Block

2

GENDER, FILM AND CINEMA

UNIT 1 GAZE/ EYE OF THE CAMERA

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this block you will be studying cinema and gender perspectives of films through various phenomena. As this is the first unit, you will need to know something about cinema in general –what form of art is it? How different is it from other forms you have studied in the previous block, i.e. literature? What are the technical modes used to make a film? The unit will also explain the role of the camera and the product it creates. How is that product different for the maker of the film and the viewer of the same film? Who dominates what in the social domain? This unit will discuss these aspects from a gender perspective.

You may have watched a film in a theatre sometime or the other, but may not have paid any attention to the technicalities of the production you watched. All of us as spectators are happy to watch the heroes and the heroines of a movie; for us they are the idols or role-models to be guided by, psychologically and emotionally. Very often, the villain and most of the other characters mean little to us as spectators. It is fascinating to discover this psychological relationship between a life on the screen and one's own life. In this unit we discuss such issues in philosophic, scientific and aesthetic terms.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

• Describe the different concepts of a film;

• Critically analyse the role of the technicians and the performers;

• Discuss the relationship between reality and the representation of reality in cinematic production;

• Explain the dominant role the society plays in framing a character in a film; and

• Understand the gender perspectives in a cinematic production.

1.3 CONCEPTS OF CINEMA

There is no doubt that cinema is a form of art – an art that is not just for art's sake but for other more significant reasons. Being an art form, it cannot be bound within fixed boundaries; it is a moving art, rather art in motion. But philosophically speaking, cinema must comprise several compositions within itself – several concepts that must combine to form it, as for example, perception, representation, signification, adaptation, evaluation, identification, figuration and interpretation. All these together complete this form of art called cinema. We will discuss some of these concepts from a gender perspective.

Let us begin with the first concept in this list, that is, **perception**. 'What is perception?' you will ask. This is a basic question –relevant and fundamental. The dictionary defines 'perception' as "the act or power of perceiving an object, and trying to recognise it through a combination of senses" (Kirkpatrick, 1991, p. 947). Let us simplify this term. Say, the book in front of you is real – it has a physical reality, you can touch, smell and see it. Now to feel the book, you will hold it in your hand and try to contemplate it for some time, perhaps you will close your eyes and think about it or touch its cover. Through this process of thinking, the book becomes a symbol of presentation in your mind. If you have read it line by line, you may be able to communicate your thoughts about the book to someone else. If the physical book isn't there in front of you, you try to perceive the book mentally and describe it in the manner you have perceived the book. That is one level of perception. Now if you are asked what did you learn from the book? Then you will communicate some lines from the book and try to formulate exactly what you *feel* about it. This, too, is perception. But in cinema such a concept takes place in a different form. In cinema, according to the **Gestalt theory**, perception implies the process of incorporating cultural and social codes into visual life to create a semblance between some incidents or parts of individual life and the

cinematic portrayal of human life. Thus, we tend to see cinema as an integral part of our everyday life and what is perceived everyday in life.

Now when we see this cinematic perception from a gender perspective, you might have noticed that, in mainstream, commercial cinema, at least, female actors are made to look gorgeous, vamps are made sensuous, and female villains are made emotionally crooked; while on the other hand, male actors are handsome and/or powerful, and male villains are physically strong. But there was a gradual shift in such portrayals from the late 80s to the 90s of the last century. For instance, male actors were seen as poor and responsible son/brother, while female actors become powerful, and not necessary gorgeous. For instance, protagonists such as Chandu in *Naseeb Apna Apna* (1986) portrayed as unrealistically bad-looking, or Jyoti in *Khoon Bhari Maang* (1988) was simple looking, but yet very wealthy. With passage of time, vamps, who had been in pivotal roles with the male villains of the films and are usually portrayed alluring the male heroes, have totally taken over by female villains, like mothers-in-law, or sisters-in-law, in family drama. Gradually the perception about the fixed portrayals of men or women changed in keeping with similar shifts in social and cultural perceptions about genders.

Representation is another mode of cinematic art. The word 'representation' has originally come from Aristotelian theory of *mimesis*, where the performer tends to imitate real life in the contemporary society of any given culture. What the people in a society or culture accept as physical reality, gets imitated and presented as reality through this form of art. Let us try to differentiate between physical reality and psychological reality. It is assumed that physical reality is something that is present in front of you, like a book; but suppose someone asks you what is a book? The 'book' in your mind might be small in size, not very thick, and might have a red cover, but it may differ from someone else's perception of a 'book'. The figuration of the book in your mind is a psychological reality. As you can see, the 'psychological reality' of a perceived object can vary from person to person. Thus, we all differ in our mental representations and choices. According to film theorist Christian Metz, this concept works in cinematic perception also. In the next unit, you will learn more about gendered representations in cinematic art.

The next concept is **adaptation**. The word seems simple enough; it becomes complex when we try to find examples from real life. For instance, say you are planning to visit the IGNOU headquarters in Maidan Garhi of New Delhi from your home town to collect your grade sheet. You plan your trip in advance. When you reach IGNOU in the morning, you realise that there are several administrative procedures for obtaining the grade sheet, and so you need to extend your stay by another day. What comes immediately to mind are matters like '*where would I stay*' and '*what would I eat*'. Suppose you

manage to find a place for the night, what comes next is the food. You might not be accustomed to the food usually served in New Delhi hotels or restaurants. That is very different from what you usually eat at home. But you try to make adjustments with all this. This phenomenon of adjusting oneself to one's immediate environment is adaptation. In cinematic world, a similar process happens. Say, a folk tale of your place is being adapted for a film. In the film, the story undergoes several changes through translation and transformation to fit the language in which it will be produced. According to the film theorist Jean Mitry, when a story from a different language is modified/adapted as the plot of a film, the treatment of it becomes a necessary aspect of film-making, and this can vary according to the language [and culture] in which the film is being made. Very interestingly, it is noted that films that is adapted from literary texts has a fixed formula of portrayal, mainly for making the film commercially successful. For example, Sarat Chandra's Bengali novel *Devdas* has been made into films by male directors only, the roles of Paro and Chandramukhi is equally portrayed in comparison to Devdas, that is, they are portrayed as powerful, gorgeous, emotionally vulnerable. Similarly when, Maheshweta Debi's *Rudaali* was made into a film in 1993 by a female director, Kalpana Lajmi, she does justice to the portrayal of this profession of mourners or lamenters, by using strong, realistic portrayals of women. Thus, adaptation allows us to critique the stereotypical portrayals of woman in commercial cinema, and appreciate the efforts of those directors, especially women directors, who have offered more balanced, realistic, and complex images of women.

According to Hugo Münsterburg, **identification** is the story of the sub-conscious mind that could be represented in a cinematic form of art only when there is intelligibility of human action and genuineness of motivation in its production. Therefore, to understand any given film as art, it is very important that the producers communicate properly to the spectator what they have in mind. Let us take the example of the social institution of marriage in any given society. In the Indian context, the lineage, wealth and character come into question –like what does the groom's father do, whether the family is a 'respectable' one or not. All such queries have to be resolved before arranging a marriage. As discussed above, we are invited to identify with a character or a situation being shown in a film. In the matter of showing marriage in a film, the producers and directors have to think about their spectators and whether what is to be presented would be socially acceptable or not. Notably, inter-caste marriages began to be shown in the 30s and 40s of Bollywood, with films like *Achhut Kanya* (1936) where we see a Brahmin boy and an untouchable girl gets married based on their own choice. Gradually, inter-class marriages also made an entry in Bollywood cinema, where the hero and heroine are shown belonging to different classes. This theme reigned till the 80s, with a growing awareness of women's roles and changing thought processes, women centric films rapidly picked up. Women protagonists were now shown as taking charge of decisions

regarding marriage and other aspects of lives. This is not too imply that in earlier times women were not seen in strong prominent roles. For instance, we have examples like *Hunetrwaali* (1935), *Mother India* (1957), *Amrapali* (1966), and the list goes on. Similarly, we can see a wide variety in terms of portrayals of masculine roles. Films didn't shy away from portraying different kind of men, poor and down trodden in *Awaraa* (1951) or *Lawaaris* (1981), physically strong like *Faulad* (1963) or *Balwaan* (1992). We also have instances of bondage between two males in films, for instance *Dosti* (1964), *Sholay* (1975), *Yaraana* (1981), *Main Anadi Tu Khiladi* (1994), etc.

The last concept of cinema that we will look at is **interpretation**. This is integral for understanding and analysing cinema as it focuses on the context/s of meaning and whatever is pertinent in such meaning-making. It basically studies the *otherness* that may not be immediately visible when you watch a film. You must have understood that every individual has her/his own way of thinking which is governed by the norms of the society one lives in. For example, you might be used to eating rice for the morning meal but your classmate from Rajasthan might prefer chapati while another from Tamil Nadu prefers idli, those who are used to busy city life would like bread. Food habit is formed and governed by a particular culture, society and the material conditions of a place. Rice, chapati, idli or bread would carry distinct meanings for you. You would definitely not derive the same meaning for the food which is not a part of your habitat. If you haven't ever tasted idli, the item would carry a different significance for you than that evoked by bread or chapati or rice. According to Merleau-Ponty, the way a film portrays the scene of a food habit can suggest interpretations of different kinds depending upon its cultural context and social surrounding. But when it comes to film, such gender interpretation doesn't imply that effectively. For instance, you might not like the hero/heroine your best friend likes, because likeness depends entirely in one's own domain; but as mere spectator most of us endure the perfect beauty and the attires of heroes or heroines. You might not be aware that this perfect beauty is done technically through enhancement of front light focus and fading back light. Emotional moments of films are shown through different camera movements, such as a deep focus on facial expressions, especially eyes, or a sad scene from a high angle shot, a death scene from a low angle shot. Interestingly, rape scenes or violence against women have often been signified through musical background scores or movements of props on the scene, such as chandeliers swinging, or glasses breaking, birds fluttering, thunderstorms, heavy downpour, violent waves striking the rocks on sea sides, and many more. Next time when you watch a film note how the interpretations of different themes depicted in films of different eras.

Now that we have examined some of the major concepts of cinematic art form a gender perspective, let us turn to the modes for reading or studying a film.

1.4 MODES OF READING OR STUDYING CINEMA

According to film theorists, there are two ways of reading or studying cinematic art: Semiotic and Psychoanalytical modes. Let us examine each of these below.

The **Semiotic Mode** is the most useful method for studying a film. This is related to the theory of *signs*. Ferdinand de Saussure introduced semiotics as a scientific to study of *signs* in a given society (as you have already read about the Unit 4 of the Block I). The concepts you read in the previous section like perception, signification and identification –can be examined from the perspective of semiotics. For example, when I say tree, at once a tree appears in your mind, which could be different from the tree I am thinking of. You have already read about this with the example of book. Now take an example of any scene from any film, where a song is being shown on the screen. You often see that the hero and the heroine of the film goes to a different location with different costumes, all at one shot, which is drastic from preceding scene of the film. If you take away the song, it still carries a meaning relevant to the music and the tenor of the song. Similarly if you now see the song in the film, it still has a meaning but the meaning enhances with more emphasis. But think the other way, if the same song is placed somewhere else in the film, you will think there is no requirement for the song in that particular context. Consequently, if you like the song you will keep on humming it all the time, till another song of your liking doesn't replace that. Now when it comes in comparison with other people who has seen the film with you, might not like the same song. So there will be differences between all who watches a film. Such differences create a stereotypical image of the hero or the heroine, like some hero/heroine you might like because he/she dances well, or someone else might like it for his/her dressing sense.

Cinema uses such kind of semiotic forms to create meaning to the entire film. Cinematic art signs establish certain factors which may not agreeable or acceptable to many societies or cultures. Therefore those films have to be defined within a fixed parameter that indicates a utopian understanding of life among diversified cultural country like India. For instance, dialogues that the characters utter must remain within the domain of the particular

parole, as also permissibility and impermissibility of that system. You might have noticed that films sometimes portray things which might not be accepted by your society or culture, for instance, widow remarriage, in *Kati Patang* (1970) or *Prem Rog* (1982), or inter-religious marriage in *Bombay* (1995) or *Pinjar* (2003), or pre-marital pregnancy as in *Aradhana* (1969) or *Julie* (1975), or prostitution as in *Amar Prem* (1972) or *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985).

The second mode of reading a film is **psychoanalytical**, the fundamental issues of which you have studied in unit 2 of block 5 in MWG 001. You have come across the theories of Freud, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault and others. Their theories can be used to study cinema. Take for example Lacan's philosophy of meaning and being, through his theory of 'vel of alienation'. This theory signifies that psychology of choosing one over the other also results in deprivation, like choosing between money and life. If one tends to choose money, life itself deprives of something, and similarly if one chooses life, deprivation of money will be there. In both the cases, the choice depends on the individual. This Lacan explains through a Venn diagram, where meaning and being of life is like the choice between money and life, in pursuit of which the individual becomes non-meaning. For example, if one chooses the being as the subject then the meaning or other becomes non-meaning (Lapsley & Westlake, 1988, p.72)
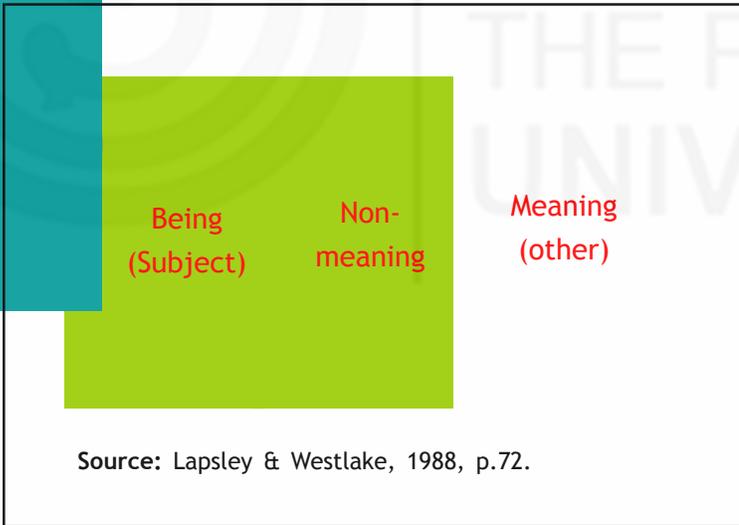
Being (Subject)   Non-meaning   Meaning (other)

Source: Lapsley & Westlake, 1988, p.72.

If this philosophy is adapted onto cinematic art, then it would suggest that when you as a subject utter something, that will convey some meaning to everybody. But you will notice that everyone doesn't interpret the word in the way you intended it when you uttered it, and that becomes the non-meaning of your utterances. Similarly, if you pick up a dialogue from any given film, let us for example say that, the hero tells the heroine, '*I didn't expect this from you!*' –you might interpret the statement in a different way from someone else in the audience. Similarly, when someone tends to generalise certain gender issues, which you have seen or heard of in your

place, you will tend to defer with the generalisations. For example, the issue of child trafficking might sound irrelevant to people who are not aware of it in their place of abode. Or the concept of marital rape might sound to some as illogical or unbelievable for some. Similarly, there are many gender issues that we tend to avoid discussing about in our everyday life. Films which bring these issues into the open challenge us to question our beliefs through various interpretations based on cinematic art. In the next section, let us look at the structures of cinema as an art form.

1.5 STRUCTURES OF CINEMA AS ART

The most important structure of cinema is its narrative technique. Cinema is basically a medium of expression which tries to represent the realities of life. Every form of art has its own specific style of communication. Cinematic art is defined by structures like the language of the film. When a film is taken into consideration, the technique of its narrative structure, or Aristotlean *opsis*, depends much on the scientific technology used for making films. This includes image, sound, camera, cinematic apparatus and so on which involves not only the actors but the entire production team including every technician who contributes to the making of the film.

The structure of language comprises Saussurean theory of major components – semantics and syntax. You have already read about signs and their meanings. Signs constitute the semantic structure of cinema. But the syntactical structure of cinema is very different from other forms of art because it includes image, sound and montage as its integral parts. The syntax of a film is basically the linear aspect illustrating the ways in which different techniques are put together to complete the form, like the camera, the images shot with it, the sound, the music, the editing, the locations where the images are shot (sets), the costumes, the lights, the dialogues, the performances, and above all, the direction, which we have discussed in the previous sections. Take for instance, the hero along with his male friends might try to find out the name of the heroine stay in the story, their sound is shot at such a decibel that as spectator you will be able to listen to it, but as other characters present in the same scene may not be able to decipher what they are discussing. Or take another example when a quarrel between hero and heroine takes place, it is mostly being accommodated or made hyperbolic by adding background score to it.

Images seen in a film can be 'read' at two levels – the optic and the mental – that is, what you see and what you perceive or think you have seen. This occurs at three levels: the **saccadic**, the **semiotic** and the **cultural** (Monaco, 2009, 1977, p. 194). Saccadic images follow one another quickly to augment the sense of motion. This is easy to understand with the example of the animation film. One needs to draw one image at a time and then shoot

them. When each film formulates the reel and its motion taking place, you see that a cartoon character is moving fast like any animate object. This is what saccadic structures are. Regarding semiotics, it has already been explained in the previous section that it is based on the relationship of signs, signifier and signified. The last level of cinematic construction is the cultural structuring. This focuses on the spectator. When watching a film, a spectator from a rural background may have very different expectations and experiences from that of another spectator who has grown up in a metropolitan city. Because of this basic difference in cultural experiences, each person would connote an image with a different meaning.

Understanding the image of cinema is very different from reading it. Interpreting the Saussurean theory, Monaco comments that there are two ways of understanding any film, they are **paradigmatic** and **syntagmatic**. In a paradigmatic structure, one is guided by individual choices which are mainly denotative and connotative. In denotative choice, icon and symbols are important, whereas connotative choice has symbol, metonymy and tropes; symbol and metonymy produce the index of the film. For example in a scene picturising a song, the hero shows his dancing capabilities, say stretching the legs at 180 degrees. This becomes a symbol and you exclaim in wonder because you have never seen such a dancing pose before. Or take an example where the heroine is fighting masculine stunts with several men. The same awestruck feeling might envelope you as you may not even imagine that a woman can do stunts like that. This is what a paradigmatic structure of cinema means. For a syntagmatic structure, there are two categories of construction – space or the synchronic structure, and time or the diachronic structure. In space, the language of the film is descriptive or detailing takes place. In the diachronic structure, the language is historical, providing the information about the sequence in which the shot is taking place.

In the **narrative** structure, one derives the meaning from the codes that the film portrays. Codes derive from certain aesthetics, like mise-en-scène and mise-en-shot. Mise-en-scène is a French word, which literally means 'putting on stage' or 'staging'. It has originated from the theatrical art that depicts Aristotlean *opsis*. But in cinematic terms, it means any given event that you as a spectator can see, the way it is filmed, the set design, the location, the lighting, and the portrayal of the character. Mise-en-shot is a cinematic term. It means 'putting into shots' or simply 'shooting (a film)'. The main parameters of mise-en-shot includes the position of the camera, the movement of the camera, the shot scale or distance from where is it being shot, the duration of single shot and the pace of editing. There are three ways of shooting any scene – the long take, deep focus photography and continuity editing. 'Long take' is a shot taken for a long duration, whereas deep focus photography keeps several planes of the shot –foreground, middle-

ground and background --in focus at the same time. Continuity editing is something quite different and deals with the synthetic unity of space and time by breaking down a scene into a multitude of shots.

We discussed earlier in this unit that in a commercial cinema a heroine is made to appear more beautiful through the usage of lighting and position of the camera. The camera will focus on her face and the light will be brighter while the back drop light will be faded so that her beauty is revealed perfectly. Or to understand the camera shots, take the example where in a scene the hero is trying to rescue the heroine from a hanging bridge. Note here that most of the time in commercial films, the heroine is placed in such circumstances so that the villain can be cast in a negative light and the hero's entry justifies him to be good-hearted and in true love with the heroine. You will notice that in some scenes their facial expressions are revealed in the most realistic way possible while in others the camera zooms out in order to make the spectator realise how dangerous or fatal is their situation. While you watch the film it will look that all the shots are happening simultaneously, this is because the film is edited in such a manner. But realistically these three camera shots –the close-ups, the long-distance shot, and the close up of the rope –are shot at different intervals. This comprises an example of narrative structure.

1.6 WAYS OF LOOKING AT CINEMATIC ART

Looking at cinema as an art form is important for anyone to appreciate its socio-cultural importance. A wide variety of factors interrelate to create the aesthetics of cinema. We will discuss them in three categories (i) spectrum of abstraction, (ii) modes of discourse and (iii) rapports de production.

1.6.1 Spectrum of Abstraction

According to Aristotle, art can be understood as a type of representation, or imitation of reality depending on a medium through which it is expressed, and mode, i.e. the way the medium is utilised. Being a form of art, cinema can also be understood to be practical, environmental, pictorial, dramatic, narrative and musical (Monaco, 2009, 1977, p. 31-32). Practical refers to the art of design, i.e. the props and sets used in a film, like what background should be in the focus of the camera, what furniture to be used, what costumes, what form of make-up, and everything that comprises the props of a set. Take for example, if the scene is of a palatial living room, the furniture would have to match the contours of the sets, the colours have to be rich and bright, and so on. In this case, if you think of a particular scene of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film *Devdas*, you can see the detail used to create the opulence of Devdas' home, the costumes of the people in the home and the exquisitely matched furniture. At the same time, the female

characters are made to look gorgeous and affluent with heavy jewellery and richly embroidered costumes.

Designing, on the other hand, happens only with architecture of the designs. To some extent, architecture interacts with other categories that are environmental, and often depends on the immediate ambience. Architectural forms leads to the representation or imitation of a certain philosophy, and one such architectural form is the pictorial category of art of the set where a shooting of a film takes place. If you think of any film showing a destitute or a poor person's house, the clothes may be shown dirty, sometimes torn, and the characters will appear unkempt hairs, but it differs entirely if the hero or the heroine is portrayed in the same setting. Their costumes and architectural set will be same but not the make-up. It is always made perfect so that they differ from all the other characters in the same setting.

Photography, although pictorial, can also be interrelated with practical and environmental like architectural set. Dramatic art has something to do with stage and theatre, which would inter-relate it to pictorial, environmental and practical category. The narrative category of art includes literary forms such as the novel, story, non-fiction and other forms. But when one thinks of musical form of art, some interrelation between literary art and music is clearly visible. Like poetry and dance are both literary and musical. But only music is typically the musical expression of art. Think of any song sequence of any film, you will note that the background score, the locations, the costumes, change at once. And the music is used to add appeal. All of these aspects together comprise a spectrum of abstraction that we see in cinematic art.

1.6.2 Modes of Discourse

The most important relationship for any art is with its modes of discourse -- what form is it, who is the creator or the artist and who observes the artistic form. We accept the fact that art is a form of communication, depending on the degree of abstraction it is being formulated in. Film theorist James Monaco defines this system of artistic communication through a geometric figure. He uses two axes – the axis of experience and the axis of transmission. The axis of experience has two poles — artifact that is used to make the art and performance that modulates this artifact from within (Monaco, 2009, 1977, p. 33). Take for example, an action scene of any recently released movie. As a spectator, you will see cars rolling or crashing in the background, the music is harsh and sound effects are used to reinforce of every action taking place. Now if the axis of transmission is taken in this particular example, than the artefacts become the cars rolling or crashing, and the protagonists' action sequences are modulated according to the demands of the scene. The axis of transmission also has two poles —

representation and the record of the representation. Now keeping the same example of an action scene, if the hero and the villain are both performing, the sound effect has a different note, while with other protagonists the sound effects used will be different. Both these axes meet at a point, which is you, the spectator, who observes the art or watches cinema.

1.6.3 Rapports de Production

You, as a spectator, are the centrifugal point of both the axes in the modes of discourse. What is important to be presented for you is the result of the production procedures and consumption techniques (Monaco, 2009, 1977, p. 34-35). For example, after watching a film, you might not like it so you may not refer it to anyone else; soon you realise that the movie flops because of similar word of mouth commentary that is being circulated widely. This is what is implied by 'rapports de production' or in simple terms, the relationships of production. There are certain determining factors for the production and its relationship with the spectator. They are socio-political, psychological, technical and economic factors, depending upon the function and system of criticism.

In the socio-cultural context of any society, the determining factor for watching a film is based on its utility or the usefulness. When such a social system of utilitarian mindset for watching a film with some company is there, the psyche of entertainment from that specific film depends on the ethical and political reasons. For example, watching a film with your family would be different from watching it with friends. You might enjoy with your family a particular genre and with friends it may be a different one. By chance if you watch the same film with your family as well as friends at two different venue and time, the entertainment varies in both the context. In the psychological context, the determinant function is the expression that has several reactions upon you for the immediate ambience. Similarly in the technical category, the function of art is the philosophy 'art for art's sake' and the determining factor of criticism is aesthetic. For instance, you just went to watch a film because you didn't have any other choice of recreation, so you will take the film in a different way; or if you desperately want to watch a particular film and waiting anxiously for it, your reactions would be different. All these reactions are because your inclination for watching a particular film is different from that of socio-cultural reasons.

The last determining factor is economic and this is very important in today's society. The interrelation between you as an observer of the film and the producers who make the film, is also an economic one. If a film becomes successful then the production unit gains a lot of money, the protagonists and the technicians get a break-through, just as *Zanjeer* was a breakthrough film for Amitabh Bachhan. But in the system of film criticism, this economic aspect might not be very significant as the film critics would be discussing not from then economic aspect but from the technical perspective: for

instance, how does the camera work, how is the music produced and such other factors. These factors constitute this category of 'rapports de production' of looking at cinema as art.

Activity 1

Watch a film either in a cinema hall or on television and try to test all the concepts you have studied. Try to interpret it with the help of the philosophies of the film you have read. You will soon realize that the film you watched can be discussed from many different angles.

1.7 GENDERING THE GAZE OR CINEMATIC EYE

After these discussions, you may feel more confident about reading and understanding a film. According to the film theorist Toby Miller interpreting Freud's psychoanalytical study of mental processes, he says that while viewing cinema exemplifies the cultural efforts to provide the viewer with paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures of images which according to the gaze of the viewer appear natural and automatic (Miller, 2000, p. 476). These images combine together to build a relationship between the film and the spectator, like what was the motive behind making a film like *Deewar* (1975). If you probe into the contemporary social scenario, you will find the relevance of making such a film, like migrating to big cities for better economic opportunities. So, we can conclude that everything you see in the film has some relevance and interrelation with your own experience in cultural or social life. In this regard, Miller interprets Freud's scopophilia or "the pleasure in looking" as the visual capture of something that seeks to make an object from the first and hold fast to it. This pleasure could be perverse if it is not the only means of obtaining sexual satisfaction (Miller, 2000, p. 477-478).

This 'gaze' of the spectator has a significance in terms of the different types of responses to what is a film *according to the attitude and temperament of the viewers,* like exhibition, voyeurs, slaves, masters, victims and victimisers. The term 'exhibition' indicates that the viewer may be influenced by watching a film, say, by the physical appearance of the hero or heroine, and may begin to reflect certain characteristics in social or cultural life. Lacan's voyeurism is another type of response of the gaze. The film you watch may become an object of pleasure or displeasure and affects one's psychic internality. For example, when you watch a character undergoing pain and sorrow, you may shed tears or feel pity; in other words, the cathartic effect of fear and pity works upon you and your immediate reaction changes. Similarly, the other responses –like that of slave and master, victim and victimizer relationships –work in terms of similar paradigmatic structures.

The film theorist Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" defines the psychoanalytical structure of a viewer's gaze from a gendered perspective. The paradox of phallocentricism depends on the notion of the castrated woman to give a structure or order and meaning to the world she exists in. Thus 'woman' becomes the mode of construction of a symbol that the society views, as for instance in a Bollywood film. Cultural concepts of respect and dignity (*maan-maryada*) are often thrust upon either women or the subordinates, who must bear the burden of protecting social values. So the symbol of a woman as a mother figure or a subordinate figure gains significance. In the case of males, there is a different structuring, for instance, a son is supposed to support his father as per the norms of a patriarchal society. Therefore, cinematic art is expected to replicate the same social structures.

Mulvey further describes from a psychoanalytical perspective the pleasure one derives while watching a film, referring to this as *Fascination with the Human Form* and *Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look*. She interprets the former phrase – '*Fascination with the Human Form*' — in the light of Freud's scopophilia on an erotic basis. She says that characters in the film become objects of a spectator's gaze. The spectator subjects them to a controlling and curious gaze and derives erotic pleasure in looking at the other person as object. Thus, the spectators in the cinematic world engage in surreptitious observation of the unknowing and unwilling victims, who are portrayed in a hermetically sealed world and unveiled in front of the spectator, producing a sense of separation from the surroundings and creating an intimate world of voyeuristic fantasy (Mulvey, 2000, p. 487-492). Simply put, this implies a certain level of identification with the characteristics on the cinematic screen. The concepts of Recognition, Figuration, Identification which you have already read about in the pervious sections, take place during this process too.

In the context of the phrase, '*Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look,*' Mulvey discusses the sexual imbalances that exist in the pleasure of looking. She identifies two sexual roles, active and passive. In a heterosexual world, the active sexual role is usually performed by the male and the passive role by the females; but in the queer world, the active and passive roles may not be as clearly demarcated on gender lines and may have more to do with sexual desires. The traditional exhibitionist role assigned to women in mainstream cinematic production makes a woman an object for the patriarchal society. Her appearance is aimed at creating a strong visual and erotic impact in patriarchal phallocentric societies, where women are projected as objects of sexual gratification. The depiction of women in many sexist songs is aimed at producing voyeuristic pleasure through the objectification of women for sexual gratification. Women are displayed as objects to the male gaze which is invited to take on a position of control. We will examine similar concepts in the context of queer people in the last unit of this block.

1.8   LET US SUM UP

You may now understand why 'gaze' or the 'eye of the camera' becomes important in the context of the gender perspective of a film. Depending upon the orientation, attitudes and perspectives of the director, actors, actresses and spectators, the viewing experience may be 'gendered' in different and complex ways. The 'gaze' or 'eye of the camera' is thus inherently connected to both those who wield the camera, and those who view what the camera looks at, and reproduces as spectacle.

1.9   UNIT END QUESTIONS

1.   Critically evaluate the concepts of cinema taking any film as a case study.

2.   Discuss how cinema becomes a gendered art, and the ways of looking at cinema as art.

3.   Describe the modes of reading or understanding a film.

4.   Discuss the notions of gender, pleasure, objectification nad 'the gaze' in terms of cinema.

1.10   GLOSSARY

Auteur   :   In, the 1950s-era **auteur theory** holds that a director's film reflects the director's personal creative vision, as if he or she were the primary 'auteur', derived from the French word meaning 'author'. Despite — and sometimes even because of —the production of the film as part of an industrial process, the author's creative voice is distinct enough to shine through all kinds of studio interference. In some cases, film producers are considered to exert an 'auteur' influence on the films they produce. But in legal terms, a film is treated as a work of art, and the auteur as its creator. Under European Union law, the film director is considered the author or one of the authors of a film.

Hermeneutics   :   It is the study of interpretation theory, and can be either the art of interpretation, or the theory and practice of interpretation.

Opsis   :   It is derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* meaning spectacle in theatre and performance. It is now used by theatre critics, historians and film theorists to describe the mise-en-scène of any performance, whether theatrical or cinematic.

Bollywood	:	It is an informal popular term used for the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, India. The name was modeled on USA's Hollywood. The term refers only to a part of the entire Indian film industry, which includes several regional film industries sorted by language of a particular state. Bollywood is the largest film producer in India and one of the largest centers of film production in the world.
Phallocentrism	:	Phallocentrism or phallogocentrism is a neologism coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to the privileging of the masculine (phallus) in the construction of meaning.

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UNIT 2 REPRESENTATIONS

Simran Chaddha

Structure

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have got some idea about representations as a cinematic mode and how representation can be used as a way of understanding or interpreting cinema. In this unit we will take that discussion further and talk about it in further detail. Here, we will look more closely at the relationship between representation and gender. We will learn how men, women and the same-sex, have been represented in Indian cinema especially, the commercial Hindi cinema of Bollywood, to see what representations reveal about the way gender is understood and mediated through cinema.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you would be able to:

• Define and describe representations in the context of cinema;

• Analyse the debates on representations from ancient to modern times;

• Discuss gender representations in contemporary Indian cinema; and

• Explain and distinguish different categories of gendered representations in cinema.

2.3 DEFINING REPRESENTATIONS

At the outset, we could begin by saying that a representation is a depiction or a sign that stands for, or takes the place of, something else. This could be the world around us or an abstract idea or for that matter even a political articulation. A representation could be conveyed through a variety of forms such as theatrical performances, cinematic narratives, literature, art, photography, digital encoding and so forth. These choices, however, are not random or politically innocent. Moreover, as there is no unmediated access to reality, representations are an essential component of our lives for they help us understand our world better and even from a different perspective. Nonetheless to treat a representation as politically neutral is a fallacy. This unit underscores the need to read representations in terms of their ideological effects, for even the earliest modes of representations which comprised theatrical performance and poetry dealing with the valour of kings, tales of war or the separation of lovers, were not devoid of the ideological mores of their age. Thus, the ancient Greek poet Homer sang ballads about the Trojan War and of the marvellous exploits of the Greek hero Odysseus mainly because he catered to an audience of courtly lineage.

What really is a representation? Why do we use the term 'representation', when categories like art, literature, film or aesthetics would suffice? One would like to know why a bust of the Greek philosopher Aristotle falls well within the realm of representational art, while a rare satellite photograph of the moon does not? This is not to imply that photography is not a representational art form, but to draw attention to the difference between representation as a creative activity, distinct from the mechanical process of imitation. As re-creation, a representation must be filtered through the subjectivity of the artist, who in turn belongs to a certain historical context and cultural milieu. So, while Keats "Ode to Autumn" is brilliant poetry, it is nonetheless a depiction of an English autumn from the point-of-view of a subject called John Keats, who was located at a moment in time when industrialisation was first making its appearance in the English countryside. The "Ode" captures a fast disappearing pastoral activity - that of the hand operated cider press. Similarly, while the impressionist artist Claude Monet's masterpiece entitled *The Water Lilies* (http://www.moma.org/images/dynamic_content/exhibition_page/31634.jpg) is a re-presentation of actual water-lilies, it has in turn inspired many more representations which, while simulating the original, are by no means servile copies of it.

When seen as a representation, art cannot be abstracted from the conflicts of its age. It is no longer viewed as transcendental or as occupying a realm of pure beauty untouched by time or place; rather, it is very much a part of its times, of the mundane and politically inundated reality from which it grows. Therefore, as representation, art stands demystified and embedded

in the discourse of its time. Thus we can say that culture and ideology are the salient factors that determine the study of representation. Let us look at some examples. While the sign of the Red Cross, for instance, represents medical and humanitarian aid, Edvard Munch's iconic painting *The Scream* attempts to re-present the angst of the post World War II generation; likewise, the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* attempts to re-create the essence of a complex historical period - the Tsarist regime in Russia; and last, but not the least, is the diasporic Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* which attempts to re-presents gender taboos in the Indian society. The term 'attempt' used here, illustrates the difference between reality and its portrayal; for while reality is far too complex, rough, unclear and often diffuse, when it gets transformed into a piece of art it appears as an artistic product that has finesse, shape and form. In other words, reality has been re-constructed.

The reality that art attempts to portray is therefore a construction and like all constructions it is not free of its politics or ideology. However, as no system of representation can ever encompass the entire gamut of reality, new modes and media of representation are constantly being invented/ constructed to signify reality in better ways. Newer media are forever being invented, as is evident in the trajectory of art forms beginning with cave paintings to movements such as Surrealism, Dadaism, Cubist art, and post-modernism, and various other art forms such as literature, cinematography, digital and electronic media and so forth.

As a representational art form, literature, it has been stated perhaps naively, is a 'representation of life'. 'Naively', because while a novel like Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* for instance does represent life in the Victorian age or the gory aspects of industrialisation in Victorian England, it is instrumental in influencing opinion regarding capitalism in general and the Victorian age in particular. Likewise, the play *Dance Like a Man* by the contemporary Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani represents the effect of a normative, machismo culture on a protagonist who challenges the stereotypical definitions of 'masculinity'. Commenting on the play after watching the performance, the audience commended Dattani for presenting a departure from the regular stereotypes of dissidence. They admitted that the play had influenced and even changed their perceptions regarding gender. It is important to remember that mainstream Indian cinema exerts a strong influence on various aspects of Indian life including fashion, ethics, politics and especially gender and the social expectations of gender roles.

The curious question is, if representations stem from life, what effect, if any, can representations have on life? In this regard the Victorian writer Oscar Wilde was not far from the truth when he made the controversial statement that life imitates art and not vice-versa. From the above discussion one can infer that representation and reality are in dialogue with one

another and while it is an established fact that the former is not a mirror reflection of the latter, yet representations cannot be divorced from the culture and society that have produced it. Art as representation can mould society's attitudes, perceptions, behaviour and values. In the Indian subcontinent, media and cinema have proved to be the most influential modes of representation. However, before we embark on a full-fledged analysis of gender representation in film, certain theoretical aspects must be clarified.

The two factors that stand established are: one, art is influenced by life and in turn exerts its influence over life; and two, all art is representation, which means that it is hardly ever neutral, unbiased or politically innocent. This is not to say that all art whether popular or elitist is no different from propaganda. But by describing art as representation, we foreground its ideological and political constructedness. In the next section, let us look at various attempts to theorise and debate representation through the ages.

2.4 DEBATING REPRESENTATION: PLATO TO EDWARD SAID

The earliest attempts to theorise representation are found in the work of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. In their treatises, the word *mimesis* is used to define representation as a literal translation amounting to imitation. 'Imitation' is not viewed in a pejorative manner but treated more in terms of the layered ambiguity of representational art. As Aristotle saw it, 'imitation' is a natural aspect of the human condition and humans, far more imitative than other animals, learn their first lessons through imitation. It is thus the first step towards a performance. For instance in the *Poetics*, Aristotle uses the term *mimesis* to describe tragedy – the most performative and representative art form in ancient Greece:

"An imitation of an action that is serious and complete, and which has some greatness about it. It imitates in words with pleasant accompaniments.... It imitates people performing actions and does not rely on narration. It achieves, through pity and fear, the catharsis of these sorts of feelings." (Butcher, 1974, p. 31-55).

The aim of tragedy as an art form is to bring about *catharsis* or purgation. Aristotle insisted that tragedy, by arousing pity and fear, had a purging effect on individuals. Aristotle's statement was made in response to Plato's call for censorship in the arts. In Book X of *The Rebublic*, Plato had proposed banning imitative poetry in the ideal city-state as he claimed that it aroused emotions of baser and irrational nature and perversely affected the human mind. The performance of tragedy and comedy would therefore promote undesirable modes of behaviour among the citizens. Bolstering his argument

further, Plato insisted that imitative art being thrice removed from reality was a falsehood and deserved to be banished. The argument goes as follows: while the original form, let's say of a chair, for instance, rests with the creator, it was in turn copied by the carpenter and the likeness of this was further reproduced by the poet or the painter. Art was thus thrice removed from the original idea (Allen, 2006). This argument can be better understood in the context of the present-day media which bear the charge of mediating reality and creating for the viewer a version of reality that may be far removed from the events that actually transpired. So, for Plato, art created illusions, in much the same manner as the present day media is accused of falsification of reality. Plato makes a strong argument regarding the potentiality of representational art to rouse emotion and influence opinion. It therefore had no place in his ideal republic. The only poetry that was allowed in the city state or in the nurseries of the young and impressionable was the kind which dwelt on heroic valour or the coronation of kings or didactic tribute to the state.

While Plato was well aware and wary of the idea of art on the mind, Aristotle made a case for the same by drawing upon the *catharsis* or purgation. He argued that by re-presenting the more disturbing, volatile and irrational side of human nature, the viewer's experience was at best vicarious and this induced a purgation of those undesirable elements thereby cleansing viewer of negative emotions. Aristotle insisted that art and its performance led the citizen to leave the theatre completely purged of all that was base (Butcher, 1974, 1961).

Moving from ancient Greece to the Romantic Period may appear to be a quantum leap but it was with the Romantics (Coleridge, Kant, Hegel among others), that the concept of aesthetics as the philosophy of art was first articulated. Speaking about this period, Terry Eagleton states "... the assumption that there was an unchanging object called 'art' or an isolable experience called 'beauty' or the 'aesthetic', was largely a product of the very alienation of art from social life...." (Eagleton, 1983, p. 21).

This was the time when industrialization was beginning to make its presence felt in the English countryside. Thus, for the Romantics, artistic creation transcended the vagaries of historical, material, social or political change. In other words, art was removed from the materiality of commercial activity and appeared absolved of the conflicts of its age rather than embodying them. The Victorian age with its emphasis on utilitarianism and progress welcomed this line of thought by insisting that imaginative endeavour was as an activity gloriously useless, and at best an end in itself. Attempting to make a case for the arts, Oscar Wilde insisted on the adage 'art for art's sake', implying that it was reductive to look for a message or purpose in a work of art. Paradoxically, Victorian art is extremely representative of the discourses of its times. Moreover, with the emergence of print culture in

the Victorian age, artistic representation especially literature found wide dissemination.

As the post-modernist philosopher Michel Foucault later pointed out, the Victorian age straitjacketed sexuality into discourses of the normative as opposed to that of the deviant or the dissident. Representation played no small role in this facilitation; rather, as Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality Volume II*, it added to the proliferating discourses on sexuality. Typical representations of sexuality such as the normative family, the hysterical woman, the dissident, the deviant, the lady, the prostitute and so forth abound in the Victorian Age. The thrust of Foucault's investigation is why all this transpired in the Victorian age and not before or after it? He tries to show how discourse and the knowledge it produces and disseminates are connected to the power structures which in turn stand validated by that knowledge. Foucault relates this to the demands of the welfare state that was beginning to consolidate its position and shows how representations of normative sexuality were complicit with it.

Using the Foucauldian framework, the post-colonial scholar Edward Said in his path-breaking study titled *Orientalism* (1978), analyses the way geographical territory of the Orient (Middle East) was depicted by the European imagination through the entire period of colonial expansion from eighteenth century onwards. He notes how these representations of the Orient focus on images of primitivism, despotism, cruelty, sensuality, superstition, exotic splendour and so forth to create certain stereotypical notions about the Orient and its inhabitants. For the European imaginary, the Orient, through its representations, stood for everything that they prided themselves on not being. In other words, the Orient was the uncivilized, barbaric 'Other' to the civilized West. Thus, Orientalism helped the West to define its self-image more than it did for the East. You have already come across Said's work in unit 3, Block 5 of MWG 001. It may be helpful for you to review the relevant section.

The overarching question is why such representations of the Orient would be helpful to the Western power structures of the time in time and why would the West wish to propagate such representations? The answer lies in the economics of colonial polity which needed an ideology such as Orientalism to facilitate the project of colonial conquest. As Said says, Orientalism became: "…a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." (Said, 1978, p. 3). The ideology of Orientalism projected colonial expansion not as the exploitative mechanism it really was but as a civilizing mission of carrying the white man's [and woman's] burden – that is, of carrying the light of civilization and modernity to the darker and savage regions of the earth. In this regard, representations of the Orient by the Occident, worked to validate the altruistic aspect of colonial conquest. While agreeing that representations can never be exactly

realistic, for there is no Orient (except as a geographical location) out there waiting to be realistically depicted, Said states: "there is no such thing as a delivered presence but a re-presence, or a representation" (Said, 1978, p. 21). Representations however cannot be dismissed as untrue, for as the text goes on to demonstrate, Orientalism, i.e., knowledge about the Orient produced by the Occident, deeply influenced colonial polity and therefore had vast implications for real people in real contexts.

Our next point regarding the theory of representation deals with the politics of the viewer because besides the creating subject, the interpreting subject too imparts meaning to the piece of art in terms of her politics and ideologies. As the cultural critic Ella Shohat says:

> "Each filmic or academic utterance must be analysed not only in terms of who represents but also in terms of who is being represented for what purpose, at which historical moment, for which location, using which strategies, and in what tone of address." (Shohat, 1995, p.166-178).

In other words, while studying representations we must be alert to the ideological work the representation accomplishes. So while liking or not liking a text/art may appear to be no more than a value judgment, it speaks volumes about how power operates in a society at any given point of time. Our critical responses, variable as they may be, are demonstrative not just of the vagaries of human nature but reflect deeper prejudices and beliefs, which as mentioned earlier on in this essay, shows how power operates in society. For instance, while the neo-classicists decried Shakespeare's plays as the products of a mind untrained in Latin, Greek and mathematics; the Romantics deified him but doubted the literary capabilities of the poet John Donne.

As you have seen from the above discussion, representations are therefore deeply political and laden with ideological mores. This is particularly true of cinema and mainstream Indian cinema which is labelled as an escapist mode of mass entertainment. When studied in terms of representation, this cinema reveals the politics of its making. In the next section we will take a closer look at gender representation in contemporary Indian cinema.

Check Your Progress 1:

What is representation in films? Is it different from other forms of art?

2.5 GENDER REPRESENTATION IN INDIAN CINEMA

Gender representations in the mainstream contemporary Indian cinema (Bollywood) generally follow a set pattern or formula; for instance femininity is represented in terms of passivity, chastity and as the repository of traditional, ritualistic values, while controlled anger and violence are the characteristics of the virile male hero in his role as protector of the defenceless women. Their maschismo character makes them the hero, while gay men are often shown as effeminate, and lesbians are portrayed as exhibiting masculine traits. Films did evolve beyond such stereotypical depictions, about the gay men and lesbian portrayals we will talk in details in the last unit of this block. The nuances of such attempts will be explored in this section. We will look at representations of dissidence vis-à-vis their equation with heterosexuality, the manner in which they challenge the traditionally established and inviolable gender demarcations and how this relates to the homophobia of a heteronormative society.

2.5.1 Masculine Representations

In this section, we will begin by examining two important aspects of masculine representations in Indian cinema: **homosociality** and **homoeroticism.** The difference between the two terms lies in the social behaviour between two male protagonists in a film. **Homosociality** refers to a bonding between the two characters without any sexual connotations. For instance, either they are two heroes, or two brothers, or hero and a villain. Between the male hero and the male villain, certainly action and showing physical power of the two are evident, overlaying the fact that good (hero) always wins over evil (villain) whatsoever may be the incidental development in the movie. So this category might be seen through ethical and moral point of view; but the first two categories of two heroes/brothers are more prominent examples of homosociality. For instance, the bondage of friendship between two male protagonists is sometimes portrayed sharing their feelings and love for each other at plutonic level. Films like *Dosti* (1964), *Sholay* (1975), *Yaraana* (1981) and many more films where two protagonists turn out to be heroes of the films each having two different heroines. Not only such portrayals, but pairing up two male heroes with bondage of same profession or motive behind their acts, like *Do aur Do Paanch* (1980), *Shaan* (1980), and many others, is also quite common examples of homosociality. Still today such representations of masculine homosociality are acceptable by spectators widely.

The other representation of two male actors is **homoeroticism**. Their amiability and bondages with other male protagonists in any given film sometimes depicts an erotic bondage beyond the parameters of sexual overtones. Take examples of films where, two heroes fall in love with the same girl and one sacrifices for the other, like *Arzoo* (1965), or *Muqaddar*

ka Sikandar (1978), or *Qurbani* (1980). Another example of homoeroticisms in Bollywood Hindi cinema are camp readings. Camp readings see male spectacle as masculine. Camp readings combine the antithetical qualities of authenticity and theatricality. This can be seen as an oppositional reading of popular culture offering the identification and pleasure that dominant cultures deny to homosexuals. Camp emphasises the performativity of gender and shows that gender enacts a set of discontinuous, if not parodic, performances (Butler, 1990, pp. 163-80).

Representations of gender matter because gender is a fiction disseminated by the prevailing power structures, which is in this case the welfare state. In being seen as natural, gender representation assumes dimensions akin to natural truth and can exercise the power to determine the destiny of the persons concerned. Particular acts and choices function as the markers of pathology typifying the deviant character type which expresses, as Foucault says, a degenerate constitution whose sexuality is governed by concepts of risk, danger and violence (Foucault, 1976, pp. 38-79). These groups are taken to be marginal but in their marginality function to determine the dominant, that is, they consolidate reproductive sexual relations as normative and healthy.

2.5.2 Feminine Representations

As you have read, femininity is often represented in mainstream commercial cinema in terms of passivity, chastity where woman becomes the repository of traditional, ritualistic values making her the carrier of *maan-maryada* of the family, community and nation, such as the figure of the *pativrata* (devoted wife and mother), the *Sati-Savitri*, and the portrayal of villainy through characterisations of vamps. The depiction of deviance on the Indian screen has followed a staple pattern too, with very few exceptions. The *Pati- Parameshwar* phenomenon has become a ritualistic tradition for representing women in cinema. Until the 80s of Bollywood there was an increase in the number of female-orientated movies. Masculine characteristics of action were depicted. Even, the roles of vamps or female villainy saw changes during this period. Vamps were no longer shown as docile feminine characters attached to the male villains, they rather were portrayed as over-powering and significant roles in most of the family dramas, for example like a torturous *saas* or *nanad*, like *Sau Din Saas Ke* (1979), *Ghar Ek Mandir* (1984), *Biwi Ho To Aisi* (1988), etc. Another significant factor can be seen in films, is the feminine homosociality. The plutonic bonding between two female protagonists is also represented in many films, like the male bonding. Two female protagonists may be involved in the same act, like stealing *Parvarish* (1977), or supporting the heroes to take revenge, like in *Mawaali* (1983).

2.5.3 Same Sex Representations: Lesbians

In Indian cinema, same sex love has often been used as stock situation for comedy. This is especially true in the depictions of male homosexuality which is often represented in terms of effeminacy or an inadequacy in terms of meeting the norm of masculinity typified by the figure of the hero. For instance, the blockbuster *Kal ho Na Ho* (2003) directed by Karan Johar was among the first films to portray camp reading gestures on screen. Yet when this was shown through sexual postures of the two male leads Shahrukh Khan and Saif Ali Khan, the camera focussed instead on the nervous agitation of the *bai* bringing the morning tea. Her reaction prompted hilarious comedy, thereby negating the possibility of making manifest the subversive sexuality observed by the viewer, who through the reaction of the *bai* is now encouraged to view the enactment as a comic misunderstanding rather than a conscious choice made by the protagonists. The subversive edge of the preceding shot — enacting Camp (through gestures) — was thus translated as a comic occasion. The film *Dostana* (2008) followed a similar theme but established heterosexuality of all the couples involved in the final sequence. The possibility of a committed and fulfilling homosexual relationship, in this case between the two male leads Abhishek Bachhan and John Abraham, was reduced to the level of farce. You will read more about such examples in Hindi and vernacular films in the last unit of this block.

In this unit, you will learn about lesbian representations in Bollywood cinema, citing two examples only. Deepa Mehta's radical movie *Fire* (1996), despite the representation of a bond between the two main characters played by strong female lead of Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das, ultimately took recourse to explaining the desire between the two women as the outcome of a cloistered and lonely marriage. Female homosexuality was seen as demonic and threatening and needed to be erased to re-set familial and social balance. Depictions of homosexuality as in the films mentioned above strengthen the binary between the hetero and the homo, with normativity and health associated with the former.

In this regard, Karan Razdan's film *Girlfriend* (2004) marks a departure from the set norm. At the outset, the 'Tanya' character in the film is depicted as a masculine woman or the mannish-lesbian; but she is so by choice. As the masculinised lesbian, the character of Tanya follows the stereotypical image of female homosexuality but it is through the inherent doubleness of her character, existing and partaking of both the realms of masculinity and femininity that she challenges established and exclusivist gender boundaries. Through her, the auteur is able to subvert the staid dichotomy of active male as opposed to the passive female – a binary that is foundational for defining gender in a patriarchal culture.

Narratives are often structured through opposition, thereby enabling the spectator to identify with the point-of-view desired by the auteur. In this text the stereotype of the homicidal, psychotic butch Tanya, is foiled by the ultra feminine, victimised, 'normal' woman Sapna, who besides being a professional model is utterly incapable of taking care of either herself or her finances. Needless to say, she has to be rescued time and again by Tanya. While Sapna fits the stereotypical mould of the damsel in distress, Tanya on the other hand straddles a bike, makes money as a street fighter and becomes the menacing serial killer. Danger stalks her character. Following lesbian stereotypes, she too is cast in terms of the castrated female lesbian. She is in this regard the wild uncontrollable entity- the female homosexual, who by subverting societal mores now exists in a space that is taboo.

Representations of female homosexuality, as is evident from the above example, do not serve the function of celebrating female desire but place it on display for the masculine spectator. Women's desire is a matter of curiosity, and it demands investigation simply because it is the 'other'. The spectator engages with the scene by seeing the lesbian as the 'other', a fit object of 'investigation-by-scrutiny' (Kuhn, 1985). This objectification of the images on screen imply a masculine subject position, which can be occupied by spectators, be they men or women.

According to Sigmund Freud (Frued, 1905, pp. 387-90), homosexual women suffer from penis envy, therefore the homosexual female, as visualized in the dominant discourse, tries to overcome her castration by assuming a masculine role in life, cross-dresses and behaves through gestures and desire like a man. A significant part of the lesbian fantasy/myth is the origin of the lesbian. For Freud, a lesbian is a woman who has never recovered from her sense of phallic inequality.

Ultimately, the cinematic text attempts to contain the unruly and deviant female body which threatens to confuse gender boundaries and disrupt the social order. Such an argument establishes heteronormative sexuality as the accepted sexual behaviour and dismisses homosexuality as a pathological deviation. However, the final method of containment is always lethal. The psychotic lesbian must die, which may not be the case with the male homosexual who by being effeminate and funny is rendered innocuous. As Michel Foucault iterates, the culturally sanctioned signifiers of the homosexual experience cannot go beyond casual encounters, the anonymous sexual act and the immediate albeit illicit pleasure (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001, p. 168).

Foucault argues that homosexual connections assume disturbing and disruptive positions when they translate into gentler modes of camaraderie, affection, friendship, passion, solidarity, companionship and tenderness (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001, 168). The dominant stereotypes of gay men range from

the sissy to the sad young man to the ageing queen and as mentioned earlier they are characteristically the source of comedy because they fail the norm of masculinity. These stereotypes are often introduced through visual, aural and descriptive iconography to typify male homosexuality, such as codes in dressing, certain gestures, stylistic décor or extended looks, all of which can invoke the homosexuality of the character. Typically in the *Girlfriend*, the male homosexual is a limp-wristed effeminate man.

The representation of the male homosexual objectifies the male body and delivers to the gaze. But the image of the male body as an object of the gaze is fraught with ambivalences, repressions and denials. Like the masquerade, the notion of spectacle has such strong female connotations: for a male performer to be an object of display and desire, even if it means donning a mask, it threatens his very masculinity. But because the phallus is a symbol and signifier no male body can ever symbolise it completely and although the patriarchal male subject has a privileged relation to the phallus, he will always fall short of the phallic ideal. Jacque Lacan (Lacan, 1977, p. 291) notices this effect in his essay on the meaning of the phallus: "the curious consequence of making virile display in the human being itself seems feminine." Hence the male spectacle acquires a feminine position. While the theatricality of the performing male is aimed at arousing desire, sensuality is more a feminine trait. It is the female body that can legitimately be objectified as sensual and desirable thereby commanding the gaze, while the sensual masculine posturing, even in theatricality, easily becomes an object of laughter.

Check Your Progress 2:

What are the differences between homosociality and homoeroticism?

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Our analysis of gender representation in mainstream Indian cinema shows how representations are far from innocuous and stereotypes far from sterile. Their presence ensures that the hegemonic social gendering maintains and validates its position as the dominant, true and natural. However, it is the inherent ambivalence in the nature of representation that reveals the antithetical directions at one and the same time. The cinematic text discussed above, at one level solidifies the position of the heteronormative by playing on the homophobic notions of society but at the same time destabilises notions of gender by pointing to the 'performance' of gender. What this makes apparent is that 'gendering' is an ambivalent process and that identity, specially gendered identity, is relational.

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Use examples to illustrate how gender and representation are interlinked.

2. Critically analyse the concept of *mimesis* in the context of gender taking examples from any film you have watched recently.

3. Discuss same-sex representations in Indian Cinema with the help of examples. What do these representations reveal?

4. What is Camp reading? How is gender represented in this form of readings?

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UNIT 3   SPECTATORSHIP, CENSORSHIP AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Anandana Kapur

Structure

3.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous two units, you have read about how gender can be represented or analysed a film, and about the relationship between gender and 'the gaze'. In this unit, we will look at the issue of spectatorship, censorship and critical analysis. We will learn about validating authorities and certification procedures, and try to understand the nitty-gritty of spectatorship from a critical perspective.

3.2   OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

• Define censorship;

• Evaluate the various kinds of censorship operational in society;

• Define spectatorship and discuss the impact of censorship on audiences;

- Analyse representations of gender and sexuality in mass media; and

- Compare certification processes as an alternate to censorship.

3.3 WHAT IS CENSORSHIP?

While describing the 'ideal State' in his philosophical and political treatise *The Republic*, Plato recommended that official censors should prohibit mothers and nurses from 'relating tales deemed bad or evil'. While the idea of monitoring and regulating nursery rhymes and bed-time tales may seem absurd to a modern day reader, similar acts of regulation have been used to muzzle expression in literature, art, cinema and even mundane speech over centuries.

While Plato is perhaps the first thinker to have formally recorded a rationale for intellectual, religious and artistic restriction, every society has had customs, taboos, or laws by which speech, dress, religious observance, and sexual expression have been regulated. Even in Athens, where democracy first emerged, opposition to orthodoxy was treated as a crime and it was proposed that laws be enacted to suppress acts that would be considered heresy. In ancient Rome, freedom of speech was the privilege of those in positions of power. Authors of so called 'seditious' writings were punished severely, including poets Ovid and Juvenal who were banished for their liberal views. Critics of the emperor Nero faced the same fate and their books were burnt.

As citizens of a country that constitutionally guarantees 'freedom of speech' we are theoretically open to the idea of debate, difference and diversity of opinion. However in practical conduct we encounter, oppose or even collude with restrictions on our actions and expressions. These may arise out of personal beliefs, social conditioning, lack of information and even coercion. In fact the phrase, 'reasonable restrictions' (Article 19(2)) which is conjoined with Article 19(1) that guarantees 'Freedom of speech' in the Indian constitution should be examined closely to see whether it is useful, effective or relevant and how it affects each of us as citizens, audiences and private individuals.

Censorship can be defined as the control of information and ideas being circulated within a society. It involves examination of books, plays, films, TV and radio programmes, new reports, internet posts and other forms of communication for the purpose of altering or suppressing ideas found to be 'objectionable' or 'offensive'. This suppression of knowledge and thoughts is carried out through a framework of laws and procedures that are used by governments or organizations to prevent the free and unopposed circulation of material in society (Nigel Watson, 1991).

The rationales for censorship vary, with some censors targeting material deemed to be indecent or obscene; heretical or blasphemous; or seditious or treasonous. According to Sue Curry Janson (1991), censorship is a form of surveillance, a type of mechanism for gathering intelligence that the powerful can use to tighten control over people or any ideas that threaten to disrupt established system of order (Janson, 1991). Over the centuries, ideas have been suppressed under the guise of protecting three basic social institutions: the family, the religion, and the State.

Censorship is in fact as much an act of commission as an act of omission. This is because certain kinds of images/texts are funded, promoted and circulated widely by individuals, organisations and the State at the expense of others. This makes them seem natural or normal and therefore self-evident and standard. Other expressions which are not allowed to be showcased and discussed then get associated with the non-standard and acquire the label of deviant and unacceptable. Over time, social tolerance and acceptance of these materials becomes lower and their censorship continues unquestioned and unchallenged. A case in point would be the acceptance and integration of sexual minorities in secular, religious and political spaces. Historical texts, paintings, sculpture and biographical accounts point to an inclusive existence up until religion and state decorum were invoked to suppress individuals. It is here that Elisabeth Noelle Neumann's '*Spiral of Silence*' theory seems to be an apt fit. According to Neumann, "people fear social isolation" and so they tend to speak openly in favour of what they believe will be perceived positively or is majority opinion (Neumann, 1993, p. 139). As a result, status quo is maintained and alternate views do not get ample representation or articulation. Interestingly, Neumann was associated with the dictatorial regime of the Nazis during her formative years as a journalist.

3.3.1 Regulatory vs. Cultural Censorship

As discussed above, not all censorship is regulatory i.e. arises from government or external force. According to Beate Müller (2004), "censorship is a cultural phenomenon that transcends time and place". Society too employs individual and collective censorship on an informal basis. This is often expressed as prejudice and the avoidance of certain topics and people. One such taboo concept is sex and sexuality (Muller, 2004, p. 14)

The Delhi High Court, while referring to novelist Arthur Koestler, observed in an indecency case seeking to ban Khushwant Singh's novel *The Women and Men in my Life* that most "Indians have a notoriously ambivalent attitude towards sex. On the one hand there is this cult of lingam, the erotic temple carvings, and the Kamasutra, and on the other hand, prudery, hypocrisy, lip service to the ideal of chastity, but all combined with spermal anxiety"(Singh, 1996, point. 20).

During several periods of history, Indian society was accommodating of sexual minorities and expression of individual opinion. Even in cinema and art currently taboo topics were the subject of many creative expressions. Nudity was not considered obscene nor was kissing on screen.

Check Your Progress 1:

What, according to you, are some of the reasons behind censoring a film before public release?

3.4 PRE-CENSORSHIP FRAMEWORKS IN INDIA

Regulatory censorship functions through various mechanisms. Soli Sorabjee (1997) in his book *The Emergency, Censorship and the Press in India 1975-77* categorises censorship into three kinds based on the Censorship order. These include: pre-censorship i.e. screening and deleting of all 'objectionable' material prior to public notification or release; news management i.e. monitoring of which news gets released, when, where and how; or a complete and outright ban of certain news reports and other information.

Prior-censorship controlled by the State or religious authorities remains the norm in many parts of the world. Someswar Bhowmik (2009) provides a historiography of censorship laws in India in his book *Cinema Censorship: The Politics of Control in India* where he says that in pre-Independence India, the colonial censorship has growing anxieties among the Indian audiences, while watching inflammatory films or morally imprecise films. Under the colonial rule, film censorship was used as an instrument for restraint and thus after independence became a medium of reinforcement of the British rule. The same approach was inherited by postcolonial India and remains largely unchanged today. He also argues that censorship under postcolonial India is even more tightened and centralized than the rather diffused structure of colonial censorship. According to him, the proponents of control have been unanimous that the extraordinary powers of the 'live' visual medium can be restrained only by pre-empting the 'objectionable' subjects or themes in this realm. Thus, pre-censorship has come to be accepted as the most effective method to contain the 'supposedly' evil influence of cinema. (Bhowmik, 2009, pp. 66-105).

In India the clause 'reasonable restrictions' is often appealed to for the same. Censorship in India can be studied through the constitutional laws which govern the country. Article 19 (2) states "Nothing…shall affect the operation of any existing law, or prevent the State from making any law, in so far as such law imposes reasonable restrictions…in the interests of the

sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence" (Bhowmik, 2009, p. 75).

Since the declaration of the Constitution, many subsequent acts have been passed pertaining to censorship. And these have largely centered on the control of broadcast media. Some of these Acts have been listed below:

Box 3.1: Censorship Acts

Dramatic Performances Act (1876)	For better control of public dramatic performances WHEREAS expedient to empower the Government to prohibit public dramatic performances that are scandalous, seditious or obscene.
Cinematograph Film Rules (1948)	Rules applying to storage and transport of Nitro-Cellulose based cinematograph films.
Cinematograph Act (1952)	To make provision for the certification of cinematograph films for exhibition and for regulating exhibitions by means of cinematographs.
Punjab Cinemas (Regulation) Act (1952)	To make provisions for regulation and exhibition by means of cinematographs in Punjab.
Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act (1956)	To prevent the dissemination of certain publications harmful to young persons.
Copyright Act (1957)	To prevent reproduction, circulation and modifications without authorization of Copyright owner.
Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act (1971)	To prevent insults to national honour including provisions with respect to the use of the national flag, Constitution of India and singing of the national anthem.
Cinematograph (Certification) Rules (1983)	Rules made by the central government with regard to the exercise of the powers conferred by section 8 of the Cinematograph Act,1952 and in supersession of the Cinematograph (Censorship)Rules,1958.
Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1986)	An Act to prohibit the indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act (1990)	An Act to provide for the establishment of a Broadcasting Corporation for India, to be known as Prasar Bharati, to define its composition, functions and powers and to proved for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.
Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act (1995)	An Act to regulate the operations of cable television networks in the country and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Moreover, India also has an Obscenity Law under Sec. 292 of the Indian Penal Code which states that "the selling, letting, hiring, distributing, publicly exhibiting or putting into circulation in any manner for selling, letting, hiring, publicly exhibiting, distributing, making, producing or having a book, pamphlet, paper, writing, drawing, painting, representation, figure or any other object that is obscene is punishable by law. A text is considered obscene if it is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest, or its effect(s) is to deprave or corrupt the persons who come across the matter" (Bhowmick, 2009, p. 226-228).

It is these anonymous persons and possible/intended audiences in whose names the rationale and supporting ideologies of censorship are furthered. While many oppose censorship on the grounds that healthy debate can help address prejudices and that out of sight, does not always mean out of mind, you will find that there exists an instinctive impulse to censor in order to maintain status quo. Try this simple self-assessment test: Have you ever objected to any portrayals or depictions in art, literature, cinema or music? Which elements would you want removed or censored? What are your reasons for the same? Would that not contradict someone else's right to freedom of speech and action? It is therefore essential, that arguments in favour of and against censorship are analysed in detail.

Check Your Progress 2:

What are the different acts for censorship in India? When were they implemented?

3.5 SPECTATORSHIP

The term spectator is conceptually different from the terms viewer and audience. According to Annette Kuhn (1987), "...audience members become spectators in the moment they engage in the processes and pleasures of meaning-making attendant on watching a film or TV programme" (Kuhn cited in Buccola, 2004, p.137). The anticipated pleasure of spectatorship is perhaps a necessary condition of existence of audiences.

Spectatorship refers to the consumption of visual media but also identifies and interprets the manner in which audiences are represented, addressed and positioned vis-à-vis the medium. An ideological framework, spectatorship traces the complex task of viewer reception.

John Ellis (1982) while differentiating between film and television spectatorship says, "...film spectatorship, it may be argued, involves the pleasures evoked by looking in a more pristine way than does watching

television. Whereas in classic cinema the concentration and involvement proposed by structures of the look, identification and point-of-view tend to be paramount, television spectatorship is more likely to be characterised by distraction and diversion" (Ellis, 1992, p. 77-91).

In this unit we will restrict our analysis of spectatorship vis-à-vis the medium of Cinema. According to Ravi Vasudevan (2003), "...intersections with other media forms and visual industries such as music, fashion and advertising have also made for a more dense understanding of the cinematic sensorium" (Vasudevan, 2003). Spectatorship therefore looks at how audiences receive cinema by taking into account genres of films, exhibition formats and spaces (kinds of theatres, locations etc) and contemporary socio-cultural and political events and their collective impact on the patterns of viewership. Over the years, spectatorship studies have begun focusing on how the viewing subject i.e. the 'I' is defined in relation what is seen. This in itself is multi-step and ranges from studying representations and viewers' negotiations with them (acceptance, rejection or rationalization) as well as looking at how viewers look at and interact with fellow audience members. Tracing the flow of information beyond cinema halls and exhibition spaces is an integral part of spectatorship. Since spectatorship is a study of individual and mass mediation of cinematic representations, the attempt to control these through censorship becomes a critical area of enquiry.

Censorship assumes that it is possible to entirely anticipate an act of reception and that these acts are standardized and mass based. However, it has been proven empirically that individual responses to, and readings of, images are diverse and not entirely predictable. Then what strategies do supporters of censorship adopt to advocate its implementation?

3.5.1 Images and their Impact

Shohini Ghosh, in her *Looking in Horror and Fascination: Sex, Violence and Spectatorship in India,* questions "the assumption that there is a single and unified interpretation of the text" (Ghosh, 2005, p. 29-43). According to her the discourse that interprets images as having 'negative effects' finds it origins in the 1940s theories of 'direct impact'. Known as the hypodermic needle and magic bullet theories, they stated that mass media has a direct, immediate and irreversible impact on the receiver. According to these theories, audiences accept what is being shown wholly and unquestioningly. This in turn fueled the premise that mass media content could induce audiences to become 'copycats' and reproduce the 'harmful' and 'anti-social behaviour' that might be shown.

Ravi Vasudevan (2003) says, "...attracting families and women audiences, [was] always considered crucial to the cinema's social legitimacy" (Vasudevan, 2003). Ghosh, also points to the sexism in profiling vulnerable audiences as

women, children and the socio-economically weak. Rather than protecting these sub-groups, censorship prevents viewers from deriving their own meanings. According to her, the spectatorial repositioning brought about by "empirical studies of the 1960s" revealed the complexity of the relationship between the image and the spectator. They emphasised that larger social reality helped shape a person's responses to a form of media.

"Media has consequences. It does influence, inflect and mediate, but in ways that are unpredictable and non-determinate" (Ghosh, 2005, p. 43). Christine Gledhill (1988) in her work *Pleasurable Negotiations* explains that "meanings are not fixed entities to be deployed at the will of a communicator, but products of textual interactions shaped by a range of economic, aesthetic, and ideological factors that often operate unconsciously, are predictable and difficult to control" (Gledhill, 1988, p. 14). Some scholars suggest that that media spectatorship forms a 'trialogue' between texts, readers and communities, thereby making it a negotiable site. Kuhn also believes that "...the model of the spectator/subject is useful in correcting more deterministic communication models which might, say, pose the spectator not as actively constructing meaning but simply as a receiver and decoder of preconstituted 'messages'" (Kuhn cited in White, 1999, p. 14)

Bhowmik says, "Within film theory, spectatorship is a theoretical concept that informs us how...films position and construct certain ways in which spectators are able to view films. The relationship between Indian cinema and its viewers has been primarily theorized from the perspectives of the films themselves" (Bhowmik, 2009, p.48). He is critical of representations in films per se and says that "the film censorship in the Indian context is more in the nature of a restrictive and prescriptive practice, and also shuns transparency by witholding information. That is what makes it such dubious and at times a suspect institution" (Bhowmick, 2009, p.337). His argument is similar to the point regarding commissioning that we have discussed in section 3.3 above. Majority mass media content reproduces structures and situations already present in society rather than questioning or replacing them and censorship can be used to withhold or blunt those which do.

In an article-series titled "My Name is Controversy" by *The Pioneer*, authors, filmmakers and social scientists reflect on how cinema becomes a site of contest. According to Kishwar Desai (2011), "As India grapples with modernity, cinema is a common casualty because it is the premier medium which reflects social change in a free society. Whenever new ideas are explored, there is always a backlash from the die-hard conservatives who prefer to maintain status quo." She also observes that the appointment of a Censor Board, "somehow gave the false notion to the moral police that everything on screen had to be viewed very strictly through a moral lens" (Desai, 2011, 16 Januaray).

Nikhat Kazmi (2009), a film critic, has blogged, "Sex and erotica have been an intrinsic part of Indian cinema since its inception". It was way back in 1928 in *Shiraz* that Indian audiences first saw an onscreen kiss between actors Enakashi Rama Rao and Charu Roy. Kazmi points to other films like *Throw of A Dice* (1929), *Light of Asia* (1925) and *Karma* (1933) which showed kisses being exchanged between Rai and Devika Rani. Whether, one calls it the "rising tide of nationalism" or '"bowing to Gandhian-Victorian values", kissing on screen was soon regarded as 'unpatriotic' and 'un-Indian' and disappeared from the screen. While it resurfaced a few decades later in Raj Kapoor's film *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978), Kazmi (2009) quotes Kapoor's dilemma on not being allowed to show a breast in the same film. According to Kapoor, "what's immoral in showing a beautiful girl…If a Fellini shows a woman in the nude, it is considered art. If I show off a woman's beauty, it is called exploitation!'' (Kazmi, 2009, June 8).

The GD Khosla Committee (1975) that was appointed to review the functioning of the Censor Board in order to suggest a more progressive application of the Cinematograph Act of 1952, stated: "If in telling the story, it is logical, relevant or necessary to depict a passionate kiss or a nude woman, there should be no question of excluding the shot'' (Noorani, 2011). The committee deemed the Censor board guidelines 'archaic' and found them wanting in terms of being up to date with the norms of conduct and ideologies of contemporary Indian society.

The committee suggested among other provisions that:

• the use of sex and nudity in art does not automatically imply that is it is obscene;

• the obscene part must be considered by itself and separately to assess if it is truly so gross/obscene that it may corrupt vulnerable minds;

• the interests of the society and the influence of the book is to be considered;

• obscenity without a pre-pondering social purpose or profit cannot have the constitutional protection of free speech or expression;

• representation of sex as appealing to the carnal side of human nature is offensive, etc

A little over two decades later after the G.D. Khosla Committee Report of 1975, in 1996 Shekhar Kapur's film, *The Bandit Queen* contained a brief scene of frontal nudity lasting about 20 seconds. The High Court of Delhi ruled that this scene was indecent and should be deleted. The Supreme Court however reversed the decision and ruled: "Nakedness does not always arouse the baser instinct." The judgement read: "Scenes of nudity and rape and the use of expletives as permitted by the censor board were in aid of the film's theme and not intended to arouse prurient and lascivious thoughts but revulsion against the perpetrators and pity for the victim".

3.4.2 The Female Spectator

Kuhn states "…each medium constructs sexual difference through spectatorship in rather different ways." In agreement with a fellow thinker she says," Pointing to the centrality of intuition and emotion in the construction of the woman's point-of-view, Pam Cook regards the construction of a feminine spectator as a highly problematic and contradictory process" (Kuhn cited in Buccola, 2004, p.142). In the book, *Sexuality Gender and Rights: Theory and Practice in South and South East Asia* contributing author Shilpa Phadke (2005) observes that, "The presence of real life heterosexual couples in public spaces blurs the boundaries that distinguish public from private, threatening the boundaries that distinguish the good women (who's sexuality is located firmly in the private) from the bad (who's sexuality is for public consumption). Built into these binaries are efforts to control and regulate the sexuality of women by the State accomplished largely by defining subtle codes of behaviour and attire deemed appropriate for respectable women. These codes have been reflected in a variety of restrictions." (Misra & Chandiramani, 2005, p. 67-79).

Such restrictions are not limited to cinema, books or advertisements but also extend to paintings and female beauty contests. The attempted justification for such acts is rested interalia on Article 51 (A) of the Indian Constitution which prescribes certain fundamental duties, one of which is 'to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women'. It is the fervent desire for the preservation of a society uncontaminated by supposedly immoral Western influences that is the main impulse behind censorship.

And yet, a country which saw widespread protests to the lyrics '*sexy sexy mujhe log bolein*' (People call me sexy, *Khuddar* 1993) and led to the re-dubbed version '*baby baby mujhe log bolein*' today dances to the beat of '*I'm too sexy for you…Sheela ki Jawani.*' (*Tees Mar Khan*, 2010) This proves that spectatorial realities are fluid and changing and the same is projected on to and expected from the screen. Globalization and media led discussions on sexuality have meant that some transformations have taken place. But, as Shilpa Phadke notes, "they do not necessarily allow for open-ended creative interpretations or definitions of sexual behaviour by individual women" (Phadke cited in Misra & Chandiramani, 2005, p. 67-79).

3.6   OBJECTING TO OBSCENITY

The contrast in Indian and western perspectives of indecency is sharply brought out by the provisions of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986 and its enforcement. Posters of women and magazine cover shoots have seen many court cases against the models or actors involved. One of the most long drawn out cases was against Madhu Sapre and Milind Soman along with the photographer, publisher, distributor and

advertising agency for an advertisement campaign for Tuff shoes. All were acquitted after the matter was sub judice for 14 years. The actor Shilpa Shetty too was summoned by the courts when a still frame from her film *Auto Shankar* (which was given a 'universal viewing' certificate) was used by a paper. The petitioner has submitted that the "very sexy blow-ups and medium blow-ups" violated the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986, Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act 1956, and IPC Section 292 (Sale Obscene Books) etc. The case was finally decided in favour of Shilpa Shetty and other co-accused. Shetty claimed, "If navel-showing is obscenity, then…the traditional sari-should be banned in the first place".

The Cinematograph Act 1952 provides that a film shall not be certified for public exhibitions if, in the opinion of the authority competent to grant a certificate, it is against decency or morality (section 5 (B)). Filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar was asked to remove on-air promos of his film *Jail* (2009) which showed a frontal nude of actor Neil Nitin Mukesh. However, John Abraham's nude back shot was cleared in one go for the film *New York* (2009). Filmmakers are also directed to avoid using visuals or words depicting women in ignoble servility as a praiseworthy quality in women (Rule iv-a) and yet Indian cinema is replete with plotlines where women are raped for revenge or shown accepting male domination, abuse and infidelity in the name of honour, sacrifice and Indian values. Oddly, censorship has never questioned such passive and victimized portrayals of women.

In India, eroticism is often treated as interchangeable with obscenity. Though the word obscenity is rarely mentioned, courts in India have inmost cases equated indecency with obscenity. There are demands for bans on sustained kissing, use of swear words and songs with double entendre even though they may be used widely in reality. Oddly, sexual relations between husband and wife are seldom shown while those between lovers are shown, even though Indian society is conservative about the latter. Also, despite the decriminalization of homosexuality with Article 377 being amended there is very low tolerance of same-sex relationships on screen. The film *Na Jaane Kyun* (2010) directed by Sanjay Sharma which shows a gay couple was returned by the censor board with recommendations for several cuts. Even though the director maintained that the Indian society is mature enough to handle such themes, while the censor board did not think so. In fact, conjunction with this regulation, the actors and filmmaker were subjected to social censorship as well. One of the actor's family has publicly disowned him and the cast and crew routinely get threats from political parties and religious outfits. In contrast films like *Girlfriend* (which is a gross misrepresentation of lesbians) and *Jism* (which is centered on infidelity) were passed by the Censor Board without cuts. A similar prejudice is seen in the case of films like *Gulabi Aaina* (2003) which is on trans-sexuals.

Directed by Sridhar Rangayan, the film has received great critical appreciation abroad, but has been dismissed as 'vulgar and offensive' by the censors in India. While the filmmaker has appealed twice unsuccessfully to the censors in India, his multi-award film which has internationally been dubbed a 'sensitive and touching portrayal of a marginalized community' has never been screened in India. Even Bishaka Dutta's documentary film on sex-workers called *In the Flesh* (2002) has not been passed by the censor board.

Here we can see how concern about the portrayal of violence and sex is used to reflect the kinds of sexualities the State thinks should exist. There is an obvious attempt to control the private lives of citizens by preventing certain realities from being reinforced through onscreen portrayals. This, conjoined with the fact that the film distribution system does not support films that support alternate points of view makes it all the more necessary to question the contradictions in the decisions of the censorship frameworks of our country.

Check Your Progress 3:

Do you think obscenity should be censored? Why or why not? Defend your argument based on what you have read so far.

3.7 PORNOGRAPHY

No debate on censorship is complete without addressing the issue of pornography. If the dictionary definition of pornography i.e. "portrayal of obscene writing, painting, and the like" were to be examined then sex education classes, medical schools and pharmaceutical kits would also have to be banned. Hence, across countries and legal systems, there is an addendum which reads – "that is primary designed to produce sexual arousal in viewers" (Kirkpatrick, 1991, p.1000).

Despite laws against creation and consumption of pornographic materials, the profits accrued by producers of pornographic material are proof of its widespread existence and demand. According to Wendy McElroy (2004), "Pornography is free speech applied to the sexual realm...Pornography, along with all other forms of sexual heresy, such as homosexuality, should have the same legal protection as political heresy. This protection is especially important to women, whose sexuality has been controlled by censorship through the centuries" (McElroy, 2004).

According to many critics and feminist activists, pornography enables women to express themselves freely and derive pleasure from their bodies, something

which is not possible in the visual realm of censored images. Some, like Nadine Strossen, have even gone on to claim that if images do corrupt and influence their spectators so wholly then all films on war should be banned as they glorify violence and those which showcase uninhibited expression of intimacy should be widely accessible as they would lead to calmer and happier audiences. Nadine Strossen in her book *Defending Pornography* (2000) describes how it is an intrinsic part of our sexuality and believes it to be a healthy exercise, which should not be condemned (Strossen, 2000, p. 10-14).

The suppression of sex may lead to an eroticization of violence in sexual relations. The more abnormal a sexual expression will be deemed, the more deviant and defiant the depictions are likely to become. Also, the fact that pornography too promotes sexist attitudes goes unaddressed and unnoticed because it is not subject to open, public scrutiny and debate. The representation of men's and women's bodies and their relationships is never called into question, even though such films and materials may be recycling and promoting a hetero-masculine discourse.

Vis-à-vis censorship Strossen uses scientific studies to refute the statement "monkey see, monkey do" where she states that seeing sexually explicit expression does not necessarily mean translation of kind. Numerous surveys have rejected the purported link between sexual expression and aggression. And even though an area of concern remains access by children and minors, the sexually charged and explicit language and images employed by popular culture at large is indicative of over-exposure outside of pornography.

India's first pornographic graphic novel – *Savita Bhabhi* – had a female protagonist and chronicled her sexual experiences. A huge success online, it was finally banned by the Indian State and is now a paid service accessible only to those who can afford the same. Once again, social stratification is operational in this regulation as the ordinary, middle class woman that *Savita Bhabhi* depicts cannot access, discuss or decide for herself if the material is indeed corrupting and degrading. According to Bhowmik (2009), censorship has evolved into a siege on the 'political rights of the citizens' of a democratic India, on the pretext of societal interest.

Check Your Progress 3:

What is pornography? Who are the spectators of pornography?

3.8 IMPACT ON GENRE

Outside of the realm of regulatory censorship operates the far more pervasive cultural censorship. The commercial basis of filmmaking dictates the kind of films that can be made or not. Most often, filmmakers avoid making films that are critical of existing power structures because their production and circulation may be severely restricted. In that regard, documentaries, small budget features and experimental cinema are able to showcase and address issues for a wider spectatorship base. The film *My Brother Nikhil* is one such example, where the hitherto socially taboo issues of homosexuality and prejudice against AIDS victims were addressed very sensitively. The film was also allowed by the censors without any comment or cut.

Further, the fact that different genres have different audience expectations may lead censors and social groups to approach them differently, thereby discriminating against them. Feminist films and films made by women are also approached differently. The direct resonance of the filmmaker with target audiences converts the 'trialogue' (Previously referred in Section 3.4.1) into a dialogue. Women, representing women is therefore a more alarming phenomenon than men depicting semi-clad women in item songs.

A filmmaker who has borne the brunt of this most severely is Deepa Mehta. Her strong female protagonists have met with violent resistance from orthodox religious factions. Her film *Fire* (1996) which depicts a comforting lesbian relationship as an alternate to patriarchal abuse and neglect is the first film in the history of Indian democracy to be returned to the censors at the behest of a political party for review. The censor board passed the film again without any changes. The screenings of the films, like before, were marred by violence, destruction of property and protest marches. In the documentary *Controversy: Firestorm* (1996), Deepa Mehta is shown grappling with death threats and the realization that fascism is appropriating free speech in public discourse and there is no censor board that can stem that. She was faced with even more violent protests when she tried to film her next film *Water* (2005) which was about the plight of widows from Benaras. Despite submitting her film script to the Information and Broadcast Ministry and getting all approvals, Hindu religious groups disrupted her schedule. Mehta finally shot the film in Sri Lanka with a new cast.

Girja Kumar in *Censorship in India: Studies in Fundamentalism, Obscenity and Law* observes that "There is censorious impulse, latent or overt, in all those who wield power through political, religious, cultural and literary institutions....Fundamentalism is the upholder of status quo and while defending its own version of religious faith, it has its eyes on a larger objective of capturing state power. All creative and dissenting writings are by definition skeptical of the given 'truth' and prone to questioning and are

for new interpretations of existing knowledge" (Kumar, 2009 p. 207). Fundamentalism and by extension, the censorship it insists on, denies pluralism and diversity.

According to the educationist Krishna Kumar (2000) "TV has enabled cinema to reach our living spaces" And the sheer pervasiveness of the medium has also triggered off moves to control the images relayed on it as well. Broadcasters have to adhere to the Program and Advertising Code under the Cable Television Network Rules (1994) and TV content is monitored and pre-censored under an amendment to the Cinematograph Act 1952 that is applicable to cinema.

3.9 THE CENTRAL BOARD OF FILM CERTIFICATION

The major institution of censorship in the country is the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) which is a statutory body under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, regulating the public exhibition of films under the provisions of the Cinematograph Act 1952. Under 5B (2) the central government has issued the following guidelines – "A film is judged in its entirety from the point of view of its overall impact and is examined in the light of the period depicted in the film and the contemporary standards of the country and the people to whom the film relates, provided that the film does not deprave the morality of the audience."

Censorship even extends to film titles and posters. The 1952 Act does not cover posters or film advertisements and these come under the common law of the land relating to obscenity, particularly section 292 of the Indian Penal code. Furthermore, this issue comes within the purview of the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations, particularly their law enforcing agencies including Police. After discussions with the film industry representatives, it was decided that the film industry would deal with this matter on its own. Thus, the Film Publicity Screening Committee was formed with headquarters at Bombay and regional chapters at Bangalore, Hyderabad, Madras and Thiruvananthapuram. The committee, which began its work in April 1990, screens film posters and other publicity material for obscenity and depiction of women in a derogatory manner or highlighting violence.

The CBFC can rate a film "U" i.e. universal, "U/A" i.e. open to children under parental guidance, "A" i.e. for adult viewing only. The certification process is simple involves sending the final cut to an examining committee comprising of an equal number of men and women, who may or may not be trained in analyzing films. Post viewing, the group conveys a consensus about any cuts and the rating. Directors have the option to appeal to a revision committee, which comprises many members from the film industry, for a revised verdict. Her/his final recourse could be to appeal in the court of law.

The CBFC's guidelines amended up to May 1983, clearly laid down its three-fold objectives of censorship: (a) that the medium of cinema remains responsible and sensitive to the values and standards of society, (b) that artistic expression and creative freedom are not unduly curbed, and (c) that censorship is responsive to social change. Whether the CBFC has indeed striven to achieve the above in the spirit of the letter is debatable.

Check Your Progress 4:

What are the major reasons for censoring a film?

3.10 ALTERNATE SYSTEMS OF CERTIFICATION

In the United States of America, in 1968, a classification system was adopted by the Motion Picture Association of America. Applicable to all Hollywood movies, it involves voluntary adherence and merely rates films as a cautionary warning. There are no cuts or deletions suggested or enforced. Considered as a progressive system of film rating, it rates films as G (for a general audience), PG (parental guidance), PG-13 (Inappropriate for Under 13s), R (restricted, 17 and under allowed only with adult guardian) and NC-17 (no one 17 and under admitted). (You can read more about the system on the website www.mpaa.org).

In the United Kingdom an independent, self financing regulator called the British Board of Film Classification classifies and certifies films for public distribution. The ratings are U (suitable for all, usually 4 years and above), PG (parental guidance is advised), 12A (12 and above, A stands for viewing in cinemas), 15 (suitable for 15 years or over), 18 (adults only), R18 (specially licensed cinemas, sex shops and only for those 18 and over). The BBFC not only classifies cinema but also videos and video games. (Detailed descriptions of their work above can be found on the website www.bbfc.co.uk).

While most filmmakers prefer classification to censorship, one needs to analyze which groups and organisations have an influence on these independent bodies and how that impacts their analysis and reception of films submitted to them. Also, it is critical to see if the classifications are an endorsement of current standards and in that sense patronizing. If classification has no bearing on our viewing habits and choices, does it still remain necessary? These are some of the questions that we must continue to grapple with.

3.11 LIMITS OF CENSORSHIP: CENSORSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

Developments in technology are increasing rendering censorship obsolete. The ability to mass produce and disseminate digital copies has been complemented by the reach and dynamism of the internet. Films that are banned can be downloaded and distributed for as good as free and filmmakers upload 'uncut' versions for spectators via the worldwide web with increasing frequency. Further, technological developments and software enhancements have meant that portrayals on screen are increasingly more life like, impactful and evocative. Special effects, CGI and 3-D have made the medium far more powerful and difficult to subdue. The complex sensorium triggered by viewing cinema is perhaps even more nebulous and difficult to regulate. The question before us is to what extent censorship is really necessary? People may indeed self-censor out of free will but as artist Ben Shahn states, "You have not converted a man because you have silenced him" (Shahn, 1968).

3.12 LET US SUM UP

Censorship operates in society through visible authority as well as through non-formal socio-cultural resistance. Premised on the powerful and indelible impact of images on spectators, the argument in favour of censorship hinges on notions of 'obscenity', 'decency' and 'appropriateness'. In India, regulatory censorship is implemented through a series of Acts and cultural censorship is the recourse of many political and social lobbies. Film censorship is enacted via the Central Board for Film Certification which suggests deletions prior to certification which is a pre-requisite for public release of a film. Freedom of expression is therefore constantly being negotiated by artists, thinkers and individuals. In this, the spectators' right to see what they prefer is compromised and there is a homogenization of audiences in to a standardized, passive receiver. In reality, spectators establish unique and diverse relationships with media texts based on their location, gender and cultural realities.

3.13 GLOSSARY

3D	:	Acronym for three dimensional models and scales. It is also applicable to film formats where there is an enhanced illusion of depth while viewing films. Audiences feel part of the onscreen action as a result.
Addendum	:	An addition to a document or text, after it has been published.

Audiences	:	An aggregate of individuals who listen to/view the performance and broadcast of media texts
Ban	:	To prohibit entirely usually through an official directive.
Blasphemous	:	Irreverence towards religious beliefs and symbols
Blog	:	A website entry i.e. web log that is regularly updated by people to convey their opinions on various matters to other internet users
CGI	:	Acronym for computer generated imagery that is used to create special effects in film.
Censorship Order	:	When 'emergency' was declared in India during 1975-77, on June 26, 1975 an order was passed which required every newspaper, periodical and publishing unit to submit for scrutiny, to an authorized officer, all the contents to remove all 'objectionable matter' that could lead to 'rumour mongering', 'enmity between people' and 'cause disaffection among the armed forces or civil servants', etc. The order was an attempt to intimidate the press which was critical of the imposition of Emergency and the then ruling party.
Coercion	:	Using force to bring about compliance
Discourse	:	Written and spoken communication associated with a practice. It employs specific vocabulary and terms related to the ideology behind it.
Eroticism	:	Sexual desire and the aesthetics involved in sexual excitement.
Fellini	:	Critically acclaimed Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini (1945-1992). He employed fantasy in his narratives and his works were largely biographical in nature.
Heresy	:	Opinion contrary to an established system of religion
Hetero-masculine	:	That which privileges the male, heterosexual point of view. Feminists employ the term to signify patriarchal control.
Historiography	:	Scholarly historical research and presentation

Mass media	:	All media technology employed for mass communication i.e. cinema, television, radio, press, internet etc
Mundane	:	Ordinary and lacking novelty.
Obscene	:	Any act or expression that offends prevalent morality.
Orthodoxy	:	Strict adherence to a form of monotheism and set doctrines.
Rationalization	:	To provide reasons or logic in defense of.
Reception	:	The act of receiving. In mass communication studies it also refers to the receipt of messages embedded in media texts. Reception may not always be as intended by the sender as is contingent on the position of the receivers
Re-dubbed	:	Recording and replacing original voices and sound during the post-production stage in filmmaking i.e. after filming.
Seditious	:	That which incites discontent or rebellion against an authority, regime or government.
Sensorium	:	Similar to the word sensation, it is the faculty of perceiving and refers to the reception, processing and interpretation of sensory stimuli.
Sexist	:	The fostering of sexism which is the belief that one sex is inherently superior to the other.
State	:	A governed entity like a nation or a province,
Status-quo	:	Continuation of conditions as before.
Sub judice	:	A matter or case currently under trial in a court
Taboo	:	Social prohibition
Text	:	A compilation of symbols i.e. words, images, numbers or characters that conveys some information or message.
Treasonous	:	Betrayal of one's nation or sovereign.
Viewer	:	An onlooker. Some one who views and examines a media text.

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3.14   UNIT END QUESTIONS

1.   Discuss the differences between Regulatory and Cultural censorship.

2.   a. What are the Acts laid down by the Constitution to control the broadcast media?

2.   b. What strategies of censorship are adopted to advocate their implementation?

3.   Elucidate the meaning of 'female spectator'.

4.   Discuss the complex relationship between gender, pornography and censorship.

5.   According to you, can there be any other forms of censorship which would be better suited in the Indian context? Discuss.

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UNIT 4   QUEER(ING) CINEMA

Himadri Roy

Structure

4.1   INTRODUCTION

In the other units of this block, you have studied about gender, film making and cinema. Each unit focuses on different ways of reading a film. The first unit talks about how the camera becomes a mode of looking various ways of interpreting gender in a film. The second unit deals with the way the categories of gender are represented in cinema and the third unit attempts to define how the censor board of a country plays a pivotal role in determining what you as a spectator may expect from a film and the final product that reaches you. In this unit, you will learn more about how the 'other' gender or the queer category is represented in a film within a historical context. We will also examine how to trace the representation of groups known as LGBT or Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender groups.

4.2   OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

• Describe the major elements of queer cinema;

• Explain the different depictions of the queer people in different eras chronologically;

• Talk about the other categories of films made in India;

- Describe the vernacular queer cinema made in different regions of the country; and

- Analyse how queer culture is portrayed in cinema.

4.3 ELEMENTS OF QUEER CINEMA

The pain or the fear of being ostracized for being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender — as not belonging to the binary groups of male and female — in a country where the legality of their existence doesn't seem to matter to anyone, neither to the society nor even to their own family, compels a life in a closeted world – about which you have already read in the Blocks 3 and 6 of MWG 001. India is also a country where legal space has not yet been provided to such groups of people. Therefore, most 'queer' people prefer to live in closeted worlds where they have space and freedom for what they seek, away from the harsh reality of rejection or ridicule. They constantly confront the traditional hetero-normativism and opposition from all spheres of life in the heterosexual social set-up.

Despite these harsh realities, there exists a hierarchy of sexual values and power categorized in terms of sexual hegemony for understanding the phenomenon of sexual otherness. Through this categorization, discrimination is often compulsively forced upon queer people. They are differentiated not only on the basis of sexual choice, but also psychological level of social existence.

Indian films portray different kinds of emotions. A film lover is familiar with such emotional depictions of innumerable characters on the silver screen –from that of a regal or a destitute mother; a harsh mother-in-law or a caring sister-in-law; from a treacherous betrayer to a terrible villain; a loving step-brother to a loathing brother. Every kind of emotional depiction receives the treatment to match the expectations of the spectator. The reality of emotions and feelings of a queer person gets lost somewhere in the staunch hetero-normative paradigm that every queer person is compelled to live by in almost all societies, leaving only feelings of regret. One can see that the concept of the "queer" has been carefully avoided, both in parallel films or commercial releases, with exception of the depiction of eunuchs as the only kind of queer people.

There are several reasons for such avoidance. At the very outset, the meaning of the word itself often leads to wrong connotations and "queer" or "homosexual" gets misunderstood in these perceptions. However, the origin of the word "queer" has its roots in the late nineteenth century European science. At this time, it was codified as a particular area of study where the meaning is more category-based than personality-based. Such codes have been decoded by different societies and cultures according to

their understanding. Down the ages this decoding has taken the shape of social inhibitions when only two sexual spaces –male and female –are accommodated and accepted. It is so in India where it is often assumed queer people are 'lacking' in some ways –that is, they are physiologically or anatomically deficient –or that they are 'eunuchs'. So the distinctive differences among queer people are erased and they are all homogenized as eunuchs, which then get reflected in cinema.

Most of the films produced in India, despite different languages, share some common features and attitudes. One of them is this mistaken notion of representing eunuchs as the only kind of homosexual or queer. Other categories of queer people, like gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual/ transgender simply do not exist for commercial profits of filmmakers. As a result of this dominant attitude of the filmmakers, the quality of being distinct and different from one another is never considered as meaningful in the queer cinema scenario.

The other most important element to trace the "queering of cinema" is the manner of representation. You have already read about this in Unit 2 of the same block. The (mis)representation stresses the fact that the invisibility of queer people in the film world is a major setback because the reach of Hindi films could have made a difference in the way they are perceived by the society. In Block 3 of MWG 001, you have already read about the importance of the articulation of queer identity through movements. In this unit the focus will be on the way their liberation is portrayed in cinema. The other element is that most films fail to manifest their exact reality of life and they are always kept in the background by most of the filmmakers, and are not portrayed as the main subject in commercial films. The continuous and continuing (mal) representation, (mis) representation or non-representation of queer people and issues in mainstream cinema constitute major factors for the emergence of queer cinema.

4.4 CHRONOLOGICAL PORTRAYAL OF QUEER PEOPLE

Generally, most commercial Hindi films of Bollywood's production houses treat the subject of "queer" people in stereotypical manner. It is noteworthy that in the mythological/historical sagas of the Silent Era around the 1920s, a film called *Bhishma Pitamah* (1922) depicted the famous mythological transgender character *Sikhandi*. Such legends also created inhibitions in the minds of the spectators. For decades, only eunuchs were taken to represent the entire gamut of the "queer people" in films. This trend continued till the turn of the century when such depictions began to be questioned. This, to some extent, led to the uncovering of a subject that has remained 'invisible' for so long –the silent world of the gays.

Bollywood wouldn't think of risking its productions by challenging the inhibitions of the audience. It prefers portraying the silent world of the gays in the way it has always done –which is mostly inadequate representation. The truth about the closeted world of the LGBT remains enclosed in secrecy. The reasons are obvious and have been mentioned above: one, lack of legal rights for queer people, including this country; two, invariable inhibitions fed by prejudices and bias control the audience taste. But it is not only that legality confines the queer people within concealed spheres; there is also the issue of compulsive social identity dictated by familial or societal considerations. Usually respect for parents, relatives or peers governs the enclosed world of these people who would rather remain closeted than risk social questioning of their sexual preferences.

Another very interesting fact about this veiled world of the queer people in the country is their desire to maintain private individual identity away from the public eye. Probably such identity strengthens the bond between their real self and the 'public' self. Most of the queer people in this country have accepted this form of a separate individual space in the society and have made their real world a mode of existential struggle. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her essay titled 'Epistemology of the Closet' writes poignantly that "The gay closet is not a feature only in the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life" (Abelove et.al., 1993, p. 46). These forms of closeted life have proliferated in the 21st century with the emergence of the cyber and virtual world which has given immense boost to the virtual existence of the queer people. It is disheartening that Bollywood has failed to portray such identities in any form. Only recently, a few movies have attempted to depict the queer world with some authenticity.

4.4.1 Portrayals after Independence till the Golden Era of 1970s

The gay people in this country have been entirely invisible or depicted negatively in cinema. Bollywood categorised them first as eunuchs and later as cross-dressers or drags or transvestites. This reflects the heterosexist attitude of the majority that pushes queer people deeper into their unspoken, invisible space.

You may remember being entertained by cross-dressing of super-heroes like Kishore Kumar in *Half Ticket* (1962), Biswajeet in *Kismet* (1968), Rishi Kapoor in *Rafoo Chakkar* (1975), or Amitabh Bachhan in *Laawaris* (!981). When such successful heroes portray cross-dressing, the spectator misinterprets this to mean that the drags are neither real men nor real women. Instead they tend to think that such depictions show some sexual lacuna. As these depictions are no threat to the existing paradigms of

masculinity or femininity, they are taken as humorous episodes for comic relief in the main plot or for the enactment of item songs and therefore are promptly forgotten. Other than the songs enacted by the heroes, people hardly remember anything else about the subject. Bollywood has been very cruel in depicting the reality about the queer world by either confusing them with the eunuchs or camouflaging them as drags or transvestites. The other categories are neglected and not talked about, during this golden era. There have been a few rare exceptions. One such film was *Kunwara Baap* (1974) produced by Amarlal Chhabria and directed and enacted by Mehmood. The film had an important social message and focussed on polio vaccination. The film was a commercial success for its theme and songs. For the first time in a film, the music director, Rajesh Roshan, has the lead vocalist Mohammad Rafi sing *"Saj rahi gali"* with Mehmood and real eunuchs. The song topped popularity charts in the Binaca Geet Mala during that time and brought with it some respect and adoration for the *hijras* (eunuchs). But this idea was not taken up by any other film of this decade.

4.4.2 Portrayals after the Golden Era of 1970s till 1990s

The Golden Period of the melodious 1970s did not see any other queer character in the movies. Neither transgenders/transvestites nor the others of the queer community were seen such as gays, lesbians, transsexuals and bisexuals. It is taboo to even talk about their sexual performances, or other differences between them such as active and passive roles, dominant masculine or feminine traits, and many others

Let us discuss the depiction of queer people in Bollywood films. Even as late as the 1980s and 1990s, the actors and actresses of the era simply followed what the superstars of yesteryears have depicted. From Aamir Khan in *Baazi* (1995) to Sanjay Dutt in *Khalnayak*, from Shah Rukh Khan in *Chamatkar* to Paresh Rawal in *Mohra*, all followed the same portrayal pattern of their successful predecessors. The only depictions of the queer people replicated that of the golden era.

However, some bold steps were taken by producer-directors like Mahesh Bhatt, Pooja Bhatt Production House and Vishesh Films when for the first time after *Kunwara Baap*, transgenders got some important roles in films.

In *Kunwara Baap,* the movie revolves around a child found in a garbage bin by the main protagonist played by Mehmood, and the famous song of the movie *Saaj gayee meri ma* focusses on the blessings of the transgenders. Their part during religious occasions and festivities like birth, marriage and so on is shown with perfection by the director. In 1982, another film called *Nadiyan ke Paar* showed similar depictions of hijras. For instance, the song *Jogijee wah jogijee* shows a hijra as fortune-teller and bearer of blessings. The song was a part of the festival of colours Holi, in which the main

protagonist Chandan, played by Sachin, wants to know if his love Gunja, played by Sadhna Singh, would be successful or not. Then we come across several actors portrayed as cross-dressers, as mentioned above.

Films like *Sadak* (1991) and *Tamanna* (1998) also depict hijras in important roles. The hijras are major protagonists in the films, in one as an evil harem keeper and in the other as a caregiver and guardian to a child. *Sadak* is the story of a young man falling in love with a young prostitute, but the pimp or harem keeper is a hijra called Maharani (Sadashiv Amruparkar) who doesn't want that any of her women in the house would fall in love with any customer/client then her market value would diminish and the source of earning would also stop. The real life of hijras is depicted truthfully in some of these films. In real life they eke out their existence as occasional singers for ceremonies like birth and marriage, or by begging. More powerful ones are guardians or pimps of prostitute quarters or harem keepers. For the first time, Vishesh Films took the initiative to depict such a role for the other sex as distinct from heteronormativity.

In *Tamanna*, the portrayal is totally different as the hijra is supposed to be the child of a yesteryear film actress Nazneen Begum. She depends upon her eunuch child for survival when they are nearly destitute. Tikku (Paresh Rawal), the hijra, sees a woman leaving a child in a garbage bin. Tikku's yearning for company compels her to rescue the girl child and bring her up as her own. She fights social obstacles to get her educated in a good school. The child is placed in the school hostel. But when she returns to Tikku and finds her a hijra, she shuns him and goes away. The sad reality of hijra life is depicted well in the film.

Towards the end of the 1990s, there were more films on queer people. For example, *Bombay Boys* (1998) depicted a gay character openly. The Kismet Talkies Production shows a gay character Pesi Shroff (Roshan Seth). The director Kaizad Gustad shows the closeted world of gay people with its clichéd inhibitions in a heterosexual set-up. The film also shows Pesi encounters with male prostitutes from the Marine Drive area in Mumbai. Pesi grows close to his tenant Xerxes (Alexander Gifford). Despite frank portrayals of sexuality, the movie didn't fare well commercially nor did it receive any favourable critical report. It was soon forgotten. Although Kaizad Gustad did try to intervene in the stereotypical conception of queers with his film, he failed to bring any change in the thinking of the Indian audience.

Another noteworthy film as a Hindi commercial release based on lesbian relationships is *Fire* (1996) by Deepa Mehta. The film created a furore because it questioned prevalent heteronormative power and perhaps because the two characters in lesbian relationship are named Radha, played by Shabana Azmi, and Sita, played by Nandita Das. They express their sexual desire for each other to compensate for their unhappy married lives.

The first bisexual movie is *Daayraa* or *The Square Circle* released in 1996. The film made by the reputed director Amol Palekar is based on the relationship of a transvestite (Nirmal Pandey) with a rape victim (Sonali Kulkarni). It depicts the orthodoxy of the heterosexual social set-up.

Check Your Progress 1:

Try to recall any film, which hasn't been mentioned here as an example and discuss its relevance in the context of the issues discussed so far.

4.4.3 Recent Portrayals

From the above examples, it would be clear to you that Bollywood has failed to probe into the reality of the queer world. Unfortunately, only the 'passivity trait' discussed in the previous section has been portrayed. Until the beginning of this century, the portrayal of queer people of this country hardly progressed out of the clichéd depictions as effeminate characters. This continues albeit with more commercial success in films like *Kyaa Kool Hai Hum* (2005) and *Apna Sapna Money Money* (2006). In *Kyaa Kool Hai Hum,* the director Sangeeth Sivan uses an excellent example of an effeminate character, who plays a very significant role in the film. Kiran (Bobby Darling) becomes a victim of the atrocities of the heterosexual protagonist Karan (Ritesh Deshmukh). He is shown being dumped by his boyfriend D.K.Bose (Rajendranath Zutshi), in whose fashion store Karan works. Later in the film, another heterosexual protagonist Dr. Rekha the psychiatrist (Neha Dhupia) speaks against effeminacy while treating her homosexual patient. When the world of medicine and genetics is trying to find linkages for queer behaviour, Hindi commercial films suggest that queer traits cannot be explained in any way. Within the frame of comic portrayal, the film once again misrepresents the individual sexual space and confuses the audience by showing queer people only as cross-dressers or transvestites.

In *Apna Sapna Money Money* (2006), the character of Kishen played by Ritesh Deshmukh, reprises the Kishore Kumar role in *Half Ticket* of the 1950s. He disguises himself as a woman Sunaina, the mysterious aunt of Arjun (Shreyas Talpade). Comically, Satyabol Shastri (Anupam Kher) falls in love with Sunaina. It seems that the Sangeeth Sivan mocks at cross-dressers by showing cross-dressing as a kind of refuge for villainy. Thus, Hindi filmdom has so far reduced queer people to mockery and generally made them appear the laughing stock.

Dharma Productions' *Kal Ho Na ho* (2005), has another blatant mis-representation. In the film the housemaid of Rohit Patel (Saif Ali Khan) sees some intimate scenes between him and his friend Aman (Shah Rukh Khan). The maid misjudges their friendship as a gay relationship and watches them suspiciously whenever she sees them together. Similar kind of (mal)representation/(mis)representation is seen in *Dostana* (2008). Super heroes John Abraham and Banishes Bachhan pretend to be gay characters. The entire movie focuses on the issues of gay people In the film, the immigration officer Javier comes to investigate whether Kunal and Sam are really gay. The film becomes unsympathetically numb and tactless. There is also the over-powering heteronormative mother of Sameer who accepts her son's style of life very reluctantly. More than that, the film continues to portray queer characters as effeminates. Versatile successful actor, Boman Irani plays an effeminate M or Murli who must resign as the editor-in-chief for a fashion magazine 'Verve'. The depiction is vulgar and atrocious. Both the films *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2005) and *Dostana* (2008) lack aesthetic sensibility and portray the gay world insensitively. On the other hand, since these blockbusters are from a big production house, the subject of the queer world though (mis)treated by them, nevertheless reaches a wider audience and brings it to public consciousness.

Due to economic considerations, filmmakers rarely take up issues regarding queer people as they appeal to a minority audience. With the decline of the category of parallel cinema or art films due to their non-profitability, a different genre of films begun to emerge. These films try to capture the reality of life and some of the courageous directors and production houses have dared to produce films dealing with queer people and their problems.

Several such realistic films have tried to decipher the lives and experinces of queer people. One such director is Mahesh Dattani, an eminent Indian playwright, who made a film called *Mango Souffle* in 2002. The protagonists Kamlesh (Ankur Vikal) and Maqsood (Mahmood Farooqui), perfectly portray the feelings of queer people. Dattani's other play also made into a film is *Dance Like a Man* which projects the social dictates of a phallocentric society which demarcates masculine and feminine behaviour and roles. The film deals with a man's passion for dancing which his father regards as effeminate. Arif Zakaria plays the role of the Bharatnatyam dancer evocatively in this aesthetically creative film.

The director, Madhur Bhandarkar the director has made a name for himself for taking the initiative to introduce innovative and socially relevant themes in commercial or mainstream cinema. He tries to focus on queer issues too. He began with *Chandni Baar* (2001) which makes an emphatic point about the sufferings of queer people. He dares to portray sodomy and its consequences in a very different frame. He depicts the impact of this horrendous sexual act upon the character Abhay who is sodomised by two

boys in a prison for juvenile delinquents. Bhandarkar deals intelligently and sensitively with the issue to arouse loathing for such sexual exploitation. He shows the hypocrisy of the social set-up which doesn't appear to have in place a strong punitive system for such sexual exploitation and oppression. Bhandarkar's film *Page 3* (2005) courageously portrays sexual exploitation in high society. In the film, an aspiring model Tarun must sexually appease the designer Abhijeet. Such a shocking truth depicted through the film sets a radical trend in Bollywood. But even Bhandarkar portrays queer effeminacy as a characteristic of queer people in his film *Corporate* (2006) through the character of Monty. His most visibly effeminate character is seen in his recent box-office hit *Traffic Signal* (2007) in the character of Gullu, played by Manish Mehta. Bhandarkar gives a realistic tinge to Gullu as a gay prostitute. In the film, there is competition between Gullu and the heterosexual prostitutes. The sharp dialogue between them reveals the cruel fact of homosexuals being regarded as anti-social. In *Fashion* (2008), Bhandarkar again makes an effort to break the heteronormative stereotypes. Harsh Chhaya plays an effeminate designer Vinay Khosla who is assisted by another aspiring designer Rohit Khanna. Both of them play effeminates. Vinay as an overt effeminate and Rohit depicts a covert one. The only difference between them is visibility – while one is a gaudy character, the other is a subtle one. Bhandarkar portrays them quite distinctly. He seems to have studied the gay world before showing them on the screen with such finesse. There is an atmosphere of acceptance of the existence of queer people albeit as effeminates. Rohit (Ashwin Mathur) is a good friend of the female protagonist Meghna Mathur. Vinay Khosla, (Harsh Chayya) is a renowned designer. Salim is the hair-dresser for the models. All of them are accepted for their professional creativity. Bhandarkar shows the acceptance of the gays as effeminates in the fashion world.

In 2007, Excel Entertainment produced *Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Ltd.* The film talks about the closeted queer world and its impact in a heterosexual marriage. Set in the background of the metorpolitan Goa, each couple introduces a distinctive theme for discussion. Vicky Kapoor (Karan Saxena) and Bunty (Vijay Chatwal) represent the gay world. In one scene, Bunty confesses being gay to his conservative family and fiancé Madhu (Sandhya Mridul). Madhu starts hating Bunty as she thinks she has been used by him. Her devastated world is shown through her tears. Bunty moves out of the room and sits beside a pool for a drink. Later, the same situational set-up is shown in another movie called *Life in a...Metro* (2007). The female protagonist Shruti (Konkana Sen) has a weakness for her boss Rishi K. Their relationship that seemed to blossom is rudely disturbed when Shruti discovers Rishi K to be gay and a person who believes in sexual freedom as a form of release from his stressful life. Shruti is heartbroken. The search for individual sexual space becomes the vividly prominent issue in the film. Shruti leaves the job and joins a new one. Her escapist tendency opens up

the discussion of the typical avoidance of gays. The director Anurag Basu throws light on the century old images built into the orthodox mindset of the society. It is important that such films be made to make the society re-think gay issues and realize that they too have right to sexual freedom.

The same year, in another film called *Ek Chalis ki Last Local* the director Sanjay Khanduri depicts a gay villain played by Deepak Shirke. He is a south Indian mafia don who picks up Nilesh the male protagonist, played by Abhay Deol, to sodomize him. He is unsuccessful in his attempt. The film unfolds yet another side of the queer world with horrible villains, which negatively impacts the public perception of queer people.

In 2008, the talented director Shyam Benegal made *Welcome to Sajjanpur* in which a hijra is shown as a positive and powerful character. The film is about a village where religious superstitions, feudalism, patriotism, gender bias exist. Yet there is a hope that one day things will change. The most remarkable character is Munni Bai Mukhanni, played by Ravi Jhankal. He is the hijra of Sajjanpur, who wants to contest the local elections, because he and his community are subjugated and denied opportunities to survive. Munnibai wins the election by huge public support. Benegal uses him as a trope for depicting the reality of their life.

Four Front Films came out with a brilliant creation titled *My Brother Nikhil* in 2005. The director Onir made a bold attempt to focus on the theme of AIDS. In the story, Nikhil Kapoor (Sanjay Suri) is infected with this fatal disease by his friend Nigel de Costa (Purab Kohli). What Onir does is to suggest the danger of unprotected sex. Once infected, Nikhil experiences rejection in all spheres of life – from family to the society. His entire family, except his sister, rejects him and this affects him psychologically. The social rejection begins with parental denunciation. During this phase of his life, Nigel gives support first physically by sheltering him at his home and then by his unconditional love. This refuge gives Nikhil psychological strength. Onir not only depicts the deep love between a brother and a sister, but also the love between the two friends. The mental strength from a friend becomes the most effective instrument for Nikhil to struggle with AIDS (recalling the Jonathan Demme directed 1993 Oscar winning Hollywood film *Philadelphia* starring Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Antonio Banderas). *My Brother Nikhil* shows a fine relationship never seen before in Hindi cinema even in the male bonding films. Thus Onir brings a meaningful change in the country's celluloid world. The portrayal of unconditional love draws the attention of Hindi film fans and changes their perception of gays. Such films would also help to break down the ghettoisation of gays, drags and effeminates, and the stereotypical prejudices and inhibitions about the queer world. Thus, the claim for separate sexual space becomes important in Hindi commercial cinema and perhaps its depiction would soon become a reality after with such movies.

Lesbian films are rare among Hindi films. Karan Razdan ventures into this area with his film *Girlfriend*, released in 2004. It depicts a masculine woman in the character of Tanya, played by Isha Koprikkar, and a feminine lesbian in the character of Sapna. This film has already been discussed in Unit 2 of this block.

Shamim Sarif is another director like Bhandarkar, who doesn't hesitate to question heteronormativity. Her *The World Unseen* released in 2008 is a historical film adapted from her own novel. The film is set in the 1950s Cape Town, South Africa, during the apartheid regime. The film shows them falling in love in a racist, sexist and homophobic society. Amina (Sheetal Sheth) epitomises individuality and freedom. She defines her own laws and lives on her own terms undeterred by the reproving police and the disparaging Indian community. Miriam (Lisa Ray) demurely follows conventions and makes no demands from life. Her world is confined to that of a doting mother to her three children and a subservient wife to her chauvinistic husband Omar. But their desire to pursue a relationship is thwarted by the indignities and injustices of the prevalent laws of apartheid. Omar's sister Rehmat (Nandana Sen) marries a white man against rules that forbid mixed marriages. In the resplendent South African landscape with retro music in the background *The World Unseen* explores Miriam's relationship with Amina and how it empowers her to make personal choices that change her world. Shamim Sarif has portrayed the lesbian relationship very artistically. Her recent film *I Cant Think Straight,* released in 2009, also deals with two lesbian protagonists Tala (Lisa Ray) and Leyla (Sheetal Sheth). It talks about a diasporic Indian family and an orthodox Islamic family. The two characters although engaged with men, fall in love with each other and thus break the normative boundaries of sexuality.

In 2008, IDream production house releases a film on the theme of bisexuality, *Straight: Pinu Patel ki Tedhi Medhi Love Story*. The director, Parvati Balagopalan, portrays Pinu Patel (Vinay Pathak) who gets confused about his own sexuality. When in comes into contact with Kamlesh (Anuj Choudhary) and Gul Panag, he really couldn't figure out the differences between his relationship with both of them. The film focuses on this confusion and tries to depict emotional affinity between the two in the same parameter.

Pankh (2009) is another film that brought up the subject of the closeted queer world. The film deals with Jerry (Maradona Rebello), being compelled to cross-dress by his mother Mary (Lillete Dubey), to get roles in films. Jerry becomes a popular girl-child artiste known as Baby Kusum. The movie focuses on this aspect of cross-dressing and its impact on the psychology of a child, who later on becomes confused about his own sexuality. He creates his internal imagery Nandini (Bipasha Basu), showing the inner struggle of sexual identity. Later, he tries his best to get into the film world as Jerry. The movie focuses Jerry's desires for a sexual freedom, through both his masculine (external) and feminine (internal) identities.

In 2010, another queer film was released titled *Dunno Y...Na Jane Kyon*. The film revolves around two men, one gay, Aryan (Kapil Sharma) Yuvraaj Parasher, and the other bisexual, Ashley (Yuvraaj Parashar). Their emotional involvement, their sentimentality and confrontations with heteronormative family situations are some of its depictions. The film depicts the emotional compulsion a gay confronts to marry a girl by the prejudiced family. Later when he comes across, a male prostitute he realises that his actual emotional feelings are more prone towards men than women, unlike *Straight: Pinu Patel ki Tedhi Medhi Love Story*.

In 2011, director Onir released another film under the production house of Anticlock Films called *I am*. The film tells different stories of four characters as *Omar*, *Afia*, *Abhimanyu* and *Megha*. They are all different themes, of which *Omar*'s character is based on queer issues. The story line of *Omar* is simple; it describes a gay man Jai (Rahul Bose) searching for a loving partner. He meets another gay man (Saaheil Sehgal), but later falls in love with a male prostitute Omar (Arjun Mathur). Jai becomes victim of love which makes him vulnerable to Omar's emotional blackmail. Omar threatens to report him to the policeman, played by Abhimanyu Singh. Onir does a brilliant job of creating the feelings and emotions of a gay man.

A recent film made by Rituporno Ghosh in English on the subject of homosexuality and a mother's struggle to accept the reality of her son's sexual preference is *Memories in March*. The film revolves around the loss of a lover on one side and a son on the other, the closeted world of the son in contrast one side with the accepted love of the other. Many such emotional turbulences are being dealt with in the film.

Check Your Progress 2:

Have the portrayals of different sections of queer people been done adequately in Bollywood films? Justify your answer.

4.5 'QUEER' IN REGIONAL LANGUAGE FILMS OF INDIA

There are many films made every year in India in the regional languages. Out of these languages, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Malayalam and Bengali are few of the prominent regional film industries. Let us begin with the Marathi film world. The first queer film in Marathi was Amol Palekar's *Daayraa*, which was also made in Hindi. This movie has been discussed in the previous section. The sequel to *Daayraa* is *Anaahat* or *Eternity*, released in 2001. The film depicts the sexual awakening of a queen in the tenth century BC. The

film also tries to delve into the complexities of sexual roles ordained by the society. Palekar continues with *Thaang* (*The Quest*) in 2010 as a bi-lingual film in Marathi and English, thus completing the *Daayraa* trilogy. The movie revolves around the sexual incompatibility of an urban married couple and their quest for ultimate sexual pleasure from other people in the same city. It even depicts sexual affinity between the main female protagonist's mother and mother-in-law.

Malayalam film industry has a great influence on its audience. The first and foremost queer film in Malyalam is *Sancharram* or *The Journey*, released in 2004. It claims to be a true story of lesbian lovers in Kerala. The film portrays two friends Kiran (Suhasini V. Nair), a Hindu, and Delilah (Shrruiti Menon) a Catholic from their first meeting as children to young adulthood, when they realise their love for each other. It shows how the woman also undergoes compulsive heterosexual marriage despite knowing the fact their child has a different sexual preference. The family submits to the traditional society and its norms they live in.

Tamil film industry has always played a major role in Indian cinema. It made a queer film called *Navarasa*, or *Nine Emotions*, in 2005. The director Santosh Sivan unveils the myths related to transgender. The movie revolves around the main protagonist Shweta, a thirteen year old, who discovers that her uncle Gautam (Ejji K. Umamahesh), leads a secret life of a hijra. When Shweta confronts Gautam, he wants to run away to Aravan at Koovagam, where an annual hijra festival is held. During this festival, hijras ritually re-enact the story of Aravanan. Shweta embarks on a journey to bring her uncle back. In the process she enters the world of hijras and befriends some of them. The film portrays in details about the traditions of hijra's marriage and their attainment of the spiritual satisfaction, more than the mere physical one.

Bengali film industry has recently released some good films on the queer world. In 2010, *Aarekti Premer Golpo* or *Just Another Love Story*, was directed by Kaushik Ganguly based on the life-story of a living transgender theatre actor Chapal Bhaduri (Rituporno Ghosh). The movie unfolds the travails experienced by Bhaduri and his relationships. It depicts how the theatre personality undergoes emotional turbulences and has to submit most of the time to the strict societal norms and traditions.

4.6 QUEER FILMS BEYOND MAINSTREAM CINEMA

India has produced several queer films beyond the mainstream cinema. Now you must be wondering what is a mainstream film and what could be other films beyond this category. Let us begin by defining a mainstream film. You have already read about why films are made. Most films are produced with economic gain in mind. These are called mainstream films

or popular cinema. There are film makers, who prefer to interpret an idea and take it to the spectator. They are concerned not about commercial success, but focus on their idea germinating from a societal issue, and frame it into a film, despite knowing the fact that it attract only niche audiences. Such films are sometimes categorised by film critics as off-beat or parallel cinema. Sometimes these are made as documentary films or short films.

India has a big industry of such films. Sridhar Rangayan is one such famous name who makes films based on the queer perspective. He tries to make the invisible queer world visible to everyone. His first creative venture is *Gulabi Aaina* or *The Pink Mirror*. The film depicts the fearless participation, for the first time, of more than 100 gay and transsexual members of NGOs working for queer people like The Humsafar Trust in Mumbai and Lakshya in Gujarat.

His second film is *Yours Emotionally*, released in 2006. The film focuses two gay protagonists, drawing them from two different class-structures, meeting at a gay-party in a remote rural setting. It deals with the emotional attachment beyond the sexual structures of the film. With a consistently surreal look, *Yours Emotionally* feels like a beautiful fever dream inspired by both avant-garde queer film and the tropes of the mainstream film. His latest queer film *68 Pages* (2007) deals with HIV+ infected people. It revolves around several characters. One of them is a transvestite, played by Uday Sonawane, who becomes an HIV+ patient. Sridhar Rangayan also depicts the gay characters, Kiran (Joy Sengupta), and Mohit (Sherrin Verghese) who is shown as a couple living a life of love and trust. But as the film progresses, Mohit is shown as promiscuous and who brings the disease to both of them. This film in a realistic perspective shows Rangayan's creative skills.

Check Your Progress 3:

What are the similarities and dissimilarities of vernacular films and off-beat films?

4.7   FILMS DEPICTING SPECIFIC QUEER CULTURES

You must be wondering why we haven't spoken much about the exact depictions of the queer cultures in the films. So now let us talk about some of the prominent queer cultures and the films that talk about them.

Closeted identity of a queer person is one of the most prominent cultures. To avoid unhappy consequences, most queer people hide their identity. In

fact films show this hidden identity that pursues its sexual desires by falsifying identity. This is a very common phenomenon among queer people. For example, in *Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Ltd.*, the director, Reema Kagti uses a voice-over of a radio-jockey. Vicky as Harish writes letters to the radio-jockey who entertains his listeners. The film portrays how closeted gays mask themselves with false names. The existential world of closeted feeling gets expressed sometimes through film frames like this one from *Honeymoon Travels Pvt. Ltd*.

Gay parties offer another space as social get-together providing opportunities for bringing like-minded people together, and try to break the shackles of closeted identity. Films like *Bombay Boys* or *Yours Emotionally* portray this culture. Sometimes the film world has portrayed queer people in the profession of prostitution, as for example, in *Bombay Boys, Traffic Signal, Dunno Y...Na Jaane Kyon,* and *Omar* of *I AM.*

Homophobia is a staunch prejudice of the heteronormative society of India. The film world has portrayed this reality also, as in *Fashion* (2008). The film shows that queer people may feel safer in remaining 'invisible' and homophobia can become a weapon in the power struggle between sexes. Similar situations are also shown in film *Page 3* (2005) and *Life in a...Metro* (2007).

Chandni Bar and *Ek Challis ki Last Local* portrays the issue of sodomy prevalent in queer male culture. These films also show that the psychoanalytical study of sodomy that reveals the power game between two individuals.

HIV+ or AIDS has foregrounded the queer people as subjects for research and fieldwork. During the 1980s, when the cause for the disease was being explored, it raised AIDS-phobia. Films such as *My Brother...Nikhil* and *68 Pages* are the best examples dealing with this vulnerability of queer people. These films show how a world-wide phobia regarding the infection of this dreaded communicable disease has affected the society. Studies were undertaken globally by research institutions and most reports clearly pointed to the vulnerability of queer people.

Marriage of convenience is another aspect of queer culture that film world has dealt with. Queer males in this country are often forced to opt for heteronormative traditions of society and end up marrying partners they are not sexually attracted to because heterosexuality gives them a refuge. Madhur Bhandarkar touched upon this in *Fashion* (2008). The designer Rahul Arora persuaded by his overpowering mother marries Janet Sequeira and compromises his relationship with his boyfriend Ashish. Thus his mother insists that he follows heterosexual conventions in a marriage of convenience and forego his gay desires.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

As you have seen from the above discussion, the social acceptance of queer people hasn't been very visible. As a rule, Indian filmdom, in general, has been successful in appeasing the psychology of what it perceives to be the mass audience. This makes them ignore or marginalise the existence of queer people. Vito Russo in his book *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* writes that heterosexual society has a vested interest in keeping the homosexual relationships untenable and mystical because, made real they are seen as threat to family living (Russo, 1987). This idea has been supported by film production houses by projecting queer people as a threat to the perpetuity of the family structure. The commercial releases do not talk about them or represent them with respect. Lately, the portrayals of queer people in films have found some sensitive and realistic representations by directors who have tried to carve out a unique space for the representation of queer people through cinema.

4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Describe the elements of the ways in which queer people are portrayed in cinema.

2. "Cross-dressing was an accepted aspect of films for a long period in film history". Justify this statement with relevant examples.

3. Analyse any three films of the recent period from the perspective of the portrayals of different groups of queer people.

4. What are the major queer cultures that have been shown in Bollywood cinema?

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