point of view, the narrative establishes that Tina is destined to die, but she is allowed sufficient time to say her goodbyes to her loved ones.

The handing over of the letters to Dadi also indicates a shift from the older mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships in which these women were often seen to be arch enemies because the older women often subjugated their daughters-in-law. There is an element of trust and an indication of a positive relationship between the two women that was not evident in older films.

The mystical manner in which the Hindu astrologer is forced to postpone the wedding while the Hindu child makes *dua* in the manner of a Muslim is notable. The graciousness of the fiancé Aman as he hands his prospective bride over to Rahul because he ‘understands’ the nature of someone’s ‘first love’ remaining their last and only true love is also interesting. The film ends as the young Anjali imagines an image of her mother giving her a thumbs-up sign as Rahul finally weds Anjali. In line with the fairy tale genre, after all the grief; everyone lives happily ever after. However, they have all grown in the process and the narrative has successfully challenged and overcome feminist stereotypes, changed perceptions about

¹²⁷The mystical nature of the script allows her to first hand over the eight letters to her mother-in-law and say a touching good-bye to her husband that is reminiscent of the English film, *Love Story* (Hiller: 1970). *Love Story* is a tragic romantic story in which Oliver and Jenny meet and fall in love. When they are about to start having a family, they discover that Jenny is terminally ill. The final scene of this film is very similar to the scene in *KKHH* when Tina is dying. Both Oliver (*Love Story*) and Rahul (*KKHH*) embrace their wives in their hospital beds as they die.

cultural practices such as astrology and proven that love endures through all political and nationalist agendas.

Johar continues with his auteurship in his next blockbuster, *K3G*. This will be analysed in the next section.

5.3 *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (K3G)*

Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham translates as ‘Sometimes happiness, sometimes sadness’. It is a complex film that deals with various issues on many different levels.

- Firstly, the film explores three different worlds. There is the portrayal of the elite through the wealthy Raichand family; the portrayal of the lower class and religious minorities through the representation of *Chandni Chowk*¹²⁸, and the portrayal of the Indian diaspora through Rahul, Anjali and Pooja when they move to England.
- Secondly, the film examines the manner in which patriarchy articulates with Indian nationalism in relation to the demands that are made on women as represented through the character of Nandini. The conflict that occurs between the project of nationalism which was shaped by patriarchal social structures and the shifting power relations as represented by the younger generation of females (Anjali and Poo) will also be discussed.
- Finally, the relationship between Hindu and Muslim characters will be examined by taking into consideration the element of class distinction which is represented by the Raichand family (superior) as opposed to the characters living in the rural setting of *Chandni Chowk*.

5.3.1 Brief overview

This film deals with themes of patriarchy, class distinction and blood ties. Yashvardhan Yash Raichand is a wealthy businessman who is married to Nandini. They live in India with their two sons, Rahul and Rohan. Rahul is the adopted son of the Raichand family and Rohan is their biological son. “Yash” is a patriarchal and traditional man who places strong emphasis on social status and traditions. Both sons attend boarding school in England and he takes it

¹²⁸ *Chandni Chowk* is a lower class neighbourhood in Delhi, India.

for granted that they will agree to the idea of having arranged marriages. When Rahul returns from England after qualifying with an MBA degree, Yash unilaterally arranges his marriage to Naina, a sophisticated young woman whom he believes will be an asset to both Rahul and the social status of the Raichand family.

Rahul is unaware that his father has arranged his marriage and falls in love with Anjali, a woman from a working-class family in *Chandni Chowk*. Anjali does not possess the social graces of the elite and is depicted as an uninhibited, uneducated village girl. When Rahul informs his father about his love for Anjali, Yash is furious and sees this as a sign of disrespect. He questions Rahul on his decision and demands to know how Rahul thought that this 'rural' girl could ever fit into their upper-class home with its traditions and upper-class etiquette. Yash is disheartened and disappointed in his son. Out of a sense of duty and the need to please his father, Rahul agrees to marry Naina. However, when Rahul goes to tell Anjali that he cannot marry her, he discovers that her father has suddenly died. In a moment of impulse, he marries Anjali.

When Yash discovers what Rahul has done, he disowns him. Rahul re-locates to England with his wife Anjali and her younger sister Pooja. As a last resort, his mother Nandini sends the family nanny Sayeeda with him because she knows that her husband will not allow her to have any contact with her son; and she doesn't want Rahul to ever feel the lack of a mother's love. Rahul says a tearful goodbye to his mother and younger brother Rohan who is at boarding school.

Rahul and Anjali begin their married life in London. Their family consists of their son Krishi, Anjali's sister Pooja and nanny Sayeeda. Ten years later, when Rohan returns from boarding school, he discovers the reason why his brother left home. He takes it upon himself to reunite the family and sets off for London. Once in London, he enrolls himself at *Kings College*, where the young Pooja, now a university student is also studying. Pooja has long abandoned her Indian name and is now known as the glamorous 'Poo'. She becomes his ally and together they try to unite the broken Raichand family. It is at the funeral of Yash's mother Lajjo that Rahul returns to India in order to light the funeral pyre with both Yash and Rohan.

After years of separation and much heartache, the family is re-united. Nandini finally stands up to her husband for having cut Rahul out of their family and for separating a mother from her son. The years have taken a toll on Yash and he is depicted as a broken man. He tearfully apologises for his behaviour and accepts Anjali as his daughter-in-law. Rohan and 'Poo' are married and the entire family is back together in India.

5.3.2 The Raichand Family

The first half of the film is set in India and the Raichand family are portrayed as part of the ultra-elite. They travel in helicopters with their company name embossed on them, there is mention of Yash's appearance on *CNN*, and an article in the newspaper features a picture of Yash and his son Rahul with the caption, "Tycoon turns 60 on 6th Street." The characteristics of this family will be outlined in order to trace the manner in which they evolve as the film progresses.

Hierarchy in the Raichand family

The hierarchical nature of the Raichand family is introduced at the onset of the film with Yash Raichand being the dominant patriarchal figure. In the beginning of the film, both Yash's mother and mother-in-law are at a temple in Hardwar, India. His mother Lajjo is crying and expressing her pain to his mother-in-law about fearing death. She is perturbed about how she will explain to God that she could not unite her 'scattered' family since she is unable to stand up to the patriarchal authority of her son and insist that he allow Rahul back into their home. According to Gandhian principles, the 'home' was considered a stabilising force that was vital to the balance of wholesome family life (Parker et al: 1992: 398). The Raichand family has clearly been affected by the separation between father and son and Lajjo holds herself responsible in her capacity as the 'mother' of the family. However, the traditional structures of patriarchal hierarchy within the Raichand household do not allow her to change the status quo.

Yash's mother-in-law is quick to answer, "Yash has warned us not to interfere." This dialogue emphasises the influence of patriarchy within the Raichand family which in turn, is also representative of many family structures in India and amongst Indians globally. Even

though Lajjo lives with her son and she is afforded the title of being the mother of the family, in essence, she has no say in household matters. Yash makes unilateral decisions that ultimately have a ripple effect on all the members of his family. Lajjo's pain is felt by her younger grandson Rohan when he overhears her talking about Rahul's exile to London. The inherent bonds of kinship that exist between Rohan and his grandmothers are highlighted in this scene as he sits in front of the fire with them and comes to understand the reality that the Raichand family has endured over the past ten years while he was at boarding school.

Rohan then promises his grandmothers that he will bring his brother Rahul back to India and thereby reunite the Raichand family. Before analysing Rohan's role in bringing the Raichand family back together, it is essential to briefly trace the period before Rahul left for London, which was characterised by a strict patriarchal regime and an adherence to various Indian traditions and rituals.

Patriarchy

In a scene between father and son, Rahul tells his father about his love for Anjali. Yash is enraged and claims that he cannot fathom how Rahul ever assumed that a man of his stature would accept an ordinary girl like Anjali into his family's fold. Yash does not consider Anjali worthy of becoming the daughter-in-law of his family and cites class distinction, a lack of values, traditions and family background as reasons for his decision.

Rahul admits to not having considered any of the aspects that Yash points out and admits that he simply fell in love. Yash accuses Rahul of not respecting the status of their family in which inherent traditions need to be upheld. He expresses his disappointment in Rahul; then sits down dejectedly on his armchair with tears in his eyes. He is only content again when Rahul kneels down before him and promises to do as he wishes. Yash clearly takes full advantage of his influence over his family unit and does not think twice about their feelings or desires. Roy (2006:125) argues that this construction and representation of patriarchy is central to notions of Indian belief-systems according to which there is no discussion once the patriarch has made his decision. As a result, Rahul goes back to *Chandni Chowk* with the intention of breaking his relationship off with Anjali.

When he arrives in *Chandni Chowk*, he finds a grief-stricken Anjali cradling her younger sister Pooja in front of their father's corpse. Overwhelmed by this scenario, Rahul marries Anjali in a moment of impulse and then takes her back to the Raichand home. In retaliation, a furious Yash refuses to make eye contact with his son and says, "Today you have proved that you are not my blood, you are not mine. You have no right to call me father." During this emotionally charged interchange, Nandini and Lajjo stand on one side of the room, holding onto each other. Even though they are in tears, the patriarchal structure of their household ensures that neither woman has the conviction or courage to stand up to Yash. As Bartky (quoted in Kavoori & Punathambekar: 2008: 185) notes, in patriarchal societies, there is no need for external surveillance mechanisms to control women, their allegiance to the discipline of the patriarch is an acceptable norm.

Nandini kneels down in prayer, but this does not stop Yash from disowning Rahul. He does not consider the maternal bond that he is severing because the patriarchal structure of their family grants him the power to deliver the final verdict without any deliberation about the feelings of the other members of the family. The innate bonds that exist between mother and son become insignificant against the wishes of the patriarch. Hence, through the arrogance of the parochial nature of patriarchal structures, the Raichand family is torn apart.

Maternal bonds

The intense relationship that exists between mother and child is firmly embedded in the narrative through a black and white montage of picture-shots that capture intimate, endearing and tender moments. This depiction highlights the nature of Nandini's hands-on relationship with her adopted son Rahul. The other mother-son relationship in the film is represented through Yash and his widowed mother Lajjo. Lajjo is a part of the Raichand household, and she is usually just 'informed' about major decisions in the family. Yash, for example, asks her opinion about the arranged marriage that he envisages between Rahul and Naina and she expresses her happiness about the union. However, when she suggests that Yash ask Rahul's opinion before formalising the marriage proposal, Yash brushes her off, claiming that Rahul does not need to be consulted about matters that are best left to the discretion of the adults in the family.

There is a marked difference in the interactions between Nandini and Rahul as opposed to the interactions between Lajjo and Yash. While the former relationship is characterised by deep affection, Yash's interactions with his mother position her as a woman who is more of an ornament than one who is capable of having any real opinion or ability to enforce change. Notably, Nandini also does not have the ability to enforce or even suggest change in her marital relationship, but her son confides in her and trusts her with his most intimate feelings as is evident when he tells her about his love for Anjali.

Traditions and Rituals

Various traditions and rituals are firmly embedded within the film's narrative. The first ritual is illustrated through the grand representation of the *Diwali*¹²⁹ celebration at the lavish Raichand home. During this religious festival, statues of various Hindu Gods are placed on altars and the home is filled with candles and light. These symbols highlight the importance of the *Diwali* celebration. The manner in which Rahul rushes back from his University in London to be a part of the festivities is noted. He lands in a plane and a helicopter is waiting nearby to whisk him back home so that he does not miss the auspicious *Diwali* prayer ritual. Rahul's first onscreen appearance as an adult is juxtaposed with the *Diwali* celebration at the Raichand home. This signifies the importance of tradition and rituals to the Raichand family. While Yash is involved in the rituals of attending to family and guests, he also makes a point of complimenting Naina, the woman whom he has unilaterally selected to be Rahul's future bride. At the same time, in accordance with Indian culture, he spends time with Naina's father, for it is from the father that he will ask for her hand in marriage for his son. He is content to leave the actual leading of the prayer to his wife while he attends to setting the scene for the arranged marriage that he envisions in the near future. The young Rohan, still too young to understand any of the politics that are at play here, is seen with his nanny Sayeeda. His only focus is enjoying the feast of sweetmeats that is traditionally served on occasions such as these.

Nandini carries out her religious duty of singing, worshipping the Gods and lighting the candles with grace and humility. The focus on Nandini as the 'mother' of the household is highlighted as she leads the women through the various rituals of prayer through song. Both

¹²⁹ Diwali is an important Hindu festival that is celebrated yearly.

her biological mother and mother-in-law Lajjo are at her side. At one point, she is singing praise for the Gods as her husband stands across from her and it seems as if there is no difference between her reverence to God and the reverence and allegiance that she has toward her husband. The words that she sings such as ‘My life is but a shadow to yours’ and ‘The only name that these lips will chant is yours’ serve to further perpetuate the Indian ideology according to which it is believed that husbands should be revered as equivalent to God (Forbes: 1996: 18).

However, in the middle of the prayer ritual, she senses something untoward and hurries toward the door of the house. She is consumed with anxiety and seems to hold her breath in anticipation of her son’s arrival. She breathes a sigh of relief when Rahul runs through the door. The image of mother and son is the focus of the entire frame as Rahul says, “Ma, how do you always sense my presence before I arrive?”

The deep bond between mother and son is brought to the fore and in the next frame, the whole Raichand family stands before the Gods in prayer. Naina, the girl whom Yash envisages as Rahul’s future bride prays with the family and Yash lovingly draws her closer to him as a sign of family acceptance.

Rahul is completely oblivious of his father’s plans and Yash does not ever stop to consider the possibility of discussing this with him. Even when Yash and Rahul meet in Yash’s office, he does not discuss Rahul’s private domestic life with him. Instead, he is intent on handing over the Raichand Empire to his son who has just returned from London with an MBA degree. In his office, Yash has huge portraits of his father and fore-fathers and he proudly asks Rahul to salute them. It is notable that while Yash’s home is filled with statues of Gods and adherence to prayer rituals, his work place features family portraits of those who have been successful in the public sphere. He discusses the importance of heritage, tradition and the status of the Raichand family and asks Rahul to promise to always honour these traditions.

In another scene, the Raichand family is again depicted as leading a harmonious existence. Nandini is planning a surprise birthday party for her husband with her mother-in-law while Yash plays chess with the young Rohan. When Rahul comes home after attending a party, the subject of marriage is broached. The discussion that follows entails a discussion of arranged

marriages of yesteryear as opposed to the love marriages of the new generations. As Dwyer & Patel (2002: 84) contend, in patriarchal societies, the family decides on the choice of marriage partner. Therefore, when Nandini tries to express the views of younger generations in choosing their marriage partners, Yash is formidably clear in his statement, “Nothing has changed Nandini, nothing has changed.”

Nandini attempts to argue with her husband, but he does not let her get a word in. He stares at her fiercely and repeats, “Nothing has changed.”

She is visibly afflicted by his harsh tone and fumbles nervously, but Yash is firm and finally adds, “I said it, didn’t I? Enough. I said it!”

This signals the end of the discussion and there is no room for further comment. Even though Rahul is distressed by this exchange between his parents, it is clear that patriarchal superiority has been unilaterally and culturally imposed and no one in the room attempts to defy or stand up to this haughty regime.

The party that follows is yet another extravagant affair in the Raichand household. Naina takes centre stage and sings happy birthday to her prospective father-in-law. Yash the patriarch is honoured by family and friends and he doesn’t hesitate to dance recklessly with non-Indian scantily clad female dancers. As the male, he does not consider himself answerable to anyone and believes that his word is the final word or opinion on matters that concern his family. Therefore, when Yash asks Naina’s father for her hand in marriage he does so without anyone’s consent, as he deems this to be ‘traditionally’ correct. Both Nandini and Rahul are shocked when they are told, in the presence of Naina and her father that the marriage proposal has been formalised. Nandini is distressed because Rahul has told her about his love for Anjali and Rahul is taken by surprise because he had no idea that his father was formalising his marriage. Yash, on the other hand, firmly believes that he is following traditional values, since he too did not have a say in choosing his own bride. He firmly believes that the arranging of marriages is best left to the elders of the family who understand how to make suitable matches.

In another scene, Nandini has bought traditional gifts of gold and clothing for Sayeeda’s daughter, who is to be married soon. When Sayeeda invites Yash and Nandini to attend her daughter’s wedding, Yash hastily informs her that he will send Rahul as his representative. Nandini is distraught by her husband’s callous manner of declining to attend the wedding.

She believes that Sayeeda is an important part of their family and wants to attend the wedding. She approaches her husband with this request fearfully. He is busy with his I-phone when she tries to persuade him to attend the wedding and doesn't even look up while she speaks to him. His answers to her are curt, "How can we go there? We can't go there. End of discussion, Nandini. I said it, didn't I? Enough. I said it!" Nandini is left standing without any recourse, for her husband has pronounced the final verdict. Rahul then attends the wedding in *Chandni Chowk* as a representative of the Raichand family. Nandini is not permitted to go.

5.3.3 Chandni Chowk

The village of *Chandni Chowk*, a lower class neighbourhood in Delhi, is a significant space through which Johar deals with the impact of class distinction on individuals as well as the religious conflation of the Hindu and Muslim cultures. Rahul and Rohan's Muslim nanny Sayeeda lives in *Chandni Chowk* with her only daughter Rukhsar. Anjali lives in a modest apartment adjacent to Sayeeda with her father and younger sister Pooja. Anjali works in her father's sweetmeat shop while her younger sister attends school.

Through this space, Johar clearly differentiates between two very different worlds: the world of the elite Raichands against the world of the lower-class people in *Chandni Chowk*. When Rahul and Rohan arrive in *Chandni Chowk* for the first time, Rohan is visibly distressed by the odours and downtrodden appearance of the neighbourhood. This is evident when he fans his fingers in front of his nose and says, "How tacky, how down-market." He is reluctant to climb out of his brother's expensive sports car which stands in stark contrast to the poverty and simplicity of this village-type setting. This lower-class space is further characterised by a distinct difference in dialect, the presence of street performances after the winning of a cricket match in which India was victorious and people dressed in various types of ethnic clothing. The song and dance styles in *Chandni Chowk* are notably more traditional as opposed to the musicality in the Raichand home that is influenced by Western aesthetics and styles.

The juxtaposition of the birthday celebration of Anjali's father in *Chandni Chowk* with the birthday celebration of Yash Raichand is interesting. This song is intercut between the spaces of the rural village (as represented by the home of Anjali in *Chandni Chowk*) and affluent modernisation (as represented by the Raichand family home). While the former space is

traditional in terms of dress codes, lyrics and beats of the song, the latter space is characterised by more modernity.

Another scene that is of relevance in *Chandni Chowk* is the one in which a family arrives at Sayeeda's home to ask for the hand of her daughter Rukhsar. The woman who is the mother of the prospective groom is quick to inform Sayeeda that they are originally from *Lucknow*, yet another neighbourhood in India, but clearly considered to be more affluent than the modest *Chandni Chowk*. Sayeeda notices the woman's assertion of superiority, but in keeping with Indian culture, does not retaliate at all because the woman is her daughter's prospective mother-in-law. She quickly tells the woman how introverted and shy Rukhsar is, thereby conforming to the ideals in Indian culture according to which passive qualities are considered to be attributes of character. As Bhattacharya (2011; 5) notes, Indian women have always been misled by the imposed ideal of womanhood according to which their own aim in life is to be prepared for marriage and marital duties. It must be noted that both women are Muslim, therefore the assertion of superiority is rooted in materialism rather than religion.

5.3.4 Religious Conflation

Immediately after the above scene, Sayeeda visits Anjali's father with her daughter Rukhsar. It is refreshing to notice how harmoniously the Muslim and Hindu families are engaged in conversation about marriage. Anjali's father expresses the reality of all daughters having to leave their father's residences because they must get married. Notably, Sayeeda (Muslim) is in complete agreement with Anjali's father (Hindu). There is no inter-religious tension between the two families and it is agreed that Anjali will perform the duties of a sister at Rukhsar's wedding.

The lyrics of the song that follows echoes a Muslim sentimentality and the word *Allah* is repeated constantly in the chorus. The manner of warding off the evil eye is also demonstrated in this song sequence by Sayeeda as it is in line with her religious and cultural affiliation. However, it is also demonstrated by Rahul as he imitates Sayeeda's hand movements and wards the evil eye off of Anjali while she dances. This gesture signifies the practice of removing bad omens from the person during celebrations. The conflation of practices/rituals between Hindus and Muslims is hence illustrated through the dance sequence in which both Sayeeda (Muslim) and Rahul (Hindu) perform the same movement.

It has been established that the divide between Hindu and Muslim has been fuelled by the ‘imaginary line’ of partition drawn between India and Pakistan when India gained independence from British rule in 1947. In an analysis of the film *Henna* (Kapoor: 1991), Viridi (2003: 35) notes a scene which is set along the bank of the Jhelum river that begins in India and flows through Pakistan. In the film, Hindus worship the river by praying to the rising sun while Muslims simultaneously offer prayers to their Allah beside the very same river at sunset. The narrator of the film poses the question, “The water doesn’t make distinctions between different human beings. Then why do people observe difference in their hearts?” As Viridi (Ibid) argues, films such as these prove that nature and culture are invoked together; therefore ‘difference’ is a cultural construct. *K3G* firmly establishes this point with ease because not once in the narrative is any issue raised about the differences in Hindu and Muslim religions. Anjali assists her friend with the ritual of *Nikah* (traditional Muslim wedding ceremony) effortlessly. Similarly, when Anjali is married according to Hindu rituals, Sayeeda and Rukhsar (who are Muslim), do not have any hesitation in being a part of the traditional Hindu wedding ceremony.

5.3.5 Imaginary attachments

The notion of the nationalist imaginary is a theme that is explored in many diasporic Bollywood films. *K3G* engages with this aspect through its representation of characters. The Raichand family in particular are projected as a part of the Indian diaspora. While Yash lives in India with his traditional values and views, he expects his wife to accept his word as law without question. On the other hand, he is also a transnational businessman. The references to his appearance on *CNN* as well as his picture being featured in the newspaper locate Yash as a global entrepreneur. However, while Yash has grown and evolved as a businessman, in his domestic life, he remains rooted to colonial structures¹³⁰. It can be argued that Yash displays split characteristics¹³¹ by having double standards with regard to his home life and life outside the home.

¹³⁰ According to Desai (2004: 13), diasporas cannot be separated from colonialism.

¹³¹ As Chatterjee (1993, 6) rightfully notes, the split characteristics of the Indian diaspora are brought about by the need to create clear distinctions between life within the home and life outside of the home. It is ironic that even though physical spaces were delineated separately, these separate spaces often created much confusion in identities of the Indian diaspora.

In a global context, the question of diasporic identity is an important issue (Sahoo: 2006:88). According to Punathambekar (2005: 159), it is the 'debauched west' (according to the nationalist project) that corrupts the spirituality of the traditional and morally superior values of Indianness. When applied to Yash's behaviour, he is firmly embedded in tradition and rituals when he is with his wife. He is equally comfortable in the presence of Western dancers as he flirts and dances with them recklessly. Within the narrative of *K3G*, the influence of Westernisation is metaphorically represented through the dancers who are dressed in Western clothing because Yash is clearly enticed by them. In joining them on the dance floor, if examined through the notions of the nationalist project, he is in a sense being 'lured' away from traditional Indian values. Within this setting, the struggle between the 'debauched west' as opposed to the moral values of Indianness is represented by the dancers on one end and Nandini at the other end. It is of relevance that Yash abandons all of his inherent Indian characteristics at the party until his wife taps him on the shoulder and quietly reminds him that he is over-indulging. This reinforces the duality of Yash's nature because while he asserts and demands an adherence to strict traditional values and modes of conduct within his home environment from his wife, he does not follow the same principles. His Indian identity is clearly informed by traditional patriarchal structures and he therefore supports the nationalist project in relation to its views on patriarchal family structures. As Sen (2005, 73) notes,

The nature of the Indian identity is significant for those who live in India.

In other words, while the pursuit of Western business ideas are important to Yash when outside his home environment, he is invested in upholding his Indian identity by insisting that his family remain loyal to strict patriarchal structures.

In the second half of the film, Rahul and his family become part of the Indian diaspora when they relocate to London. Johar continues with the strong representation of tradition within the context of the Raichand's home in London. Similar to their home in India, a prayer room with statues of the Gods is a central focus of their home in London. Every morning, Anjali rises and performs her daily prayer ritual in front of the revered statues of the Hindu Gods while her husband and son attempt to sleep through this ritual by placing earplugs in their ears. Anjali is not fazed by Rahul and Krishi's playful antics and continues with her Morning Prayer ritual followed by the preparation of breakfast for her family. While she prepares breakfast, she insists on singing patriotic Indian songs while constantly reminding Krishi that India is the best place in the world. Rahul does not enforce the need to be Indian to his son

and treats Anjali's patriotism lightly. Through these representations, Johar begins his first engagement with tradition versus modernity within the geographical space of London.

When in India, Rahul rushed out of a helicopter and raced into the house in order to make sure that he didn't miss the Diwali prayer ritual. However, when in London, both he and his son try their utmost to sleep through the morning prayer ritual even though it is taking place in their home. It is at this point in the narrative that the issue of morning prayers is discussed when Rahul begs Anjali to refrain from singing every morning. Anjali, being a traditional Indian woman, finds solace in this ritual and refuses to abandon it. She justifies her singing by explaining that it is the only way that their son Krishi will learn about their heritage in India.

Johar uses the geographical locations of India and London to engage in the dialogue pertaining to the Indian/Western dichotomy. According to Pugsley & Khorana (2011:360), it is the 'underlying sentiments about thinking of the home (India) as an idealised paradise, and its traditions as morally, ethically and spiritually superior to that of the 'West' that create this false nostalgia. Even though Anjali is adamant about returning to India for the sake of retaining her culture, she does not realise that tradition does not reside in a geographical space. Clearly, through her own efforts, she has practised the rituals close to her heart and kept the 'idea' of India alive while residing in London. Essentially, even though she does not realise it, the rituals are an extension of her own persona. It can therefore be concluded that attachments to geographical spaces are in fact imaginary. It is the individual's adherence to their own traditions and rituals that are more important. The place itself is not important except in the sense that it is probably associated with memories of moments. These very moments can however, be re-created in any other geographical space.

Individual characterisations of Anjali, Pooja and Nandini will be provided in the next section.

5.3.6 The representation of female characters

Within the context of the film's narrative, Nandini represents a subaltern woman. Her daughter-in-law Anjali is the second character that Johar deals with and she represents tradition in every sense of the word. In stark contrast to the other two women is Pooja, Anjali's younger sister, who represents modernity. In order to highlight the injustices of

various traditional ideals that are imposed upon women by Indian nationalists, it is necessary to examine in detail, the character of Nandini as a subaltern woman. In contrast to the other two female characters in the film, Nandini is representative of a mythic and idealised Indian woman who is worthy of glorification by Indian nationalists who promote conservative Indian ideologies (Stephens: 1989: 93).

Nandini Raichand

Nandini is the traditional wife of the formidable Yash Raichand and lives in a luxury mansion with her husband and mother-in-law in India. It is suggested that she had a problem conceiving children and based on this reality, she and her husband adopted a two-day old baby. It is of relevance that while Nandini was never degraded because of her inability to bear children¹³² as would have been the case in ancient Indian society, she was also not consulted about her opinion in adopting a child. It was assumed by her husband that she would honour the role of being a mother to Rahul. Nandini does accept Rahul wholeheartedly and the question of her consent is not raised in the narrative until the end of the film.

From the beginning of the film Nandini is depicted as a nurturing, hands-on mother. Nine years after adopting Rahul, she gives birth to Rohan. On the surface, she seems quite content to be a loving wife to her husband Yash and mother to her two children. She is assisted in the caring of her children by the family nanny, Sayeeda. With regard to her relationship with her mother-in-law, she performs all the duties that are expected of her as an 'ideal' daughter-in-law.

She routinely assists her husband with his tie every morning before he goes to work and because she is very short, she needs to climb onto a little step-stool to assist him. The symbolism of this menial act is pertinent to the narrative as well as to the evolution of Nandini's character as the film progresses. In the beginning, she is quite content to climb onto the stool in order to be able to reach Yash's tie. However, by the end of the film, when Yash has disowned Rahul and thereby separated a mother from her child, when Nandini

¹³² According to ancient Indian ideology, Nandini's barrenness would have become a major element of her 'lack' as a woman. As Gangoli (2005: 155) notes, in the idealised Indian family setting, a woman's status as a maternal figure is more important than that of a wife. It is also important to note that Hindus consider marriage as a necessary sacrament for begetting a son (Krueger 2011: 3) However, throughout the film, Yash does not ever taunt Nandini about her initial inability to bear a child.

needs to place the customary dot onto his forehead after prayers, she merely looks at him and does not make any effort to reach up to him or to climb onto the step-stool. After a while, he has no choice but to bend down so that she is able to complete the ritual. Nandini's refusal to climb up and Yash's response of bending down to accommodate her are a reversal of the patriarchal relationship according to which the woman is always forced to concede. This interaction takes place passively and it is clear from Nandini's body language that she has been reduced to an individual without much spirit left. She is depicted as one who is merely going through the motions.

When observing Nandini with her son Rahul, there is a noted difference in her demeanour. She is vibrant and happy. However, in interactions with her husband, she is guarded and even when she wants to disagree with him, she must assemble herself before approaching him. There is no conversation and no sharing of opinions and ideas between them. Instead, their relationship is characterised by a parochial and one-sided dialogue which ends with the usual, "I said it, didn't I? Enough. I said it!" These words signal the end of the discussion and Nandini as the wife is aware of her place and retreats into herself. There is no room for further discussion, the atmosphere is filled with tension and the patriarch continues with his ways, unaffected by the pain that he has inflicted upon those who are under his order.

While Yash reaps the benefits of the 'outer' domain, he insists on enforcing the laws of yesteryear upon his wife by forcing her to maintain the 'inner core of national culture'. According to this structure, she is forced to abide by his personal laws (Punathambekar: 2009: 164). Their marital relationship can be further understood through the clear distinction that exists between the realm of the material versus the realm of the spiritual (Chatterjee: 1993: 613). Since Nandini is bound by Yash's personal laws, she is unable to verbalise her thoughts, and becomes captive to her own silence. According to Spivak (1988),

The subaltern woman is located deeply in the shadow of male dominance.

Nandini then, as representative of an Indian woman who is subjugated without physical force, assumes the persona of a mute. Stephens (1989: 97) notes the sentiments of Mody & Mhatre who claim that this reaction is a result of a social mechanism which represses women. It is the lack of consciousness of rights which should be hers that prevents her from acting on her own behalf (Ibid). In reality, it was the Indian women who were 'implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems who were mainly victimised (Mohanty et al: 1991: 57).

Within the context of *K3G*, Nandini does not fall into this category. Instead, Johar's narrative positions her as an urban bourgeoisie housewife who is refined in her demeanour, has an elegant sense of dress and is not economically disadvantaged or illiterate. However, as Viridi (2003: 60) rightfully notes, she has been raised to be passive, submissive and resilient.

According to Sangari, Nandini's character becomes a personification of all these characteristics which hail from a cultural mythification of values that 'good, ideal' Indian women should uphold (Viridi: 2003: 60). As a result, she is located as a victim of past ideologies. Several post-colonial scholars such as Guha (1988); Chatterjee (1993, 1997); and Spivak (1988, 1993, 2003) have examined the cultural problems associated with post-colonial societies. In *K3G*, Nandini is subconsciously bound by her memory of her understanding of her role as a dutiful wife and because of this she struggles to voice her opinion. Her dilemma is further intensified by the fact that she is married to a man who insists on adherence to a strict patriarchal regime in the household in the name of culture. As Spivak aptly notes,

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (Morris: 2012: 104)

As Spivak further argues, subalternity is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed (Morris: 2010: 8). In *K3G*, Nandini's husband represents the structured place of power. Her personal world is therefore characterised by moments of silence coupled with her withdrawal from her husband. It seems as if the phrase that he uses as a symbol of his dominance over her has silenced her. As a result, when Yash announces the arranged marriage of their son, Nandini lowers her gaze, unable to speak on behalf of her son, whom she knows is deeply in love with another woman. When Rahul is forced to leave the family home because he defies his father's wishes, Nandini does not possess the courage to stop him from leaving. Instead, she prays fervently and cries silently. During this intense scene, Yash stands with his back to everyone and does not at any point turn to look at any of his family members, including his own elderly mother.

Within the space of this patriarchal regime, Nandini is dutifully bound by ancient ideals and reverence to traditional structures of the husband/wife relationship that she has been inculcated with as a child. According to ancient Indian ideology, the 'ideal' Indian woman must cater to her husband's every whim. As Roy (2006: 117-118) notes, the wife should

‘mind the hearth and children’ without asking questions or exceeding any boundaries. As a result, she remains wedged in an unholy space that deprives her of expressing her own opinions. Through the representation of Nandini, Johar illustrates that *even after* catering to her husband’s every whim the woman is still forced to endure unwarranted anguish and *does not find redemption* (Jayawardena: 1986: 96, emphasis mine).

However, as the film progresses, Nandini undergoes a gradual change. After enduring a lifetime of being silenced by her husband as a result of the impact of his words, she reaches a stage in her life where she stands up to her husband and speaks her mind for the very first time. In a scene that leaves Yash speechless, she confronts him. Sitting down meekly beside him, she tries to reason with him, but he is so accustomed to silencing her that he shoots her a warning look which distresses her at first, but she has clearly reached the end of the line, for this time, she wipes her tears and speaks,

“You know, my mother always says that a husband is equivalent to God. Whatever he says and thinks is right.”

And then she tells him about the error of his ways in allowing Rahul to leave home, in separating a mother from her son, in shattering their family to pieces.

Yash is quiet and Nandini continues, “How can a husband be God? God can’t do anything wrong. “

Yash is still silent.

And Nandini says, “My husband is just a husband, just a husband. Not God.”

When she gets up to leave, Yash looks up at her and meekly says her name, to which she swiftly replies, I said it, didn’t I? Enough. I said it.”

Her final dialogue with her husband reverses the dynamics of their relationship in a moment.

Yash is clearly struck by the potency of his personal signature phrase that has been used against him. However, by the time that Nandini musters the courage to speak her mind, she has already lost a large part of her life to an empty existence and both she and her husband have aged. As a result of being subjugated by what appears to be an innocuous phrase she has died many silent deaths.

The other two women are not faced with the same challenges as Nandini and while Anjali is rooted in her traditional beliefs and is inherently patriotic to India, these values have not been enforced upon her in any way. The depiction of Poo as an uninhibited ‘fashionista’ without

any affiliation to Indian culture as such, suggests that it is not necessary for an Indian woman to be classified as either traditional or modern.

Anjali

The second character that Johar deals with is that of Anjali. Through Anjali's character, Johar engages with the world of the lower working class in India and highlights the importance of tradition for these people. In a sense, Anjali is also the embodiment of an 'ideal', traditional woman. According to Viridi (2003: 60),

In many Bollywood films, the 'ideal' women are not only traditional, but also passive, victimized, submissive, one-dimensional and resilient.

This is where Johar deviates from standard modes of representation, because while Anjali is representative of a traditional Indian woman in terms of her dress code and unflinching devotion and patriotism to India, she is not subjugated by her husband. Her traditional values are an extension of herself as a person and in her relationship with her husband, she is an equal. Nandini on the other hand is an embodiment of the sentiments expressed by Viridi. It is important to note that tradition is established as an important facet of Indian life in the narrative. However, while one traditional woman is subjugated, the other one lives liberally. This can be seen in the manner in which Nandini treats rituals and her husband's desires as ordained laws, while Anjali uses the same rituals to ground herself without falling prey, as Nandini does, to dictatorial confines. At the same time, it is important to consider the role of the male in these husband/wife relationships. While Yash is governed by a sense of patriarchy, Rahul is more liberal.

Anjali is a vivacious, outspoken woman who is initially introduced in the film residing with her father and younger sister in the lower-class neighbourhood known as *Chandni Chowk*. They live adjacent to Sayeeda (the nanny of Rahul and Rohan) and her only daughter Rukhsar. Anjali is uneducated, speaks with a rural village dialect and is exceptionally patriotic to India. When the Indian cricket team wins, she celebrates with the people in her village by waving the Indian flag and dancing on the streets with her neighbours. The manner in which Anjali articulates her emotions through song and dance is important.

During a colourful song and dance sequence within the narrative, Johar creates an interesting gender-role reversal. This takes place when Rahul attends Rukhsar's wedding (as promised).

During this brief scene, the male gaze which is always dominant in Bollywood films is shifted to the female perspective as Anjali takes in Rahul's attire. In an earlier scene she had expressed the need for a male to be clad in traditional Indian clothing such as a kurtha as opposed to the Western style of donning a suit and tie. As Virdi (2003: 146) observes, in the majority of Bollywood films, the focus is particularly on the heroine who is fetishised through close attention to her costumes, body movements and carefully angled shots that heighten scopophilic pleasure. In this scene, the male (Rahul) is subjected to a similar treatment as the camera pans over his entire body, as he strikes a pose for Anjali, waiting for her approval. Johar's construction of a male character that makes an extra effort to 'Indianise' himself in order to please the woman whom he loves is noted.

Nevertheless, despite gender neutral cultural expressions that take place through song and dance sequences, existing structures of class-distinctions are foregrounded in the film. When Anjali realises that she has feelings for Rahul; she immediately convinces herself that their union will not be possible because she is aware of the class difference between them. Her instinct proves to be correct, because after she and Rahul are married, they are disowned from the Raichand family home. It is of relevance that Anjali does not abandon any of her traditional rituals when in London. She also maintains her traditional ways in relation to her personal dress codes and mannerisms even though her sister chides her for being overly dramatic and 'too Indian'.

Anjali constantly reinforces the idea of India being the best nation in the world to her son and feels alienated from her homeland. She dreams of returning to India one day so that she can teach her son 'real' values and an understanding of what it is to be 'truly' Indian. She shares a deep love with her husband and is aware of the pain that he feels because he has been alienated from his family. She is forgiving in the sense that she is willing to ask her father-in-law for forgiveness for marrying his son even though she has done nothing wrong. She respects the familial bonds that Rahul has with his family and begs Rahul to return to India because she believes that their roots are cemented within the homeland.

Anjali articulates an extreme sense of anxiety with regard to their life in London because she is aware of the change in the nature of their family which has become nuclear as opposed to their life in India which was characterised by an extended family system. In her case, her extended family consisted of her neighbours and the people who lived in *Chandni Chowk*

with whom she performed common rituals and traditions. In London, she feels isolated and uncomfortable with her British neighbours because according to her they know nothing about traditional Indian culture. In one particular scene, her inner feelings about non-Indian people or in this case, the British people are brought to the fore. This is illustrated when her neighbour Mrs. Sprightly leaves her own daughter with her so that she can go to school with Krishi. Anjali deliberately excludes Mrs. Sprightly by continuing to speak in her mother-tongue (Hindi) and through her rude manner, unsettles the other woman. After Mrs. Sprightly leaves, she mimics both her British accent and manner. Throughout this exchange, Rahul is composed and neutral, but is not in favour of his wife's condescending attitude toward the British woman.

Anjali is relentless in her mockery of the British and expresses the concern that her son will grow up to be an 'Englishman' without any knowledge of his authentic Indian roots. She yearns to be a dutiful daughter-in-law to Rahul's parents even though they have rejected her and believes that she and her husband will be happier if they are accepted into the fold of the Raichand family where they belong. It is the need to be a part of an extended family that is demonstrated through Anjali's character. As Uberoi notes, the moral dilemma of the Indian Diasporic mother is highlighted through the mother who privately performs her Indianness by seeking to have her child imbibe values about India's culture and heritage (Brosius & Yazgi: 2007: 373). For this reason, when Krishi sings the national Indian anthem *Jana Gana Mana* during his school festival, Anjali is reduced to tears.

When the Raichands' arrive at the festival, Anjali is furious about being seated at the back, while the British locals enjoy front row seats. This incident intimates that Anjali is clearly affected by India's colonial history. Yet, when Krish leads the rendition of the anthem, all members of the audience stand up and place their hands across their chests as a sign of respect, regardless of race or religious affiliation. Anjali is visibly stunned when neighbour Mrs. Sprightly stands up and applauds, while giving her a nod of approval. Mrs. Sprightly's gesture results in Anjali letting go of her personal and subjective prejudices. Through this scene, Johar illustrates the manner in which personal prejudices prevent people from forming healthy relationships with people from other cultural and religious backgrounds.

Pooja (Poo)

The third female character that Johar engages with is that of Anjali's younger sister Pooja. Since re-locating to London with her sister and brother-in-law, Pooja has become the glamorous 'Poo' and is depicted as a version of Alicia Silverstone's character in the Hollywood film *Clueless*¹³³ (Heckerling: 1995). Poo's character immediately elicits the ongoing debate about tradition versus modernity. Her dress code in particular is a matter of conflict between herself and her brother-in-law and he constantly chides her for wearing revealing clothing. As Maira observes,

Indian Diaspora parents struggle to persuade their children¹³⁴ to preserve an Indian authentic self because of the influences of the different cultures that their children encounter when living abroad. (Punathambekar: 2005:160)

In this case, Poo represents the daughter of Rahul because after her father died, he assumed the role of the patriarch in her life. The light-hearted interactions between Poo and Rahul reflect the tendency of the Indian patriarch to uphold Indian values in their households. In contrast to the manner in which Rahul's own father carried the mantle of patriarchy, Rahul does not support a one-sided enforcement of patriarchal structures. As a result of having grown up in London under the jurisdiction of the liberal male, Rahul, Poo comes to represent a 'modern' woman who is constructed in direct contrast to her own sister who lives in the same household and is depicted as both patriotic and traditionally Indian.

Poo's Western dress code is not the only aspect of her character that is not Indian. She enjoys an unrestricted social life with both genders which would not have been the situation if she were to have grown up in India under the jurisdiction of a patriarch such as Yash. As a child, Pooja grew up in the humble *Chandni Chowk*, surrounded by traditional Indian values and traditions. However, since moving to London with her sister and brother-in-law, she is the embodiment of modernity. Poo's Western demeanour and dress code is questioned by Rahul constantly, thereby highlighting the problematic nature of her mannerisms within an Indian context. Nevertheless, Poo is quite secure within herself and pushes 'modernity' to the

¹³³ In *Clueless* (Heckerling: 1995), Silverstone's character is obsessed with her image from the beginning and throughout most of the film. However, when she finds love, she places less importance on her glamorous image and looks for meaning within her life. Johar's Poo follows a similar journey.

¹³⁴ Within the context of Indian culture, Poo as the baby sister of Anjali is regarded as the younger sibling/child in the household. Rahul, in his capacity as Anjali's husband and Poo's brother-in-law assumes the role of father/patriarch.

extreme. This is apparent in her refusal to change her attire as well as her constant arguments with her sister about letting go of her obsession with India and its traditions. This tension between traditional ways (represented by Anjali) and the need to embrace modernity (represented by Poo) is a theme that is constantly explored by diasporic filmmakers.

In *K3G*, while Johar navigates between the extremes of traditionalism and modernity, he leaves the narrative open to various possible interpretations. With regard to Poo, it is interesting to note the manner in which she ‘allows’ Rohan to ‘Indianise’ her. It can be argued that her transformation occurred because she was willing to change herself for love. On the other hand, Pugsley & Khorana (2011: 367) argue the possibility that ‘Poo’ attained salvation through espousing her decadent Western ways in order to re-embrace traditional Indian attire in order to be integrated back into the patriarchal family’. Either way, Johar’s narratives allow for interpretation on many levels.

As soon as Rohan sets out to “Indianise’ Poo a change in relation to both her appearance and manner is noted. She wakes up early with him and offers prayers in front of the Gods during which she is dressed in Indian attire. As soon as Rohan points out Poo’s revealing cleavage, she quickly and willingly adjusts her top. Rahul expresses his astonishment at Poo’s Indian dress code and asks, “Who is this?”

Rohan replies, “You don’t recognize her because you are seeing her fully clothed for the first time. It is your sister-in-law.” Poo does not object to ‘being tamed’ and seems quite comfortable to adopt an Indian demeanour as opposed to her previously projected Western demeanour. However, while on the one hand it seems as if Johar supports the idea of Poo ‘being tamed’, he could also be suggesting that the adoption of Western styles of dress should not be used to judge women. According to Viridi (2003, 60), the portrayal of women in Bollywood films has been split between the figures of the Madonna and the vamp. In a sense, Johar does illustrate this notion through the references in the film by various characters about ‘Indianising’ Poo. However, at the same time, there is a suggestion that the embodiment of Western styles of dress and the refusal to ‘fit-into’ the mould of tradition as forwarded by Indian nationalists will not necessarily lead to denigration.

During Poo’s first meeting with Rohan in London she reveals, “We have made a little world for ourselves here in London. If you look at it from the outside, you will see only happiness. But come a little closer and you will feel the pain of my brother-in-law who cannot forget his

parents.” Through this statement, she acknowledges the reality that superficial constructs only look glossy from a distance. It is also important that when Poo agrees to help Rohan reunite the Raichand family, her character, attire and mannerism are not at all Indian.

Ultimately, it is the same Poo, whether dressed in a mini skirt or in traditional Indian clothing who not only assists Rohan in bringing the family together, but who also has no qualms about trying to convince her brother-in-law to make peace with his father by standing before him humbly, with her hands clasped together in a traditional Indian manner.

Poo’s characterisation is complex, and she reflects the ongoing controversy that is prevalent with regard to the Indian woman who must either be classified as traditional or modern.

Through various representations of women in *K3G*, Johar suggests that it is possible for a woman to be both. The tendency of women in Bollywood cinema being categorised as either ‘figures of Madonna or vamps’, is challenged through the narrative of *K3G* (Viridi, 2003: 60).

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey (1975: 6) explores the way the unconscious patriarchal society has structured film form in terms of the male gaze. Mulvey argues that classical Hollywood cinema puts the spectator in a masculine subject position while the figure of the woman is projected on screen as an object of desire. In relation to Poo, her first introduction in London as the ‘glamorous’ Poo posits her as an object of desire.

Thereafter, in the scene before she goes to the prom, the camera pans over her entire body in conjunction with the gaze of Rohan. She is clearly objectified. However, when Rohan joins her at the prom, he receives the same treatment from the camera. Objectification thus becomes gender neutral. The pair is then seen dancing together and there is no difference in the representation of male and female bodies on screen. Both are treated as equals in the frame as they dance perfectly together through the changing tunes that are played. It can therefore be concluded that in *K3G* there is no parochial objectification because Johar’s direction forces the camera to treat the images of both genders equally.

Sayeeda

Sayeeda, lovingly called Daijaan by Rahul and Rohan, is a Muslim woman who lives in *Chandni Chowk* and works as a nanny in the Raichand household. In terms of class, she can be regarded as a lower class individual, because she is a working class woman who is employed by the wealthy Raichand family to look after their sons. In her relationship with the Raichand’s, there is no conflict of religion. She assumes to role of a mother-figure to the boys and attends to their needs.

Her subalternity is witnessed through her interactions with the Raichand family. She is a devoted nanny and respects her employer. In one scene, she refuses to allow Anjali to even touch the newspaper in which her boss has been featured until she washes her hands first. In another scene, she is visibly offended by her boss's refusal to attend her daughter's wedding, but conceals this by changing the subject and walking away. The subaltern woman, whether referred to as a wife or a woman of a lower class subjects herself to a similar 'silent' vow. She takes the strain of the circumstances in which she lives and almost routinely, transfers this pain back within herself. By placing strain upon her body, she subconsciously bears the burden of all instances. In relation to Sayeeda's character, she becomes silent in situations when she disagrees with what is being said. In this sense, her body takes the strain of her unspoken words.

5.3.7 Concluding thoughts

K3G is a film that is layered with textured subtexts and the exploration of various worlds that affect many individuals and families in the Indian diaspora. The 'imagination' of the Indian diaspora is examined through themes of motherhood and patriarchy. In line with Johar's unique style of representation, the narrative engages with traditions, rituals, dichotomies of tradition/modernity and the conflation of religion. The lower-class neighbourhood of *Chandni Chowk* is used as a space from which to identify further prejudices. The ludicrousness of the 'imaginary' lines of partition drawn between India and Pakistan through the representation of Hindu/Muslim characters is highlighted.

The other 'imaginary' attachment that *K3G* erases is that Indian women must practice their unflinching devotion to the traditions and rituals within the geographical space of India. This is achieved through Anjali's character. The manner in which she continues to practice Indian rituals in London illustrates that India is just a 'geographical' location. Culture and tradition are embedded within the psyches of individuals and can be practiced and upheld anywhere. Therefore, to label the West as a marker of negativity in terms of 'abolishing' and erasing previous loyalties to cultural practices is incorrect. As Anjali's character demonstrates, sentiments and beliefs are embedded within oneself.

The negativity of the patriarchal order according to which women become victimised is exposed. This is illustrated through the character analysis of Nandini as the subaltern woman.

Nationalist ideals have led to the idea of tradition being equated with negativity. As the narrative of *K3G* suggests, it is not necessary for the traditional woman to be subjugated and subservient to the patriarchal order. This is clearly illustrated through the depiction of Anjali and Poo who live their lives freely as members of the diaspora because they are free from the demands of a nationalistically inscribed femininity. In direct contrast to the representation of the two sisters is Nandini, who is portrayed as a product of the nationalist project and is therefore bound by traditional ideas of femininity. While the project of nationalism aims to perpetuate notions of women who must be ‘supplicants in a male-ordered universe’¹³⁵ in order to fit into their constructed paradigm of pure and ‘ideal’ Indian womanhood, representations of diasporic families in popular Bollywood films challenge this ideology.

The Raichand’s are recognised as representing a quintessential Indian family because within their home setting, Anjali insists on performing all the traditional cultural practices that are familiar to her as a result of having grown up in India. Additionally, Rahul assumes the role of the patriarch. In this instance, patriarchy is not represented as negative. Even though Rahul forms part of the diaspora, he still maintains his responsibility over his unmarried sister-in-law. By taking on the responsibility of his wife’s sister as he would be responsible for his own daughter, he respects and adheres to the Indian culture of kinship. He shares a loving relationship with his sister-in-law and feels the need to protect her in accordance with the Indian social order. Therefore, even though the Raichand’s live abroad, the general atmosphere in their household is guided by an adherence to cultural and traditional Indian practices.

The issues that exist between tradition and modernity are brought to the fore through the dialogues of Poo, who is constantly at loggerheads with both her sister and brother-in-law about the absurdity¹³⁶ of adhering to Indian traditions. Nevertheless, Poo is committed to reuniting their broken family against all odds. Hence, Johar’s narrative suggests that even a woman who is presented as a seductress, experiences the need for family unification and is willing to work towards its attainment. At the same time, there is a suggestion that the

¹³⁵ In *Framing the feminine: Diasporic readings of gender in popular Indian cinema*, Ram (2002, 30) explores the manner in which Hindu mythology is used to coerce women into powerless positions. It is important to note that the nationalist project also used tales from Hindu mythology to relegate women to subordinate positions.

¹³⁶ Within the context of the film, Poo claims that all Indian traditions are ‘absurd’.

embodiment of Western styles of dress and the refusal to ‘fit-into’ the mould of tradition as forwarded by Indian nationalists will not necessarily lead to denigration. Instead, through the characterisation of Poo/Pooja, his narrative completely dismantles the ongoing debate according to which tradition is associated with the positive and modern with the negative.

In relation to the visual representations of male/female characters, Johar completely reverses the notion of the male ‘gaze’. During Rukhsar’s wedding ceremony, Rahul is clearly the object of the female gaze as is Rohan at the nightclub when both Anjali and Poo openly admire their respective partners. This novel representation of the reversal of the male gaze takes the pressure of ‘image’ away from the woman and re-establishes it as a neutral ideology.

Shabani Azmi¹³⁷ explains her views on the representation of heroines in Bollywood films. She is quoted as follows, “I don’t think there is anything wrong with women celebrating their sexuality provided they are not at the same time surrendering to the male gaze.” She claims that in mainstream cinema, there is a very thin line between the celebration of sexuality and surrender to the male gaze. While she argues that the celebration of sensuality is healthy in a sense, she also stresses that the visual aspect of film that shows fragmented images of womens’ bodies causes women to lose all autonomy and thereby become commodified. In *K3G*, both the male and female characters are mutually commodified and this erases the possibility of only the woman being represented as an object of desire. Instead, both Rohan and Poo desire to be together and the representation of their sexuality is portrayed consensually. Hence, there is no bias with regard to the representation of the female character or the representation of her as an object of the male gaze.

Hence, through the use of a multi-layered narrative, Johar dismantles past stereotypes and initiates new realities. He continues with his auteurship and pushes more stereotypical boundaries in his next blockbuster.

¹³⁷ In an interview on *BBC News* (2013c), successful Bollywood actress Azmi speaks candidly about the relationship between women and sexuality in India.

5.4 *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (KANK)

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna translates as 'Never say good-bye'. This film explores four different worlds that have become a reality for the Indian diaspora. These four worlds are transiently introduced at the beginning of the film.

- Firstly, the diasporic character's engagement with the global sports world is represented through Dev, as he scores the final goal that secures his \$5M contract. As Dwyer & Patel (2001: 59-60) contend, this new globally defined visual culture¹³⁸ is becoming synonymous with modern diasporic characters because it projects affluence and modernity.
- Secondly, Rhea, a modern Indian woman is seen walking through the offices of a high powered magazine. Her first words to her employer during her interview are, "I am a mother, but my professional life and my personal life are two completely different entities." While Rhea appears to be modernised because of her dress code, her boldy articulated sentiments reveal that she is aware of the dichotomy that exists between the 'home' and the 'world' (Chatterjee: 1993:121). According to traditional nationalist ideologies, a choice must be made between these two worlds. In a sense, Rhea has already understood the need to make this choice and while she does not specify which world she is more loyal to, she does intimate that she will not let her life at home interfere with her life at work. As Gangoli argues, 'The Indian woman of the 90s is now both Western and Indian, sometimes more Western than Indian and often located geographically in the West'. (Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 157) This aspect will be discussed in detail within the character analysis of Rhea.
- Thirdly, immediately after the introduction to Rhea, there is a close-up of Maya, a traditional Indian bride. The song that plays in the background is reminiscent of a bygone era in Indian history. Maya's first onscreen appearance immediately after the appearance of Rhea evokes a sense of Indian national pride because her attire is rich in cultural symbols. She wears a classic red traditional Indian sari, her hands are adorned with henna and she wears

¹³⁸ In this case the global culture is represented through the world of sports on an international level.

heavy Indian jewelry. The red sari is an important marker of the good/chaste Hindu woman (Gangoli as quoted in Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 155).

- Finally, the frame instantaneously cuts to a shot of Rishi fast asleep on a couch in his apartment, while his friends (male and female) are sprawled out in various places. There are empty wine glasses and beer bottles strewn all over the place as a result of the aftermath of a party.

These four instantaneous cuts at the beginning of the film will be examined in relation to traditional/modern and Indian/Western dichotomies. In order to understand these binaries within the context of the film as a whole, a brief overview of the film will be provided

5.4.1 Brief overview

KANK is set in New York and candidly explores the theme of adultery through representations of male and female protagonists. It traces the lives of two couples, Dev/Rhea Saran and Rishi/Maya Talwaar. Dev Saran is a successful soccer star. He is married to Rhea, an ambitious woman who is working her way up the corporate ladder with a popular fashion magazine. They have a son named Arjun. Dev's mother Kamaljeet, a widow and wedding caterer by profession, lives with them.

Rishi Talwar is a businessman who is about to marry school teacher Maya. Rishi's father Sam is a wealthy widower who has graciously raised Maya as his own daughter when her parents died. Unknown to both father and son, Maya only agrees to marry Rishi out of a sense of obligation. Maya meets Dev minutes before her wedding to Rishi. This meeting takes place while Dev waits outside the reception for his mother because she is employed as the caterer at the wedding. Immediately after the meeting, Dev is involved in an accident that injures his leg and ends his sports career. As a result, Rhea becomes the breadwinner of the Saran family. As Rhea becomes successful in her career, Dev becomes bitter because his injury has forced him to retire and he resents his wife's success.

Maya and Rishi also struggle with marital problems. Rishi goes out of his way to please Maya, but she does not love him and she uses her own inability to bear children as a guise through which she expresses feelings of inadequacy and uses it to remain aloof toward her husband. It is interesting that her barrenness affects her and not her husband or father-in-law. As Krueger (2004: 3) opines, in ancient India, Maya's inability to bear children would have been a factor that disadvantaged her. In *KANK*, both Rishi and Sam clearly do not use this

ancient ideal as a means of oppressing Maya. Instead, they shower her with unconditional love and affection.

As both couples struggle with marital problems, Dev and Maya meet again by chance and after a series of meetings, they fall in love and sleep together. After this incident, they cannot live with the guilt of their actions and confess their infidelity to their respective spouses. Both marriages are immediately terminated and Sam and Kamaljeet are shaken by this truth. The shock of his daughter-in-law's infidelity causes Sam to have a heart attack and he advises her to leave Rishi, which she does. Kamaljeet asks Rhea if she can continue to live with her because the situation is not her fault and she cannot live without her grandchild. Rhea agrees. In this film, similar to the earlier films by Johar, both heroines are again depicted as the antithesis to each other in terms of their ambitions, mannerisms, and styles of dress as well as views towards adultery. In the end, both marriages are dissolved. Years later, Maya and Dev meet again as single individuals and are re-united, and both Rhea and Rishi move on with their lives and each find new life partners.

5.4.2 Four realities/worlds

The introduction of four realities at the beginning of the film through swift camera inter-cuts allows the audience to begin their engagement with representations of India versus the West. The setting of the film in New York allows for the reassessment of gender roles (Pugsley & Khorana: 2011:367). This is achieved by taking away the burden of patriarchy and nationalist ideals through character representations that are not aligned with the Indian family social system. Within the context of the film, there are three atypical nuclear families. The first family is represented by Dev and his mother Kamaljeet (a widow). The second family comprises of Rishi and his father Sam. Maya is an extension of their family unit based on her having been graciously taken in by the Talwaar family when she was orphaned. After living with them as a member of their family, she then marries Rishi and assumes the role of the Talwaar daughter-in-law. Finally there is Rhea, who is married to Dev, and seems to have no links to her own biological family. As a result of these family constructions outside India, freedom of choice is afforded to all characters. When Rhea marries Dev and they have a son, they become a type of extended family because Kamaljeet continues to live with them. However, when Maya marries Rishi, even though Sam is an integral part of their lives, he does not physically live with them. Sam's world is characterised by casual 'flings' with non-

Indian women and a life in which he seems to be using alcohol to camouflage a deep-rooted pain.

Having set up character profiles which are not congruent with the past structures of both nuclear and extended families in India, Johar opens up a space for novel representations. At the same time, he continues to engage with various dichotomies through glimpses of traditional backdrops in various scenes. In the very first scene of the film, Dev's commitment to sports is depicted against his battle to communicate with his wife, whom he claims has no time for him or their son. It is clear that his mother Kamaljeet plays a central role in helping them to raise their only son. Rhea is depicted as career orientated at the expense of both her husband and her son. It is Kamaljeet who adds an Indian flavour to their nuclear family through her dress code which is modestly Indian as well as her job as a caterer/chef of Indian food. Rhea's attire is completely Western as is her demeanour in the household. Notably, her relationship with her mother-in-law is not characterised by any form of hierarchy and she stands side-by-side with her husband as an equal.

When Maya is introduced, she is the epitome of Indian culture in terms of dress codes and demeanour in her interactions with her father-in-law. The element of sacrifice is revealed by her when she tells Dev that she is marrying Rishi out of a sense of duty because both Rishi and Sam accepted her as family when she had nowhere to go. She is clearly not happy with the arrangement and seems to have resigned herself to accept her fate which is to be married to a man whom she will never love.

Sam and Rishi are both introduced as eligible bachelors who are immersed in partying and recklessly engaging in sexual encounters with women without any regard for societal judgement. When Rishi wakes up one morning, he suddenly remembers that it is his wedding day and he rushes to his father's apartment, where the senior male is having a party of his own with a scantily clad non-Indian girl on his arm. Rishi is aware that his father's indulgences are inappropriate, especially because his father seems to have no qualms about being surrounded by 'call-girls'.

The swift return to Indian tradition is established in the next scene as Sam and Rishi are seated in a cart being pulled by a horse and are surrounded by Indian dancers and merry-makers in an authentic Indian manner. Their dress is traditional and the transformation

of their appearance from Western to Indian is noted. As Sen (2005: 73) states, the nature of the Indian identity is important for the estimated population of twenty million Indian people all over the world. Even though Rishi and his father Sam are immersed in their personal indulgences before the wedding, they present themselves in an authentic Indian manner for purposes of the marriage ceremony, which is also performed according to Indian traditions. This is established through a complete change in their attire and demeanour as they prepare to attend the wedding. Indian tradition is further perpetuated in the film through the traditional marriage ceremony and reception that ensues.

5.4.3 Tradition

Tradition is perpetuated very early in the film's narrative during the actual *phere*¹³⁹ at the wedding of Rishi and Maya. As they walk around the fire seven times, Dev is walking away from the wedding house. There is then a sudden juxtaposition of Dev's accident with the placing of *sindoor*¹⁴⁰ upon Maya's head and immediately afterwards, there is blood dripping all over Dev's face as he lies on the floor unconscious.

During the wedding ceremony, Maya is clearly unhappy. At the same time that Maya is officially married to Rishi (this occurs when the husband rubs the *sindoor* into the parting on her head), Dev's future as a soccer player is terminated through his accident. Symbolically, while Dev's desires are suppressed when blood trickles out of his injured body, Maya's desires are simultaneously suppressed by the *sindoor* that is placed in her hair by her husband. In films of older times, it was often common practice for the husband to use his own blood as *sindoor* when claiming his bride as his own. *Yeh Vaada Raha* (Kapoor: 1982) is one such film in which the male protagonist claims the woman that he loves as his wife by rubbing his own blood through the parting in her hair. In *KANK*, Dev and Maya do eventually engage in an extra-marital affair and the artistry of intersecting the scene of Dev's accident with the placing of *sindoor* on Maya's forehead serves as a symbol of their impending relationship.

¹³⁹ *Phere* refers to the 7 circumambulations that the bride and groom make around the sacred wedding fire which signifies their souls becoming one (Selwyn: 1979: 686).

¹⁴⁰ *Sindoor* is the vermillion powder that is applied down the parting of the bride's hair. This signals the bride's transition from a single to a married state (Madani: 1993: 143).

On a deeper level, Johar illustrates the manner in which both male and female desires are vanquished. Dev's desire to be a soccer star is suppressed by the accident, in which he had no constructive hand. Maya's desire to find her true love is also suppressed by the symbols of *sindoor* and *phere* at the wedding ceremony that bind her to a man whom she does not love. It is, however, pertinent that while the male has been dealt a blow by destiny, the female has willingly allowed herself to be bound into a loveless marriage through her own choice. In committing to a loveless marriage, Maya willingly assumes the persona of a 'subaltern' woman. As Spivak (1988: 271-313) notes, the 'subaltern' woman is suppressed under the ideological construction of the dominant male. However, in *KANK*, neither Maya's prospective groom or her father-in-law who represents the patriarchal male are represented as being dominant in any sense. Even so, Maya chooses to behave like a 'subaltern' woman in relation to her acceptance of Rishi's marriage proposal due to feelings of 'gratefulness' towards both males for taking her in when her biological parents died. It is the need to be loyal to this sense of gratitude that she relies on to suppress her inner feelings.

This representation is in line with Johar's tendency to construct his narratives in *media res*. Even though the film is set in New York and there are no impositions or unholy patriarchal structures that force Maya to marry Rishi, her inherent nature compels her to set her own desires for passionate love aside when she willingly agrees to be a part of a loveless marriage. This idea is reinforced in her conversation with Dev when he acknowledges his understanding of the sacrifices made by brides in ancient India. Scenes in which there is an engagement with past structures are reminiscent of earlier times in which women were forced to be sacrificial. In line with such representations of ancient Indian traditions, Johar also compels the audience to remember the plight of widows through the autonomous representation of Kamaljeet.

5.4.4 The Rehabilitated Widow

Johar's engagement with the practice of *sati* is brought to the fore by the introduction of Kamaljeet, Dev's widowed mother. Again, this scene is written in *media res*. This is achieved because Johar does not provide any backstory about the fate of Indian widows in ancient society. Instead, he introduces Kamaljeet as a self-actualised individual. Indian audiences who are aware of the manner in which widows in ancient India were punished, will view the depiction and first appearance of Kamaljeet as refreshing.

Kamaljeet is the chef/caterer at the wedding of Rishi and Maya. Her first onscreen appearance positions her as a well-articulated and emancipated individual. She is confidently immersed in her task of making sure that everything runs smoothly in terms of catering for the wedding. She accidentally bumps into Sam and as he observes her colourful attire, he flirtatiously comments on her figure while simultaneously acknowledging her heritage as Indian. As has been established, women such as Kamaljeet would have in earlier times either subjected themselves to being burned alive on their dead husband's pyre or accepted to live a life that was devoid of happiness as a matter of choice. Johar's narrative erases ancient ideologies without engaging in any debates and he is not apologetic about the portrayal of this widow as a person with high confidence levels and one with the ability and inclination to engage with the frisky Sam.

The independent nature of this 'rehabilitated' widow is further cemented by her interactions with her son Dev. There is clearly no hierarchical structure prevalent in the dialogue between Dev and his mother even though he is the male. In *K3G*, Yash treated his widowed mother like an ornament as opposed to this film, in which Kamaljeet boldly tells Dev to go home because she is not finished with her work. Dev simply leaves.

Kamaljeet's ability to assert authority over her son could be due to her financial independence and commitment to work in her own capacity. Her socialisation patterns are also different to those of Yash's mother who was content to reside in her son's home and visit the temple as her only social outlet. While Kamaljeet enjoys platonic coffee dates with Sam, Yash's mother spends her days agonising about the manner in which Yash disowned Rahul.

Independence is presented positively in relation to women in *KANK*. This representation is in direct contrast to the project of nationalism according to which independent women were frowned upon and were regarded as outsiders to notions of traditional Indian culture and normative behaviours. From this perspective, the representation of the colourful Kamaljeet is a breath of fresh air in contrast to widows who were expected to walk the earth like living corpses. The importance of the maternal influence/input in family situations is highlighted as necessary within the family paradigm. This is achieved in *KANK* when Rhea finds out that Dev has had an extra-marital affair. In her position as a self-sufficient woman who is also a widow, mother to Dev, mother-in-law to Rhea and grandmother to Arjun, Kamaljeet assumes the role of the 'fair patriarch' of her own accord.

Even though she is a woman and is not depicted as ruling the family in any sense throughout the course of the film, when she becomes aware of her son's infidelity, she does not condone his behaviour. Instead, she approaches Rhea as an equal and asks her permission to continue living in their common home because she cannot bear to live her life without her grandson. Rhea immediately and graciously agrees. As a result of Kamaljeet's fairness in handling the situation, Dev leaves the common home after apologising for his actions. In direct contrast to the depiction of Kamaljeet is the portrayal of Yash's mother, who had no say in family matters. The representation of female characters in *KANK* will be further explored below.

5.4.5 The Representation of Female Characters

This section will examine the representation of female characters in terms of feminist perspectives and the impact of transnationalism. According to Vasudevan, 'the tension between traditional ways and the push for modernity' emerges as a common theme in diasporic films and 'threatens to open out an uncharted terrain of social flux' (Pugsley & Khorana: 2011:367). In relation to the representations of Maya and Rhea, Johar challenges stereotypical behaviours and perceptions that pigeonhole women into categories that are either traditional or modern. In this film, he pushes the boundaries of both dichotomies to their limit. This will be discussed through an individual analysis of both female characters. The representation of Kamaljeet also follows.

Maya Talwaar

Maya is a school teacher and housewife. She is depicted as an obsessive personality focused on cleaning and keeping her house tidy and germ-free. As Chaudhuri (2004: xiii) notes, a great deal of feminist theorising has interrogated the imagining of a nation that conflated itself with a sanitised image of Hindu upper caste women. It is established at the onset of the film that she is marrying her husband out of a sense of duty. Maya claims to be from a different world. She tells her husband in no uncertain terms that she doesn't want to be a part of his world which includes late nights, partying and socialising. Instead, she claims to be content going to work and then coming back home and stressing about cleaning their home. She is always uptight and does not allow Rishi to come into her personal space, even though she is his wife. She refuses to accompany her husband to his corporate parties and often deprives him of sexual relations with her. She is bitter about being barren. According to

ancient Indian belief-systems, Maya's barrenness would have become a major element of her 'lack' as a woman. In *KANK*, both males in her household (her husband and her father-in-law) are not in the least perturbed about the fact that their legacy will not continue. According to Gangoli (2005: 155), in the idealised Indian family setting, a woman's status as a maternal figure is more important than that of a wife. It is also important to note that Hindus consider marriage as a necessary sacrament for begetting a son (Krueger: 2004: 3). In this instance, Maya is not ever taunted about her biological problem. Instead, she uses it as an excuse to sulk.

Maya lives luxuriously, and Rishi goes out of his way to please her and loves her dearly, but she is shut off from him on every level. When she is with him, she berates him for behaving like a child, and when he tries to engage in a sexual relationship with her, she lies on the bed like a living corpse. During this time, Rishi does not exercise any force upon her and is always stepping back to give her space in the hope that she will return his love one day.

When Maya meets Dev coincidentally, they forge a relationship that slowly consumes them and they end up sleeping together. It is interesting that the same Maya who is lifeless and sullen when in proximity to her husband, assumes a vibrant personality when she is with Dev. She complains incessantly about Rishi and is completely open towards Dev, especially sexually. Maya initiates the first move towards Dev and she does so on the ground that both of them are in similar situations in terms of their respective failing marriages.

They push the boundaries of their relationship further when they visit a sex-toy store where Dev convinces Maya to buy lingerie and sexy outfits so that Rishi will find her desirable. Maya plays along with this fantasy, but does not stop to consider the reality of her life, according to which her husband finds her desirable to the point that he bends over backwards to accommodate her. She does not need sex toys or lingerie to lure her husband into intimacy. When she is with her husband she projects an image of sanctity through her idiosyncrasy of needing to have everything 'squeaky clean' at all times. She claims to be obsessive about hygiene and cleanliness as represented by her constant references to cleaning the house and making sure that Rishi goes out of the house in impeccably clean clothes. However, not once does she stop to consider the lack of cleanliness when she role-plays sexual fantasies with a man whom she is not married to in a public department store. Nor does she stop to consider the lack of cleanliness when she takes off her clothes in a hotel room and sleeps with Dev while she is still married to Rishi.

On the surface, Maya presents herself as an 'ideal' woman who is content to live within the 'private' sphere as Chatterjee (1993) describes. According to Indian ideology as proposed by Indian nationalists, she would be considered a 'pure' woman. However, despite giving the impression of being sanctified and innocent, she does not hesitate to explore an unholy space. This space is demarcated by the time that she spends with Dev on the sly. She is aware of her infidelity, because she does not ever mention her meetings with Dev to her husband. Instead, she slips out quietly and immerses herself in her relationship with him after which she continues to live with her husband as an unhappy woman.

In a heated exchange with Rishi, after she refuses to have sex with him, she challenges him to leave her. He, in turn reminds her that he is always trying to mend their relationship and that she is constantly pushing him away. He demands to know why she married him even though she has no feelings for him. Maya is both defensive and evasive, while she is in love with Dev. When Rishi can't get through to her, he finally tells her that he is getting tired of being patient and as a last attempt to get through to her, reminds her that he has even accepted the fact that he will never be a father. Maya uses this last fact as an excuse to withdraw from him even more, and thereby conceals her own deceit.

When Sam discovers that Maya is having an extra-marital affair, he has a heart attack. Maya is too embarrassed to even make eye contact with him. It is on his death bed that she accepts the error of her ways when she asks him, "One can be forgiven for making a mistake. What sentence should I get for being selfish?" Sam is gracious in his answer and says, "I am a father, I can't punish. I can only advise." This interaction between father-in-law and daughter-in-law is laudable in terms of past Indian ideologies. He tells her that death and love both come uninvited, almost legitimising her affair, but then adds, "Leave Rishi. Incomplete relationships are not good for anyone. You are stopping him from finding true love and are blocking your own path at the same time."

Sam is depicted as being open-minded and just and does not berate Maya, but accepts the reality of her relationship with Rishi. Maya comes to realise the unwarranted nature of her actions and decides to disclose the truth to Rishi. Ironically, she expects him to forgive her and this is clear when she forlornly asks him if he wants her to leave. For the first time in their interaction, Rishi's back is turned to her and he does not turn to look at her when he tells

her that he will not stop her from leaving. Instead he demands to know why she continuously preached cleanliness when she was the one who brought the most 'filth' into their marriage.

Through the representation of a 'pure' woman who engages in an extra-marital affair, Johar dismantles the traditional belief-system of women who are contained in the 'private' sphere being less prone to influences of the outer world. In direct comparison to Maya is Rhea, the woman who is not only the bread-winner of the family, but who is uninhibited in terms of her social interactions with the opposite gender.

Rhea Saran

Rhea is a confident, well-groomed ambitious woman who is striving to attain her own goals in life. She has her sights set on becoming the fashion editor of the popular magazine *Diva*. It is suggested at the beginning of the film that she and her husband are having marital problems. Dev accuses her of following her own dreams when she should accept his as a part of her own, but she is determined to attain her own individual goals. In her own words, she claims, "I am not like other women. I believe in living life according to my own standards and value-systems." Her reference to the 'other women' is embedded within the narrative to imply the position of women in ancient India. In contrast to the disposition of those women and past ideologies, Rhea juggles her career with her responsibilities toward her son and husband. However, it is clear that she is primarily driven by her own ambition and is completely immersed in the corporate world. During an interview, she tells her prospective boss, "I am married and I have a son, but to be clear, my personal life and my professional life are two completely different entities."

In line with her character representation, she notably maintains her own value-system in relation to her personal life. When her boss flirts with her and intimates the idea of an affair, she is firm in her resolve about being faithful to her husband and clearly tells her boss that she will not engage in an extra-marital relationship. However, within her marital relationship, both she and Dev have different ideals and while it is suggested that they were once happily in love, they have drifted apart. As Gokulsing & Dissanayake (1998: 76) note,

Women who seek to live by traditional norms find happiness, while those who dare to transgress them are punished and victimized.

In line with this belief-system, Rhea tolerates sarcasm, taunting and unreasonable behaviour from Dev. He becomes bitter towards life after his accident, especially since Rhea has assumed the responsibility of being the primary bread-winner of the family. Her substantial earning power is clear from the lavish house that she has provided for her family (which includes her husband, mother-in-law Kamaljeet and their son Arjun). Dev's resentment for her grows each day as she caters to all the material pleasures of her child, but is too busy to attend many of his extra-curricular activities. Both Kamaljeet and Dev attend to the primary needs of the child, while Rhea climbs the corporate ladder.

According to the ideology forwarded by Gokulsing & Dissanayake (Ibid), her marital life is filled with pain for the mere reason that she is following her own career ambitions. As a result of following her own career path, she is forced to deal with Dev's outbursts. It is notable, however, that she enjoys a friendly relationship with her mother-in-law, which is uncommon according to ancient Indian ideology. As Gangoli (quoted in Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 146) notes, servility in the marital home is regarded as noble as well as putting up with humiliation. Rhea is not subservient in any way within the home. She also makes a distinction between her relationship with her mother-in-law and her relationship with Dev. She is quite comfortable with Kamaljeet and the two relate to each other as friends. They are also in harmony with regard to their parenting styles and love for Arjun.

In terms of social behaviour, Rhea is uninhibited. She is a free soul and does not hesitate to peck her male colleagues on the cheek or to hug them. However, at the same time, she does not harbor any passionate feelings about the men that she works with and is at her most radiant when with her husband. It is clear that she longs for him to love her, but she also desires her career with the same fervor. It is her desire for a career that Dev uses as an excuse for their failed marriage. When he accuses her of making him feel inferior because she is more successful, and of neglecting Arjun, she reminds him that she has had to assume the role of the male because of his own failed career. Both husband and wife have their own issues and opinions about the reasons why their marriage is failing, and neither one of them is willing to compromise. According to one aspect of Gandhian principles, the rules of social conduct for Indian women and men should be developed on the basis of co-operation and consultation and there should be no imposition on either of them (Jayawardena: 1986: 95). At the same time, Gandhian principles also perpetuate the notion of women stepping out of the private sphere for purposes of the nationalist struggle only (Jayawardena: 1986: 96-98).

By setting *KANK* in New York, Johar distances his characters from the project of nationalism. However, a glimpse of the nationalist belief-system is prevalent through Dev's constant inferences that Rhea is not as domesticated and motherly as she should be. Nevertheless, she continues with her goals. At the same time, she remains faithful to Dev even though she is surrounded by temptation. Even though Rhea has the opportunity to have an affair with her boss, she chooses not to. Dev, on the other hand succumbs to temptation.

When discussing her troubled marriage with her mother-in-law, she is candid and says to the older woman, "I don't expect you to take my side, you are Dev's mother."

The older woman unexpectedly replies, "I am a woman before I am his mother. And I understand that it is his fault, but you must make the extra effort to make this marriage work."

Rhea asks, "Why are women always expected to make sacrifices and the first move?" These words question the assumed role of the Indian woman within traditional structures and Rhea, even though she is a transnational character, is aware of what is 'expected' of her from an Indian perspective.

Kamaljeet, hailing from an older generation swiftly replies, "Because women have more strength. We have been gifted with a greater insight. You are not weak, your relationship is weak." Kamaljeet's response is in line with Gandhian principles according to which he believed that women were inherently predisposed to embodying the qualities of tolerance, subservience and sacrifice (Jayawardena: 1986: 95).

Rhea is not interested in the philosophies of yesteryear and firmly professes, "I am not like other women. I will not use my child as an excuse to continue in a loveless marriage. I will not put anything more into this marriage until Dev puts love into it."

Rhea is a determined and independent woman. According to Radhakrishnan ,

Questions of change and progress posed in Western attire were conceived as an outer and epiphenomenal aspect of Indian identity, whereas the inner and inviolable sanctum of Indian identity had to do with home, spirituality, and the figure of Woman as representative of the true self. (Parker et al: 1992: 84)

Rhea's attire and her exposure and engagement with the world beyond the home are all factors that separate her from the notion of being perceived as 'Indian'. Perceptions of

societies towards women who are immersed in the 'outer' world locate them as outsiders to acceptable notions of Indianness. According to these notions, within the context of Hindu culture, the 'ideal' woman is passive, victimised, sacrificial, submissive, glorified, static, one-dimensional and resilient (Viridi, 2003: 60). Through the representation of Rhea, Johar illustrates that Western attire and affiliation with Western modes of social conduct and behaviour do not necessarily 'corrupt' a woman, nor do they lead to any flaws in her character. In comparison with Maya, Rhea is honest and tries her utmost to salvage her relationship with Dev, but he has already written their marriage off due to his own bitterness about his handicap.

In one scene, a frustrated Rhea says to him, "I don't know what makes you angrier, your failure or my success." When he accuses her of neglecting their child, she tells him that she could not ever be Arjun's mother because she had to become the 'man' of the house in order to compensate for all his deficiencies. She acknowledges that she has endured intense pain in their relationship. While Rhea openly articulates her deepest emotions, Dev is fixed on his own failures and continues to blame her. He cannot accept the fact that his wife is more successful than him and his body language reveals that he is insecure. Instead of engaging with Rhea on an emotional level, he retaliates, "Thank you for letting me stay in your house, Rhea."

Despite the sarcastic 'tantrums' of her husband, Rhea forges on with her life and embraces the outer world as her domain. Dev is resentful of her because of her choices and his anxiety and fear are grounded in Chatterjee's argument about the material world being considered as typically the domain of the male (Parker et al: 1992: 84). However, he does not ever stop to consider the reality that he has stepped back from the 'male domain' and were it not for his wife, both he and his mother would not have a place to stay. When Dev and Rhea's marriage is being dissolved, Kamaljeet chooses to stay with Rhea and Arjun. Rhea is gracious in her attitude towards her mother-in-law and allows the older woman to live with them. In turn, Kamaljeet is honest and candidly acknowledges the vices of her son. The character of Kamaljeet is also notable in terms of challenging older stereotypes. This will be discussed below.

Kamaljeet

Kamaljeet is an elegant woman. She is well spoken in both Hindi and English and is content in her life which she divides between her job as a wedding caterer and spending time with and looking after her grandson. Her modest style of dress is a blend of Indian and Western fashion.

Johar constructs her character to represent the modern, 'rehabilitated' widow. According to ancient Indian ideology, if she wasn't forced to ascend onto the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, she would have been forced to mourn his death by wearing white clothing and leading a life devoid of any happiness. In contrast, Kamaljeet's personality is characterised by a strong sense of self and family. When Sam asks her how she deals with her loneliness, she informs him that she finds solace in friends.

Her relationship with her daughter-in-law is based on mutual trust and fairness. She is aware of her son's erroneous ways and does not defend him. Instead, she acknowledges the fact that he is wrong and tries to unite him with Rhea. She does not hesitate to admit to Rhea that Dev is wrong, but does gently coax her to be the bigger person in the relationship because she is the woman. According to Kamaljeet, it is the woman who possesses more strength and she believes Rhea can make Dev see the light again. The lack of male dominance in her life is not an issue for Kamaljeet. In fact, she commands respect and love from all the people in her life, including her daughter-in-law.

From a social perspective, she befriends Sam based on their parallel circumstances in life. Both of them are widowed, both need someone to talk to in order to abate their loneliness and both have children in troubled marriages. However, while Sam is quite the playboy, Kamaljeet is traditional and refuses to engage with him romantically. She forges a platonic friendship with him and even though he is frivolous in his manner, he is a traditional Indian male at heart and understands her reservations, for he asks her, "So friendship means no touching?" She immediately replies by giving him a perfunctory hug and he is content to accept that as the basis and boundary of their relationship. They do not judge each other, but rather, accept and respect each other's personal lifestyles. At the same time, they identify with each other in terms of dealing with their married children who are both having marital problems. While Kamaljeet represents a strong, modern widow with a sense of self and

purpose, Sam as the patriarch is depicted as a reckless and indulgent widower without any regard for morality.

5.4.6 Patriarchy

The depiction of all three male characters in *KANK* is important in terms of their engagement with patriarchy. As Cudd & Andreasen (2005: 9) note, in both the West and the East, patriarchy is deeply entrenched in nearly every aspect of social life. In *KANK*, the construction of all three males challenges older notions of patriarchy.

Sam/Samarjeet Talwaar

Through the representation of Sam/Samarjeet markers of a split identity are apparent. He has already renounced his Indian name Samarjeet for the more western 'Sam'. As Pugsley & Khorana (2011: 367) note, a new location, in this case New York, affords the diasporic character the 'opportunity to be recreated, to forge a new identity'. Gangoli (quoted in Kaur & Sinha: 2005: 148) agrees that these markers are constituted by names, appearances, costumes and persona. In films of the 1950s and 1960s, these markers suggested westernisation and located the character as being an outsider to 'Indianness' (Ibid).

Sam's characterisation is novel in the sense that he openly indulges with scantily-clad women and does not even attempt to disguise his indulgences. Since the film is set in New York, there is no community or society to judge his behaviour and he seems quite comfortable living with his forged western identity. Evidence of his inherent Indian nature is however briefly witnessed in various scenes throughout the film. When he proudly accompanies his son Rishi to wed Maya, he is the epitome of an Indian patriarch in appearance and holds his head up high as he escorts his daughter-in-law to the wedding podium.

Even though he is initially introduced in the film as a 'fallen man', he achieves redemption in the end when the audience learns about his internal struggle with his own conscience. In a touching scene, Sam reveals that he is leading an empty life which is devoid of genuine commitment because he is punishing himself for having ill-treated his deceased wife. Through Sam's character, Johar implies that even the male is capable of misbehaving when not supervised; in a sense, this representation suggests that both men and women are fallible.

Through this depiction, Johar draws on yet another Gandhian principle according to which women have the ability to maintain the home. Sam is forlorn and this is indicative of the 'lack' of stability in his life due to the absence of a 'nurturing' woman.

Therefore, even though Sam is the patriarch of his nuclear family, he does not enforce any rules upon his son and daughter-in-law. Instead, he is immersed in his own emotional dilemmas. As a result, even though he is the patriarch of the family, he does not embody this role with honour. At the same time, he does not enforce unrealistic demands on his family.

Rishi Talwaar

Sam's son Rishi is portrayed as a 'true' gentleman. He is deeply in love with Maya and when he marries her, abandons his bachelor-lifestyle in order to be a devoted husband to her. He bends over backwards to accommodate her and is tolerant of her idiosyncrasies, selfishness and does not ever taunt her about being barren. Rishi's character represents a complete reversal of Indian gender role stereotypes. Instead of expecting his wife to 'cater to his every whim' as dictated by ancient Indian ideologies, he attempts to please her in every possible way, regardless of her inconsideration.

Rishi is a committed husband. His deep genuine love for his wife causes him to overlook every flaw in her character. He overlooks her negative aura and believes that his love will conquer her selfish personality. Based on the hierarchical nature of the Indian family social system, Rishi holds a higher rank than Maya. Despite his ranking, he does not at any point in their relationship exercise any forceful behaviour upon her. In many earlier Bollywood films, it was the male who behaved like Maya, but in *KANK*, Johar's inversion of gender roles suggests that all Indian males do not take advantage of their patriarchal status. Instead, the narrative of *KANK* suggests that each relationship should be evaluated according to its own merits.

Dev Saran

Dev's character is central to *KANK* because his inner conscience is presented to the audience in the form of voice-overs throughout the film. The importance of his character and his deep-seated revelations are introduced in one of the opening scenes of the film when he is sprawled

on the floor after having been hit by a car. As blood trickles over his unconscious body, a voice-over reveals his deepest thoughts, “They say time erases all wounds, but some wounds get deeper with time.”

Immediately after this first revelation, the film forwards to four years later with Dev as an crippled and bitter male. Johar constructs the narrative to allow Dev's voice-overs to form an additional layer of subtext to the actual narrative. This strategy allows for deeply personal revelations from a male perspective.

Long before his accident, Dev is portrayed as an ambitious young man with a goal to become a soccer legend. However, even then, his marriage to Rhea was troubled. The brief conversation that he has with her reveals that they have drifted apart and do not share the same aspirations. He expresses his concerns about Rhea's parenting style and is unhappy in their marriage. Their marital life deteriorates further after Dev's accident because his injury forces him to abandon his career and dreams. He becomes disillusioned and bitter and unleashes his frustrations on his wife and son. He is angry at the world and even though his mother lives with them, Rhea shares a more intimate relationship with her than he does.

Dev meets Maya through a couple of coincidental accidents and befriends her. Unknown to their respective spouses, they engage in an extra-marital affair. From the moment that he sleeps with Maya, Dev's conscience is aware of the injustice that he is doing to his wife. These thoughts are revealed through voice-overs when the lovers meet. He admits to knowing that what they were doing was wrong and at the same time acknowledges that they could not stop themselves. Dev's revelation is similar to Sam's revelation about being responsible for hurting his wife.

In earlier Bollywood films, males who engaged in extra-marital affairs were not ever held accountable for their actions. They openly visited brothels and had mistresses with whom they indulged themselves. In *KANK*, Johar not only holds the male responsible, he also places the same responsibility on the female. Gandhian principles promote the idea of both males and females being held accountable for their actions. In this film, both Dev and Maya pay dearly for their infidelities.

Johar reinforces the idea of both responsibility and accountability through the scenes in which Dev and Maya admit their infidelity to their respective spouses. These scenes are interesting because while Dev truly repents his actions, Maya still expects Rishi to forgive her. Dev does not retaliate when Rhea slaps him, but when Rishi tells Maya that their relationship is over, she assumes the persona of a victim. It seems as if her selfish personality endures through her own betrayal. Even though she consciously pushes him away, she still expects him to embrace her.

Dev on the other hand, wholeheartedly accepts and acknowledges his guilt. Just before leaving their common home, he says, “I know that I have lost the right to ask you for forgiveness, but I don’t want to lose the right to give you blessings.” He then touches her face gently and says, “Have a good life.”

After confessing his infidelity, he stops the affair with Maya and through his voice-over laments the ‘death’ of his extra-marital relationship. He says, “Our entire relationship came to be defined by the word good-bye ... but such a silent death of a relationship I have never seen.” Within the context of the film, death is metaphorical. Both Dev and Maya continue with their own lives and in this context, death is associated with the termination of their respective marriages. At the same time, their expression of love for each other is silenced and neither of them is able to voice their opinions in light of their crimes of passion.

5.4.7 Feminist Perspectives

From a conservative Indian feminist perspective, Rhea would probably be considered to be too Western. This is based on the constant perpetuation of the belief-systems of the nationalist project into Bollywood narratives. As a consequence of this, Rhea would have been confined to the private sphere/home. She would also be expected to sacrifice her own goals in order to attend to the needs of her husband and his mother. In terms of dress codes, Rhea does not conform to traditional Indian dress styles as would have been fitting for the ‘ideal’ Indian woman. She is thus not bound by traditional ideas of femininity, a concept that has been advocated by the national project in relation to women.

From a Western feminist perspective, she would be lauded for not giving in to the male. Were she to abandon her career, she would then be solely at the mercy of her husband’s moods and

whims. His bitterness about the fate of his own life would overflow into her space and she would not be able to think rationally. Therefore, by constructing Rhea as an individual with her own drive and rationality, she is not placed in a position where she can be subjugated. Her career affords her an economic advantage in the sense that when she finds out that her husband had an affair; she is in the superior position of asking him to leave the common home. In earlier times, if she had been living in India, she would have been denied equal rights in marital, familial, social educational fields (De Souza as quoted in Roy: 2006:51). This would have then impacted on her economic status in the sense that she would have been completely dependent on her husband. If she was not financially sound, when she found out that her husband had an affair, she would have been left without a place to stay. Alternately, she would have been forced to live under his roof with the knowledge of his infidelity.

Johar's engagement with non-normative female behaviour, as represented through the characterisation of Rhea, constitutes a liminal space, 'a site of both empowerment through transgression and containment through regulation' (Bose: 2008: 35). Rhea's character breaks down stereotypes of traditional 'imaginary' ideals that claimed women who dress and behave according to conservative ideologies in terms of dress and demeanour are 'pure'. In older Bollywood films, overtly Western clothing such as the type of clothing that Rhea wears was a symbol of urban and modern tastes of society and the temptations and corruptions of anti-Indianness where being Indian meant identifying with, and committing to constructions of tradition and virtue (Wilkinson-Weber: 2005: 138). Of her own admission, Rhea claims to be both independent and 'unlike other Indian women'.

In direct contrast to Rhea's character is Maya's superficially traditional and 'pure' character. From an Indian perspective, Maya represents tradition. Indian ideology suggests that the woman who steps out into the public sphere will eventually be corrupted. Her characterisation is in line with the depiction of a woman who is devoted to her home as the centre of her universe, and through this depiction, it is implied that she is a 'good woman' (Brosius & Yazgi: 2007: 362). However, it must be noted that the persona that Maya projects is far-removed from her actual persona. This highlights the ludicrousness of being faithful to 'imaginary' ideals.

In her relationship with her husband, she is selfish and deceitful. She only projects a persona of being the traditional housewife in the sense that she is not happy to step out of the public

sphere and attend parties with him. Yet, at the same time, she is having her own private party with a man who is not her husband.

In terms of social relations with members of the opposite sex, the only touch that is represented as unholy is the touching that transpires between Maya and Dev. In contrast, when in public, Rhea openly kisses and hugs Rishi as a colleague, but the forced and false affection between Maya and Dev is exposed. Rhea is an open personality-type. She has nothing to hide and if she does kiss her colleagues it is intended only as a polite greeting that is acceptable in the West.

According to Indian customs, there are specific boundaries in terms of perfunctory hugging and kissing between males and females. Clearly, Maya is aware of these boundaries, as she is aware of her suggested obsessive affiliation to being a 'clean' woman. Therefore, when Dev kisses her on the cheek in front of Rishi and Rhea, she is visibly perturbed. Yet, she also professes to be traditional in every sense of the word, for example, she marries Rishi out of a sense of duty. Even though she keeps house for him and plays the role of a housewife, she does not commit herself to him and her desires and loyalties are placed elsewhere. When Dev kisses her, she knows that this represents her immorality, yet this only bothers her in public. When she is alone with Dev, she is very comfortable in his embrace.

Rhea on the other hand, appears to be 'Westernized' in every sense of the word. She dances at parties with other men, she socialises freely, but her inherent sense of integrity is intact throughout her life. She is the same personality in both the inner and outer domain. There is no immorality in her actions or thoughts. Instead, she is striving to fulfill her inner desires without being dishonest in any way. Her failing marriage is a source of disillusionment to her, but this does not change her character or her moral beliefs. She is forthcoming and honest about her beliefs. When Dev confesses his infidelity to Rhea, she tells him that their marriage is over and slaps him. Dev does not retaliate. Rhea is broken by Dev's revelation and Kamaljeet is disgusted with her son to the point that she does not even look at him when he tries to speak to her, but stands with her back turned to him. In an endearing exchange, Kamaljeet asks Rhea if she can continue to stay with her after Dev leaves because she cannot bear to be separated from her grandson. Rhea agrees and breaks down in the older woman's arms.

Through the representation of Maya and Rhea, heroines who are antithesis to each other in every sense, Johar challenges the notion of 'Indianness' as being superior to the West. He further challenges the assertion of Indian nationalists who claimed that the East was superior to the West (Chatterjee: 1993: 120).

5.4.8 Concluding thoughts

The primary target market of *KANK* in relation to audience reception is the Indian diaspora. The subtle and overt characterisations of both heroines should be read against the historical background of women in India, their challenges and the evolution of feminism in India. In light of this, Johar's narrative dismantles centuries of accepted normative beliefs such as: the woman who is kept away from the outer domain will be spiritual and therefore the best keeper of the home; the woman who steps into the material domain, which should be reserved exclusively for the male will be corrupted; the woman who is not controlled by the male will lose her morality.

Johar constructs Maya to project an image of an 'ideal' wife in the sense that she constantly professes the need for cleanliness and voices her disapproval at attending mixed gender parties. In contrast, Rhea is constructed to project the image of a 'vamp'. However, her moral convictions are firmly grounded within her own sense of self. Her open affiliations with her colleagues do not in any way distract her from her career goals and she does not at any time engage in any form of inappropriate behaviour. She does, however, adopt the Western manner of socialisation and greeting that make her 'appear' to be 'modern'. This modernity then immediately evokes a sense of anxiety about the extent of her open nature, but as a person, she is devoted to her career and when she wholeheartedly tries to mend her marriage with her husband, he is too consumed by his own failures to meet her half-way.

The model of the distinction between the spiritual and material as forwarded by Chatterjee is one that Indian nationalists cling to fiercely in order to prevent Indian women from becoming independent. In *KANK*, Johar is cognisant of the constant perpetuation of this ideal within Indian society and this notion forms a deep-seated subtext to the actual narrative. This is evident in his construction of the two heroines. While Rhea represents the woman who steps out into the material world, essentially a male domain, Maya represents the traditional woman who 'claims' that she is content to stay within the spiritual space which is delineated

by her home. Her constant references to cleanliness perpetuate the idea of her being an 'ideal' woman and her disapproval of the mixing of genders at parties further locates her as a 'good' woman who is content to mind the 'hearth' as Roy (2006: 118) suggests.

However, Johar takes his ideal further by inverting the moral characteristics of his heroines when subjected to temptation. The main premise of Indian ideology as proposed by Indian nationalists supports the notion that the woman who is 'guarded' from the 'corrupt' influences of the West will maintain her chastity and remain faithful to her husband whom she is to consider as her 'lord' and 'Master'. In *KANK*, it is the woman who is fully immersed in the material domain, who guards her chastity and does not fall prey to temptation when the opportunity presents itself through her boss, who is keen to engage in an extra-marital affair with her. Instead, it is the woman who is located within the realm of the spiritual/domestic sphere who not only engages in an extra-marital affair, but is instrumental in actively encouraging the male who is not her husband to forge a relationship with her.

Passion between Maya (who is representative of the spiritual) and Dev is portrayed as a force that consumes them because they allow it. At the same time both Maya and Dev remain cold and aloof toward their respective spouses and this indicates deceit on their part. The same Dev who is immersed in an extra-marital affair claims to be repulsed by his wife's interactions with the opposite sex at the parties that they attend together. Similarly, Maya also expresses an aversion to Rishi's open nature towards females when they attend parties together. Both Rhea and Rishi are not in the least bothered by the reactions of their spouses to their socialisation patterns as they do not harbour passion for any of the people with whom they mingle. While claiming to abhor any form of contact with members of the opposite sex, Maya and Dev withdraw from these settings and become bitter, while Rhea and Rishi enjoy the very same settings as part of their natural socialisation processes. The difference in the outlook of the heroines in relation to their life journeys is important because through their journeys, Johar establishes a new reality that is in opposition to the notion of the West being representative of immorality and India representing a holy spirituality.

The patriarchal order is another traditional ideal that Johar challenges in *KANK*. Sam represents the patriarch, but Johar's narrative sets him up from the very beginning of the film as a 'fallen man'. This is highlighted by his son's constant but gentle warnings to him to 'act his age'. In a sense, it is Rhea who, while climbing the corporate ladder, assumes the mantle

of the patriarch. Through her own admission, she tells Dev that she has become the 'man' in their relationship. While the narrative of *KANK* appears to operate on a superficial level, the subtext is layered with the questions that challenge existing nationalist ideals as well as faithfulness to older feminist perspectives.

Rhea, despite the subtext that continues to challenge past notions of stereotypes and loyalties to nationalist ideals, has evolved as an independent woman in the sense that she 'desires' more than a life in which she is only a housewife. However, she is also a mother. When she steps out of the private sphere to follow her career aspirations, she leaves the upbringing of her son to her husband and mother-in-law. She is often accused of neglecting Arjun by Dev, but in her mind, she has assumed the role of the male and therefore, she only attends to the material requirements of the child. As the film progresses, she realises of her own accord, the error of her ways in neglecting her child. Through this realisation, Johar emphasises the importance of motherhood as a stabilising force. However, at the same time, he does not present motherhood as a choice that must be made by the woman. Instead, he promotes the necessity of the mother/child bond by demonstrating the damage that the child suffers as a result of neglect from the mother. The superficial relationship that Dev has with his son is also shown at various points in the narrative.

From a feminist perspective, messages of women being able to juggle the inner and outer domains of their lives are stressed. Of her own accord, after Rhea and Dev are divorced, she puts her impending relationship with her boss on hold because she says, "After years, I have become a mother. For now, this one relationship is enough for me." Her commitment to re-establishing the broken bonds with her child indicates that the woman who steps out into the material domain will not be 'corrupted'. At the same time, there is the representation of Maya who insists on not stepping out of the spiritual domain, but harbours passionate feelings for another man and then engages in extra-marital sex. Through the representation of Maya as traditional and Rhea as modern, Johar completely dismantles the model of spiritual/pure and material/corrupt as forwarded by Indian nationalists.

Chapter 6

6 Conclusion and recommendations for further study

This study focused on examining the representation of female characters in the three popular films of auteur director Karan Johar. Within the framework of feminist studies, a descriptive, analytical and comparative analysis was conducted. The impact of transnationalism on Indian society was also considered. Research revealed that Bollywood cinema has become a transnational/cultural role player for both Indian national and diasporic audiences.

Based on the strong link between Bollywood films and Indian society, it is safe to contend that Bollywood cinema contributes to the ongoing dialogue on women's position in India. While it is acknowledged that Bollywood cinema was used as a tool to promote Indian nationhood before 1990, it has also been established that post-1991, Bollywood films promote modernisation, westernisation, urbanisation, and new ways of living, particularly with regard to the emancipation of women. In the light of changing representations of women in these films, strong allegations were made against Bollywood filmmakers in 2012. This study thus became more relevant because the continuous dialogue surrounding the representation of women in relation to the Indian/Western dichotomy which has always been a contentious issue was placed under an international spotlight.

Similar to other cinemas, Bollywood cinema is a powerful polemic. Indian communities appreciate this medium because it is rooted in Indian culture. Over the years, Bollywood films have provided the masses of India with a colourful form of escapism in the form of song, dance and the *masala* format of representation. Due to the processes of transnationalism, there have been shifts in cultural politics; and representations of women have changed considerably. As a result, female characters have been afforded many liberties in terms of dress, socialisation patterns and they are also depicted as living independently. These changing representations provide audiences with material that suggests re-thinking old patriarchal structures. There has clearly been evolution with regard to the representations of women in the sense that they are being increasingly portrayed as individuals with options as opposed to being subjugated.

The causal link that exists between popular Bollywood films and Indian society is important in relation to representations of women. Based on this close relationship, Bollywood

filmmakers have been accused of fuelling the rape culture in India through the representation of women in certain *item numbers*. This is a serious allegation. It has been intimated through the media that Bollywood filmmakers should at once refrain from objectifying women through representations in *item numbers*. Issues such as rape and its suggested causes such as internalised patriarchal mind-sets within India, westernisation and the objectification of women through the employment of *item numbers* in Bollywood films have been discussed in this study.

In linking the rape culture to representations of women in Bollywood films, what emerges is the fact that Bollywood does indeed yield a powerful influence over the masses of India. While the manner in which *item numbers* have been isolated as derogatory modes of representation have been discussed, it is more important to focus on the fact that in addition to various other factors, Bollywood has been recognised as a sovereign medium that has the power to integrate into Indian society on many levels. It is thus proposed that instead of isolating Bollywood cinema as a negative stimulus based on a handful of representations in *item numbers*, in addition to its position as a transnational/cultural role player, it should be ranked as a potential authority in its capacity to influence the masses of India. The strong allegations made against Bollywood filmmakers underpin the link between Indian society and representations of women on screen. However, while the retention of Bollywood cinema as a core tool in shaping the mind-sets of audiences in India is an important aspect that should be seriously considered, the representation of women in certain *item numbers* still needs to be addressed. In this regard, the tendency of Bollywood filmmakers to adapt their movies to please their audiences is important (Hemphill: 1988; Nandy: 1998).

Based on audience preference, many films produced in earlier years were characterised by repetitive scenarios, and song and dance sequences without any dramatic innovation. It is worth mentioning that literacy rates in India were low and therefore, in earlier years, the majority of people enjoyed watching circus-like fantasies. However, after India became liberated in 1991, there were significant changes in Bollywood cinema. Change was even more defined when filmmakers began catering for diasporic audiences who were more sophisticated than the masses in India. According to Pugsley & Khorana (2011: 359), when Bollywood filmmakers began catering for the 'emerging middle-class and diasporic audiences', their narratives were received more positively in the global world. As narratives evolved, so did song and dance sequences.

The centrality of song and dance sequences in Bollywood films in relation to Indian tradition has been established (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004: 101). Song and dance sequences are integrated into the visual culture of the popular Bollywood film. As both society and Bollywood films evolved, especially in relation to representations of women, filmmakers began developing their song and dance sequences according to Western aesthetics. Hence, the *item number* which in the past featured only *vamps*, opened up a space in which the heroine could perform. Even though song and dance are considered as forms of cultural expression in an Indian context, the *item numbers* in which female protagonists perform has become a highly contentious debate. In this regard, the complexity of issues (such as socio-political factors, poverty, internalised patriarchal mind-sets, and high illiteracy levels amongst others) that plague India must be given serious consideration.

It has been established that within the *masala* film, song and dance sequences were marginalised by First world culture and society as well as by Indian scholars for lack of narrative coherence. However, there was a sense of logic to this form of representation which was guided by the socio-economic climate that prevailed at the time. In the same manner, the *item number* can be viewed as a consequence of economic liberalisation and the influence of modernity which has been influenced by diasporic audiences. While it is unfair to blame the rape culture in India on representations of women in *item numbers*, the inferences that have been made should not be taken lightly. If there is even the slightest possibility that these representations are feeding the existing entrenched patriarchal misogynistic mind-sets, then Bollywood filmmakers should take heed.

The 'male gaze' in relation to the reception of *item numbers* has been discussed and is an important factor that must be considered. Psychoanalysis as a method of understanding the notion of the 'male gaze' and the manner in which this articulates with past patriarchal structures has been identified. An analysis of spectatorship revealed that film allows insight into the shifts that are constantly taking place in gender relations. Research also ascertained that film allows for the definition and re-definition of existing and past ideals. This idea is further extended when a filmmaker assumes the role of an auteur. As a consequence of setting out to develop specific ideologies, films can thus be viewed as educational tools and vehicles through which societies can be influenced.

Johar's films have been identified as influential in educating societies on various aspects of gender politics in Indian society. As Gangoli (2005: 157) observes, 'Johar's films reflect a transnationalisation of cultures as well as the creation of a new female identity'. This is important within the context of the allegations that have been made against Bollywood filmmakers. Clearly, not all Bollywood filmmakers are invested in promoting modernisation through the use of *item numbers*. Even though Johar's films are similar to other Bollywood films in the sense that they feature beautiful people in exotic locations, there are layers of subtexts in his movies that can and should be used positively to change mind-sets, re-shape cultural attitudes and thereby influence people and societies.

If we trace the trajectory of the plight of women not only in India, but throughout the global world, then we will realise that many women have come a long way from being oppressed under various structures such as patriarchy, male domination and inequality. Nevertheless, in this twenty-first century, women continue to be raped. This act transgresses through all codes of civility and humane behaviour and embraces the barbaric. While it would be erroneous to lay even an iota of blame upon the women who are being raped, it is time for the world to unite in order to find a solution to this crime which results in innocent women being mercilessly ripped apart, not only physically but emotionally as well. In our capacity as intellectual, rational, analytical beings, we must assume some form of responsibility in response to this recurring atrocity.

Bollywood films are important tools that can be used to reflect on societies, their cultural practices and many other issues that affect real people. Film in the context of Indian society is even more powerful because the link between Indian society and Bollywood cinema has already been foregrounded and it has also been established as a powerful form of escapism for millions of people. Directors such as Johar have demonstrated their expertise in understanding the inherent dilemmas of Indian people, more specifically, Indian women. It seems as if the foundation from which Indian society can benefit has been laid and already exists in the colourful format of Bollywood cinema. It thus makes logical sense to use this convention positively and constructively to uplift the sections of Indian society from the 'pit' in which they are stagnating, based on a blind adherence to negatively entrenched patriarchal and misogynistic mind-sets. Bollywood cinema should therefore not just be regarded as a transnational/cultural role player, but as an integral part of Indian society. Based on research and discussion, it seems as if Bollywood filmmakers have earned their place within the

Indian family social system. Once this relationship is formalised and acknowledged, Bollywood filmmakers will automatically be elevated to the status of being members of the community. The onus of creating/constructing representations that can benefit Indian society will then have to be assumed by them in a responsible manner.

Recommendations

When studying Bollywood cinema, the strong link between this convention and Indian society must be kept in mind. Once the importance of this link is both underscored and accepted, Bollywood filmmakers who consciously project women on screen as objects and the actresses who willingly perform in *item numbers* may come to realise the power that they yield. As the old adage goes, 'With great power comes great responsibility'. Bollywood cinema is a central facet in the lives of many Indian people. It is therefore suggested that Bollywood filmmakers carefully think about the effects of their representations. It might then be argued by many that film is a form of art and by setting boundaries, the creative enterprises of established and budding filmmakers will be stifled. This recommendation is, however, given in lieu of the reality that many young males in India are not socialised to understand the need to respect women as individual members of society who are entitled to human rights. Coupled with this problem is the tendency amongst these youths to treat rape as a sport or pastime. Representations of scantily-clad women who mime lyrics that 'invite men' to indulge their deepest, darkest sexual fantasies while dancing provocatively, seem to be sending mixed signals to uneducated individuals who do not even stop to differentiate between representations and reality. This is the core problem.

It can be argued that women should be allowed to dress, dance and mime whatever they please, even if this is in the form of lyrics to a song. The reality is that society in India still needs to evolve with regard to its treatment of women. If Bollywood filmmakers can assist society in understanding the importance of respect, they can become icons in their capacity to initiate positive ideals. The actresses who perform in scintillating *item numbers* should also tread carefully in light of the reality that these representations are being perceived by certain audiences literally. Bollywood filmmakers and actresses must embrace their roles as representatives/members of a powerful convention (Bollywood cinema) who have the privilege to influence the mind-sets and attitudes of Indian society at large.

In conclusion, the following recommendations for further study are made.

- Research and studies on Bollywood cinema should continue based on the understanding that Bollywood films play an important role in assisting not only women, but Indian society as a whole with their evolutionary processes.
- There are still gaps in literature regarding the importance of auteur directors as role players in influencing societies and changing mind-sets. Based on the analysis of Johar's films, it has become clear that as an auteur, he is invested in re-defining and initiating change with regard to women's positions in Indian society (Other auteur directors such as Farhaan Akhtar and Rajkumar Hirani also deal with specific issues within the context of Indian society). Since the link between Bollywood cinema and Indian society has been sufficiently underpinned, auteurship in Bollywood should be encouraged. This will open up a space within which scholars can engage with narratives and representations within an Indian context.
- Open-minded engagement with various representations in films will lead to discussion. This dialogue can prove to be valuable in terms of altering embedded patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes against Indian women. Progress in this regard will promote a healthier society.
- Finally, auteurship in India by directors who understand the intricate aspects of Indian culture should be encouraged. There should be an initiative or call for these directors to identify specific problems and then deal with them through the medium of popular Bollywood films that continue to lure audiences to theatres.
- As has been suggested in Chapter three, it seems as if it is time to implement a type of well-planned educational and socialisation programme that is not perceived as a threat by the males in India. Instead, such programme should encompass both males and females into its mission. The goal of this programme should envisage a space that promotes a peaceful environment for both genders. In addition, it is suggested that a single equation that impedes violence against women be integrated into each state's legal system. Integrating this idea into Bollywood films within 'glamorous settings' with well-planned narratives written by auteurs who are well versed in Indian culture can only assist India in becoming a more fair society with regard to its treatment of women.

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Asoka 2001, motion picture, Shahrukh Khan and Juhi Chawla, Dreamz Unlimited, India

Baabul 2006, motion picture, B.R Chopra, B.R Films, India

Biwi Ho To Aisi 1988, motion picture, Suresh Baghat, India

Cleopatra 1963, motion picture, Walter Wanger, 20th Century Fox, London

Clueless 1995, motion picture, Scott Rudin, Paramount Pictures, USA

Deewar 1975, motion picture, Mumbai, Timurti Films Pvt. Ltd, India

Dilwaale Dulhania le Jayenge 1995, motion picture, Yash Raj films, India

Ek Din Bahu ka, 1983, motion picture, India

Gone with the Wind 1939, motion picture, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Loew's Inc., USA

Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna 2006, motion picture, Karan Johar, Dharma Productions Yash Raj Films, USA

Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham 2001, motion picture, Dharma Productions ,Yash Raj Films, London

Kal Ho Na Ho 2003, motion picture, Yash Johar, Yash Raj Films, USA

King of Heaven 2005, motion picture, Ridley Scott, 20th Century Fox, USA

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai 1998, Yash Johar, Dharma Productions Yash Raj Films, Mauritius

Lagaan 2001, motion picture, Aamir Khan Productions, Sony Entertainment Television (India), India

Lage Raho Munna Bhai 2006, motion picture, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Vinod Chopra Productions, India

Legally Blonde 2001, motion picture, Type A films Marc Platt Productions, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, USA

Love Story 1970, motion picture, Love Story Company Paramount Pictures, Paramount Pictures, USA

Mona Lisa Smile 2003, motion picture, Revolution Studios Red Om Film Productions, Columbia Pictures, USA

Mother India 1957, motion picture, Mehboob Productions, India

Munna Bhai M.B.B.S. 2003, motion picture, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Vinod Chopra Productions, India

One Fine Day 1996, motion picture, Lyda Odest, 20th Century Fox, USA

Prem Rog 1982, motion picture, Raj Kapoor, R.K. Films Pvt. Ltd, India

Revolutionary Road 2008, motion picture, DreamWorks Productions BBC Films, Paramount Vantage, USA

Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam 1962, motion picture, Guru Dutt, India

Salaam Namaste 2005, motion picture, Aditya Chopra, Yash Raj Films, Australia

Something's Gotta Give 2003, motion picture, Waverly Films, Columbia Pictures, USA

Sweet Home Alabama 2002, motion picture, Touchstone Pictures Original Film, Beuna Vista Pictures, USA

Terms of Endearment 1983, motion picture, James L Brooks, Paramount Pictures, USA

The Dirty Picture 2011, motion picture, Bajali Motion Pictures, ALT Entertainment

The Proposal 2009, motion picture, Touchstone Pictures, Walt Disney Studios, USA

The Shawshank Redemption 1994, motion picture, Castlerock Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, USA

The Wedding Planner 2001, motion picture, Intermedia, Columbia Pictures, USA

Titanic 1997, motion picture, 20th Century Fox Paramount Pictures Lightstorm

Entertainment, 20th Century Fox Paramount Pictures, Fox Baja Studios

Yeh Vaada Raha 1982, motion picture, Rose Movies, India