

**MEN MEET MARKET: BOLLYWOOD, PUBLIC(ITY) AND  
THE MALE BODY**

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**Certified that the Thesis entitled**

**MEN MEET MARKET: BOLLYWOOD, PUBLIC(ITY) AND THE MALE BODY**

submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Dr. Trina Nileena Banerjee, Assistant Professor, Cultural Studies, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree/ diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

Countersigned by the

Supervisor:

Dated:

Candidate:

Dated:

*To 'Dadaiya'*

“The cinema is truth 24 frames-per-second.” – Jean Luc Godard

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## **CONTENTS**

<b>Titles</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
Introduction	01 - 20
Chapter I Marketing Strategy: The Making and Distribution of a Hindi Film	21 - 52
Chapter II New-Age Cinema: OTT and the Notion of ‘(S)Hero-Worship’	53 - 85
Chapter III Concept of New-Age Posters: Digital Printing and its Effect on Art Form	86 - 114
Chapter IV Fitness and Deception: Presentation of Body in the Age of Multimedia	115 - 140
Conclusion	141 - 147
Notes	148 - 154
Bibliography	155 - 168

## **Introduction**

The thesis is titled “Men meet Market: Bollywood, Public(ity) and the Film Poster”. There are four keywords in the title. Men, market, publicity and Film poster. The title was planned when I thought of working on the change seen in the presentation of men in the Hindi film industry. By the word presentation, I mean their on-screen visual presence, the impact they have on fans and the changes seen in the way men are perceived in the Hindi film industry as well as its audience, which is popularly known as Bollywood. The research has covered the time-line from 1998 to 2022. The release of the film *Pyar Kiya toh Darna Kya* (1998) marks the beginning and it ends with the ‘OTT’(Over-the-top) release of the second season of *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* (2022). The reason for this selection was the beginning of the presentation of the male body as a bare torso in a song of this 1998 film, which paved the way for a series of display of the bare male body for almost twenty years after the release of the film. Salman Khan, the lead actor in the film had been pivotal to this change. The audience was enthralled by this sudden change of stance and the notion of Salman Khan looking for opportunity to take off his shirt was a popular stunt for the audience. The male torso was not sexualized in this way before by the audience of Hindi films. It was a new beginning of making the audience accustomed to looking at the body of the leading men alongside women with wafer-thin waistlines and semi-bare bodies on screen. By the time we come to the last leg of this time-line, we are introduced to the changed norms of presentation of a lead actor who is not hyper masculine and need not be the one to go shirtless in order to lure the audience to watch the film. The influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the way films have been marketed and released is another important aspect of the research.

The second word– ‘market’ is a synonym for the demands of the audience. Once the bare bodied male torso was on display by one actor, the other actors followed. There was a series

of films like *Ghajini* (2005) and *Om Shanti Om* (2007) when the two other leading actors Aamir Khan and Shah Rukh Khan started working on their body and advertising their fitness. The market was gradually filled with six-pack and eight-pack abdomens and well-chiseled bodies. On the other side of the market was the fan, someone who looked up to these role models and started craving for a body like that on screen. Unrealistic body-goals and crash diets led to the evolution of another industry. The fitness industry started to pick up momentum and gradually it became a massive allied industry alongside the film industry. However, with time, people shifted focus from presentation to content and fitness became a necessity and not a fancy desire for the common people. Films too changed with the changing mindset of the audience. The Hindi film industry shaped itself anew with the idea of making films on the life of people living in the fringes of the society. Gradually the narrative changed and the focus was on the common people. This shift was seen in the mainstream commercial cinema very gradually and steadily. It is not that this was the first case of making films that are based on content, but in the 70's and 80's the content specific films were not a part of the mainstream film making. The gap between the two kinds of films, (content centric and star centric) gradually became narrow after 2000 and it continues to be like that now.

The other aspect of the Hindi film industry was its film promotion methods that made a huge contribution to the trends in question. The Hindi film industry has shown many significant changes in the way promotions are handled in the production houses. The journey from the hand-drawn posters to the digitally reprinted ones has been simultaneously enriching and new for the industry. It has contributed significantly to the cost of production.

Posters have evolved and included other forms of change in film promotion, for example, like making of trailers and Instagram reels which ensure that the film is more attractive to the prospective audience. The format of presenting the male lead actor in a film poster too has

changed over the years. This is similar to the way in which women are presented in the promotional videos, the sexualizing gaze is now not limited to a particular sex. The audience is now presented with multiple choices of films, releasing on the same day and the industry has shown very significant changes in terms of its promotional strategies. Film posters and publicity are intricately related but not limited in its reach. Posters have become the new accessories in the homes of the fans, as the cost of buying them has become affordable for the middle class as well. Also, publicity is not limited to interviews and trailers. The actors are now required to go on promotional tours. The space of interaction for these actors with their fans has been varied and therefore included public places like gyms, colleges and concerts et cetera.

In developing the notion of the different perspectives that are presented while reading the list of books during the time of literature review, I was faced with certain questions that kept cropping up. The first question that made me wonder was about the credential of a film as a piece of literature. The politics behind the presentation was somewhat problematic from the initial days of reading a film as a statement. The presentation of masculine identity, the elaboration of the human emotions, the notion of having a larger-than-life narrative, everything combined to form a general disturbance of an otherwise perfected image of the fine art of film-making. Taking the steps with the critics and readers of the Hindi film industry we get multi-dimensional reading of the film as a presentation of one's imagination. The thought behind the identity of the hero is obviously a kind of discretion of the director and the audience's perception of the ideal hero. To look at the presentation of the urban narrative as a part of the upcoming trend of rural obliteration was somewhat talked about by Ranjani Mazumder in her celebrated book, *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (2007). She observes that, in 1970s, the trend of central space of action of a film shifts to the urban locale as the new norm. The question is why the shift is her primary concern. She traces the

journey of urbanisation from *Deewaar* (1975) to *Ghulam* (1998)- the periodization is strange, for it is elaborated over a period of twenty-three years and talks about a logistically high dimension of drastically different perspectives.

Mazumdar talks about the parallel industrial growth, which in turn contributes to the consuming appetite of the audience. She discusses advertisement strategies and talks about the presentation on walls, billboards and lamp-posts. She discusses the shift of locale as a shift from Gandhian to Nehruvian notion of the nation. She includes the re-centering of power struggle as the screen deities form a new form of normal where the audience includes the notion of urban as the new space of desire. Mazumdar claims that the book looks at Mumbai's cultural imagination of the hero's presentation and its interaction with cinema. She brings in the notions of nationalistic, ideological, biographical and historical perspectives in her discussion and draws it along the lines of specifically looking at the relationship between popular cinema and urban life. A very interesting presentation in the chapter "Rage on Screen" was found to enlist the influence of past in the life of the angry young man.

Mazumdar takes the influence of nostalgia as a part of the protagonist's identity and takes a plunge from the angry young man to the psychotic anti-hero who takes the past like a pill and seeks revenge from the shadows. This transformation from Amitabh Bachchan to Shah Rukh Khan in a series of films using the persona as a presentation of a form of a character is a part of her socio-economic reading of the film in particular and the genre in general. She makes a note of the changed reality of the hero and the different realities that urbanity provides them with. The confluence would definitely indicate the dichotomy of the reading. For example, Mazumdar estimates the urban space as a hostile womb of a type-casted hero who is nothing but a mere reflection of the past. The hero cannot think, for he feels so drastically and is loaded emotionally. This makes the including of their tendency to be the messiah and the rebel simultaneously. The audience needs to conform to the identity of a larger-than-life

figure who is at ease in any environment and has the necessary transformative adaptability to suit the market that needs him to be at ease in a position of power. She problematizes the situation of the mad-man that is repeatedly projected as a result of the nostalgia looming large on the mind of the hero.

This projected madness and the associated presentation of the other is dealt with by Rachael Dwyer and Christopher Pinney in the book, *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (2001). Pinney and Dwyer talk about the migratory liminality taking into account the extent of Stuart Hall's thinking about the active destruction of the particular ways of life and their eventual transformation into something completely new. The note that the authors make in this text about the Indian audience is, that the viewers are not homogenised whole but a differential field with diverse tastes and agendas. This results in a varied reception of the content that is delivered and discussed by the film critics as a typical example of a period. They take in the concept of Homi Bhabha as seen in *The Location of Culture* (1994), which they illustrate and present. This is the concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism"<sup>i</sup>, which is seen as a kind of new way of analysing the array of thought process and lookout of the audience of the Hindi film industry. They have the varied tastes due to the conceptualisation of the variety in terms of the inextricable mutuality of reception and production which at one point is discussed and Ravi Vasudevan is brought into question by Pinney and Dwyer. Asha Kasbekar, one of the contributors to the development of the notion of heterosexual male voyeurism also enlightens the readers about the operation of pleasure within various constraints. This has to find a space that antagonises the viewership and tries to exclude the female viewers from their right of being consumers of a particular form of entertainment. This estimate is self-analytical as the perfection of thought as to be seen in the light of the fact that this thought of voyeurism is created not only on the viewership and response of the male heterosexual audience in order to highlight the concepts

illustrated by the deity presented on screen but also by the mere projection of the personal as the universal.

Sandrin B. Freitag in the first chapter of Pinney's book, titled "Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption and Participation in the Public Sphere" talks about the act of consumption as an act of identity formation. He assumes the interplay of consumption and nationalism to be at the core of this discussion and talks about the Foucauldian model, the "ontological reduction" of modernity yielded as a 'modern hegemony of vision, modern technology and modern forms of governmentality'. What he intends to trace is perhaps the role of gaze that unifies the technologies of power and the idea of self into a whole. This unified vision is perhaps best elaborated in the context of power dynamics between the audience and the model created out of the desire of the audience. The trickled down version of the other kind of audience is the one that Sara Dickey presents in the chapter titled "Opposing Faces: Film Star Fan Clubs and the Construction of Class Identity in South India" where she talks about the role of the Fan Club beyond the realm of mere movie enthusiasts. Dickey also incorporates a section on the conflicting projection of violence in the South Indian films as compared to the Hindi film industry and the associated image of masculinity as presented among the audience. The image created for the demi-God on screen is debated, questioned and chastised by the audience as and when required. The strains of viewership are also elaborated as films enter into the arena of family drama in the chapter by Asha Kasbekar called "Hidden Pleasures: Negotiating the Myth of the Female Ideal in Popular Hindi Cinema" where she talks about the other being brought to the fore and the ideal and real amalgamating into a thesis of the presentation on screen of the women in films. Thus, presentation becomes a vital disjoint for many film readers and the presentation of the actors is never really limited to the common sphere of human qualities. The people being presented are extremely perfect. This perfection is normative.

Rachael Dwyer in the chapter “Shooting Stars: The Indian Film Magazine Stardust” talks about the tracing of the developments and trends in the film industry and also highlights the discussion and contribution of the film magazine in the documentation of the history of Hindi film industry and its growth as an important ideology in the revamping of print media and the association of journalism in this regard. This in turn contributed to the economic and cultural phenomenon that it created in the 1990s and contributed towards the seriousness of the business in question.

While I shift to reading Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalisation* (1996), I am caught between the ‘theory of rupture’ and the idea of media and migration being two different interconnected analogies that tend to talk about the work of ‘imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity’. Appadurai talks about the general trend of provoking resistance to the consumption of mass media and the idea of selective absorption and the associated concept of vehement ideology. He distinguishes between the individual and collective sense of imagination and stresses on the importance of imagination as a property of collectives and not ‘merely as a faculty of the gifted individual’. He highlights the concept of ‘community of sentiments’ where the collective thinks in a similar pattern and tries to form a community feeling towards a particular mode of entertainment. Appadurai is of the opinion that the role of globalization has been of key importance in bridging the gap between the producer and consumer. This has however, blurred the line between the temporary locales and the imaginary national attachments. Appadurai elaborates with the reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomic conception of the ‘theories of rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand and fantasies of electronic propinquity on the other’. Thus, the cultural processing of today’s world becomes a tenet of the centrality of the problem.

The further illustration ranges from the concept of ‘nostalgia for the present’ where Appadurai looks back at Fredric Jameson and continues into late capitalism; pastiche and nostalgia are central modes of image production and reception’. He calls the past a land not to return to in a ‘simple politics of memory’. The cultural scenarios have been stacked in this frame of the past that enables a kind of recasting into the same old structure the new faces that fill the types of characters that have already been long presented on screen. The new role of imagination and the further development of the mechanically-produced images (with reference to the Frankfurt School), is very illustrative of the tendency that develops into a kind of differential reading of the imagined community that in a way is a ‘constructed landscape of collective aspiration’ and which Emile Durkheim identifies as ‘collective representations’. This is now translated into the complex medium of modern media and the imagination occupies the central form of all ‘agencies’ and becomes the global order or the key component of this imagination.

Commenting on homogenization and heterogenization, Appadurai elaborates the illustration of the forces and fears of these ideologies in relation to their own minorities. He elaborates the concept of the ‘imagined worlds’ and ‘productive fetishism’ where he talks about the creation of an illusion by ‘contemporary transnational production loci that masks trans local capital, transnational earning flows, global management and often faraway workers...control national productivity and territorial sovereignty.’ He states that the consumer is transformed through ‘commodity flows.’ There is thus, a sense of masking of the real seat of agenda that enables the producer and not the consumer as the target of the production.

In the book, *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (1983), by Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Langlet, the first chapter titled “The Context: A Social Cultural Anatomy” by Raghunath Raina has a supposed notion of a similar context. He says, ‘The new cinema is “regional” in the sense that

it speaks in terms of recognisable situations, gives its characters a social identity, and deals with situations close to life.’ This elaborates to the kind of ‘consumeristic’ behaviour that the audience has developed in reception of the films that they have been exposed to. He also talks about the role of film-addicts who have been pivotal in the smooth running of the film industry as an industry in the first place. We suppose that the identity or the loss of it can be framed in the context of viewership but the range of addiction is much more extravagant than the one that comprises of the apparently harmless audience who formulate the situation in an immediacy of action. The situation is vital and the consumption is widespread. In the introduction to the same book, Phillippe Lenglet states that the Indian film industry is basically a ‘commercial’ industry that finds itself ‘threatened in the last decade or so by a cinematic approach which is exploring avenues that are ‘different’ and ‘new’, trying, through reconciling art with celluloid to forge an idiom more relevant to the emerging Indian reality’.

The image of the ideal has travelled far beyond the capacity of the possible reality. The other contribution to the ideal is the image of the ideal. The men in Hindi films have travelled a long way of troubled path and contributed steadily to the commercial success of the film industry through the constant image shuffling. Ruth Vanita in the foreword of the book titled, *Masculinity and its Challenges in India* (2014), by Rohit K. Dasgupta and K. Moti Gokulsing speaks on the changing image of the man in Hindi film industry. She points out that the politics of colour that plays a huge role in transforming the men of the celluloid has been projecting masculinity in a different light from what had been a long-standing trial for the screen deities. Ranjani Mazumdar however, in her essay, titled “Figure of the 'Taponi': Language, Gesture and Cinematic City”, published with the *Economic and Political Weekly* (Dec. 29, 2001 – Jan. 4, 2002), states that the image of the outsider, the masochistic messiah for the poor, the homeless ‘tapori’, the nomad with an ambition of being the resident of the city becomes a permanent image of the struggle that the audience has to endure in a ruthless

city for pursuing their dreams. This image is encashed by the market policy and the fact highlighted here is the idea of the ever eluding horizon as seen through the mask of the high-end entrepreneur who gives this flaneur a cause and robs him of the identity of an outsider. The outsider becomes a second-class insider but the outsider as a threat is now dissolved and reinstated as a successful inclusion who is not so vehemently included after the initial acceptance into the realm of the city dwellers. These contradictions add to the fact that the existence of the outsiders who are always at a loss of presence. They are in a state of constant motion from one identity to the next, jumping in and out of the arena of inclusion. The audience relates to this dichotomy, for they too are consistently pointed as outsiders in the realm of citizenship. This category of audience, as Mazumdar points out origins from the marginal rural spaces and their need to be included in the city-scape is primarily to ensure their right to work as labourers and also to find a home away from home. This is never achieved in their life and the realisation is completed only when they include themselves in the feeling of inclusion of the on-screen outsider. The hero thus ends up contributing not only to the industry in terms of financial revenue but also attracts the revenue of audience when they form the narrative of inclusion. This reversal of the role of the man in infuriating a section of deprived and 'othered' audience (largely comprised of men) makes it a kind of gendered prerogative of the 'othering' which has only been subjected to the women in the system so far. In the Introduction to the book, *Men and Feminism in India* (2018), Romit Chaudhury and Zaid Al Baset opines about the relational concept of the feminism and masculinity as seen in India. The idea of 'othering' is not limited to the gender disparity but extends to the concept of being the one in charge of the mutual support system initiated between two equally oppressed subservient notions of reality that the two clans could otherwise have never bridged. The input regarding the break from the stereotype of masculine presentations in films have been seen in the chapter by Dashini Jeyathurai in the book by

Dasgupta and Gokulsing, where the author calls the chapter “Rethinking the Circuits of Male Desire across Multiple Dostanas” and discusses within the scope of the chapter the idea of desire being projected in two different lights by the two films by the same name. The Amitabh Bachchan and Shatrughan Sinha film that surfaced in 1980 and the Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham film that was released in 2008. The issues of the films being completely different and the treatment being completely relocated in the genre of social comedy (or rather part-parody) is somewhat dichotomous for the treatment meted out to the men in question. The space in the 2008 film has been open to the masculinity in terms of the changed concept of including the homosocial connect that was severely lacking in the tale of two friends who declare their loyalty and punish the self in order to establish the other in a happy cocoon of hapless familial ties. Hindi cinema has seen it all, been in the space of certain gendered misnomer and become renewed in the aspirations of the newly developed ideology of inclusion that has been instrumental in revamping the modern mindset of the audience.

In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord states:

Separation is itself an integral part of the unity of this world, of a global social praxis split into reality and image. The social practice confronted by an autonomous spectacle is at the same time the real totality which contains that spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point that the spectacle seems to be its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of signs of the dominant system of production-signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that system. (Debord 18)

This perhaps can be included as a reading of the Hindi film industry as the separating force that divides the world into reality and image of the reality. The conditioning obviously hints

at the fact that the spectacle is often seen as the goal, the misleading nature of this goal can scheme the resultant to be a spectacle so enchanting that would lead to the vehement criticism of the projected identity on screen which needs to be supplemented but is celebrated.

In the essay “Timepass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India”, by Craig Jeffrey in *The American Anthropological Association*, in August 2010, the idea of not having a unanimous timepass<sup>ii</sup> for the people in South Asia is pointed. To the astonishing ideas that are being presented in the essay, Jeffrey points out the fact that cinema happens to be the only unified strain of leisure that has equal acceptance among the audience in spite of their gender and social identity. The concept is obviously subjected to survey but the conditioning seems to be very rigidly focussed on the factual presentation of proximity to a film as a part of the developing economic contribution that the film makes in the socio-economic scenario of the country.

In the essay “Popular Hindi Film Song Sequences Set in the Indian Diaspora and the Negotiating of Indian Identity” by Nilanjana Bhattacharjya, published in the *Music and the Asian Diaspora* (Winter- Spring 2009), states that the songs in a Hindi film identifies not only the domain of the internal culture, but the idea of tourism which is related to the shooting of song sequences in and out of India in a typified location of cultural markers in the form of garments and language whereas the setting is mostly urbanised and rather has a kind of colonial flavour to it. The other avenue that needs to be looked at in this perspective would be to identify the concept of gendered performativity in the location of these song sequences. The completely covered male body (as it was pre-1990s, circa) and the scantily-covered and much-exposed female body has been the reason for the initial popularity of the song sequences. However, with the new ideologies springing with the evolution of bare-bodied male actors (as seen in the projection of Shah Rukh Khan in the song *Dard-e-disco* in *Om*

*Shanti Om*, 2007) being glorified and reinstated in 'item numbers' the concept of the body is being slowly reviewed and not along the lines of gender stereotypification.

As Judith Butler in the 'Preface' to *Bodies that Matter* (1993), points out that "if gender is not an artifice to be taken on or taken off at will and hence, not an effect of choice, how are we to understand the constituting and compelling status of gender norms without falling into the trap of cultural determinism?" (Butler ix) The argument that she presents to the readers is obviously interconnected with the concept of performativity as seen in film productions. The obvious underpinning of the strategy of performance is to deviate the role of gendered individuals as a part of the larger camaraderie that constitutes the theology of representational politics as seen in films and as projected in the media as necessarily futuristic. They have been vehemently criticised and restructured as time has continued to bifurcate and establish itself as a constant in the ever-changing dilemma of representation.

The review is a continued process. There are aspects that have not been elaborated in my understanding. This is a first exposure to the arena of literature surrounding the idea as presented (or desirous of presentation by me). The review shall be continued and further enhanced as I keep looking at the works relevant to my understanding of my original plan of action. Chapter 1 concentrates on the market that the Hindi film industry has created over the years. It includes three major interviews with cinema hall owners and proprietors, as well as portions of small interviews with other relevant workers attached with the cinema halls for a long period of time. Primarily, it discusses the contrast between the spectatorship of multiplex and single screen theatres. The three major interviews were conducted in person and the interviewees in question had been eager to speak their mind. While Basushree and Jayanti are cinema halls that run on original reels of cinema, Mallika is a video hall. It is a kind of hall that organizes shows without bringing reels of the film from the original

distributors. Once the DVD or equivalent of the reel is out in the market, these cinema halls use them to screen films. Generally, these halls screen a film after a month of their release. Such halls are very common in the suburban areas of Kolkata.

The idea was to select different cinema halls among others who have not changed their format of their shows and yet they are still in business. The halls in question were Basushree, Mallika Cinema and Jayanti, Barrackpore. The proprietors were quite interested in speaking to me. I had a set of questions for them which I shall include here. Their answers were divergent. Yet they had some common links in terms of circumstances through which they had to pass in order to keep their cinema halls running even when the audience had become keener to visit the multiplexes.

To these people, the experience of watching a film does not necessarily centre on physical comfort and they claim that their halls are to be more renowned but less comfortable. For the owner of Jayanti, a sweeping statement was common – “If you want a comfortable watch, go to Inox, if you are a common man, come to Jayanti”. (Biswas) This categorization of the cinema hall has been very popular amongst the audience of the suburban area. A group of audience (in the age frame of twenty and thirty) were eager to talk about the style of the hall and told me when asked that “we come here because we do not want to miss out on the new release because it is the end of the month”. The economic aspect of the continuing popularity acceptance of the single screen theatres is somewhat significant since it attracts audience in large numbers. The effect on the revenue is positive since the money collected is not drained on the paraphernalia of glossy exteriors and consumable peripheral commodities presentation to the audience. The people who watch a film in these theatres know what they have signed up for. Jayanti, being a converted multiplex, was a local favourite for the film loving audience. Jayanti at one point was a single screen theatre which was later turned into a low

budget multiplex by the same owners. There are three screens now and a snacks counter. The set up was such that the people would get the idea of it being a new-found kind of a film screening space which is somewhere between the multiplex and the single screen theatre. The comfort was compromised and cost, curtailed. This resulted in increase in the number of audience opting for these cost-effective multiplexes.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the presentation of masculinity in two contradictory films from two different mediums, *Jamtara* Season 1 and 2 (2020 and 2022) and *Gurgaon* (2017). While *Jamtara* was a 'Netflix' original, *Gurgaon* was premiered in the IFFA, Macao 2016 and released worldwide in 2017. The names of these films are taken from cities of the same name in North India which are not considered to be first grade places like the metropolises of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. While the cities are pivotal to the plots, the narrative of these films is more rustic and less sophisticated because of their settings. The origin of this genre of films could arguably be traced to the 2012, *Gangs of Wasseypur*, written, directed and produced by Anurag Kashyap. However, Kashyap's film was along the lines of *Satya* (1998) and *Shool* (1999) which could be loosely categorized as the gangster movies, where the protagonist was presented as a morally ambiguous character. He is neither a conventional hero nor a villain. Where *Gangs of Wasseypur* won over the likes of its predecessors was the presentation of masculinity especially in the sequel of the film, *Gangs of Wasseypur II* (2012).

The reason for selecting these new-age films was to trace the narrative of the film at length and make an estimate of how the image of the Hindi film hero has changed over the years. It would be perhaps inappropriate to use the term hero in this context. We can blur the lines and talk about the central character of a film since the characters are now unmarked in fixed categories. We are now used to a non-cinema going crowd, after the pandemic hit us hard on our faces. But the love for cinema has remained with the Indian audience throughout the ages

and is not lost even now. With the access of 'Netflix' and its competitors, 'Amazon Prime', 'Disney Hotstar' and the regional equivalents like 'Zee 5' and 'HoiChoi', the new theatre is inside the audience's pocket. Cinema is now released simultaneously and sometimes independently on 'OTT' platforms. These are the new ways in which cinema becomes an intimate affair. For decades, films have changed its modes of spectatorship audience based on social circumstances, the kind of situation through which the social scenario of the time has evolved.

The telefilm was not invented by 'OTT' platforms, but the medium used was television in the case of regional telefilms. These telefilms were telecast at specific times and dates. This led to condensed viewership which made the TRP (Television Rating Points) rise and fall with the time of telecasting. With the advent of the modern take on these mediums, the telefilms have become much accepted as a form of entertainment and people can watch these while they commute and therefore, the viewership index has become somewhat improved in connection to the concept of flexible time for viewership.

The first 'OTT' launched in India was 'BIGFLIX' launched by Reliance Entertainment in 2008. This was not a major success then. Gradually the country has incorporated around fifty-one 'OTT' platforms and the range is widely regional. 'Netflix' started as a DVD rental system back in 1997, in Mumbai it developed its own niche of distribution, production, and the 'Netflix Originals' is an example of film production which has taken the multimedia as the means proponent of reaching out to a wider audience. The 'OTT' has different customized options through which they section their viewership and show a particular kind of content to a particular audience. This creates a possible categorization and the prospective audience gets more comfortable with the medium.

In Chapter 3, I have incorporated interviews with poster makers and industry experts and trade analysts. Today, the poster makers have receded to the fringes of the city and the digital image has taken its place. However, the most popular idea was the conception of the posters and how that has evolved with the passing of time in the Hindi film industry. The trend shifted in 1995 with the release of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* which made the poster in regional language (Hindi was used explicitly in its first set of posters) and specified the area of publicity. It was one of the first movies by Yash Raj Films to have multiple posters pre and post release of the film. The film has recently, in 2021, completed twenty-five years of its continuous screening in 2021 at Maratha Mandir (a single screen theatre in Mumbai). The posters have undergone different layers of changes. In terms of content and documentation as well as presentation and making, posters have travelled a long way. When we talk about the production of posters, we must be aware of the localized poster making. The posters that are put up in various cities are all transported virtually and printed at local markets. In this chapter, I have talked about the inclusion of the Instagram reels and trailers as the other modes of film promotion. The digitization of posters and the loss in the field of poster making as an art is something that has been discussed at length. Interview of a poster maker (who wished to keep his identity hidden) has been included in the chapter.

A very interesting aspect of the art of poster making is the colour-scheme. The specific colours used in a poster, determines the kind of film one can anticipate it to be. Usually in mainstream Hindi cinema, shades of green and black represent horror, while pastel shades are used for films dealing with interpersonal relationships and love as a prominent theme. While blue is most judiciously used in the posters pertaining to films dealing with a more complicated relationship issues with blends of darker hues. These general assumptions are so stereotypically used in the film posters that it makes the art of poster making somewhat predictable, if we follow the pattern of the compositions closely. Colour palettes in the film

posters often determine the scheme of thought that the director follows keeps in the entire film. Sometimes the dominance of a certain colour makes it schematic to a particular environment that has relevance to in the plot. This is a technique that Sanjay Leela Bhansali started in his film-making. The colour palette was an obvious determining factor for his films like *Saawariya* (2007) and *Black* (2005). He was the first in mainstream Bollywood to talk about the colour scheme and the idea of presenting the film poster as a schematic representation of the colours that shall be predominant in the film itself. His colour palettes have often brought out the era in which the films are set and the kind of environment they represent. Strong determined shades of colour have been incorporated to suit the presentation. This aspect makes it more difficult and what is more difficult to look at is the relevance of these colour schemes to in the mind of the audience. The unaccustomed eyes see it as a bright poster, but the trained audience understands this strategic concept of colour usage as to be a quality meant to attract the audience to a particular kind of cinematic imagination. The audience therefore gets attracted to a well thought-out film publicity material. It makes an effective publicity for the film.

In Chapter 4, these are interviews of the people who tend to look at body-building as the only means of livelihood and the industry around body correction centres and the people associated with it. The entire industry of fitness and body correction rests on the notions that arise out of these beliefs. In this connection, I have conducted a series of interviews. The interviews range from that of a fitness-enthusiast, a fitness coach, a certified dietician to a gym proprietor, food joint owner and a physiotherapist.

The one event that changed the day-to-day functioning of affluent fitness centres was the Covid-19 pandemic. The closure of the fitness centres and gymnasiums at this point in time was a mandate that was made by the government at both the central and state level. This

made it impossible for the sustenance of the employees and service-providers. The people working for these institutions were completely under the effect of the pandemic while people took this to be of secondary importance compared to medical care and food. This chapter has six major interviews and two minor interviews (where I did not get the desired time and input from the interviewee). The way the Hindi film industry has contributed to this industry is being examined in this chapter. After an intensive study of the field and the established work in this area of research, my initial argument was to look at the changing trends. I started with a comparison of the multiplex and the single screen cinema hall. I later went on to understand how the 'OTT' as a platform has replaced both and become the new reality for the Hindi film industry. I started with the faith that the gyms and fitness centres are purely influenced directly by the changing trends of the film industry.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Marketing Strategy: The Making and Distribution of a Hindi Film**

On April 20, 1921, *The Times of India* published an article titled “Indian Film Making: The Latest Production” enlisting a grand success of Madan Theatres Ltd. *The Times of India* (In the special edition of the *Uncut* edition published in 2013), quotes *The Statesman* and Anshul Chaturvedi writes:

When Madan Theatres Ltd., embarked on film production they decided that their work should be on a par with the best Western studios, and to this end they engaged expert producers, directors and camera men from Europe. That they have succeeded in their ambitious project... will be plainly evident to all who see the release at the Cornwallis Theatre of the first “Super Select Oriental Film.” (Chaturvedi 5)

To revive the theatre, the use of the special screening was done to embark upon the audience the need for a theatre space which would be good to screen films and not be stereotyped as a popular hall for screening of recent films. Here, the report of *The Times of India* has been apparently interesting enough to be reported taking the context of a previous report from a competing newspaper for the relevant audience to feel a certain attraction towards the history of the theatre that screened undeclared film that has been launched under a certain banner. It is seen to be having an approach of positive publicity to market one of the earliest examples of Hindi film of the nation. At this point what is interesting to note is, when the publicity is done it is not concerned about the content of the film. Rather than the content, the presentation and moreover the acceptance of the banner is made the issue of emphasis here. Therefore, it may be said that the audience receptivity is targeted towards the emergence of

the creation of a brand that Hindi film industry was yet to become. Repeated referencing can be read as the basic of the repeated appeal to the audience.

This trend has continued till the present day. The marketing strategy of the film has not shifted at all from its standpoint of alienated market survey. By this I mean that the market is judged and trends are created with the help of the launch ideas. Different ways of promoting a film is formulated and this is done systematically to ensure that the films meet a market ready for its reception. These do not necessarily involve themselves with the content of a film, but create a cult for the film that is based on a trend setting actor, who makes his identity unique to his flagship as a star rather than a performer. The performer is always absent in the propaganda. The star, on the other hand is always catering to the demands of the structure of publicity. The ‘star’, who apparently holds the key to the success of a film, is actually carved out of a performer designed by a team of propagandists. This is the assertion that is latent in the article, quoted at the beginning of this chapter but it needs further inspection.

In a chapter, titled “The Production and Distribution of Hindi Films” in his book *Oxford India Short Introductions: Bollywood*, M. K. Raghavendra says:

The term ‘Bollywood’ used for popular Hindi cinema suggests that Hindi cinema had been institutionalised like Hollywood in the organisation of film- making and distribution, but this is hardly a fact. Historically, the term ‘studio system’ applied to Hollywood refers to the practice of large motion picture studios between the 1920s and the 1960s of producing movies primarily on their own film- making lots using creative personnel usually under long term contract and dominating exhibition through vertical integration, that is, the ownership or effective control of distribution and exhibition.<sup>iii</sup> (Raghavendra 14)

Just as Raghavendra argues, that the people involved with the film making are in a position of strength about the production and distribution of the film since the saleability evident in the production design. The way the film is marketed is important because it manifests the way in which the film should address the prospective audience. It creates the divide among the audience regarding the choice of films that they make and how it produces different categories of audience in the industry. These audiences are then taken into confidence and convinced that the necessity of viewership rests with a certain category of audience for a certain film that is made. The team never preserves the integrated ideology of film aesthetics and the creative licence of the director when thinking about the marketing strategy. The market- value of a film depends on many crucial factors that trade-analysts try to understand and implement.

The trend of using the contents of a film to propagate it to a certain audience is a tried and tested formula. It works while the propaganda for the film is not always related to the audience's interest in the plot could be in the theme of the propaganda. In her book, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, Tejaswini Ganti writes:

The most striking feature of the Bombay film industry is its entrepreneurial and fragmented nature in all three sectors: production, distribution and exhibition. The industry comprises independent producers, distributors, financiers, exhibitors and independent audio companies. All three sectors of the film industry are run by family-films, which is, the dominant characteristic of business activity in India. (Ganti 56)

The 'family film business' that most production houses are an example of, is just one part of the game. The prosperity of the business house is always more important than the actual production of popular content and this restricts the growth of an artist making him a businessman in the process. Many popular actors and directors are getting involved in

production houses and in making of films. The reason obviously differs from what they claim it to be and what the market readers take it to be. When Aamir Khan is interviewed in *Koffee with Karan* for its Season 6, he confesses that promoting and producing films are an important part of his growth as a person associated with the industry, whereas the profit margin involved with the production of a film is undeniable. The bait is ludicrous and immensely accepted in the film fraternity, says he. The choice of the actor in participating in the production is simply because of the large amount of money involved with the prospect of being a filmmaker. The performers, for a slice of their presence on the poster are ready to compromise on their creative integrity and to enhance their ‘star-value’<sup>iv</sup>, of which they are made aware as a strategy of the film fraternity. This trend has led to the amalgamation of the present-day publicity with the tried and tested formula of ‘star merit’ that has taken the public into confidence. The ‘star-merit’ is a kind of unsaid liberty that the performer gets in order to make themselves useful in the market. In an interview conducted by Anshul Chaturvedi, in March 2008, (reprinted in *The Times of India: Uncut*, 2013) Shah Rukh Khan answers the question – ‘How big a brand do you want to be, Shah Rukh?’ with the words:

I don’t know what it means to be a brand. I do things exactly the way I have always done them. I sometimes read *The Economic Times* and figure out how big a brand I am, but the basics of brand building are the oldest clichés our parents tell us- be hard-working, be honest to yourself, be happy and whoever you meet make them feel they’re special. (Chaturvedi 15)

This statement too is a part of the brand building exercise that the actor has taken upon himself. The obvious question therefore is why the notion of brand building not accepted by the actors? The false modesty acts as a positive justification for their brand name. The actor makes himself a product of the market, willingly and makes himself the person who can be

the multi-dimensional idea of the same individual. The concept of branding is subjected to rejection by the audience as well as understanding and therein lies the importance of the presentation of a certain individual on screen in a particular manner. The one primary instrument in this process is the idea of pretence that performers like Khan puts up. The candid does not remain a candid and the market get benefit of this stardom. The brand building works in two levels of marketing and the second one is more functional since it acts as an unidentified form of propagation. Negative publicity too is a part of it.

The plastic<sup>v</sup> glory of these stars is something that apprehends itself on the psyche of the audience. With the humongous presentation of the 'hero' in Hindi film industry and the accentuated tapestry of their larger-than-life presence in the film propaganda, the lives of 'film stars' have taken a shape according to the demands of the marketing industry. With the change in lookout, the change in attitude has also been brought into consideration. The pragmatic cinema lover has started believing not only in the plot but also has believed in the power of the self-publicity (done by the actor) of late. The image of the 'stars' has been created in the image of the unparalleled self-esteem that the common man subjects himself to think. The cinema goer is now not a person dazzled by the glory of publicity but is someone who is keen to know about the trends that are created in the form of film propagation. The cinema enthusiast is affected by the trends and the psyche is suited to the idea of being updated with the information regarding a particular actor or a so-called 'star'.

Reminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha in their book, *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens* says:

Whatever technological, narrative and aesthetic dimensions were incorporated into films, they presented a relationship of *difference*, providing a parallel to Partha Chatterjee's (1986) arguments on Indian Nationalism, namely that is borrowed from

elsewhere, continued to dialogue with the outside and eventually became a force to be reckoned with both inside and outside of its bordered territories. (Kaur and Sinha 19)

This difference in the Hindi film industry was seen in the beginning of 90's era since the production management began to contribute differently to the presentation of a film in Indian and foreign markets. The way in which films have proceeded from a particular time to the present day is a journey of what difference it has made and how the difference has been created across the time in which the form of film has travelled. The journey of the film industry had the past methods of publicity as a point of reference. At present publicity has become a necessary part of the film's production cost.

In the 1920s the theatres showing films in India became a massive revolution but with the introduction of the multiplexes in India what came about was the competitive multi-screen dimension to this narrative. Multiplexes have developed a demanding<sup>vi</sup> audience, but the single screen theatres have survived in the small towns without much effort. However, to survive in the metropolitan cities the small screens have been struggling severely. In the first part of the series of interviews conducted with the proprietors of single screen cinema halls in Kolkata, I had come across these facts:

### **Field Survey: Interview of the Single Screen Theatre Owners**

I had intended to interview the owners/proprietors of Basushree, Star Theatre, Jayanti and Mallika cinema halls, but could not conduct the interview of the proprietor of Star Theatre because of non-availability. I could however conduct interviews with the three others on the list. Two of the above-mentioned theatres, Jayanti and Mallika are placed far north of the metropolitan area, and Basushree is situated in South Calcutta. The geographical locations of these cinema halls are also relevant to their different approaches to lure the audiences into their sometimes-non-air-conditioned halls which function without many facilities.

The idea was to select different cinema halls among others who have not changed their format of shows and yet are still around with screenings of different films. The halls in question were Basushree, Mallika Cinema and Jayanti, Barrackpore. However, interestingly, the proprietors of Basushree, Mallika and Jayanti were not very reluctant but rather interested in the interview. I had a set of questions for them which I shall include here. Their answers were divergent. Yet they had some common links in terms of circumstances through which they had to pass through in order to make their cinema halls run shows even when the audience had become prone to visit the multiplexes. To these people, the experience of watching a film do not necessarily centre on physical comfort and they claim that their halls to be more renowned but less comfortable. For the owner of Jayanti, a sweeping statement was common: “If you want a comfortable watch, go to Inox, if you are a common man, come to Jayanti”. (Kar) This categorization of the cinema hall has been very popular amongst the audience of the suburban area and a group of audience (in the age frame of twenty and thirty) were eager to talk about the style of the hall and told me when asked – “We come here because we do not want to miss out on the new release because it is the end of the month.” (Anon.) The economic aspect of the acceptance of the single screen theatres is somewhat significant since it attracts audience in large numbers. The effect on the revenue is positive since the money collected is not drained on the paraphernalia of presentation to the audience. The people who watch a film in these theatres know what they have signed up for. Jayanti being a converted multiplex was a local favourite for the film loving audience. Jayanti at one point was a single screen theatre which was later turned into a low budget and self-financed cinema hall by the same owners. There were three screens and a snacks counter. The set up was such that the people would get the idea of it being a new-found kind of a film screening space which is somewhere between the multiplex and the single screen theatre.

The questionnaire that I prepared for the field survey had primarily included the following questions, but the questions did not remain limited to these by the end of the interview:

1. As an owner of a reputed cinema hall, how do you feel about the recent growth of multiplexes in the city?
2. The projection of male body has changed over the last few years, with the advent of muscle-mania<sup>vii</sup>. Do you think films have contributed in a major way?
3. How do you think advertisements have changed the way in which we look at the male body?
4. In what way has poster making as an art changed over the last twenty years?
5. How has the hall been a part of the society? Do you think a single screen could have survived without the changes that it has subjected itself to?
6. The artists who painted posters are not comfortable about the talk on their art form. Do you think their art is dead because of their notion about privacy?
7. How has the three-dimensional poster emerged from South India and occupied the market of Hindi films?
8. Even regional films (like Bengali) have catered to the public demand to sexualise the actor's body. Do you think it is an indication of the death of the typical 'bhodrolok/ cultured' dhoti-clad Bengalee hero as seen in movies of yesteryears?
9. How do you think Dibakar Banerjee's *Detective Byomkesh Bakshy*, was a step that could have contributed to this change of the Bengali sleuth from armchair recluse to a well-built man of action? (The choice of the particular film was made because of the time of the interview conducted, which was April 2015. It was also a first time when the story of a Bengali sleuth, written by a Bengali author and directed by a Bengali director was being made in the Hindi film industry.)

10. Do you think the body of a man is the new commodity of public consumption in the film industry, which previously was the status reserved for women?

The questions were not random but planned in a way that the interviews could have some leading questions. It was contextual in the years (2015 predominantly and revised thereafter) in which the interviews were conducted and were serving as a basic interaction after which the interview went on with the different points of the discussion, which was the idea of it to be.

### **Case Study 1: Basushree**

**Date of Interview: 28.12.2016**

**Place: Basushree Cinema, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Road, Kalighat Kolkata.**

**Co-Owner/Proprietor: Mr. Sourav Bose**

After many unofficial conversations with Mr. Bose, I finally had an official interview with him at the office of his cinema-hall. A crowd had just dispersed after a screening of *Dangal* (2016), a film in which Aamir Khan was playing a wrestler and initiator of wrestling among his daughters. Based on the true narrative of the Phogat family, the film had made ‘good business’ in most of the halls in Kolkata, according to Mr. Bose. The film was accepted and made a market for itself perhaps because the theme was overcoming of barriers to achieve one’s goal. When we started talking about the reaction of the audience, Bose took us to the screening hall to see the last scene of the film. Bose also allowed my friend and photographer, Kaustav Manna to click photographs of his theatre as the space in question (the cinema hall) and the change in projection system that he had installed over the years had seen drastic changes over the last decade. In 2008, he had changed to UFO<sup>viii</sup> projection and the hall still has the same projector running. Apparently the projection of a hall determined the interest of the audience. But I would like to differ from Bose here since, the projection

basically talks about the technical knowledge of a film's presentation and what the people rather like to see on screen is the certification from their known brands and that makes all the difference to them, not the quality of the execution. He added that he was one of the first cinema hall owners to have switched to the digital viewership experience. However, he plans to change its version and update the viewing experience for the audience. The audience however, is absolutely unaware of these technical changes: this is what I gathered from talking to a few members of the audience who had come out after *Dangal* (which I shall talk about later in the chapter). For them, says Bose "the price of the ticket is what matters".

(Bose) This is another aspect that the single screen theatres are playing with. They screen the same film that is being screened at a multiplex at a lower operating cost. As a result, the tickets cost less and the number of spectators is higher per show, especially if it is an afternoon or evening show.

Here is a brief summary of my interview with him; I did not include the full transcript of the original interview here, as it will be used in fragments in different chapters in different contexts.

Bose, on being asked about the growth of multiplexes talked about the fact that Basushree has been witness to the golden era of cinema since it was established in 1947. He also discussed about the recent collaborations of the hall with the French Embassy for whom the hall had screenings of French Classics for cinema lovers at a minimal cost. The heritage has lost its flavour amongst the present generation, he lamented. He also emphasised the fame that Basushree had once given to the actors of India and that over time it has become a difficult task for him to keep Basushree in action. He pondered on the low rates of tickets at the hall compared to the multiplex as well as the fact that 4K and 2K systems of the multiplexes have made it a compulsion for single screens with low revenue to be at par with them.

Understandably, his problems with multiplexes are due to the troubles that his theatre faced because of competitive market in Kolkata.

To the second question his answer was more as a general viewer of Hindi movies. He was of the opinion that the muscular body was more of an exhibition of artificiality than anything normal or every day. He referred to the pre-nineties heroes as normal-bodied while the mid-nineties were, for him, unnatural. Even on posters, he said, the actors need to show their muscular bodies in order to remain part of the race. He however admitted that popular mainstream cinema that showcases the body of the protagonist in one way or the other attracts a greater number of viewers since they are at a state of believing in the image that they see and are more conscious about the projected body since they crave to have similar on their bodies themselves. It was according to him as external manifestation of the internal mind. This made the interview interesting since he started talking about the reactions of the audience in the context of their psychological connection to a certain place (like the cinema hall in this case). Bose made it a point to discuss his strength as a cinema hall owner while he talked to me. He was proud of the legacy that the cinema hall had created for him and his family. He said “Basushree is a landmark, not only in film production but also in Kolkata. People say Basushree is where we meet and wait for one another.”(Bose) The obvious meaning seems to be the prime position of the hall in terms of physical location but Bose believes that its his work at the cinema that ensures its status as a landmark.

On the mention of the art of poster making, Mr. Bose tried to point out at the loss of aesthetic value of posters due to digital reproduction and the loss of a form of art. He also talks of the film festivals where sometimes the artists may get some work of prominence but are sure not to get it round the year on a regular basis.

After this initial discussion on the merit of the poster, he started showing the posters to me from his hall's archive. It was interesting to note that he had only stored the digitally made ones and had comfortably done away with the older hand drawn posters that the hall had used at one point in time. This is the point that can be discussed at length though he did not give a straight answer but asked his assistant to look for the older posters and promised to show me a few the next time I went to his cinema hall. Bose's interview made it clear to me that everything that he had said was dichotomous. He was contradictory in many answers and not very convincing about the poster preservation. If he needed to 'preserve' or 'store' a poster, it should have been the one that would be less easily available, ephemeral and unique. But instead he saves the ones that are easy to preserve and done on vinyl prints and can be stored for a longer time. Therefore, unknowingly, he seems to comply with the terms of the digital age: the digitally redone posters have much better content for propagation and display of a film's features, like the look and style of an actor and the way a particular actor looks as a character in the film.

On being asked about the larger-than-life cut-outs of heroes Mr. Bose said it was an attempt to make the hero a Demi-God, and naturally there was a tendency to put garlands on these cut-outs since they made an impression of greatness. He added that on a first day first show in a single screen theatre, people would break coconuts and throw coins in order to make the film a hit, they would shout and make a rage in the cinema hall only to glorify the hero. The idea is to glorify the common man who is being seen as the hero of a film. The audience thinks it to be the story of a common man who is doing the extraordinary things on screen. The audience is often taken into the make-belief realisation of their position as the consumer with a certain amount of relatability. If the audience-connect is lost, the film would not be able to do 'business' in these halls. The disadvantage for a single screen hall is that it cannot make a mistake with the selection of a film. Bose says "if we go wrong in understanding

which film will do well, we are taken for a ride. We need to be very confident and able to predict the trend among the prospective audience.”(Bose) This is once again a marketing strategy for promoting the film. The actors in the film determine the way a film is marketed in the single screen theatres. Bose added that the time of the shows act as an added advantage. He confessed that the show time is approximately twenty minutes after the show time of the nearest multiplex. So, a film lover who tries to buy a ticket and fails would be able to get a ticket in the single screen if they are desperate to watch the film at that particular time. This too, is a marketing strategy.

Coming back to the analogy of the characters, about the villains he had another kind of analysis. He said the audience found it pleasurable to be in the position of the hero and defeat a more powerful man. This gave them a kind of fulfilment that was essential for them to establish faith in themselves and in the audience that the hero has the better body and can defeat the villain who has a chiselled body but not as powerful as the one of the hero.

The projector room and my interview with Anish-da the Projector manager was a very interesting part of my experience. Anish-da told me that the projector room was first taken care of by his father and then taken over by him. He was confident that his learning about the films was significant enough for the operation of the projector and formal training was not needed since it would add to the trouble of the owner of the hall. The claim was that, people with formal training of projector operation wanted more money and had some necessary conditions to function in a hall, which would add to the worries of the cinema hall owners.

What was significant was the kind of disapproval towards multiplex that all the members of the staff had. Perhaps it was originating from a fear that they had for the loss of their livelihood. The response of the audience was reassuring. After watching *Dangal*, an individual from a group of five friends pointed something significant, he said (I keep him

unnamed since he refused to disclose his identity) – “It is important we move ahead and save cinema, not just at spaces which can afford to save themselves.” (Anon.) When we look back at this interview in 2022, we can easily understand that cinema is now in the palms of the hand for the people. We know we can watch films on the go with the advent of the ‘OTT’. What multiplexes had been for the single screens, ‘OTT’ is for the multiplexes.

### **Case Study 2: Mallika Cinema**

**Date of Interview: 11.12.2016**

**Place: Mallika Cinema, Feeder Road, Shyamnagar.**

**Owner/Proprietor: Mr. Madan Mallick**

Unlike the bilingual interview of Bose, this interview was conducted in Bengali and the translation is mine. The question about multiplexes was farfetched, but it brought about a reply that was unexpected<sup>ix</sup> from a theatre owner. Mr. Mallick said, multiplex was a different kind of audience puller. For his hall, the main target was the lower middle-class section of the society which meant that his business would never fall drastically due to operation of the multiplexes. He added that the audiences at his hall do not mind the picture quality and the associated trouble of seats<sup>x</sup> since they get to see the film at a very low cost<sup>xi</sup>. On being asked about the male body in film posters he was of the opinion that aestheticizing and sexualizing of the stars’ bodies has always been a part of the appeal for the audience. But according to him, the commoditization of male body has been there from the time of Amitabh Bachchan and therefore, it may be a process that has changed its form but not its fundamental intention. He added that “the beauty of a film is in the notion of its hero and heroine being physically appealing to a large number of audiences. If the audience does not find the actors good to look at, they would not be interested in their on-screen chemistry and we will have no takers.” (Mallick) His hall is extremely old and unplanned<sup>xii</sup>. One has to go through a small by-lane to reach the hall and it is not very appealing to a young crowd. His audience is mostly

the lower income group working class. The rickshaw pullers and the auto drivers were his target audience. Though he categorises them among the working class, this section of the audience is never going to be away from entertainment for a long time, nor will they go to any fancy place to watch a movie. Mallick said – “We bring a film to the hall while the film has finished its business in the other halls. We are popularly called the video hall. We play films on video cassettes and not by bringing reels. As a result, the cost of screening is nothing compared to the others. They can therefore cater to an audience who are not known as film-buffs<sup>xiii</sup> by the present generation.” (Mallick)

He also articulated the fact that in order to bring the revenue collections up to par with the current times, he has to permit the running of B-grade movies in his hall during the afternoon. This being very popular among the audiences, it contributes hugely to the total revenue of the hall. He adds that it is either “Bollywood” or the B- grade films or a bit of both that runs at cinema houses these days. The video hall structure in which he operates is a very intricate structure that has to keep a lot of people happy. By this he indicates that he needs to bribe certain people in order to let the hall function properly. Mallick said that if the local police is not convinced about the structure of a hall then they will be making his life miserable. He said – “Do not put it beyond me to actually take a security in-charge for my personal security since the muscle-flexing competition in this market is huge. It is almost impossible to look at the other way when the competitors threat you directly regarding the revenue you earn.” (Mallick) Thus, for Mallika Cinema, it is not just the threat of competition from a multiplex, but rather the threat is more concrete and real in terms of physical harm and social and political controversy. The market here is different since the priority of the consumer is different. The consumer in this case is a very powerful individual and a section of the society who have limited options in life. Their demands are not to be fulfilled in a multiplex and the consumer base therefore, never shifts.

About the so-called villains he shared his opinion in almost the same light as the other interviewee. He opined that the villains need to be larger than life in order for the hero to become the screen-deity. The conversation ended but he refused to let my photographer click photos of his hall, and was vocal about the fact that the ill maintained corridors would not be a good example for the survey. The truth remains that his cinema hall needs a facelift but he deliberately keeps it low-key for the simple reason that the halls need to be undermining and non-appealing to the uninformed audience who do not know about the pattern of operation of these halls. The fact that the hall is a B-grade and a video hall is not very positive as a feedback to the image of the owner. Mallick is not sorry to be looking for an audience who are experienced. His audience is aware of the functions of the hall and the fact that in the afternoons there are screenings of B-grade films. Here the audience grows by the word of mouth and not by posters. He does not spend on publicity but rather makes it seem that his hall is like a bubble which might disappear on being scrutinised by the public eye. Every evening he makes it a point to visit the hall and collect the revenue but he says that, the revenue has been very consistent and the cost of operation being affordable, he has no plans of closing down his hall.

### **Case Study 3: Jayanti Cinema**

**Date of Interview: 27.11.2016**

**Place: Jayanti Cinema, B.T. Road, Barrackpore, Kolkata**

**Owner/Proprietor/ Manager: Anonymous (Anonymous)**

The state of this hall has had a complete makeover in 2011 when they installed three screens and renamed the hall as Jayanti Multiplex. The idea as the proprietor puts it, was to allure audience and hence it was expected to boost the revenue of the hall which was falling drastically. Not only did they install screens but also had a disco bar attached to the hall along with a shopping complex. The hall has refashioned itself in the modern scene and given

utmost importance to the comfort and needs of the audience. It however remains inferior in comparison to the actual multiplexes that are functional everywhere in the city. A Multiplex is generally a large body of business that has its branches across the city and the country. It does not operate as a single unit. Thus, it becomes easy for the multiplex to maintain a certain standard in the service that it provides.

The proprietor was of the opinion that since the change in the format of the hall, they have never looked back to the days of bad revenue collections and other associated problems of crowd pulling. The idea for this change was a boon for them and at the same time in different shows they can screen different movies without one interrupting the other. The single screens mostly have two or more movies running on the same dates and yet it was a big step for them to install the two other screens to fall into the multiplex format. His audience is mostly the remotely<sup>xiv</sup> placed crowd and not the local dwellers of Barrackpore. The divide in the audience is very distinct since most local cinema halls cater to the audience who come to Barrackpore for the comfort of a mediocre provision of entertainment which is not very lavish but comfortable. This category of audience has made a positive impact on the revenue earned by Jayanti Cinema in the last few years, according to him.

His opinion about the commoditizing of the body in Hindi films was that it was only focussed on marketing. For him, to use a poster in a certain way was part of the film's distribution plan, which in turn rested on the audience's feedback. The audience needs to come to the cinema hall with a certain perception about a film. This perception is created by the film's poster. The poster therefore serves the purpose of the film in a large way. The audience is attracted to the glitter and glamour associated with these screenings. The comfortable seats, serving of food and beverage inside the hall, add to the cinema in different ways. It was cumbersome and yet he had to manage it with his staff since the format of multiplex requires

him to do that. He had to train his staff in this format since they were used to the old ways of operation.

On being asked about the change in the audience's mindset about the body of a film actor, he added that not only films but even television and theatre had more commoditizing of the body than real content. For the present generation, being shaped by habits of body-shaming the self, it was necessary to highlight the importance of fitness.

Jayanti was once the most important hall in a locality which was far from the districts of Nadia and Behrampur (which is very far from the metropolitan Kolkata) but not exactly in the vicinity of Kolkata. This had been a very important factor in determining the size of audience for the hall. It was also a determining factor since this kind of audience demanded a different kind of film. The manager said that "it was important to note the changes in the pattern of the audience in the theatre. When the Bengali film industry changed its modes and the likes of Dev and Jeet<sup>xv</sup> became popular, their films had a major fan base and needed a lot of screen time from the single screen theatres." (Manager) So, the shift was justified.

It was difficult to note that the change in viewership should be so varied within a few kilometres. A very popular cinema hall in Khardah was converted to a banquet hall since it had absolutely no audience connect after a certain point. It is more or less dependent on the personal wealth of these small screen owners and their financiers. Mallick had pointed out – "Our financiers are powerful but they choose not to come to the forefront because it creates the situational crisis since their other identity will be at stake." (Mallick) He explains animatedly that the political connect of these 'financers' is extremely important and that this is their primary source of wealth. This makes it evident that the theatres will actually be run on the public money and will be monitored by the preying eyes of people with power and authority. The implementation of the 'save the theatres' which was a populist slogan around

Mumbai in the time of Covid-19 pandemic. When I revisited Jayanti cinema hall in 2022, they were completely different in their approach towards their audience. The financial loss was clear but the hall was still functional while the disco had closed down and the wider known shopping brand was replaced by a lesser-known brand. I had to talk to the manager and find out that the pandemic had made the hall a shadow of what it used to be before.

The other great competition that Jayanti had was Atindra<sup>xvi</sup>, another cinema hall in the same locality. Both these cinema halls are now multiplexes but have a very stiff competition. The suburban cinema halls therefore does not look at the content of a film to be important in being a revenue earner. Atindra interestingly made its presence felt after the pandemic. After the lockdown was lifted in 2022, the hall welcomed its audience to a completely new designed and acclaimed set up. It was something that had taken people by surprise. People of the locality had been to Jayanti, but the marketing style and the presentation of Atindra made it a complete sweep of the audience from the competitors. They have a supply of investments that can be traced to the fact that they had converted their halls to lavish multiplexes when the audience had completely died down. This was a drastic step towards revival, which hints that the audience base was never completely lost, but it was perhaps dormant. The investment shot the ticket prices and the people happily paid the amount. I asked a member of the audience who had been out of the hall after watching a film about the things he liked in the new hall, he replied – “It is almost like Inox, the bathrooms, the seating, the screen and the availability of the food stalls, just that it has a less costly ticket.” (Biswas) This is the kind of audience feedback that Mallick had talked about. The fact that a response from the audience makes and breaks a film and a theatre is something that has been very alarmingly true in the film marketing industry.

When in 2022, I talked to Bose was once again he had been extremely cordial and honest about the market for cinema halls in general being grim. The working class daily office commuters see a film on the go now and therefore the visit to a theatre is more of a special occasion and contributes less to the continued inflow of revenue. If the festivity is the reason for a film to prosper then the content has to be generated in a manner that suits the need of the hour. Films are released in theatres keeping the weekend in mind, but the modern audience is into binge watching of ‘OTT’ series and refuses to go to the theatre, making the market dry for the big banner theatres and the single screens alike.

After the interview with all three proprietors, I had a clearer vision of the situation in which the cinema halls were in, both in Kolkata and in its suburban areas. It is very confusing to note the different trends in the different geographical spaces of the location of these theatres. While a completely suburban hall turns itself to part B-grade cinema screen and a semi-urban area turns itself to a multiplex, the city hall remains a single screen that hosts multiple shows in different time slots. The reception of Hindi Movies is so varied<sup>xvii</sup> in Kolkata’s multiplexes and single screens. The variety is everywhere but what makes Kolkata a typical case study is that the local films are hardly the pronounced challenge here. The influence of the Hindi film industry is what determines the status of a cinema hall. The most number of shows are run for the Hindi films and the prime slots are given for the same. It’s a far-fetched comment perhaps but the honest opinion about the cinema hall is that it caters to the taste of the revenue earners and business professionals who look into the realm of cinema as a market of earning more compared to the otherwise melting market. The strategy for marketing a film based on its reception amongst the audience and the tried and tested formulae of categorising films into most suitable, less acceptable and least expected have made the theatres places of only business calculations instead of being an entertainment house. The imbalance is getting worse day by day.

The hero does not only fight an on screen battle but also a battle of revenue for these halls that show a film to allure audience and not<sup>xviii</sup> for the aesthetic value of the film. The film industry has always been direct about the profit and loss associated with a commercial film and therefore when this is the primary lookout, one cannot hope to just look at the merit of the cinema. The revenue earned keeps the industry going. This gives chance to the aesthetic faculty of certain film maker to indulge into making parallel cinema. When Mr. Bose says that the multiplexes do not show a film in one slot for more than a week, he also should be aware of the statistics for such decisions. The fact remains that what we label as parallel cinema is popular because of the presence of multiplexes. Since the popularity of films is the major limitation for single screen theatres, therefore multiplexes contribute drastically to the built up of the thinking audience who are interested in films that are not always popular.

After the series of interviews conducted with the owners and managers of different single screen theatres in Kolkata, the idea that popped up was quite clear. The evidence of unanimous blaming of multiplexes for ruining of the ‘essence’ of cinema and the confused and different sets of audience was at the core of the discussion. The halls are in the shadow of gloom but are functional. ‘OTT’ had made multiplexes backdated while multiplexes had consumed single screen cinema halls. The fact that radio had once been replaced by the television should not be forgotten in the entire discussion. The distinction between the categories of audience in today’s genres of cinema is comparable to the situation of which Eric Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy speak of in their work *Indian Film*:

The audience attending the Western Films at the new cinema palaces paid little attention to Phalke. The English-language newspapers hardly noticed him and Phalke did not advertise in them. He was reaching, almost at once, a different public. To his audience, *Rajah Harischandra* and its successors –*Bhasmasur Mohini* (The Legend of

Bhasmasur), *Savitri*, *Lanka Dahan* (The Burning of Lanka), *Krishna Janma* (The Birth of Krishna) and others- were like revelations. To them the inhabitants of the Western films had been interesting but remote...In due time Phalke, like other producers of his period, became an exhibitor and travelled far and wide by bullock cart, with projector, screen and films. The people who came were seldom two-rupee customers. Most paid four annas, two annas, or even one anna and most of them sat on the ground. The revenue was in coins. The weight of the coins on the homeward trip, could be enormous. (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 166)

If the trade analysts are to be believed and the words are to be taken on face value, we will easily abide by what Mallick had said in his interview. The hall is just a space for him to make money. The fact that screening B- grade films and having a video hall cannot be a way to taunt the business sense of the Mallick's who have sustained with their hall through the pandemic, when some of the most lavish cinema halls had a complete shut-down order from the government. The fact that money is no joke in any industry is obviously crudely talked about in Mallick's interview, but when we look at the wider picture, we know that Bose calling for a French Film Festival too is a kind of promotion and a step taken to improve the revenue of the hall. It too acts as a boost for those who had forgotten the existence of a cinema hall called Basushree. Phalke too had been catering to one category of audience and therefore it is extremely important that the identification of the audience is done keeping in mind the place in which a film is marketed. It is important to note that the masterpiece is identified much later but the film needs to be identified for a gross-seller first.

The increased consumption of cinema in India is evidence of the upgradation of the postproduction. The other side of the coin however has a different claim. The tale of establishing the narrative of struggle that continues against every aspect in the present day is

a tale of lost comradeship. The market is so competitive that the content is lost completely. The people do not look at the concept of a film as a new concept for the taste of the audience but look at the same from an analytical stand-point. They try to look at the market survey. Think about the condition of the people involved in the industry and try to read the mind of the audience. At times, the failure is drastic but it is right at most quarters. The single screen replaced by the multiplex at most claims the arena of new global market. Siddharth Jain, Director, Inox Leisure in his interview with *The Economic Times*, on May 15, 2017, in reply to the comment of Gourav Laghate (“The multiplex industry has been raising ticket prices for top line growth”), says:

We believe masses in India are extremely price-sensitive and we would like to reduce the ticket prices rather than increase them. The only reason multiplex chains are forced to- and I am using the word forced – (to raise ticket prices) is because of the increasing real estate cost. Just as filmmakers have actors as an issue in their value-chain, we have real estate owners in ours. (Laghate 6)

With these three ideas(price sensitive, increasing cost of real estate and the revenue of the filmmakers), of single screen theatre owners, age old price conscious cinema mongers and the present analysis of multiplex analysts, we see the position of the audience has always been seen as that of empowerment. There was a time when the cinema enthusiasts were mostly interested in the films that were made in the West. Times have now changed and people are going to the theatre with the intention of watching a movie in any language that can offer good content and execution. The modern, working-class emigrant does not believe in the concept of single screen theatres where cost effective cinema viewing is given a stronghold. This category of people is the relocated office-going crowd who from their place of dwelling come to occupy the urban office for the day. This section of people has different

taste as audience than that observed to be of the people who have chosen not to shift to the nearest metropolis. This section of the society which is financially aided and psychologically ahead of the last generation, believes in relishing the pleasure of viewership with utmost diligence. The recent trend of online ticket booking has become a major challenge for single screen theatres in metropolitan cities. The owners have dedicated seats to the aid of cinema goers and put up their best seats on online ticket booking sites like, 'book my show' et cetera. Sourav Basu, the proprietor of Basushree cinema hall, Kolkata, said in one of the unofficial interviews that, the single screen halls are now pseudo-multiplexes, with different films being screened in different time-slots. He added that, the cost of tickets and the slots of shows are arranged keeping in mind the effectiveness of the same on the target audience. What is interesting is that the audience in its turn have been pseudo-loyalists (by which I mean that they are multiplex audience and single screen viewers according to their own convenience) as far as cinema viewership is concerned. These online ticket bookings are a complete evolution since the audience can now select a seat that is comfortable for them to see a film. This makes it evident that the audience has now complete freedom from the obligation to make an unplanned visit to a cinema hall and wait for a film ticket to be available. This decreases the interpersonal relationship. It also makes certain jobs obsolete. The people who used to literally be the masters of the box-office of a theatre are now trade analysts who monitor the entire picture from a cloud space and therefore create an enigma around their existence. "For people like me, it is a complete transformation since it springs from the 90's when theatre used to be a very important space of entertainment and people had to plan and execute a theatre visit", says Bose.

The next generation of film viewership however, has seen a vital switch with the launch of 'Netflix' and 'Amazon Prime'. The 1997 American brand 'Netflix' started spreading its viewership across 190 countries all over the world and the sudden damage to the multiplex

was clear in the mind of the business fraternity. The comfort of ‘watching a film on the go’ changed the marketing strategy of the production teams. Even in the viewership of these streaming channels we see that there is a notion of competitive marketing strategy about luring the Indian viewership. In an interview in the July 24, 2019 edition of *The Economic Times*, Ajay Arora, Director, Product Innovation at ‘Netflix’ says:

Indian subscribers watch more on their mobiles than subscribers anywhere else in the world. We believe this new plan (of providing Netflix at 199 INR per month) will make Netflix even more accessible and better suit people who like to watch on their smartphones and tablets- both on the go and at home. (Arora 5)

Danish Khan, who coordinated the interview observes, the move behind the decision of the team of ‘Netflix’ as follows:

Netflix rival Hotstar’s subscription plans start at Rs. 199 per month while Amazon Prime video, which is part of Amazon Prime’s subscription, is priced at Rs. 129 per month. Zee Entertainment’s ZEE5 is available at Rs. 99 per month while ALT Balaji, the video streaming service of Reliance- backed Balaji Telefilms is priced at Rs. 100 for three months. Times Internet-owned MX Player is currently available on a free ad-supported model. (Khan 2)

The concept of online viewership changed its parameters when YouTube launched itself in 2005 and Google bought the company in 2006 only to establish the next generation of viewership which later manifested itself into wider scope with the avenues of net streaming applications that have made cinema halls a history, if not completely but partially. What is interesting is that the concept of viewership might have changed its format from the time Phalke started with his moving bioscope to the time when we move around as viewers with our own streaming applications.

The discounted rates on these 'OTT' platforms still has sufficient consumer base to run at a profit and this is where the story of their success lies. There is no infrastructural cost and hence not a chance of their loss being incurred on paper at a drastic level. With the technological applications and their implementation we tend to look at the effective analysis of the market which consumes content and not brands. With the rise of the 'OTT' medium, the content has once again become the most important factor in determining the fate of a film. The 'OTT' mediums have tremendous competition but the competition is purely on content that is channelized into subscription. This is not about show timing or associated add-ons of a particular hall compared to that of another. PVR and Inox are two leading brands of multiplexes competing each other from the perspective of viewership based on comfort and provisions. When Inox was launched in Kolkata, PVR was not a favourite brand of multiplex. With the rise of the PVR [XL] and the effective offers on different film-show timings had been a major determining factor in the current rise of the popularity of the brand, PVR.

When *The Times of India* published its series called 'Flashback' in 2013 to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> year of the newspaper, it had a wing of the series celebrating 100 years of Indian Cinema. In the preface, Sharmistha Gooptu writes:

Cinema or entertainment might possibly not have been granted the same value two decades before, but today 'Bollywood' is perhaps India's best known international brand. Internationally people today accept the format of song-and-dance cinema and more mainstream Indian films get shown at international venues like Cannes. Unlike even as late as 1990s, when Indian popular cinema was for many a bastardized form of 'real' cinema (read western realist cinema), today Indian films are, more than ever, appreciated and enjoyed for their difference. (Gooptu 2)

The presentation of the film of Indian origin has always been interesting and varied. Stardom has its own reflected glory on the Indian audience. The continuous effort of production houses in India and beyond have made it possible for the Indian audience to be at an empowered position. The audience is at a liberty to choose from various offerings at its mercy or so it seems. The audience becomes the consumer and the decision maker who emphasises on the importance of the development of this social hierarchy. The social class created out of choices and popularity of a film is something that the audience decides. The single screen marketing strategy might be alluring for a certain category of audience but they will nevertheless make it a choice to opt for the multiplex. To understand the reason behind such a choice is socio-economical and the trigger to that is the economical categorisation and governmental policy determination to some extent.

The idea is presented by John Dayal in his essay “The Role of the Government: Story of an Uneasy Truce” in the book, *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (1983):

The government, which is itself one of the largest film makers in the country through its Film Division, has started to show an increasing appreciation of its role as a patron of the art. The central government’s initiative in setting up the Film Finance Corporation (now merged together with the Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation into the National Film Development Corporation), and the Film and Television Institute at Pune (100 km from the film heartland of Bombay), were steps which ultimately catalysed an encouraging development in the states. The situation is now improved to the extent that not only have the state governments come out with cash support for film makers, but even banks and other commercial organisations are less hesitant about extending loans or patronage to them. (Vasudev and Lenglet 162)

This kind of patronage had been extended as a gesture to uplift the art of motion picture has ended up in the arena of revenue collection on the part of the government. It is unusual that the money spent in the acclamation of a film is not recovered and rather results in a profitable encounter. The enterprise of production therefore shifted to private funding. Thus, the entire concept of saleability is a series of contributing factors that range widely in the context of films and their marketing. The investment obviously is not made irrationally and whimsically. The decision of the government at different points in time to support, promote and uplift the notion of film making has been done as a calculated risk which would return the revenue to such an extent that the financial losses incurred in other sections of investment can be recovered. While the policy of the nation depends on the revenue earned, it is important to note that the people who are associated with film marketing are now given positions of great power. Every cinema hall hires a trade analyst. The trade analyst might be a small or a big name for the person who makes a rough estimate of the film before its release and tallies the same once the market is open and the film has started doing its business either well or ill. The analyst makes it a point to look at certain markers and predict the future of a film. For a multiplex, the trade analyst might not be a reality that determines its revenue and return but for a single screen theatre it is a person who is absolutely indispensable. When in 2021 I could get in touch with Mrityunjay Chatterjee over the phone on a Saturday afternoon in April 2021. He has been associated with advertisement for over three decades, the one important question I had asked him was regarding the importance of a trade analyst. He replied that “the analyst of the market is like an individual who has the vision of making and breaking a cinema hall at a most crucial juncture.” (Chatterjee) He used Star Theatre as an example. He said: “Look how the Star Theatre has kept its significance in the time when the other single screens have crumbled. It is important to note that the role played by Kolkata Film Festival is much like that of a catalyst.” (Chatterjee) His claims can be countered with

the argument that, the Kolkata Film festival incorporates the multiplexes and the single screens into their screening procedure but does not have the authority to bar the multiplex from taking money even from the delegates of the event. In one way it is justified that the exposure to world cinema cannot come at a low cost. It has to be paid and subscribed but the concept of the delegate card was something that demarcated the ordinary from the extraordinary in terms of film-lovers.

But this obviously isn't the end of the road according to Chatterjee. He says "film festivals are organised by local clubs and cine-clubs, these are the real propagation of the forms of cinema since it brings cinema to the audience in a form like never before." (Chatterjee) It is true that the exposure of film to the masses has been functional in making theatre become a relatively distant cousin. This is a prediction of Chatterjee that the 'OTT' will finally be a threat to both film theatres and video-halls. Once the prints of a film are out in the market, the rights of screening the film is either given to a private channel on the television or it is given to the 'OTT' platform. Different platforms offer rates and tender for the same and land up with the contract. The experimental content on these platforms are a contributing factor for the different new avenues that films are made about.

The introduction to the form of series is very vital in generating of an audience base. The audience is glued to the screen waiting for the next episode to release and the next season to be announced. Films are now being thought out as a series of episodic narratives and the time therefore is not limited to the two to three hours bracket but the time of the performance and the depth of the content is immensely updated. The content created is a kind of replication of the episodic narratives called 'telefilms' that were once screened on the Bengali private channels. The evolution of the form has led to the 'OTT' launching the self-financed productions. Like 'Netflix' calls its series the 'Netflix Originals' and likewise the other

‘OTT’ channels call themselves the creator of the content of their self-produced productions. Other than the series and the short films they also catalogue the films that have been released and accepted by the audience already and now are archived in their channels for re-watching. Therefore, the market is full of ways of further propagation of the forms of films and it leads to avenues of the film form to prosper and imbibe upon the audience newer forms of film forms. We have seen the business standards for the multiplex, single screen halls and video halls and have been in conversation with the people operating these. The way in which cinema has manifested in these mediums is remarkable and extremely varied. Therefore the marketing and distribution of a film after it is produced is dependent on the kind of reception it gets at various levels.

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## **Chapter II**

### **New-Age Cinema: ‘OTT’ and the Notion of ‘(S)Hero- Worship’**

We are now used to a non-cinema going crowd after the pandemic hit us hard on our faces. But the love for cinema has remained with the Indian audience throughout the ages and is not lost even now. With the access of ‘Netflix’ and its competitors, ‘Amazon Prime’, ‘Disney Hotstar’ and the regional equivalents like ‘Zee 5’ and ‘HoiChoi’, the new theatre is inside the pocket of the Indian audience. Cinema is now released simultaneously and sometimes independently on the ‘OTT’ platform. These are the new ways of making cinema a household name. For decades, films have changed its audience based on the kind of situation through which the social scenario of the time has evolved. For example, it was the same year, 1975 when *Deewaar* released that India had an emergency declared which continued for two years. *Deewaar* paved the way for a popular trend of the angry young man portrayed mostly by Amitabh Bachchan, who in the plot of the film, is deceived by the social sense of justice and is on the lookout for an opportunity to strike back with his own sense of righteousness. This was however, the year after the release of *Kabhi Kabhie* (1974) where Bachchan had been a part of a love story that runs generations after generations and he had been playing the role of a poet. These variations have been pointed out as change in style and thought-process of the Director of both the films, Yash Chopra.

Smriti Mundhra in her documentary *The Romantics* (2023) had elaborated on this point and in an interview with the TIME, she says:

Indian cinema was such an integral part of my upbringing, but it’s also a huge part of world cinema history and we’ve seen lots of reverence paid to Japanese cinema,

French cinema, Italian cinema, but we haven't really gotten that sort of deep dive, contextual treatment of Indian cinema. (Mundhra 2)

What Mundhra brings out in her narrative is a journey of a particular production house, Yash Raj Films (established in 1970) and the fact that they have been the pioneers of shaping the Hindi Film Industry to suit the changing times. What she does is, she traces the change that a particular film industry was going through and documents it for another category of film watching audience. To elaborate, Mundhra was making a documentary for an 'OTT' platform about a film production company that made films for the cinema halls. The fact remains that why had she chosen this medium to talk about a more prominent form of film making. The reason is the same as stated in the beginning of the chapter. 'OTT' platforms are the next chapter of marketing Hindi films.

In this chapter, I shall be talking about the presentation of masculinity in two contradictory films from two contradictory mediums, *Jamtara* (2020) and *Gurgaon* (2017). While *Jamtara* was a 'Netflix' original, *Gurgaon* was premiered in the IFFA, Macao 2016 and released worldwide in 2017. The names of these films are taken from the cities which are not considered to be the first grade places in India, like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. While the cities are pivotal in the plots, these films are presented to be more rustic and less sophisticated for their setting. The origin of this genre could be traced to the 2012 production, *Gangs of Wasseypur*, written, directed and produced by Anurag Kashyap. However, Kashyap's presentation was along the lines of *Satya* (1998) and *Shool* (1999) which could be loosely categorized as the gangster movies where the protagonist was presented in a grey light without moral judgement of his being a villain or a hero as per the conventional lines of thinking. Where *Gangs of Wasseypur* won over the likes of its predecessors was the

presentation of fragile masculinity especially in the sequel of the film, *Gangs of Wasseyapur II* (2012).

The reason for selecting these new-age films was to trace the narrative of the film at length and make an estimate of how the image of the Hindi film hero has changed over the years. It would be perhaps inappropriate to use the term hero but the popular term used in the context of the male protagonist is hero and the antagonist is villain. We can blur the lines of definite terms and talk about the central character of a film without anticipating their presentation in a negative or positive light since the characters are now unmarked in fixed categories.

### **Case Study 1: *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* (2020 and 2022), ‘Netflix Originals’**

Set in a small village of India, which is geographically in the Jharkhand region near Dumka district that is known truly for its issue of phishing. Phishing is a kind of forgery that is done by calling a person with a false identity and impersonating someone from the banking sector mostly and asking for their secret pin and thereby draining them of their money. This was a profession in Jamtara since the year 2015. In 2020, Netflix made a docu-fiction<sup>xix</sup> on this phishing racket and named it *Jamtara: Sabka Number Ayega* (2020). The film had released its second season in 2022. It talks in a very neutral light about the struggle of the local boys, uneducated and jobless, who plan to work up something to suit their needs. They have taken the path of organized cyber-crime as a profession and have no moral ground to judge them. Soumendra Padhi, the director for Season 1 of the series/ film had started the narration of the people who have zero facilities and equal needs as young ambitious conformists in the city. They operate in teams and there is shown functional competition between those who decide to succumb to the local political pressure and work under the ‘protection’ of the local politicians and the others who decide not to. It is important to see the reason to say no to such situations. They have not shown immense ideological difference or compulsion of taking

phishing as a profession under the obligation of poverty or sudden monetary needs. The difference in the operation of the two gangs is that, one decides to be under the thumb of the local politician only to ensure safe operation while practicing phishing and the other gang believes they need to be safe by themselves and no one can give them protection if the police want to trace them. Children in Jamtara were involved in phishing from an age when they were completely unsuspected and were in school. The director has highlighted the age group and contrasted them with the people of the previous generation who have been into farming and labour. The first episode of the first season starts with a fake phone call to a teacher in a primary school. The teacher who was teaching the students in a Hindi language class about the proverb “Ab pachtake kya hoyi, jab chiriya chuggae khet” which translates as “it’s too late to bother if you have once made a mistake” and immediately he makes a mistake of giving his debit card number to a young boy over phone who had impersonated the voice of a girl who was giving the teacher a car in a lucky draw of a bank. The entire incident is followed by the scene in a courtroom where these young boys are brought in front of the judge and told about their phishing career. The jurisdiction has nothing to offer and the case is pushed to the cyber court because the boys are under eighteen. The scene shows a glaring flaw in terms of the jurisdiction and its boundaries. It is important to note that the boys, the protagonist named Sunny (played by Sparsh Srivastava) and the others, have no sense of remorse or obligation regarding their conduct. They are a typical set of boys who have no sense of moral obligation towards the family or society. This makes their crime a very non-criminal work for them which will make them rich without any moral rationing. This is the new generation of Indian Film Industry, someone who is not like Amitabh Bachchan in *Deewaar* (1975) silenced by Shashi Kapoor with the lines “mere pass ma hain” (I have my mother with me) as an answer to the upstart Bachchan who had not taken the moral way to earn a lot of money.

The film then shows a newspaper reporter of a local Hindi newspaper who is asked by his editor to produce some news about his friends in Jamtara who are into the phishing network. The idea of reporters being underpaid in small towns and the fact that they need to work hard to earn a transfer to the cities is something that needs to be taken into account as an alternative profession of the youth. This highlights why the young in this place are so averse towards professions that are socially respectable.

The scene shifts towards the politician Brajesh Bhaiya (played by Amit Sial) who is a local muscleman and a politician who follows the newspaper and finds out that the phishing gang has earned fifty lacs in the year and decides to take them under his protection. The plot thickens with the disruption between Sunny and his brother, Rocky (played by Anshumaan Pushkar). While Sunny does not want the protection offered, his brother is given a gun by the politician knowing well that he is someone who loses his cool easily and has a weakness for women. He is trying to win him over and the plot is laid before the audience, who can anticipate the flexing muscles that will be presented soon. It is confirmed by the sense of empowerment that is evident in the smile of Sunny's brother Rocky.

We are next introduced to the other protagonist; Gudiya (played by Monika Panwar) the teacher in the local English speaking coaching centre, which Sunny has been running as a validation of his income. This is a proof of Sunny's farsightedness. He is not someone who can easily be caught and is confident that he does not need any political support at the cost of a percentage from his income. The police is somewhat diluted by the role by Inspector Biswa Paathak (played by Dibyendu Bhattacharyya) who has the will to take steps as an officer but is too sidelined by hierarchy. The senior officials are skeptical about the phishing case and take it lightly till a time when officer Dolly Sahu (played by Aksha Pardasany) arrives in Jamtara. While the SP of Jamtara is replaced by Sahu, we as audience is given a very

prominent line of thought. The officer calls the boys “children who are not the villains of Bollywood”, thus making it evident that the little narrative presented in the series is a contrast to the grand narrative of the Hindi film industry.

In *Sunny and Rocky*, the series presents two very different shades of masculinity. While Rocky has the fragile masculinity in his show off of power Sunny is more toned down and calculative who makes more money and is not under the thumbs of any leader. Gudiya springs up to be a representative of a social picture where need is more than any value. She strikes a deal with Sunny about marriage where she will be paid by Sunny to get married to him and she will give Sunny the training in English to improve and polish his phishing skills. The first episode of season one ends with the display of the gun by Rocky. After a fight between Sunny and Rocky he takes out the gun and shoots at absolute no provocation. The audience anticipates a power struggle and the episode ends. The next important aspect is the marriage of Gudiya and Sunny. Gudiya is twenty while Sunny is seventeen. The marriage is seen as impossibility in normal Indian circumstances. Sunny makes a powerful statement here, he says that ‘money is the most important aspect of eligibility for marriage. Neither age nor caste matters’. This is the new India that has been presented in the current scenario. The only thing that matters here is the money.

Tejaswini Ganti points out in her book, *Bollywood: A guidebook to popular Hindi cinema*:

In the age of globalization media has taken on new importance as a symbol of the nation and cultural identity in India. Unlike the 1950s, where debates centred on whether film could ever be an authentic, indigenous cultural form, since the late 1990s, cinema is being touted as part of India’s cultural heritage. With the increased presence of Hollywood in India through dubbed films, Hindi films have suddenly taken on the mantle of cultural authenticity and Indianness vis-à-vis Hollywood films.

This coupled with the increased circulation and successes of Hindi films outside India are factors that are also leading to changes in the state's attitudes about filmmaking.

(Ganti 26)

The logistics of film making and film content have travelled a long way since Hindi films have started its journey. The literature in Hindi has dried out while the films have flourished the most in this language. From adaptations to documentation, films have been a great support to the economy of the nation.

Brajesh Bhaiya guides Rocky to become Arjun. He presents the alternative reading of *The Mahabharata* as the mainstream reading and states that Arjun had to overpower his brother to become the ruler, so Rocky needs to defeat Sunny. The fact remains that *The Mahabharata* is often seen as the master plot behind Hindi films, but never has it become so blatantly been read in an alternative light. The entire narrative shifts when Sunny is accused of the murder of Gudiya's brother. Brajesh takes a high hand and has been pivotal in the murder but he had ensured that the situations change for the couple. In the second season, Sunny becomes a trainer of the school kids and makes them learn phishing. While he is becoming more involved in a new way of earning, Gudiya makes it her priority to defeat Brajesh in the elections and become the new messiah of the people of Jamtara. There is no option for her to deny this fight because she needs to return the favour of Brajesh's aunt, who is using Gudiya as a pawn to fight Brajesh. The narrative at no point becomes loaded with values but is full of minor incidents that shape the life of the characters and marks movement in the plot.

There is a contradiction in the presentation of these two seasons of the series/ film. It does not dwell on extensive marketing and larger than life presentations. Ranjani Mazumdar in her book *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (2007), says:

The link between consumption and the aestheticization of urban space has been explored by several scholars... In India, the recent rise of multiplexes and refurbished movie theatres, the emergence of shopping malls, coffee shops, ATMs and electric advertisements/ billboards across the prime districts of many big cities has introduced a different regime of aestheticized “surfaces”. The proliferation of visual surfaces linked primarily to consumerist display has transformed the nature of street interaction in some parts of the city, even as the coexistence with older forms of display continues to be present in other parts of the city. (Mazumdar 5)

What marks the situation is the lack of these virtual surfaces. The promotion is almost negligible. While promotion has been an intricate part of film making, post pandemic film promotions have taken a different turn. The promotions are made primarily as reels for Instagram and circulated via people who have taken the viewership of these reels to a constant number. While Yash Chopra had made the first promo-video of his film *Chandni* in 1989, people had taken it to be a very big step in film promotion. Now, in the Hindi film industry when promotions are not made in any other form than a promo-video people take the film seriously for its content. The ways have changed a lot and incorporated more professional attitude and as a result of which Twentieth Century Fox and Walt Disney have taken interest in producing Hindi films.

In *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change* (1998), Gokulsing and Dissanayake says:

Cinema not only reflects culture; it also shapes culture. When we consider Indian films, we see how they have promoted modernisation, westernisation, urbanisation, new ways of life, a sense of pan-Indianism, secularisation, the emancipation of women and the rights of minorities and in particular the relationship between Hindus

and Muslims. Even in aspects such as fashion and dress, films aided by such film magazines and fanzines as Cineblitz, Stardust, Filmfare, Movie, have played a central role in Indian society and have generated discussions and influenced public opinion on issues like drugs and violence. (Dissanayake 69)

In the series *Jamtara*, the reflection of anti-patriarchal presentation of villages taking over the city in terms of intellect and money is a very powerful subversion. The breaking of the stereotype of the presentation of masculinity is another aspect of freshness of presentation. In the presentation of the women Gudiya and Dolly, *Jamtara* associates the helplessness that is caused by the impromptu decisions taken by men in the plot. While all well-planned decisions are taken by the women, the men are shown as rash, irrational and fragile as the case may be. People have looked at the film with the maturity of looking at the content and not limiting themselves to the idea of flamboyant manliness as has been long associated with the Hindi film industry.

In *The Economic and Political Weekly* [vol. 35], Radhika Chopra, Chaitali Dasgupta and Mandeep K. Janeja wrote an essay titled “Understanding Masculinity”, presenting to us the perspective of the public performance involved with presentation of masculinity. They write:

The other issue was the display of masculinity as a public performance to establish proof of being male. Gay men downplay any visible markers of gay sexual orientation and adopt 'armour of excess': styles of machismo and hyper masculine images created by the media are internalised by men and work to disguise shared intimacies between them. The conditions of gay existence in India working within enduring gender paradigms enable men to live double sexual lives, presenting the issue of bisexuality as a grey area within the politics of male sexuality. It is exactly this 'enabling' of dual sexualities, however, that also cause immense anxiety and dissonance in the

constructions of the masculine self. One of the most interesting aspects of the paper addressed itself to 'men's talk' of sexual health and affirmation of masculinity.

Anatomy plays a crucial role in defining and providing bodily proof to men of their masculinity. The body thus became a double-edged site creating both anxiety and affirmation of masculine identity. (Chopra and Janeja 201)

The performative aspect of gender is adhered to in the film in presentation of four different aspects of masculinity, one in Brajesh, two in Sunny, three in Rocky and four in Biswa. They are presented as very different from one another and the body types are different just as indicated in the EPW article. While Brajesh is wealthy looking, Sunny looks like an upstart, Rocky has the physique of a Bollywood fan while Biswa looks like a middle class conventional family-man. These stereotypical presentations and contrasting attitudes make the men in the series so different from the expectations of the audience. While Brajesh makes an entrapped villain, Biswa switches over to become a very powerful alliance for Dolly. Rocky trades his fidelity and saves Gudiya and Sunny becomes insecure about his temporary handicap. The entire universe of *Jamtara*, the place is a mixture of changes. It is important that we as audience understand the importance of the use of the medium. Since the 'OTT' is a more comfortable and suited medium for extended viewership, the plot of *Jamtara* becomes dense and the decoding becomes slow and episodic. As the episodes advance, the narrative shifts towards making Gudiya the protagonist with the maximum exposure. Once again, the man is shifted to the background and the popular notion of man is decoded into a frail image of self-proclaimed importance that does not justify the role of the hero in the series to be powerful beyond measure. It shows that the importance is attached to the decisions that Gudiya takes and how she manifests herself free from the clutches of the social hierarchy and becomes the one who will eventually make phishing a national problem. The use of the feminine vocal changes by the men is another drill that perhaps loosely hints at the

trustworthiness of women and how it is always the women who make more money in any dribbling situation than the man who is put in the sphere of doubt.

### **Case Study 2: *Gurgaon* (2017); JAR Pictures**

*Gurgaon* begins its journey as a film released in the theatre but like many other films that find its place in 'OTT' after release, *Gurgaon* settled in 'Netflix' as a very well accepted film. By well accepted I mean that the audience that *Gurgaon* had as a film running in the theatres, increased manifolds when it was uploaded on the 'Netflix' 'OTT' platform. Just like *Jamtara*, *Gurgaon* too is inspired by certain events that have happened in Gurgaon, India. The situation of women in the state is under the scanner in the movie. The movie begins with a warning about the lack of birds and the joblessness of the bird-hunter in the upcoming times. Preet (played by Ragini Khanna) returns home with her friend in a session break from her college. As she enters, her mother Karma Devi (played by Shalini Vatsa) asks her to serve snacks to the garden area where her father Kehri Singh (played by Pankaj Tripathi) is host to a party which has all male guests. Preet does not like doing this but this small gesture of compromise leads to a misleading situation where her brother is asking her to serve guests and puts water on her just for the sake of fun. The situation becomes unwelcome and the father intervenes, and agitates the older brother Nikki Singh (played by Akshay Oberoi). The father is clearly fond of the daughter more since she is a person according to the father, who is the reason for the family's prosperity.

As the plot unfolds, we find out that Kehri Singh is an alcoholic who is not convinced by the ideas of business that his son proposes. He is not confident of the ideas and lists the failed attempts at business that his son had made till date. His luck in business is supported by his daughter Preet. This agitates the elder son and he in consultation with the friends of his and his younger brother makes a plan to abduct his sister and ask his father for ransom. It is at this

point that we come to know that Preet is not the biological daughter of Kehri Singh. Singh's biological daughter was buried alive by Kehri because he was, just like his son, absolutely against the birth of a woman in his house. The astrologer then told Kehri about the fact that a daughter will bring him good luck and he adopted Preet thereafter. The entire episode is like a flashback to the film where Kehri had been a replica of violence which has been impersonated by his son Nikki in the present time.

The plan of abduction goes wrong and Preet finds out her brother being the operating mind behind the plan. However, she is killed by her brother and very unexpectedly the violence is extremely pronounced and open to the family. Till the end no one makes any move towards justice but finally when Nikki comes to his mother Karma Devi, for seeking her blessings for his new project, she shoots him with a gun and the film comes to an end. Karma Devi, with the name like that is morality plays of the medieval times, has been the most underrated character in the plot so far. She is shown to be the peace maker of the family and the person who is always under the radar and yet she becomes the one to deliver the most unexpected twist in tale. The narrative ends in an abrupt end and that is not expected to be delivered by the mother. There are shown ways in which the men in the film channelize their anger. Rash driving, unnecessary violence towards people who are not intricately related to their lives (like towards a musician who Nikki meets outside a roadside food joint). The kind of protagonist craved out of the characters of Kehri and Nikki are stereotypes of fragile masculinity that the film industry has been highlighting as complementary aspects of manhood. It is created as a show of the concept that has been making men so desperate to establish their position in the society. The men in the Hindi cinema have been hailed as the hero-figure who has travelled from the larger than life saviour to the one who desperately needs validation.

Preminda Jacob in the introduction to the 2010 book, *Celluloid Deities: A Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India* says:

Banners and cut (-) outs were produced in workshop studios by team of artists, apprentices and carpenters. Once the artist completed their work, group of labourers transported the objects at night from the open-air banner company studios to mount them on spindly towers of wooden scaffolding that they had erected along major streets, beside buildings, outside cinema theatres and in other public spaces of the city. (Jacob xiv)

The image of the hero has been redundant in the past few years since the protagonist has now become the plot. Women are taking the centre stage in a big way. Women-centric films have been the new way to deal with the audience and their changing demands. The change in perspective has been there since the film *Mehndi* (1998) having Rani Mukherjee in the lead came into existence. The film however, did not do much in the Box Office but it paved the way for films like *Black* (2005) and *Kahaani* (2012). These films had broken the stereotype of the image of the hero being larger than life. The women became the most important character and grabbed the limelight in a big way. Meanwhile, in the year 2000, the daily soaps became a big hit amongst the homemakers. With *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi ...* and *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki* (2000) the popularity of television had been sky-high. Women were seen as the most important part of the family. Their decisions and conduct was gradually leading to the social change where women were on the verge of becoming the largest viewer created out of the Indian market for the consumption of content on the small screen which was becoming larger than life. With *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (2000) being the biggest show on national television and with it the advent of Amitabh Bachchan on the small screen, people were now taking the television as a very important medium of connect with

the audience. This was the audience who would easily shift into the ‘OTT’ platform, for they were not under the aura of the larger than life cut outs and not limited to the format of cinema where the hero played the most important role.

Jyotika Virdi in the Introduction to her book, *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History* states:

The pleasures the commercial film offers, and the desires it creates, make it a vital part of popular culture and a critical site of cultural interpretation. Despite its permeating Indian culture, Hindi cinema’s stylistic conventions are paradoxically in complete disjunction from everyday reality: the films use dialogues instead of speech, costumes rather than clothes, sets and exotic settings, and lavish songs and dance routines- hardly everyday familiar surroundings. Within the mise-en-scene, this non-specificity of address distances Hindi films from “authentic” portrayals of Indian life. Regional markers of costume, dress and culture are either erased or deployed arbitrarily and elements from different regions are mixed to figure as signs of cosmopolitan culture that account for a particular type of kitsch, the insignia of Hindi films. Even though they abide by other realistic conventions, such as cause- and-effect linear narratives, continuity editing, and spatial/ temporal unity, the films show scant regard for looking “authentic” or bearing a similitude to realism. (Viridi)

The fact that Indian cinema at one point in time was a pseudo-realistic aspect of the truth that is never presented in the film is very evident. Films rather present a very different reality, a notion of the commercial presentation are always make-belief. There is no definite truth in the aspect of presentation. What Virdi mentions is a truth that was there in a particular time in the Hindi film industry. It’s not as if the situation has completely changed but the notion of film has travelled a lot independently. The new ‘slice of life’ movies started with the films

like *Rajnigandha* (1974) and *Ijazaat* (1987), but the genre had not developed into a well-accepted category back then. With films like *Wake Up Sid* (2009) and *Ishqiya* (2010) the alternative plots became popular and started gaining momentum with the audience. The loss of the larger than life stature of the hero and the eventual decentralised cinema and its propagation is highly functional in the Hindi film industry at present.

When Nirmal Kumar interviews Dibakar Banerjee and documented the interview in the book, *Brave New Bollywood: In Conversation with Contemporary Hindi Filmmakers*, Banerjee has given his opinion about the stardom in Hindi film industry using the words:

Ours is a hugely unjust and imbalanced society, where there is tremendous poverty and there is tremendous control by a very small minority over a huge majority through power; business and money; through political laws and formulations that are more about sustenance of the rich than about equitable distribution of wealth; it is a colonial system. It is just that our re-hauling has not been a clear one. (Kumar 68)

The fact that the Hindi film industry only justly deals with variety and has so many shades of films created is in itself a very unique ideology that the industry follows. The industry had started with a certain larger than life uniqueness to it but it became the one where all the concepts have merged to create a space of comfort and fresh thought. The film families<sup>xx</sup> have been successful in making films for different kinds of audience. The fact that time and again the Hindi film industry has been accused of nepotism is in no way successful in making the career of the non-performer. Actors like Uday Chopra have been from one of the most powerful film family. Being the son of Yash Chopra did not do any good to him. So, the audience is the only deciding factor as to which film and which actor will be doing well in the industry.

So, the film industry banks largely and literally on the creation of the brand of a film production that highlights the aspects of the film beyond just performance. The idea presented is also about the film being far removed from reality than the presentation it makes in the films. The concept of film-magazine is associated with the working of this ideology. In fact, advertisements are designed to suit the inquisition of the fans. Often pairing of the protagonists in a film depends on the previous publicity that had them both involved. This could be anything personal as well as professional. Interestingly enough, the kind of friendship that develops during the shooting of a film is often encashed by the marketing team of a film. Film plots too are shaped and reshaped according to the relationship of the prospective protagonists. In 2007, when Imtiaz Ali made *Jab We Met* with Shahid Kapoor and Kareena Kapoor, the making of the film saw two phases of their personal relationship. The promotions were designed in the way that made them first seem to be together and later they were shown facing away from each other on the posters. The design was a hint and the news of the troubled relationship was placed before the prospective audience at the same time. The most famous poster was however, the one that showed the hero and heroine sit on a mile-stone that pointed to a particular place of relevance in the film. The presentation of the story through the hint of this being a travel narrative was used as a tool to moderate the audience reaction, which automated towards the companionship of the performers being subtly hinted at were more interested in the film as the last work of this couple together on-screen. The same pair during their hay days of the relationship had worked on various projects together but had no or little success. Suddenly the audience grew interested in the pair and later the film won appreciation for the treatment of the plot. However, the initial reaction of the audience was absolutely based on the interpersonal marketing of the film based on the personal equation states the deep root of fandom being way beyond just judgement based on the content and execution of a film.

The one big fiasco of the film market is the counter offered by the piracy to film making and distribution. It has at one point been a negative confluence of the digital age. Derek Bose in the introduction to the book, *Brand Bollywood: A New Global Entertainment Order* (2006), says:

... Who is not aware of the grey market for computer software flourishing right under the nose of the law? What have we done to curb audio and video piracy? How successful has Bollywood been at checking the clandestine telecasting of its films by unscrupulous cable operators? Intercepting satellite signals of Indian television channels by operators located abroad (to cater to a diaspora viewership) is the latest nuance to torment the entertainment industry. Piracy or infringement of copyright laws is after all a borderless crime. Sadly, it is perceived as a victimless crime as well. Herein lies the crux of the problem. Unless the industry is able to close its rank and put in place adequate safeguards, there is no way it will be able to grow, let alone draw any advantage from the opportunities which convergence holds for the future. (Bose 19)

However, this trend of the 1990's had sustained till 2000's but has gradually been deflated with the rise of the easy availability of the films post-release and the older trouble of piracy has not been used to the advantage of the black-market but the idea has been used by the 'OTT' platform to spread their reach beyond just their countries of origin. The rise of viewership and the mobile being the next big entertainment source, people are now into 'Netflix', 'Amazon Prime', et cetera, and the concept of watching a film outside the theatre has been extremely useful to make the film reach an alternative market of viewership who are subscribed to these platforms and they consume the film not only once but also multiple times using the application installed in their phone. The 'OTT' platform has taken film

production to the next level with reduction of the cost of production of physical advertising mediums and switching over to the digital medium completely. The promotion, launch and production has been completely digital and this is the most convenient form of launching films in the current situation. In the surge of Covid-19 pandemic, people had seen the complete closure of theatre and digitalization of films has been the most convenient way of keeping the loss minimal. Astonishingly, the cost of production and the publicity have been complimenting the business that the film is making. In terms of the critic's opinion the film market has been benefiting with the rise of the parallel mediums of production. The pandemic has practically been a boon for the 'OTT' medium since, their productions have become instant hits with the people of the contemporary generation. This has also led to the new adaptation of filmmaking which was once (typically post 1963 for fictional presentations and 1953 for documentaries) popularised by the BBC in their series of films that were episodic in nature. BBC produced these films and circulated them using the DVD as a medium. The 'OTT' platform however, made away with the DVD and used the smartphone as the target device to popularise the concept of series.

### **Episodic narratives and kinds of telefilms:**

The concept of a telefilm was not the brainchild of the 'OTT' platforms, but the medium used was television in case of regional telefilms. These telefilms were telecasted at specific time and date and led to the condensed viewership which made the TRP rise and fall with the time of the telecasting. With the advent of the modern take on these mediums, the telefilms have become much more accepted as a form of entertainment and people can watch these while they commute and therefore, the viewership index has become somewhat advanced in connection to the flexi-time concept. The first 'OTT' launched in India was 'BIGFLIX' launched by Reliance Entertainment in 2008. This was not a major success then. Gradually

the country has incorporated around fifty-one 'OTT' platforms and the range is widely regional. 'Netflix' started as a DVD rental system back in 1997, it developed its own niche of distribution, production and the 'Netflix Originals' is an example of film production which has taken the multimedia as the proponent of reaching out to a wider audience. The 'OTT' has different customised options through which they section their viewership and show a particular kind of content to a particular audience. This creates a possible categorisation and the prospective audience gets more comfortable with the medium. The content-specific organisation has been a true successor of the marketing policy of the Hindi film industry as Raminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha notes in the 2005 book, *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*:

In its very (sometimes) contentious name, Bollywood cinema indicates the crossing of borders. The hybrid term refers to India's commercial Hindi film industry, based primarily, but not exclusively in the city of Bombay, now officially designated as Mumbai since 1995. It has a complex history, but much like Hollywood, this commercial industry has hegemony over the diverse regional cinema in India, and circulates globally, from Japan to the US, through a transnational distribution network as well as video piracy. Hence, the neologism, *Bollywood*, to refer to Indian Cinema through a transnational lens at once located in the nation, but also out of the nation in its provenance, orientation and outreach. 'Bollywood' may be taken in at least three senses: first, to allude to the inherently hybrid constituency of Bollywood yet also an index of variant senses of Indian identity; second, the global distribution of Bollywood movies and a conveyor of 'Indianness' to diverse audiences; and third, as a means of negotiating both Indianness and its transformation, particularly when representing and being received by diasporic populations. (Sinha 155)

What is astonishingly similar about the notion of films in the context of the nation is the fact that films have been pivotal in terms of cultural monopoly of a country that is exported elsewhere consciously without the formality of the exchange. Films therefore, have been one of the key exchange points of the Indianness of the country and the arbitrary changes that have occurred in the presentation have not created an impact on the presentation of the film to the audience.

In case of a formative body correction too, the digital market has once been of absolute rigidity but gradually post 2015 the corrections are attaining greater perfection and at other junctures it is also becoming the point of no change in the presentation. The actual body politics that operates has the facet of duality as both skinny and plump are critically seen by the critics. In an article in *The Hindustan Times* published on July 5, 2018, Monika Rawal Kukreja quotes about the change in the stylistics:

Experts say that people should not confuse “fit” with “skinny” and one should work with their body type and not attempt to look like someone else. “It’s important to look and be fit; skinny is not advisable,” says celebrity stylist Tanya Ghavri, adding “There’s nothing like size zero, not even internationally.” (Kukreja 1)

So, the concept of body positivity in the Hindi film industry, much like the content revival is slowly creeping in and causing the film production to shape differently in the new era. This is visible in terms of content of the film as well. We are not discussing that in detail now, but it is a much-needed change that has taken the concept of ‘star’ away from the actor and placed it on the script and treatment of the plot. Also, the theory of the rise of the lesser-known actor is supposed to enhance the possibility of the diminishing star-power of Hindi film industry, which is now turning towards the script being the ultimate star-maker. The argument was published in *The Hindu* on February 13, 2017: Retired faculty from the Pune Film Institute,

Mr. Raghunath said how to tell the story was equally important in visual media along with what to tell. “Be it a short film or feature film, script plays an important role in its success. A budding director can convince the producer only with his script,” (Raghunath) he said, advising the youngsters not to depend solely on the storyline.

Thus, from 1998 to 2018 the situation has completely changed and post 2018 the importance of script has been like never before. The common-place ideologies, plots, stories, actors and directors have started to occupy the centre-stage in the industry. This development though very late has been pivotal in the course of the development of the industry. The fact that stardom has not been the centralised system for a decade but with time the revival has been possible is something that makes the Hindi film industry a growing industry, and not a dead industry. The demands of the audience and the few experimental productions have often changed the course of the film industry at a particular point. With the rise of the performer in *Jagga Jassos* and *Newton* (both released in 2017) perhaps strengthened the evolution of a new hero<sup>xxi</sup> in Hindi film industry, someone who is not larger than life, someone who is not perfect, or demi-God for the audience or the fans. This was a common man, lurking in the sidewalks and failing miserably in life and engaging in multiple problems while solving a few and toppling over the others. This image of the new and evolved hero has left the Hindi film industry more mature than the treatment it had subjected its audience to in the past decade. Astonishingly, the new film production has been accepted by the same set of fans that had once been completely devoted to the concept of the bare-bodied larger than life hero. Thus, at different levels of film making and hero-building exercise of the industry, people have seen the image of the hero change and alternatively grow more powerful. The hero becomes the liberated man with these restrictions being lifted. The creation of the flexible dressing for the hero was another addition to the picture when in a public appearance Ranveer Singh wore a skirt. His promotional shoot for *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) had seen him wearing a skirt to an

event. This was first for a hero of the Hindi film industry to be wearing a skirt. This is where the patriarchal dictates were broken far beyond the notion of social pressure. Singh had in an interview regarding the wearing of the skirt talked about how the industry belittles the man in more than one way. Singh had time and again broken stereotypes and have made it a point to create the idea of looking at the image of the hero in a new way where accommodating the choices and breaking of stereotypes have been extremely common.

From creating the notions of new age hero to the breaking of it has been done by the industry in a span of twenty years of its establishment as an industry. When we look at the films of the angry young man of the industry, Amitabh Bachchan we are astonished to see the image of the actor was created in a kind of larger dimension than what existed before the films like *Zanjeer*, *Deewar* or *Kala Pathaar* were functional in creating the image of the hero to be a common deprived man of disturbed identity and the eventually retrieved identity and love that he gets is a very inspirational narrative that was framed in a way to suit the social upheaval through which he was operating as the other. This is because he is not a part of the system but a step ahead of the close coterie of the social elite (from which he definitely has a best friend or a love interest, sometimes both) which he covets but cannot be akin to. This hero is created by the director and the scriptwriter of the film to facilitate the image of the common man created out of the protagonist who does not have any so-called higher degree of influence. This creates an alternative space for the growth of the character who tries to emerge as an icon from the crowd. The personal struggle of the actors are brought to the limelight in order for them to be crowned with the title of a hero who is above the average privileged male from elite social spheres. By playing along, the audience is taken into confidence that the hero belongs to them and they will take him to be someone they can relate to. This is where the image of the star is built. The fame that the hero gets is a product of the notion that they belong to the people's idea of themselves. The idea of relatability and the

fact that the villain belongs to a more powerful section of the wrongdoers is what makes the defeat of the villain a very important point in the building up of the image of the hero. When Bose is asked about this phenomenon of hero worship, he says that “the fans bring large garlands for the hero’s poster cut-out. They do it to promote the film in the cinema hall and try to act like complete fans who have an agenda of looking up to the hero as a presence of someone who needs to be looked with great expectations. Just like God is created in the image of man, similarly the hero looms large on the mind of the audience. Almost like a demi-God.” (Bose) This reminds one of the presentations of Rajnikanth in the Southern parts of India. How his films and posters are showcased and illustrated in the cinema halls is something that makes this statement true. But the question remains, why is it so important to look at the greatness of an actor and not his acting skills? Where is the room for improvement as a performer? Though we can categorise performance into so many aspects, we are definitely overlooking the content. It’s not worthy to look for the image of the God and judge if a performer is really of the level of God. The idea is to find out the promotional notion and the economical estimation of this promotion. The market is always floating with ideas of promoting a film and this is followed only by the elections. People invest in watching a film and not for the electoral process. Therefore, films become the highest contributor to the National economy. This in turn funds the government projects and the associated industries<sup>xxii</sup> of fitness and food. Another important factor which makes the film industry of Mumbai a major contributor and participant of the national economy is the number of jobs it offers to the different category of people associated with the industry. The technical jobs as well as the creative ones comprise of a huge component of the tax paying individual. It is very important to look at the concept of new age working environment and the associated economic structure along with it. The Hindi film industry has attracted so many other economic strata along with it. It seems to be so overwhelming but deep down the concept of

economy makes the content of the films a secondary important phenomenon. To put it in other words, the fact that the market is pushed by the associated products is evident from the publicity associated with the launch of the films. When the research was initiated, the focus of the research was to track the change in the perception of the hero or the male protagonist of a Hindi film, what are the factors that made this change possible. But the gradual research regarding this made the changes visible and understandable. Obviously the most important driving force is the money associated with the industry. It is wrong to presume that the industry runs on talent and concepts. It rather functions on the notion of functional risks and critical financial motivations. When asked about the huge financial aspect of film making to Bose, he said – “The industry obviously runs on advertisement and promotion. The brand-endorsements and the associated money with it make the film industry sustain. It is important to see the film promotion as a part of the money return policy.” (Bose) What can be assumed from this is the fact that the industry has many allied economically dependent industries parallel to it. In no way can we call the film industry a random thought process. It is a planned area of investment and return. While the return from the market is important, equally important becomes the voice of reason that films try to subtly put across regarding different socio-political issues. In the essay “Looking Beyond Bollywood: Maithili Rao Surveys Current Indian Cinema in the Age of Hindi Nationalism”, Rao talks about the socially vocal films that are made in the industry and deal with sensitive topics like the riots and other social oppressions. These aspects are to be taken into account when one estimates the limits of social dysfunctionality and how the films deal with it. Rather than giving an out of the box perspective, sometimes the films talk about the conventional reading of a situation and introduce a tragic aspect to it. One such film is *Maachis* (1996) which deals with the sensitive topic of political thriller that talk about the duality of the identity of youth. Directed by Gulzar, this film does not present the hero in a larger than life context or ritualise the

worshipping of the performer as an individual but present a situation to which the actors as characters react and in turn their lives get affected. The social message involved and the lukewarm response at the box-office is evident that the category of parallel cinema in the Hindi film industry is not very easily accepted by the audience. With time however, this situation has changed. The films that are made have been based more on the content and their social significance as well as the ideology of the reading audience who do not watch a movie to look at the star but because of the content of the film. The thinking audience has gradually been a mass consumer with the rise of the 'OTT' platforms. The content generated in these mediums run solely on their quality and execution. People watching these mediums are mostly the urban office going crowd and the sole idea is to execute the viewership in a way to ensure that the platform caters to their taste and ideology. The next big question is about the role of men in these changing perceptions. Bose points out an observation in this regard. He says – "With the maturation of the cinematic thought, the presentation of men on screen has seen the most dramatic change. They have been reconstructed as fragile and vulnerable. These men are not overtly sexualised and presented in the film to serve the purpose of a visual delight." When we look at the change in the perspective of presentation, we are aware of the change in times. The men being presented on screen as fragile individuals, too weak to take decisions was perhaps the most difficult decision that the Hindi film industry had ever taken. That broke the patriarchal norm of men being subjected to the hyper-masculine image of the completely aware individual who seems to know everything. The wave of the 'women-centric'<sup>xxiii</sup> films too added to the image of the alternative power equation between the men and women in cinema.

One of the most underrated performances in the Hindi film industry is that of the supporting actor. This is generally the friend of the hero or the parallel good boy in the vicinity who has been treated wrong or not treated at all by the director. This person is presented in the Hindi

films as a person of strong moral strength and as someone who gives unconditional support to the hero. The creation of the hero's best friend is seen in the film with the motivation of the supporting role being nominated in the award functions and people gradually taking it seriously. In films like *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (1994), the support system extended itself to the inclusion of the domestic help as the confidante of the hero. It made the structure of family and associated identity more prone to the confidence into which the hero could easily confide into the lesser in social strata but a friend nevertheless. This gave the parallel to the identity of the best friend which was not necessarily within the family of the hero. With flawed heroes like seen in films like *Wake Up Sid* (2009), the friend of the hero is extended to more than one to suit the necessity of the hero's whimsical decisions and the consequences of the actions. With films like *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) the avenue of the friendship among the hero and the allied characters became something to look forward to. It was a change in the perception of the friend that it extended to attract performers. The friends of Aamir Khan in the film are played by Saif Ali Khan and Akhsay Khanna, both have played the role of the hero in the past and were given sufficient screen space and equal importance in the plot. The roles were not only about their support for Aamir's character but the fact that their lives were intertwined. The motive was simple yet very effectively presented. The film made way for the kind of audience connection that could relate to not just the larger than life hero but the frame was equally divided into friends who could be together because of the common priorities of their life. The concept of new-age friends and divided attention has made the hero a common household man who can be flawed and wrong. Akash (played by Aamir Khan) is a person who cannot decide about his love interest. He suffers from indecision and is often insensitive. This portrayal of the flawed hero and the fact that the hero is not someone who can be seen as a perfect individual or be worshipped is of ample importance in the progression of the thought of the audience. The new age continuation of the travel movies

was once again of three friends and thus they go on a search for peace and happiness. The theme in *Zindagi Naa Milegi Dobara* (2011) was similar but not the same. However, it did take the role of the hero a step forward. Hrithik Roshan played the flawed individual who is workaholic and the friends played by Farhan Akhtar and Abhay Deol act as his voice of reason. Once again the plot revolves and each friend gets a life lesson from their travel experience and they tend to understand life better. Thus, the breaking up of the grand narrative surrounding the life of the hero and the building up of little narratives in the plot makes the films a break from the stereotypes that have been created in the industry with the image of the perfect hero. This was not the only break that we see in film development. During the funding of films by the government under the banner of National Film Development Corporation the films like *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) had broken stereotypes and narrated the cinematic language through means that were certainly not popular. This condition leads to a certain estimation of the means of looking at cinema through the lens of alternative and studied expertise. Javed Akhtar in an interview with Nasreen Munni Kabir in the journal *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story's* (2001) says:

Hindi cinema has its own traditions, its own culture and language. It is familiar and recognisable to the rest of India and the rest of India identifies with it. Shall we say that Hindi cinema is our nearest neighbour? And we know our neighbours well and we understand them. In Hindi cinema a son can tell his mother “Ma mujhe samajhne ki koshish karo” [‘Mother, try to understand me’]. Now in India, no son would ever say such a thing to his mother, that’s for sure. We have our own screen fathers, fathers who wear dressing gowns and hold a pipe; a father who decides his daughter can never marry the man she loves. Hindi film audiences understand that culture, they are familiar with it, so they keep seeing the films. Sometimes the audience is critical,

sometimes amused, sometimes irritated, but I suppose you can't change your neighbours. (Nasreen 52)

This excerpt from Akhtar's interview is a kind of reading of the audience of the Hindi film industry. The audience according to Akhtar understands the projection of the lie by the films. They do not have any expectation of truth from the film-makers. They know this plot and can relate to the fixation of identity. This audience is smart enough to not protest about the truth of the identity. They do not need validation of the facts. They are just into the notion of the films being a window of escape. If the opinion of Akhtar is to be taken into account, the audience is divided into two categories. Some are of the idea that the presentation of the stereotypes on screen is a mere collation of the people from different social strata, while the other category of viewers may be aware of the unrealistic presentation of the characters and wish to watch the presentation from an objective distance. Therefore, the audience changing its perception or the filmmaker looking at the audience from a more mature notion is somewhat new in the estimation of the relationship between the presenter and the target audience. It is unique to observe the change in the perception of the receptor and therefore the notion of the box-office has evolved from its initial days of estimation. The fact that film making is now an industry is in itself evidence that audience response of all kinds and categories shall be available for the present filmmakers. The films therefore get mixed response and shall be catering to a particular set of audience. While the out-of-the-box films are for a more urban and informed audience, there are films that are for the fans of the great stars of the industry. Every year during a certain festival a wide number of films are released. In the festivity and uproar the films that are generally released are based on the plot of The Ramayana, the condition being that there is a victory of the good over evil. This makes the film particularly of interest to the family oriented viewership. This viewership can be modulated to the festive environment and shall be doing good business for the production

house and the audience response shall be good. The critics shall not be very happy with the reproduction of a predictable plot and a prospective mindless execution. Therefore, the film will be a financial gain for the producers and keep the industry alive and functional. This category of films shall not be getting the jury awards in the award functions and popular category will have nominations. What is astonishing is the kind of perfection that is associated with the entire procedure. It is technically presented to show the categorisation but it is nevertheless a part of the industry. The association of the film with the industry cannot be denied, nor does it need denial for it is bringing business to the industry.

The co-existence of the two specific categories of entertainment and presentation of the hero in the industry is a matter of great dichotomy. The same set of performers is icons for some and actors for another. This is where the industry maintains a balance between its two important wings, popular and critical. In the chapter titled “Marketing and Promotions in Bollywood” in Aswin Punathambekar’s book, *From Bombay to Bollywood : The Making of a Global Media Industry* (2013) points out:

Production companies like Pritish Nandy Communications, for instance, brought with them notions of risk management and an apparatus of media production, including a conception of the “audience,” that were markedly different in an industry accustomed to a discourse of hits and flops. The audience was imagined not only by those involved in the typical production-distribution-exhibition cycle of a film—the producers, directors, stars, and distributors—and determined, in the final instance, in terms of how many people worldwide watched the film in a cinema hall.

(Punathambekar 201)

The industry takes the risks on a calculated basis. The concept of indulging into a production which is not merely a profit or loss business is a notion of mistaken concept. Obviously the

project is a profit and loss equation for the industry. The audience is the consumer and the production should cater to all the categories of the consumer.

The hero therefore is compromised as an individual. The larger than life projection is nothing but a grave monotony of looking at the kind of response that the industry gets in different quarters of its existence. What seems to be a truth to the apparent onlooker is far from the truth. The larger than life image of the hero is created only to make a larger than life film. This in turn will generate revenues that are not merely adjusting. There are extremely calculative risks that are being taken. These risks and experimentation with form and the categorisation of the audience brings to the mind of an analyst if the categories too are made out of the needs of the industry. Another idea of making this notion of industry successful is to keep passing the legacy of the film families and their associated generations into the film industry. This in turn keeps the audience engaged and interested in the film developments over the years. Popular face of the Hindi film industry, and a part of the famous Kapoor family, Rishi Kapoor was once a hero in the film *Hum Kisi se Kam Nehin* (1977) which had a famous song '*Bachna Ae Haseeno*' ('Beware beautiful women'). When his son Ranbir Kapoor was launched in the industry, one of his films was titled *Bachna Ae Haseeno* (2008) to target the nostalgia of the song and ensure that the audience connect is established with the son as it had been with the father. These are incidents of nepotism which the Hindi film industry is accused of being a harbinger. Therefore, on a closer look, the image of the hero becomes flawed and stunted under the industry's policies and strategies. It is therefore vital for the audience to be able to differentiate between the notions of presentation of a hero and how it functions to make the image of the hero huge for the audience who can only look at the presentation and not think about the logic that operates behind it.

Vikrant Kishore, Amit Sarwal and Parichay Patra in the introduction to the book, *Bollywood and Its Other(s): Towards New Configurations* (2014), talks about the perception of Madhava Prasad in these terms:

Drawing on Althusser, M. Madhava Prasad (1998) traced Indian popular cinema's journey from formal to real subsumption in his ideological history. In a later article, Prasad (2003) tried to unthink the term Bollywood as an imitative inferior as opposed to the hegemonic presence of Hollywood. The connotations of inferiority, imitativeness and derivativeness often engulf the term known as Bollywood, especially in the derogatory accounts prevalent in the English language press. For Prasad, the situation has changed considerably as the terminology has found its way into different lexicons. Film enthusiasts of yesteryear used various models to define Indian popular cinema, most of which stand dysfunctional while defining Bollywood. Prasad considers it as an "empty signifier" applicable to any set of signifieds in the realm of Indian cinema. (Prasad 2003)

What Prasad had interpreted is perhaps a concept of a term that has been so widely functional in the making of the film industry that the terminology had in it become self-aware of its reach. It is important to note that the setting of the film industry is definitely a kind of self-awareness propagation of the actual makers of this industry. This makes it evident that the hero and his presentation is a gimmick to mock the state of idealism in the film industry; something that can trace the presentation of the hero as a mere puppet before the entirety of the system under which he is made the demi-God.

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## **Chapter III**

### **Concept of New-Age Posters: Digital Printing and its Effect on Art Form**

#### **Poster making as an art**

The art of poster making is a kind of publicity that starts pre-release of a film. The poster is conceptualised and formed by the inputs of a director keeping in mind the iconic scene of a film or a particular high point in the action of the film. There is a creative team which works on the poster and other publicity tools dedicatedly. It is observed that the poster of the film looks at the appeal of the film and tries to make it reach the audience through the design that the creative team formulates. The relationship between this product (film) and the advertisement (poster) is close. Apparently, it may seem that the director is always intricately related to the production of the poster not only personally but also psychologically. But it turns out to be a very different and complete process in itself. In the introductory manual of movie posters named *A Century of Movie Posters: From Silent to Art House*, published in 2003, Emily King states:

The movie director best known for matching an unerring instinct for design with a skill for self- promotion (a skill that led to a late career in pure showmanship) is Alfred Hitchcock. Quick to catch on to the value of Bass's work for Preminger, Hitchcock hired the designer to create titles and promotional graphics for his own movie *Vertigo* (1958) and two subsequent films, *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1960). Posters for other Hitchcock films tend not to be as pleasing as those designed by Bass but they are all uniformly engaging and unfailingly direct, even to the extent of showing the director appealing in person to the audience. Taken together these images are fascinating, and it is no surprise that there are several collectors who

devote themselves solely to Hitchcock ephemera. But these first-run posters are far from the end of the story. Way out of Hitchcock's reach, in countries where Hollywood once seemed as distant as the moon, a whole separate body of Hitchcock images came into being. Posters promoting the director's films in Eastern European or Asian countries are no less fascinating than the indigenous American advertisements. Although they have nothing to do with the director's wishes, they are central to the story of 20<sup>th</sup> Century cinema, a tale that concerns migration and assimilation in every sense. (King 213)

In case of Hitchcock's films, the posters made of his films in the Asian countries had no reference to the director but were reproduced copies of the original work that had somehow surfaced in the poster making artist's vicinity. For the Indian film market Irna Qureshi writes in the *Science and Media Museum Blog* in a piece titled "Decoding the Bollywood Poster" [28 February, 2013]:

Although some of these Indian posters took their inspiration from the imagery of Hollywood, the former served a somewhat different purpose. As well as promoting the latest film in one of the most prominent film-producing countries in the world, the posters had also to respond to the audience's unique cultural needs. In a nation as vast as India, with its inherent linguistic, religious and regional differences, Bollywood is a significant unifying thread. Thus, the film poster acted as a tool to cut across cultural barriers to make the film appeal to a mass market. Historically, film posters have used language quite strategically. Text was kept to a minimum to accommodate the low levels of literacy when trying to appeal to a mass audience. Part of Bollywood's appeal is its universal language, which traverses religious and regional boundaries to make films accessible to a broad multilingual audience. (Qureshi 115)

The notion of the multilingual audience is at two levels of operation. One is the audience across India and the other is the audience situated outside the country. It is important to cater to the two separate categories since the films are shaped to the taste of these target audience at different levels. When the first film of Indian film industry (at a time before it was considered to be an industry), *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) was screened the concept of poster had not yet developed. It was first envisioned by Baburao Painter<sup>xxiv</sup> for the film *Kalyan Khajina* in 1924. Before this the text-based handbills were used to promote<sup>xxv</sup> the films. This made it absolutely difficult for the people of a country with comparatively less access to textual education to comprehend these posters. As the poster began to be recognised as a form of art, people started relating to the visual image of the poster and started taking the launch of films as a kind of advertisement of the upcoming film in an entertainment form. This was something that they have mostly taken to be an elitist form of advertisement before 1924, since the film *Kalyan Khajina* made them accustomed to the big revelation of the importance of a poster. Post-1924, be it the posters reproduced in painted form of the Hollywood movies or the hand-drawn ones of the Hindi films, the posters became the window to the film's story and the audience started waiting for the next poster. The posters slowly became a representation of the time, idea, plot and the stars in a film. Therefore the way in which these posters were appreciated and accepted by the Indian audience, it ensured that there was a eulogistic approach of the Indian audience to the Hollywood posters (which were mere shadows of the original ones that Hollywood had been printing for their publicity) was largely due to the quality of the content of the films. "My father used to say, and I have very faint memories of this being a regular phenomenon, the audience would repeat watching the films (English movies that were screened in Basushree, a single screen theatre in South Kolkata) and would come with friends time and again to watch the same film, there would be a situation much like we have now with theatres staging plays" (Basu), Sourav Basu told me

in an interview in 2016: “We had people employed here who would draw the posters (they were not available anymore in the cinema hall) and we had it stored for a long time, however, when Basushree was renovated and given a facelift (popcorn counters and food stations were installed and the projector room was renovated to accommodate the modern-day film screening equipment) those posters (or whatever remained of it) was disposed for the lack of space” (Basu).

Today, the poster makers have receded to the fringes of the city and the digital image has taken its place. However, the most popular idea was the conception of the posters and how that has evolved with the passing of time in the Hindi film industry. The trend shifted in 1995 with the release of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* which made the poster in regional language (Hindi was used explicitly in its first set of posters) and specified the area of publicity. It was one of the first movies by Yash Raj Films to have multiple posters pre and post release of the film. The film has recently completed twenty-five years of its screening in 2021 at Maratha Mandir (a single screen theatre in Mumbai). In the context of the 1975 film *Deewar*, released twenty years before *DDLJ*, (which was an example of the Angry Young Man<sup>xxvi</sup> movement replica in Indian film industry), Qureshi (“Decoding the Bollywood Poster” [28 February, 2013]), observes:

The film poster artists are also credited with creating one of Bollywood’s most iconic images, Amitabh Bachchan’s angry young man. In order to imbue the image of Bachchan with anger, the artists created their own visual language by blending distinct art styles such as painting with knives instead of traditional brushes. The unusual technique and its powerful effect are clearly visible on the celebrated poster for *Deewar* (Yash Chopra, 1975), which is dominated by Bachchan’s enraged, darkened expression. (Qureshi 33)

### **The poster as the star-maker**

This amplification of the image of the star was later followed by the posters of the films where the star value superseded the content of the film. This could be observed in the posters of *Don* (1978), *Zanjeer* (1973) and *Kaalia* (1981), *et cetera*. The posters did not depend on words or language but predominately used Hindi and Urdu whenever required. It was spoken and understood by the majority of the prospective audience. Nasreen Munni Kabir in *Bollywood: The Indian Cinema Story* (2001) says:

In a seamless blend of Hindi and Urdu have the widest distribution within India and internationally. The twin sister languages are spoken in six northern states and understood by over 500 million people on the Indian subcontinent alone- reason enough for Hindi and Urdu to be chosen above the fourteen official Indian languages to become the languages of Indian popular cinema when sound came to the Indian silver screen in 1931. (Kabir 20)

This further added to the pattern of poster-making in the Indian film industry, where the emphasis was more on the visual element of the content, much like its western predecessors. The font and size of the name of the film added to the anticipation of the content of the film. The film poster gradually evolved with time and its visibility grew. Primarily, as opposed to western film posters, the content revolved around the male protagonist or the hero of the film. The woman/ heroine was not the centre of attention. The body of the woman which is widely seen to be dominant over the poster-art of the west was not the trend of the east. If we contrast the posters of the *Amrapali* and *Anupama* (both released in 1966)<sup>xxvii</sup> to that of *Chelsea Girls* (released in the same year) we will have a contrast between the posters. While India was still working with hand-drawn posters, the west had begun to use graphics and photography to produce posters with greater clarity<sup>xxviii</sup>. The content of the films was often

free spirited and borderline juvenile in nature while the aspect of the Indian film was still stuck with serious content. The difference in the content resulted in the difference in the concept of their posters too. The protagonists were important in the film posters in the Hindi film industry as well but the presentation was marked with a sense of disproportionate importance to the female protagonist as compared to the male protagonist.

The politics of excluding the less important characters has always been the most vital aspect of poster making in the film industry. While techniques and patterns have changed with time, the presence of an actor on a poster of a film is a matter of the importance that they have in the plot of the film. When asked about this exclusion to Mr. Mrityunjay Chatterjee<sup>xxix</sup> who has been associated with poster making through his organisation 'Thoughtshop Communications', he said "The poster of a film is multi-layered as it makes the audience figure out the importance of an actor in a film and tend to the film accordingly."<sup>xxx</sup>

(Chatterjee) While saying this, he hints at an audience who is never into the content of the film. But obviously the audience now is much vocal about the content of the film than the cast. The audience decides about the future of a film based on the content it delivers. When asked about this, Chatterjee said – "That is true, stars like Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan cannot pull<sup>xxxi</sup> a movie using their stardom anymore. They need to deliver content."

(Chatterjee) The content Chatterjee talks about is the cause of audience being intrigued by the plot and reviews being written in response. When Rachel Dwyer states in the year 2014 in the introduction to the book, *Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Contemporary India*, about the way in which India is becoming a global-power; the definite link is to the rise of a certain section of the society. This rise gives Hindi cinema its much needed facelift. Instead of focussing on love and betrayal which was the most important theme in the 1990's, the industry was gradually moving towards the presentation of more domestic problems in the latter half of the 2000's. Dwyer says:

Like other arts, cinema is about standards of behaviour and their consequences, a way of understanding the self and the world which can be interpreted in many ways.

However, the Hindi film is also a mighty cultural product, consumed by millions of people in India and worldwide as a global media form. As a 'new' postcolonial nation, India created new myths and national texts. Some of these took shape in movies which have become myths, reaching out beyond the cinema halls into everyday life as they inculcate beliefs and offer ways of understanding the world.

(Dwyer 2014)

Hindi cinema has become a mode of interaction and a framework for the new way of looking at the world and its ways. The fact that it is a 'mighty cultural product' indicates that it needs to accept itself as a consumable in terms of the audience following it and looking at it with expectations. It is a bridge between the people of India and the rest of the world who are attached to this form of art as a viewer. The viewership translates into ownership as the audience gradually become the ones calling shots in the film industry. People are the most important part; it is on them that the change in film productions is relying.

When Basu<sup>xxxii</sup> was asked about the facelift and the politics associated with it, he said it is mandatory now to have a facelift for a cinema hall to survive. While only a multiplex can pull diverse audience it is obvious that the single screen fails to attract such variety of audience, even though it is screening multiple films at the same time. The cinema hall tries to justify the decision of screening multiple films by the fact that the audience will gradually shift towards the single screen halls and accommodate their show-timings. Basu also politicises the interface of poster a step further. He had shown his collection of the posters of the films that his hall has screened. The posters are stored in a room and he discussed the material of the poster. He claims that the cost of poster making has resulted in deterioration of the materials

in which the local posters are made. Basu claims that because of the kind of mechanical reproduction that is associated with posters, it becomes difficult for the artist to survive. The artist has long been subjected to extinction in the sphere of poster making. I asked Chatterjee<sup>xxxiii</sup> as well about the implications of the posters being made using machines. He is of the opinion that the people who used to draw the posters are now making it using different means.

### **Changing content of a poster**

The posters have undergone different layers of changes. In terms of content and documentation as well as presentation and making, posters have travelled a long way. When we talk about the production of poster, we must be aware of the localized poster making. The posters that are put up in various cities are all transported virtually<sup>xxxiv</sup> and printed at local markets. According to Chatterjee “the centralized distribution of posters is not the issue now but pixel burst and print quality are part of the new terminology.” (Chatterjee) Being a teacher of Fine Arts in a reputed private university himself, Chatterjee talks about the intake of students in various art colleges in the country and its problems. The vanishing job market and the influx of technicians in the field of art are major changes seen in the last ten years according to him.<sup>xxxv</sup> What Chatterjee highlights and we should be aware of are the technical aspects involved in poster making. When posters were not digitally made (before 1924), one had to improvise upon every poster that was made for a film. Hand-drawn posters are not the only idea that was propagating. “Use of carbon prints had made a lasting impact. But the volume of work increased with every passing year and advancement of the machinery made a difference in the approach of the artist towards poster” added Chatterjee. A poster artist called by the nickname of Singh<sup>xxxvi</sup> was asked about the art of poster making and he says – “We are not drawing anything now, we merely create the posters from the photographs that

are shot for the film by the actors and actresses. We pick up scenes from the movie as well and capture frame. All these are technical jobs and needs no lineage of descent from the original artists who drew film posters by hand.” (Singh) He has learnt the skill of poster making from his father Noton and they do not want to teach the techniques to anyone beyond the family. However, with the change in the techniques of poster making their skills are now not important as a parameter to judge the standard of the art they produce. They need not be skilled but need to manifest their concept of art in a digital platform to prepare posters. “This can be done very easily as it requires understanding of the digital platform. It has got nothing to do with art.” (Singh) He seemed to be very emotional about the statement made. His tone can be read as that of disbelief in what he is saying. Chatterjee says “Art is now in putting together a poster.” (Chatterjee) He divides the poster making into three primary categories: Political, Social and Film. These three kinds of posters are definitely different in form and presentation. The political poster however is closely associated in the South Indian film industry with the film poster. The idea of bringing film stars to politics has infiltrated the Hindi film industry as well. It has made a huge market for the shift in the politics of the country. More and more political parties are employing cinema artists to conduct political propaganda for them. Also tourism propaganda of the state governments is done by film actors. These advertisements are mostly propagandist in nature and they tend to make the audience believe in it by using their favourite icons. The techniques of referring to a certain product or the way films promote certain consumer items are not recent developments in the advertising industry. It tends to associate the identity of a film-star with certain brands that people start relating to the persona of the individual actor. Chatterjee says – “The advertisements that endorse certain products based on the brand value of an individual generally do not focus on the quality of the item. The use of the branding seems to be associated with the acceptance of the product without its focus on quality.” (Chatterjee)

However, this may not always be true. Branding has been there since Lux for the first time in 1925 used the brand to launch the actresses to endorse the brand since the time of Leela Chitnis and Asha Pareek. Lux has since then been a big brand that has been endorsed by almost every actress who has ever been a part of the Hindi film industry. Chatterjee says that “it was also considered to be a sign of success in the sphere of Bollywood to be endorsing Lux.” (Chatterjee) Therefore endorsements like this make one question the validation of stardom based on their idea of fame and importance. Brands are made powerful when they make chronological approaches to all the performers to be a part of its endorsement. At one point in time, films too were endorsed as part of the commercial advertisement of Lux. The endorsement of the film *Teen Devian* (1965) was done with the chief sponsorship of the company making the brand of soap called Lux (Hindustan Lever Pvt. Ltd.) and the commercials were done by the women involved in the film. This was one of the first instances of endorsement of a brand associated with a film promotion. This is however, not the last. The trend continued even today when the presentation of a brand has been integral to film promotions<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Posters always talk about a journey that the film has made as a part of the industry. It can be seen as a first look and also as a point of reference when we look for a film after years of its release. It gives a necessary glimpse into the content of the film. The film magazines and film critics often talk about the film with reference to the film’s poster and compares the works of the director from the perspective of the poster; and, after *Chandni* (1989), the trailer of a film. This does not affect the kind of posters presented by a particular film. There is a change in every five years of poster making in which one particular film-star may act in twenty different films and therefore the posters are often seen as a form of ever-evolving art.

The size of a poster determines the impact it has on various categories of audience. Singh says that “the larger the canvas, the more important people are there in the film.” (Singh) The

fact that a bigger star's films get better quality of the poster is something that might not be known to the audience but it turns out to be true as per the information given by other poster makers while I was taking an interview of Singh. The year in which a particular actor or actress gets more than three films released is considered to be the year of the particular actor. The first poster that is made in the year is not large enough compared to the third made in the same year. This marks the growth in the career of the actor in terms of market and popularity. The posters can be seen as a reflection of the actor's success. This determines the way in which a film is marketed. Just like a political poster<sup>xxxviii</sup> or a social poster<sup>xxxix</sup>, the film poster too has an agenda. The poster tries to bring to the film a kind of readiness of approach. This approach determines the aspect of looking at the film through the glimpse of a poster maker. The poster acts as a two-way interface between the audience and the makers of a film. The poster's extension is the trailer of the film. This in turn makes the film maker's responsibility divide into two parts. At first they must get a first-hand market review for the film's trailer and poster and then the release of the film will finally decide the future of the film. This acts as a final verdict of the audience. The poster and the trailer act as a dictate<sup>xl</sup> of the audience about the film and make the production house ready for the opinion of the audience.

In the times of hand drawn posters, the review was limited to a certain space since the posters reached to a certain section of the audience. Satyajit Ray had drawn the outer scape of his posters for *Pather Pachali* (1955) which was then reproduced to be circulated in the city cinema halls. However, it is also a unique stance because the director himself designed the poster for his film<sup>xli</sup>.

When I asked Singh about the style typical to Ray, he said – “Satyajit Ray in himself was an industry. Hindi film industry does not do the same kind of concrete work. The Hindi film industry tries to present a more comprehensive image of the film using the poster”. (Singh)

He perhaps hints at the comprehensive style of working of an auteur and comparing it to the spaced-out and designated work of the Hindi film industry which is a large body of systematic functioning. The art on the poster often depicted a scene in motion from the film in a still frame. This presentation has been pivotal in determining the categorization of the film. For example, when the poster of *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) has been brought out, the focus on Darsheel Safari and the foregrounding of Aamir Khan made it clear that the actions and life of the young boy was being highlighted. It was also evident that he would be given the necessary backup by the shadow of the veteran actor. The film had balanced star-power to that of the new-age concept<sup>xlii</sup> cinema<sup>xliii</sup> that made it a huge gross-earner.

### **Colour scheme in a Hindi film poster**

A very interesting aspect of the art of poster making is the colour-scheme. The specific colours used in a poster, determines the kind of film one can anticipate it to be. Usually in mainstream Hindi cinema, shades of green and black represent horror, while pastel shades are used for films dealing with interpersonal relationships and love as a prominent theme. While blue is most judiciously used in the posters pertaining to films dealing with a more complicated relationship issues with blends of darker hues. These general assumptions are so stereotypically used in the film posters that it makes the art of poster making somewhat predictable if we follow the pattern of the compositions. Colour palettes in the film posters often determine the scheme of thought that the director keeps in the entire film. Sometimes the dominance of a certain colour makes it schematic to a particular environment that has relevance in the plot. This is a technique that Sanjay Leela Bhansali started in his film-making. The colour palette was an obvious determining factor for his films like *Saawariya* (2007) and *Black* (2005). He was the first to talk about the colour scheme and the idea of presenting the film poster as a schematic representation of the colours that shall be

predominant in the film itself. His colour palettes have often brought out the era in which the films are set and the kind of environment they represent. Strong determined shades of colour have been incorporated to suit the presentation and the aspect that makes it more difficult to look at is the relevance of these colour schemes in the mind of the audience. The unaccustomed eyes see it as a bright poster, but the trained audience understands the concept of colour usage to be a quality to attract the audience to a particular kind of cinematic imagination. The audience therefore gets attracted to a well thought-out film and it makes an effective publicity for the film. In the Blog, Sheryl Puthur, writes an article titled “Colour and Settings in Sanjay Leela Bhansali Films”:

He does not place it in words but in symbols and actions. The locations that the film is set in also reiterate on the protagonist’s feelings. It makes a psychological impact on the audiences who realise the deeper intent in the filmmaker’s work when he speaks through the colour and settings of the film. (Puthur 2013)

Chatterjee says that “mostly it is the director who gives the colour palette to the artist to give shape to the poster but the end product out of the scheme is determined by the artist. This makes the artist a part of the film production.” (Chatterjee) The making of the posters are done after the film has been produced and the direction and post-production are completed, making it the last thing done in the film production and the first thing that is presented to the audience. This determines that the schemes of the film are incorporated in the poster itself. The word window would be ideal to talk about the poster. It does not give away the plot but lets the audience peep into the world which the film tries to showcase. The trailer however has begun to act as an extended poster in the recent times. It starts with a brief glimpse of the production house and the director and star-cast and often has the poster in the last shot. It comprises of all the scenes that can be taken as vital turning points in the film. Aswin

Punathambekar in the 'Introduction' to his book *From Bombay to Bollywood: The Making of a Global Media Industry* (2013) says:

Overall, I conceptualize Bollywood as a zone of cultural production shaped by multiple sites of mediation, including the operations and social worlds of industry professionals, state policies, technological and industrial shifts, and audience practices—all simultaneously dependent on, yet not completely determining one another. (Punathambekar vii)

What makes this statement to be true for film posters is that the poster serves as one of these sites of meditation mentioned here and there is a mutual dependence on the contributing factors presented in the film industry. The artistry involved in a film making is somewhat related to the plot of the film, reading into the film's market. The plot makes the director present his thinking in the form of a film. There is no one to convince before the production is complete. Once it is made, the film is only judged by the audience. Therefore, the film must have a connection with the audience.

### **The evolution of film posters**

Other than the technical aspect of poster-making, the next important idea that needs propagation is the content of the poster and the changes in the pattern of it in the Hindi film industry. The foregrounding of the large face and the existence of only an important face in the poster is a phenomenon seen in large number. The 1983 film *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* has one of the most iconic posters in Indian cinema. The plot revolves around a constructor and two camera-persons. The story is hilarious and often taken to be a cult-classic for the kind of response it still has from the audience. The poster was interesting because it had the faces of the protagonists and all the other characters popping up from the windows of several under-construction buildings. It was a new way of presenting the satirical subject of the film which

was related to the construction of a bridge. The bridge too is shown in the poster and the falling of the bridge is given a space as well. In the poster the aspects that are brought out are very interesting for the film and its publicity. In 2012 when the film was restored, the poster was reconceptualised and a red backdrop was added to the faces of the characters. They were placed in a single line and the sizes of the faces were different depending on their importance in the plot. A camera was seen in half in the poster from the bottom and created an image of the paparazzi always lurking in the background. It was fitting for a film that is a social satire on the urban Indian society, seen through the eyes and lenses of two photographers. Its presentation attracts the audience and establishes the most important themes of the film. The reconstructed posters are more thought provoking since they are being designed by the more informed audience<sup>xliv</sup> and are made to celebrate a certain number of days of the film, thereby celebrating a cult classic.

When asked about the redesigned posters and the rise in the sale of posters on online shopping sites, Chatterjee said – “It is important how the posters are being re-conceptualised. The thinking is mostly on the part of the new-age media developers. It is important for them to recreate the poster digitally and print it likewise and sell it online. With the rise in entrepreneurship the reworking on posters has been in fashion.” (Chatterjee) His statement gives us some vital insight into the importance of the art of poster-making. It can be made and remade in a way that has no copyright issue attached to it. Posters are often hung on the walls of the homes of fans of a particular film or an actor. As long as posters are reprinted and re-thought, there is no harm in their popularity as a style of propagation of the film. But the unintended piracy associated with it is very disturbing for a thinking member of the audience. Not everyone can afford a first copy of the poster, therefore digital recreations and print outs of the digital posters are now accepted norms for poster collectors. When Chatterjee argues that the production of the reconceptualised poster is an evidence of the film

being in fashion, we need to look further and address the deeper issue therein. The film might have a lasting impact on a certain section of the society and it can be very relevant to the concept associated with the film being a microcosmic reality that binds the faculty of judgement for the audience and they forget that plagiarism of art and recreating new art without due credit can be seen as a punishable offence. Everyone now can recreate posters using icons from a famous film. It requires absolutely nothing to do that. Obviously, that does not presuppose that everyone recreating a poster is doing so without following the copyright issues.

The other very important aspect of a film poster is that it gives the audience a first-hand impression of the fashion trends followed or created by a particular film. The audience can judge the social standing of a character by the clothes they wear in a particular film poster. Even before the release of the film there is a rage around the new trends that a particular film is creating. Chaitali Banerjee, a teacher of Bachelor of Fashion at The Bhawanipore Education Society College is of the opinion that fashion determines the colour of a poster. She says – “The colour of the clothes of a character on screen is very important in determining the overall nature of the film-poster as that determines the colour-palette of the entire film, sometimes, it is the other way round.” (Banerjee) She makes it evident that the response of the audience to a poster shapes their acceptance of a film. The cult images of heroes are often than life, as was seen in the cut-outs of *Deewaar* (1975). When Amitabh Bachchan along with Shashi Kapoor is shown in larger than life size in a poster, as had already been a trend of poster making down Southern part of the country, everyone understood that the towering presence of the hero was a new trend. A hero who was not ‘perfect’ in terms of being a positive character had started the trend of the anti-hero in the film posters. Bachchan was given the same space and importance in the film as Kapoor. Chatterjee says that “before the film was released, Bachchan was hardly ever thought to be of

such a stature and importance in the industry.” (Chatterjee) Therefore, for an actor to become a star the essential factor was the response of the audience. The successes of a film depended on the kind of propaganda the posters carried.

It is the posters that make an actor reach the audience. It informs the audience of the existence of a film and its content. The censor try to minimize the exposure of “indecent” content on posters since they will be mandatorily pinned and hung at every street corner. The film on the other hand can be restricted in terms of viewership when the Central Board of Film Certification issues a certain dictate about the category of its viewership. Therefore, before the film is certified, the poster needs to be cleared from the censorship of content. It is also interesting to note that the Bollywood film posters have often been presenting the larger than life heroes and not the actresses. The 1977 film *Dream Girl*, with Hema Malini in the title role, had a poster that highlighted the face of Dharmendra more than it highlighted the face or the upper torso of the actress.

This problem was addressed by Chatterjee in a way that talked about the position of women in the film industry. He said – “Women being the only presence on the poster was not what attracted the audience. The face of the hero needed to be present on the poster. That was a marketing strategy.” (Chatterjee) *Damini* (1993) once again formulated the women-centric and the posters confuse the audience by the presence of the popular performers present in minor roles in the film. One needs to remember that the women acting in these films were not particularly popular before the film. Their popularity grew manifold after their performance in these films but the reality remained the same. “Dream Girl” however was used as a title for a 2019 film by the same name, where once again the protagonists played by Ayushmann Khurrana and Nushratt Bharuccha shared the poster equally. *Kahaani* (2012) was perhaps the first mainstream Hindi film to present only the woman protagonist on the poster. Once

again, while this was a decision taken by the distributors of the film and the creative head in consultation with the director Sujoy Ghosh, who had presented Vidya Balan as a pregnant woman and subtitled his poster as ‘The mother of a story’. Later in 2019, *Mardaani* too became a poster that had only Rani Mukherjee on it. One must remember that the absence of major male actors in both the films could be a contributing factor in the decision of the respective directors. The propaganda regarding the absence of space for the women and the inequality of the pay that men and women receive are all part of the unclaimed gender-bias that the Hindi film industry faces at all times.

### **Film review and poster**

The Hindi film industry makes its name from the surprising number of films that they produce every year. If the numbers given by the Box Office in-charge in Atindra (A very renowned cinema hall in Barrackpore that has recently been converted to a multiplex, Atindra grabs attention of movie goers in the North Twenty Four Parganas for a long time. People attached to the hall are almost in their late fifties and have been employed here for generations) are to be believed, regarding calculations we get a very alarming statistics. “The number of Hindi films that come to the hall per year is somewhere between twenty-four and thirty.” (Banerjee) If we consider the films produced on ‘OTT’ platforms it will amount to double the number that the industry produces. Thus, if the production of a film is in such large numbers, the posters too shall be produced in bulk. The size and kind of posters produced per film is at least four per film. Therefore, it is important that the quality of the production is maintained. The posters produced should also have certain categorical differentiations like size and content. Different categories of posters cater to different kind of places. The sizes vary according to the space found for a particular poster. The dimension of a poster needs to be different compared to the other. This enables one to look at the different

dimensions of a poster and act accordingly to suit the market and its needs. Chatterjee says that “posters have always been in demand due to their capacity to suit the market and its needs. The audience has taken interest in posters and have made the poster a thought-provoking entity. The film poster has been one of the main forms of poster that the audience is accustomed to seeing. Posters are brilliant pieces of art.” (Chatterjee) His comment on the brilliance of the art form gives rise to the thought of a film enthusiast about the kind of techniques that one uses in the printing and technology like three dimensional print add to the variety of the poster produced. The ways in which Indian films have catered to the taste of the audience in terms of poster making, it has been showing massive influence of the Western poster making style. This has influenced the style of poster making in multiple ways. Some of the more potent ways of this influence being shown is when the brilliance of ‘leaving out’ is taken into account. The minimalist textual content of the posters is something that has been a winner of a concept. Basu had mentioned that “the need for the text is reduced in a poster for a country like India since the audience here is multi-lingual and cannot be expected to be attracted to the text in a poster. In fact, the people are not always literate but are a considerable amount of the film audience. They create the audience in a way that can be easily subjected to the visual appeal of the poster.” (Basu) Primarily, posters communicate and this communication is the key to the multiple aspects of the film’s production. Arjun Appadurai in the celebrated book, *Modernity at Large* (2005) talks about the “modern moment”, where he tries to see the influence and the lack of it on the modern recreations of the moments that are produced without the influence of the history of its production. The idea of the poster is basically illustrated in the film and this leads to films becoming a larger than life extension of an ordinary poster. This however, is not the whole truth. When Chatterjee had talked about the post production of the film and how sometimes films are constructed in a way in which they can flatter the art behind its poster, it makes evident the reason for the

poster being of such value. The cost is not only of the material that is invested upon to ideate the poster of a film. The cost effectiveness of the poster therefore tends to be important in the age of multimedia and mass production. However, with the production of posters for the ‘OTT’ platforms, the Indian film industry has become a witness to massive change in the making of the poster with the rise of the ‘OTT’ medium. Appadurai says:

Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin. Always carrying the sense of distance between viewer and event, these media nevertheless compel the transformation of everyday discourse. At the same time, they are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons.  
(Appadurai 19)

These are seen as GIFs and short moving images of the posters that settle at a particular moment into the final image of the poster designed for the film. What is more interesting is the reference to the sense of distance that Appadurai talks about. This distance (between viewer and the event) can also be read as an objective distance that keeps the audience and the maker of the poster disregard each other’s conflict of emotions regarding the creation of a piece of art. The poster is nevertheless an external manifestation of a creative idea for the artist who has visualised the composition and produced it in digital medium. The poster, acts much like the cover of a book. The renowned book cover designer Dr. Pinaki De in a very informal setting<sup>xlv</sup> had talked about the importance of a book cover. He had pointed out that to read a book, make a mental analogy of it and then reproduce it in the form of art is by no means an easy task. De has designed many book covers for contemporary authors and has been a designer for the Starmark Satyajit Ray calendar but what is unique about his creations is the content and detailing of it. The mass scale production needs a working method that can

be fast and multi-dimensional because it translates into a full scale production in no time. It is therefore very important to look at the layers of production. There are techniques involved which make this art form reach more number of people. The audience, on the other hand can keep an objective distance since the personal touch to the entire piece of art is missing. This makes the production cheaper and the cost cutting helps in reduction of the number of people needed to make copies of the poster.

### **Types of posters and how relevant they remain**

The other kind of posters that are available in the market of poster making is the text poster. It has the name of the film and the performers in rank of importance. These posters are locally printed by single screen cinema halls. These posters are printed and circulated in the locality. In the suburban towns of West Bengal, these posters are the ones that get the maximum circulation. The proprietor of Mallika Cinema, Shyamnagar said in an interview to me:

We do not get more than one big poster or hoarding of a film. Few small ones are sent to put up on the display boards of the cinema hall. The town needs to be told about the film, so we have 'our people' who draw the posters and we get them circulated. By 'our people', what I mean is that they do not get the posters from elsewhere but get them printed as per their need. This makes them employ some local technicians and a press to formulate this poster. This makes it evident that the multiple layers of production are never drying down but it rather finds new avenues to propagate art. These posters are not glamorous and glossy but made on paper that is thin and can be easily glued to the walls. These posters are mostly circulated overnight on the walls of the buildings placed on the main road. There is no legal space for the pasting of these and it is extremely complicated to be able to trace the people who put these posters in place. The people are the same as the ones making the wall art for elections. They are

locally hired and given the liberty to circulate the posters on behalf of the hall.

(Mallick)

The reception of posters also needs to be discussed. Posters made of the film *Pyar Kiya toh Darna Kya* (1998) had for the first time a bare-bodied man on display for the audience to gaze and the female protagonist looks dazed with just her face visible and looking in the direction of the bare bodied man. It is important as a movement in the realm of poster presentation in the Hindi film industry. The shift of gaze from the female body to the male is a myth but the accession of the acceptance of the existence of the same. The poster printing industry has evolved with time and thus, it is important to the evolution of the poster in the Hindi film industry. The journey of the regional films could be traced to a similar journey but we need not try to equate it to the Hindi film industry which is the issue of discussion here. The fact that the poster should be a kind of advertising for the film and that its association is far more external than internal, gives it a kind of dichotomous identity. The factors that made a poster external are the non-permanent nature of the employment associated with the people who are into design and presentation of a poster. The different media houses and production companies hire people on an ad-hoc basis to tend to the production team of a particular film. It can be manipulated at any level. The need for this kind of labour is very crucial in the marketing of films. One cannot deny that the industry has its vital aspects under the supervision of its audience members. The director works on multiple projects relying on the Assistant Directors. This is a consistent trend in the industry. This gives rise to what can be called the assembly line mode of production. Kumar in “Film/ City: Cinema, Affect, and Immaterial Labour in Urban India”, writes:

Many of these (ones produced by remote functioning) films were major box office hits because the assembly-line mode of mass production was sustained by a national network of financier- distributors whose monopoly over clearly demarcated distribution territories could ensure that mass audiences would always throng into theatres to watch their favourite movie star on the big screen. The fairly standardized model of formulaic filmmaking and the national system of financing and distribution did not allow for– or did not require– much input from the mass audience in relation of production. (Kumar 21)

Therefore, the way the film is marketed is also a process that involves the reception at multiple layers. The posters that Mallick was talking about and the way they were circulated was somewhat made into a similar process of acquired publicity through multiple channels of propaganda by different people laterally and directly linked to film making.

The initial idea of promotions had taken a backseat and the importance of posters was not very prominent. The idea that Aswin Punathambekar presents in Chapter 3 titled “It’s all about Knowing your Audience: Marketing and Promotions in Bollywood” of the book, *From Bombay to Bollywood: The Making of a Global Media Industry* (2013) was:

Until the mid-1990s, the production and circulation of paratexts for Hindi-language films was a largely uncomplicated affair overseen by a publicist responding to directions from the producer and director of the film. As the media and entertainment landscape in India was transformed during the 1990s and early 2000s, authoring hype became a far more complex affair. Promoting and marketing a Bollywood film acquired new dimensions: tailoring promotional videos for various television channels, crafting innovative making-of features, negotiating spots for film stars on different television programs, designing websites for each film, coordinating online

chat sessions involving transnational fan communities, contests and games for various mobile phone platforms, and so on. (Punathambekar 159)

Therefore, when posters were the only medium of publicity, it was a different kind of reality. Punathambekar talks about the mediums too to have been outnumbered now with the rise of the social media and the use of Instagram reels and the songs of a film being used in ‘trending videos’ made by the social media influencers. The interviews have now transformed into online chats over Google Meet and YouTube. There are so many mediums of publicity that the posters are just one of the many that creates a kind of space for the application of the newer and more innovative ideas of publicity. This obviously has made the art of poster making an associated part of film publicity. Glimpse into a film is very important now with the audience being very conscious about the content of a film.

The cost of publicity has increased manifold. For the poster too, the cost of production has increased. This is in terms of qualitative analysis. In terms of quantity, the posters produced in bulk might not be giving direct benefit to the artists drawing the poster, but it has affected the economy in a positive way for many others at different levels of workmanship. If we try to look at the analytics of the effect it has on the form of art we can estimate that the form of art that involved making of posters in the 80’s or earlier has been obsolete and replaced with more sophisticated machines because the quality of the work needed a change for the better. It is needless to say that the machines that made posters were designed with the suitable needs of the generation in mind. With the up gradation in the printing press, people started taking poster making to newer avenues. The entire poster is now made using computer applications and this has made possible many new tricks to the art of poster making. With the digital print and vinyl flex, the posters have been made in multiple styles and people have been presented with the same at multiple layers of promotion for the film.

Perceptions and introductions were needed in details because the audience has now given up on mere judgements of the music composition and the star cast of a film. All major stars were delivering flops for the lack of plot in their films. The cinema lovers were changing as a generation. Small budget and commercial was the new formula for a successful film. Not that the small budget did not exist in the era before. It was, however, side-lined as parallel cinema. Hrishikesh Mukherjee was perhaps the one director of his time who transformed the two categories into a single stream of Hindi film. His films were lacking in glamour and spectacle but it was never categorised as parallel cinema. The posters mostly had all the members of the cast in similar sizes. The year 1999 was also the year of the release of the two popular films *Taal* and *Sarfarosh* that dealt with completely different ideas and were much more commercially successful than *Hum Saath Saath Hain*. The concept of making a family film therefore had no impact on the audience if the content did not provide something that caters to the taste of the audience.

### **Conclusion**

The reception of cinema and therefore the associated poster with the same makes the audience receive it at a point in their anticipation regarding a film that is forthcoming. The assembling of the whole from parts is what is typical of the Hindi film industry. This is something that Madhava Prasad in *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction* (1998) elaborates upon. Prasad talks about the editing of a film in a way that also covers the aspect of the construction of a film. It is more about the natural tendency of the technicians to shoot films in portions and not necessarily in chronological order. This gives the shooting a sense of chaos that is somehow in order because the sequences in the film are defined scene wise and shot and preserved for the final compilation. Posters that are made at an early stage of the making of the film therefore have a tendency to be established on the most important

aspects. When Chatterjee was talking about the art of poster designing he had talked about the highlighting of the important scenes. It is more about availability than importance. The scene reproduced in a poster might be of a minor significance, like the one of a song sequence in *Hum Aapke Hai Kaun...!* (1998). It is a popular presentation of a light moment between the actor and actress in main roles. Thus, the film poster presents and differentiates the idea of a film from the others but while making the poster the film is not made to be read completely by the maker of the poster for the unavailability of the complete picture.

In omitting the characters from a poster there is an obvious thought that works in the mind of the maker. This is the thought of the director too that functions through the narration that they give the technician. Some characters are given a 'cameo' (guest appearance) and sometimes that is omitted from the poster. The person might be playing a major role in bringing about a twist in tale but may not be a protagonist of significance. Sometimes such characters have substantial roles and are necessarily kept in the plot alongside the protagonist, sometimes to act as an alibi to the hero or they act as the voice of reason. This presentation keeps them in the film all along but the posters omit them consciously. Chatterjee says – "Character roles are recognised as supporting actors in award functions but the poster is like a visual recreation that invites one to the theatre. In the invitation there is no contribution that these actors play." (Chatterjee) In the poster of multiple Hindi films we can observe this trend of highlighting certain characters or the protagonist. Thus the negative space created in the lack of a certain other character is not equally compensated. In a moving image or a teaser of the film, the space is distributed (though not equally) to all the characters who play a part in the movement of the plot. There are specific dates for the release of these teasers. They are mostly tagged with other films that are screened at the theatres when the teaser gets prepared. This is done keeping in mind the kind of audience that would go for a particular movie. The genres are often associated in the release of the teasers. An audience interested in a film of a

particular genre will be interested in an associated genre. This assumption and showcasing of the teaser in the cinema hall is now a current trend that is made popular by the partnership between different cinema halls and the production house. For example, PVR has the rights to show certain teasers while Inox has been partner to some other teaser. But both these are shown along with the film that is screened in the cinema halls. There comes the issue of paying the hall the rights of the film. If one group has the rights, the other pays them to show the trailer. In the cinema halls where there are ‘selfie corners’<sup>xlvi</sup> being created with the movie in circulation, the posters of the upcoming films are put on display and these posters are centrally distributed unlike the posters of the single screen theatres of the rural area.

Therefore the politics of the production of a poster and the associated production of a teaser and a trailer are all done in the hope that the film markets well and earns the revenue that would be more than the budget. This would be addressing the concerns of the economy of the state and the country thereafter. Personally and professionally the actors too get involved in these revenue earnings of the film. They turn producers and the profit or loss of a film in which they act becomes a part of their investment. Thus, the Hindi film industry is intricately linked and brilliantly interspersed with a number of other industries that shall be given a glimpse into in the next chapter that talks about the influence of film and actors in the fitness and food industry. It is an interesting idea to see how these two lifestyle industries contribute to be embedded in the film industry.

Chatterjee had stated in his interview that the idea of including the body in a poster could not be done while hand-drawn posters were in circulation – “It needed even better artists, and the cost would have risen manifold. With mechanical production of the poster, it was a far better idea to look at the production and the artists had changed their way of indulging in film posters.” (Chatterjee) The question is whether Chatterjee from his privileged position of

being a recognized artist fails to understand the plight of the unknown artists. Chatterjee's perception therefore can be severely criticized to be a contribution of the well-established artist who speaks on behalf of the degrading market conditions while completely neglecting the predicament it causes the masses working against the mechanical reproduction.

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## **Chapter IV**

### **Fitness and Deception: Presentation of Body in the Age of Multimedia**

#### **Introduction- The Changing Face of Gyms and Fitness Centres**

Because practices are not things, but an active, embodied doing, they are intersections where personal, social and cosmological experiences and realities are negotiated. To examine a practice is to examine these multiple sets of relationships and experiences. A practice is not a history, but practices always exist within and simultaneously create histories. Likewise, a practice is not a discourse, but implicit in any practice are one or more discourses and perhaps paradigms through which the experience of practice might be reflected upon and possibly explained. (Zarrilli 5)

Phillip B. Zarrilli in the book *When the Body Becomes all Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalarippayattu, A South Indian Martial Art*, talks about the concept of practice in the 'Introduction' to the book. He addresses the question of discipline and regimentation in attaining the desired result. The practice of bodybuilding is age old in the Indian tradition. The body builders at one point in the history of the city were found in the 'akharas' and locally established centres for exercises. The art of bodybuilding similarly has many dedicated followers. These are the people who tend to look at body-building as the only means of being close to certain ideas that they have about their favourite hero. The entire industry of fitness and body correction rests on the notions that arise out of these beliefs. In this connection, I have conducted a series of interviews. The interviews range from that of a fitness-enthusiast, to a fitness coach, then a certified dietician, gym proprietor, food-joint owner and a physiotherapist.

**Case Study 1: Interview of a Fitness enthusiast**

The interview was conducted at the workplace of a Graphic Designer, named Dipanjan Roy. Roy had been obese for the stretch of three to four years of his initial career and had been very experimental in his cooking. Being fit and active has been a recent development. This interview was conducted in person on 23 March 2022. This was after he had reduced his weight from 97 kilograms to 77 kilograms in eight months. I started talking to him keeping in mind two specific terms, bodybuilding and body-correction. I claimed that 'body-correction' as a concept has emerged from the Hindi film industry and Roy was initially agreeing to the argument. He quickly shifted the stance on further clarification and made it clear that he was aware of his position as a person benefitting from a gym and he wanted to share his experience. He categorized fitness enthusiasts into two kinds of people. Firstly, the people who were influenced by cinema and actors, the others who have explored fitness to accommodate the act of body building into their life with an aim of being a better version of what they have been. Roy said – “People are not only building a good physique to impress others or because they idol-worship a hero with a great physique, but also because they have identified the use of certain parts of their body like biceps and shoulders which can make them feel more in command while riding a motorcycle.” (Roy) He was also of the opinion that “there are two kinds of film actors. First, the likes of Shah Rukh Khan who wants to present a particular kind of body to the audience for a particular film and then there are fitness enthusiasts like John Abraham, who is fit by choice regularly. The ideas are so minor looking that we do not need to always look at the bigger picture.” (Roy) He also agrees that the most possible cases of the entry into a gym is caused by peer pressure and then by the voyeurism that people develop after seeing a hero on screen, shirtless for the span of a film. But Roy adds that the ones who stay in shape and are into fitness seriously have overcome the initial phase of being just fascinated by the glamour associated with it.

The next question that I asked him was “What is the age range of people who are in your gym? Why do you think people in different age-groups have different approaches to fitness?” (Basu), to which Roy replied that the age group of twenty-five to thirty-five are the gym going men. Among women he had noticed it to be mostly twenty-five to thirty. Women, who take the gym very seriously, are mostly working professionals or unmarried students. They focus more on weight loss than on bodybuilding. For women, it is always short-term benefits like having a particular outfit to wear for a gathering and a particular body type that they need to flaunt to look good in a dress. They mostly do not have the objective of looking like a film star. Among men there are two categories, one comprises of men who want to remain ‘lanky’ and grow in strength. The second category is the body builder. The second category does not focus on overall strength and fitness. They emphasize on certain parts of their bodies and want to replicate the look of a certain hero in their appearance. Mostly the boys under thirty have these short-term goals. For people who prefer to walk or swim, gym is an uninteresting space. However, the rate of men going to a gym in Kolkata to that of a woman going to the gym is 3:1. I asked Roy about a prospective third category: “Are there people who had started as a casual gym-goer and then developed into a very passionate bodybuilder? Do you think this is possible?” (Basu) Roy answered – “The process is tiring if you look at it in fragments. For serious gym-enthusiasts there is a ‘leg-day’, ‘torso-day’ et cetera. The effect of exercise therefore is long term and not immediate. One cannot develop a well-chiselled body just by exercising for a few weeks. Sometimes it goes on for months and there is no visible effect.” (Roy) My natural question was about people wishing to quit the gym. Roy said, people quit the gym all the time. “If it is a long-drawn time of no result, people give up. After a certain time, people wish to shift to walking or swimming and of late into Zumba-dance classes.” Roy termed this haste in people and the need for quick results as ‘Instagram-able body’s haste.” He says:

Bloggers need to present themselves on Instagram reels every day for content generation and eventual revenue earning. The need for a certain body-type is very patriarchal. People comment on your content and troll the body of the content creators. The need of socially acceptable body has travelled a lot from just being influenced by films. It has become more of social media pressure that content creators on You Tube and Instagram feel, due to their viewership and its subsequent impact on their revenue. (Roy)

Roy added a further anecdote, stating that “the social media influence is like the influence that film critics have on film actors. The fact that a particular actor is out of shape is always under surveillance by film magazines and others.” (Roy) What Roy meant was that the social pressure functions in a vicious cycle. The consumers of the Hindi film industry want their role models to dress and look in a particular way. They in turn create a fan-base where the consumer once again wants to replicate their role models. The pressure is functional both ways. The middle-income group in India had started going to the gyms in around the same time as Sohail Khan’s movie *Pyar Kiya toh Darna Kya* (1998) released. This was marked by the opening of the so-called localised gyms in almost all neighbourhoods irrespective of the suburban and the cosmopolitan. In the film, Salman Khan was shown ‘shirtless’ for the first time on screen and the trend that the film started, continues till now. Ray talks about the status of the gyms and where the men in these fitness centres locate themselves socially. The market for the perfect body is extremely consumer centric just like any other market. It needs to be more concerned about the concept of fitness, but unfortunately it is not. He divides gyms into three wide categories. One he says, is the ‘state of art fitness studios’, the second is the ‘trainer-centric fitness centre’ and the third is the ‘local gyms’ that have equipment but no training and provision. Ray has categorised the third kind of gyms to be the ones influenced by the Hindi film industry. However, the matter is not really that simple. The fitness studio

caters to a certain consumer who might not be under the influence by film actors, but its customers are often film actors themselves. The Kolkata film and television stars follow strict fitness regimes and they categorically follow the instructions of their fitness coaches. When I went for an interview to a very renowned gym of the city, the proprietor refused to talk simply because of their inability to breach protocol. They were forbidden to giving away their client secrets. Roy's argument, therefore, is not valid for all the fitness centres. He can be seen as a particular case who has taken fitness seriously without being influenced by the glamour of the Hindi film industry.

### **Case Study 2: Interview of a Fitness Coach**

Koushik Sinha was the fitness coach and lifestyle trainer for a renowned gym in Sodepur (Gold's Gym) in the year 2022. I had conducted this interview on 15th of April 2022 after getting an appointment with Sinha through a common friend. Sinha was not very keen on talking at first but was finally very cooperative since I had asked him for some fitness coaching for myself. This interview was conducted over the phone. The interview started once again with the same questions of body building and body correction being the two principles on which the fitness industry sustains itself. He said –“One can never talk about body correction in a gym. It is always about fitness and body-positivity.” (Sinha) With priority given to people who are in the gym with a positive attitude, Sinha told me that “fitness has developed as an industry because people have seen the results on screen. These results make the people interested in taking up fitness projects. They do not do it because the hero of a film is doing it. They workout in a gym because they look at the hero and understand that a certain thing like biceps will look good on them as well.” (Sinha) Therefore, the question of associating of a particular body type with a particular audience is brought up once again. Sinha continued – “Gym is a fantastic place to bond over healthy habits. We also go out for tea-breaks and snacks are brought during festivals. The gym is not

an alien land where no one interacts.” (Sinha) I had asked him about the way in which people interact in the space of workout. He seemed to be sure about the fact that people approach each other in a friendly way. The next question was a little disturbing for him. The question was: “What do you think then leads to people dropping out of gyms? Do you think that peer pressure, taunts and toxicity has got nothing to do with the fact that people drop out of gyms?” (Basu) Sinha replied – “There are always small number of cases where people are dropping out of gyms because the environment is competitive. But the dropping out is also because it is difficult for people to manage time. It takes a lot of time and patience to get into shape. We primarily target the weight in case of overweight clients and then go into body-shaping.” (Sinha) He also talked about categories of weight loss packages. Sinha said – “We have packages where people can make use of the gym equipment, then the package involves a trainer, then another involves a trainer and a dietician. As per the requirement of the client we recommend packages, and we have regular health check-ups. There is no way in which a client can be taken into the gym without examining their health condition.” (Sinha)

The next question was about the influence of the Hindi film industry on his clients. Sinha replied that “films influence our lives in multiple ways. Our sense of self appreciation is mostly reflected through our fitness regimes. Naturally, fitness has a few role models. But in places such as the one in which I work, people are not drooling over a certain actor or actress. They take fitness as a goal for themselves. They enjoy being fit and presentable.” (Sinha) He was then asked about the financial prospects of the trainers. Sinha replied that the trainers are hired at a ‘good price’ and some of the fitness enthusiasts pursue gym training on their own – “Very few were informed enthusiasts at one point of time. Now we have people who are better informed and have sound knowledge of the need for a fitness coach.” (Sinha) The interview was short and ended with his invitation to me to meet him in person for a free full body check-up at my convenient time.

### **Case Study 3: Interview of a certified Dietician**

My interview with Madhumita Mukherjee was a two-hour long discussion about food, fitness and weight loss. This was during 2019. On September 15th, 2019, I started talking to Mukherjee about the weight loss programme offered by VLCC Kankurgachi. I had met with a minor accident and was looking for a few body-therapy sessions for myself. Mukherjee came across as a very senior dietician who has been in VLCC since its inception in Kolkata. The interview began with the question – “Why do you think fitness centres like VLCC have such a limited client base?” (Basu) Mukherjee answered – “We cater to a client base which is well informed and conscious about the body. These are not the average people who come here to lose weight. They come here for a scientific weight loss program and a very costly treatment scheme is prepared according to the need of the client.” (Mukherjee) This obviously took me to my next question: “Do you think clients are influenced in their consciousness about weight by films and actors?” (Basu), to which she replied – “The gender ratio of the clients is four is to one. We have a majority of women clients. The age group of these clients is from thirties to sixties. Depending upon their needs and issues, we cater to weight loss, body therapies and body shaping.” (Mukherjee) The gym is a serious place where everyone is mostly concerned with fitness but these slimming centres are places where doctors recommend such patients to go who have no hope left in the gyms. The therapies cost them around a few thousand for a single session. The reasons for people going to these places were mostly doctor’s directions, or they were in serious need of weight loss. The therapy was not done using machines, but the centre had modern and sophisticated machinery for weight loss and body shaping. Mukherjee said – “We have modern machines from across the world. We generally tend to reduce stubborn fat and provide services to people who do not have time for the slow results of gyms and fitness studios. We provide all our services under the guidance of qualified doctors and I, as a dietician, provide people with a follow up diet to

maintain their reduced weight.” (Mukherjee) asked Mukherjee about the change in the number of clients in the last ten years of her association with VLCC. Mukherjee replied – “People now are more conscious of what they eat. They tend to be serious about the food that they eat, like the cooking medium and the calorie count et cetera. As a dietician, I am bound to be more conscious about the way in which people eat. There should be a way for them to balance their favourite food and their diet chart. I never give them a tasteless diet-plan; I control their portion size and ask them to finish their eating within eight at night.”

(Mukherjee) She pointed out that the reason of the fitness of all the film actors is not that they do not eat. It is because they eat at proper intervals, and they eat the right quantity. The myths around crash diets are over. People have now realised the importance of healthy diet and exercise. People tend to walk; they take their daily routine seriously and make an effort to accommodate their fitness as part of that routine. Mukherjee added that eating the right kind of food is important and flushing toxins is something that makes people healthy. She said that “actresses like Shilpa Shetty have endorsed fitness and yoga to make people aware that being fit, and health conscious is extremely important for a comfortable life.” (Mukherjee) I asked Mukherjee – “What about impractical body-goals? Do you think that only fitness is the target? Are people not imitating role models and struggling with unrealistic expectations?”

(Basu) Mukherjee answered – “People are now following a kind of fitness trend. They are informed fitness enthusiasts. This is because of the Instagram influencers and film-stars who make it a point to let their followers know about their diet-charts as well as associated fitness regimes. Imitation was a very important aspect of the initial entry into the fitness regime. Very popular among these fitness enthusiasts is the spot treatment.” (Mukherjee) These spot treatments included thighs and lower abdomen. Spot treatment needs hours of tending just to ensure slim and toned legs. The concept of cool sculpting was introduced by ‘VLCC Slimming Centres’ to ensure people had proper care during spot treatments, lost fat and

gained permanently trimmed bodies. The amount of money involved in the slimming and toning industry is astonishing. People of all age groups are subjecting themselves to these fitness regimes. As a result, one gets involved with the fitness industry as a lifetime commitment which is only occasionally interrupted by dietary indulgences.

Hence, the direct impact of this industry is on the food industry. The impact once again is extremely visible. The film industry has for a long time been extremely conscious about diet plans and the body. We can ask a question about gaze, here. Society has subjected female performers to many kinds of normative surveillance. The result is that a certain body weight and shape has been popular with the audience. Stereotyped presentation has often been reflected as presenting a fat actor or actress as the over ambitious friend of the actress who wants the attention of the actor and then is ridiculed by the choric characters who find it ‘funny’ to ridicule people for their physical features. Casual sexism is involved in body-shaming on screen. This was seen in films for a long time in the 1990’s. The audience too is habituated to looking at women’s bodies with a certain amount of ridicule when it does not confirm to the so-called beauty standards of the society. The interview ended with the question – “What is the reaction of people to the huge financial cost in this process?” (Basu) Mukherjee added that “the clients are ready to spend money if the results are confirmed. For the fitness industry, this consciousness is extremely positive as it makes the industry’s hold stronger on the market.” (Mukherjee)

#### **Case Study 4: Interview of a Proprietor of a Fitness Centre**

An interview was conducted with the Area Technical Head of Fitness at VLCC, Kankurgachi. This interview was conducted in 2021, just at the time the gyms and fitness centres were temporarily shut down due to Covid-19 restrictions. Monami Dutta, the Eastern Zonal Head of VLCC was, at this point, very disappointed since most of her clients were

unable to come for their sessions and the interview naturally stressed the fact that people should take their fitness seriously. My first question to her was – “Why do you think fitness is such an important aspect of people’s existence? Your fitness centre has clients of all age, why do you think they are involved in the concept of fitness in spite of their age?” (Basu) Dutta answered – “The gyms do not accommodate the old and slow fitness enthusiasts. We try to provide customer-based services. Not to mention that the aged do not find it attractive to work-out in the gyms as the results might not always be positive. They have health conditions which might prevent them from undergoing such rigorous exercise. Thus, undergoing the sessions of VLCC makes them feel better as it results in weight loss without people doing anything about it.” (Dutta) I asked her the next obvious question – “Do you think people are bothered only about the end result of the exercise? Do they not bother about the process?” (Basu) to which she replied – “In a country like ours where consciousness regarding our food is far from satisfactory, we cannot claim that everyone is very conscious about fitness. It is strange that centres such as ours are never given their due recognition, but gyms are given so much importance. When we see a transformation on screen, we see that the change is brought about by the actor/ actress after rigorous workout in gyms. Where do the fitness centres go? Are we non-existent? It is interesting to see the process but not very easy to do it. “Stars do not own up to their actual fitness secrets. That is not only exercise.” (Dutta) She further says – “Many actors and actresses have undergone severe weight loss with VLCC but they have never given the due recognition to institute for its contribution in making them screen ready. This is the main issue with the people here, they do not own up to their fitness secrets.” (Dutta) I asked her if this is a reaction to the fact that people are judgemental that someone has not worked hard to gain fitness. Dutta replied that “people need to keep false image. Our aim is to provide people of every age the service of fitness. People may find it necessary to be fit at a later age. Some of our clients are here because their doctors have asked them to lose

weight and at their late middle age it is difficult for them to start a fitness regime without some help.” (Dutta) My next question to her was – “As it is observed in the elderly, that they tend to walk a lot more than teenagers, it is important that the centre focuses on the fitness of the young with equal importance. Do you think your centre caters to all age groups?” (Basu) to which she replied – “The centre has clients of all age groups, but the number varies. It has more middle-aged clients than the young. The fact that fat is stubborn in the middle aged and needs more tending than that in the young is the reason why it is important for the middle aged to be in a centre like ours. We add machines and therapy to the services. This makes it extremely helpful to do away with the stubborn body weight. We provide the clients with light exercise zones and cardio as well. But the primary focus is on diet-control and therapy. This methodology is unique to us.” (Dutta) The interview went on for an hour and Dutta told me about the trained physiotherapists, who are a part of her team. Her team has certified dieticians. Dutta said that “the centre is primarily catering towards weight reduction and then maintaining the weight may be done by visiting gyms and yoga centres. If an obese person exercises, chances are they would hurt themselves. So, VLCC tries to reduce their weight and make them ready to exercise and maintain their weight.” (Dutta) The interview ended with a few questions regarding their products and an enquiry about their beauty centre. I asked Dutta – “You have a fitness centre and a beauty centre along with it. Do you have a separate client base for the two or do you have an overlapping one? What are the popular trends that you have noticed in your beauty section?” (Basu) Dutta replied – “The beauty section is not very popular with our brand. It’s mostly an overlapping crowd which tends to save time and go for minor beauty sessions. However, for the beauty section, therapies are a winner. People come here for skin treatments and other associated corrections. The investment is not untenable, but the outcome is very client specific. We have a very effective beauty-team which is trained from our head office.” (Dutta) Thus, the question popped – “The fitness centres in Kolkata

are also operative in realms of beauty, but do you have the centres mapped in Kolkata according to the client base?” (Basu) to which she answered – “We have a centre in Kankurgachi, one in Kaikhali, one in Salt Lake, these three centres are not very far from one another, but they have one common link. They are all centrally located and have a client base. The Kaikhali and Kankurgachi centres are in residential areas but has office goers as members too, since it is on the way to the suburban railway stations. The Salt Lake centre has a client base of the IT sector, and it is most operative in the afternoon. The lunch break and evening are the busy hours since most of our clients of these areas are targeting the same time. We have a beauty outlet at Lake Town, once again it caters to a different client base. This area-specific determination of clients and their needs is unique to us. We are here to take the fitness and beauty industry to new heights.”(Dutta)

From the interview, what could be gathered was that the notion of fitness was very different for Monami than for people like Dipanjan Ray or his gym trainer. While the Hindi film industry is intricately associated with the gyms, they have almost no impact in the fitness centres. People take very different kinds of interest in these two categories of health care centres. The target crowd is too different for these two wings of the fitness industry for them to collide and intersect each other. The fact that the people of Kolkata are not directly affected by the Hindi film industry could be a legitimate argument. The fact that the industry is in Mumbai and the fitness centres of Mumbai can have a very different story, but as a metropolitan state, Kolkata is a hub of the mixed crowd who have multiple agendas as far as fitness is concerned.

While talking about the posters of the gyms seen across the city, the Regional Head of VLCC, Ms. Monami Dutta states that the gyms and wellness centres target the office going crowd these days. This makes it easier for the people to locate the gyms in corporate areas. Dutta says – ‘If we take a space in areas like Sector V (the current pro-office locality in

Kolkata), we are bound to get more consumers and takers. While our Kankurgachi centre is filled with homemakers and an elite crowd, our Sector V has young and office going customers. As a result, we have different kind of packages in these two centres. The office goer pack is targeted to quick and compact programmes while the programmes running popular in the Kankurgachi centre are more about consistent and long-term takers.” (Dutta)

She also pointed out the difference in time of the centres being busy with clients. The Kankurgachi centre is mostly busy in the afternoon slots. Sector V centres are busy in the evening and late afternoon. The obvious difference is in the occupation of the clients of the two centres. When asked about the rise in the number of clients over the years, Dutta was of the opinion that the growth has been steady unlike the gyms.

The fitness centre as a concept in India in 1989 by Vandana Luthra, the founder of VLCC and the idea was not an instant hit. It took time to establish the idea amongst the Indian fitness enthusiasts. Ms. Dutta says – “We largely have clients who have either failed to procure results in gymnasiums or are not into fitness as a regime. We have largely been tending to the obese masses, for whom fitness is the last thing on their mind, and are here because they have been asked by their medical supervisors to lose weight. This kind of clients are difficult to deal with and need to be given personalised care. They are not trained but given therapy and inducted to machine-oriented weight loss programmes.” (Dutta)

Thus, it is implied that the cost of the fitness centre is much higher than that of the gymnasium. The people who can afford these treatments are not really the majority of the country. The question still remains, why the appeal of the body induced by the film industry has been such impactful to all the sections of the society. We may have multiple answers to that question but none of them shall be satisfactory. Vibes, another fitness centre spread across Kolkata has a number of dedicated clients who attend sessions with them and make sure that the centre gives them results. The receptionist of Vibes situated in Kankurgachi

made it clear that the centre has tough competition from VLCC. Both these fitness centres are located within one kilometre of the area where mostly affluent people have been living for the past three generations. The location is a contributing factor in the kind of clients these centres get. The receptionist who refused to be named, said –“We are better than VLCC in many ways, we have trial sessions that can be seen as a window to the kind of effect that one gets after each session. That is something VLCC does not provide. You need to take a package in order to avail their zero session.” This competitive statement is aimed at luring customers to their centre. When reported to Ms. Dutta, she was curious about the hidden cost of this trial session –“If after a trial session one enrolled themselves for a package of service, the first session will be adjusted in the package.”(Dutta) These cut-throat competitive market strategies are somewhat detrimental for the client who wishes to avail the service. For the client, the critical issue is health but that is hardly the point of concern for the service providers. In fact, quality control is also hampered because of the lack of internal quality checks. Inter-personal relationships between the clients and service providers is always aimed at keeping a client tagged to a particular service provider or therapist. The implication of this can be both positive and negative. Positive, because it will be beneficial for the centre which will be able to retain a client based on their faith on a service provider and the negative side is the business of a centre shall be dependent on a human modality.

### **Case Study 5: Interview of a Physiotherapist**

Here, I would like to incorporate an interview with the physiotherapist who tended to my injury and was a worker associated with a slimming centre. Since her institute does not give her the permission to give an interview, her name is revealed but her institute is not. Her name is Manashi Banerjee, she is a trained physiotherapist and is in practice for almost fifteen years. My first question to her was – “Why do you think is physiotherapy such an integral part of the fitness industry? Do you think it is important to people who are opting for

fitness under the influence of the Hindi film industry?” (Basu) Banerjee answered – “The concept of physiotherapy is often associated with a medical condition. It is, however, not limited to that. It extends to the nature of the major and minor injuries that take place during and after exercises. The wear and tear always makes people look for a therapist. Every gym and fitness centre has at least one therapist. It is extremely important to note that the role of a therapist is very unimportant till someone has an injury and a particular doctor has advised them to get in touch with a therapist. However, regular sessions are important for people who are into regular exercise. People tend to exercise more and more when they are nearing a festival or have a family function. This is the time when they injure their muscles and then multiple complications lead to their visit to a physiotherapist. I do not consider them to be under the influence of the Hindi films.” (Banerjee) She is perhaps right in her analysis of the market. It is not really because of the film industry that people like Banerjee are appreciated by her clients. She is valued for the service and relief that she gives to people’s suffering. Banerjee adds – “People in the centre (the slimming centre with which she is attached) are asking for experienced physiotherapists. For us, it is difficult to make time for all the clients and sometimes people just need a body therapy as a follow up, not because they are unwell.” (Banerjee) Her concept of fitness was one of my concerns while talking to her. I asked her – “Do you think fitness of an individual depends only on the gym and fitness centres, or do they have some other contributors as well?” (Basu) to which she replied – “Food happens to be one of the main components of the fitness industry. People burn what they consume and their relationship with their bodies is largely dominated by the food they eat. We at the fitness centre try to ensure that the dietician is always kept in loop while a client is being dealt with. Everyone has a different metabolic rate, and the exercises and sessions shall be of no use if the food is not kept under surveillance.” (Banerjee)

The fact that one industry overlaps into another and the economy of one is dependent on the other is clear. This reminds one of the opening remarks made by Mani Kaul, in the essay “Towards a Cinematic Object” in *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* (1983):

The distortion in this case is of the time that one spends with their family. The idealization of the perfect people seen on screen and the desire of being perfect in order to be acceptable is a very problematic concept that has been used in the Hindi film industry for a long time. The demure Sita and the avenging Gita are presented as contrasts in Ramesh Sippy’s 1972 movie, *Sita aur Gita*. The trend continued till recent release like Rakesh Roshan’s *Koi ... Mil Gaya* (2003). The change of the physical appearance of the protagonist and the change in the nature of the twins have often been very marketable plots for the industry. (Kaul 1)

Mostly, the meeker of the two is the one with less physical attractiveness and musculature. The woman shown as meeker must be submissive and mild, subjecting themselves to the atrocities of the negative characters. Thus, to have a perfect and shapely body is to be the rescuer of the damsel in distress or to be the messiah. As a person with a chiselled body one is expected to have the intention and capacity to rescue a damsel in distress. This presentation in the Hindi film industry has been a recurrent motif in reshaping the ideology of the film viewers.

Banerjee talked about the job security that has been recently introduced in these centres: “Previously, the centres were outlets that had certain elite customers and the payment of therapists was made on the basis of the number of clients opting for the services, but with the rise in consciousness of the people regarding their health, there is a rise in the pay scale for the service-providers. Now we have a provident fund and a standardized salary which was not the case when the centre had just started.” (Banerjee) The fitness industry has become

more stable and hence the services have attracted educated professionals. In the undergraduate and postgraduate level, a subject like Honours in Nutrition is slowly gaining popularity. Some are going for professional training courses and enrolling themselves as therapists in the fitness industry, while “people are taking the body very seriously and this consciousness is infectious.” (Banerjee)

The publication of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* in 1990 is one of the contributing factors of the acceptance of the fluidity of gender and the opening of the concept of sex being more than biological. The idea was to present to the audience a particular notion of body that presents itself as somewhat theoretically true to its identity, of being a perceived idea. The perfect body which was subjected to self-critical thought amongst the contenders for body industry was gradually being challenged by the well-thought mind. However, the acceptance of the body being the most important aspect of the film industry started around the same time in the Indian Film Industry which infiltrated the Hindi film industry seemingly. The common language of film, where the multi-lingual audience accepted Hindi to be a standard language of communication and responded to the Hindi films as the “films of the nation” was thrown into a new language space.

How we interpret the statement is obviously free of the idea that it could hold for the author. The case of the Hindi film industry has been unique in its own way of evaluation. Just when we need to talk about the kind of evolution of the art of dance has been integral to the development in the dancer’s quality of performance but also to the gendered identity of the individual performer. The barrier of gender and sex gets slowly turned to suit the needs of the particular director and the market needs that need to be kept in mind while the producer spends money on the film. Butler states that the act of converting a statement into a performance is somewhat inclusive of the point that Derrida raises in *Signature, Event,*

*Contest* (1988). Butler tries to place the notion of the same in a different perspective.

Therefore, involving the body, we look at it from the perspective of the poster and its relevance in the modern notion of cinema. The body is a site of the social event here. It creates the impact of a presence that does not validate alone but create a notion of right and wrong in the mind of the person looking at it.

The one event that changed the notion of affluent fitness centres was the Covid-19 pandemic. The closure of the fitness centres and gymnasiums at this point in time was mandated by the government at both the central and state levels. This made the sustenance of the employees and service-providers impossible. The kind of response that people had given these centres went downhill with the rise of the world-wide pandemic. The people working for these institutions were completely under the effect of the pandemic while people took physical fitness and exercise to be of secondary importance compared to medical care and food. While talking about the time, Ms. Mukherjee stressed the need for fitness in the time of the pandemic and asked why people do not take it seriously. She said:

It was most important to take care of one's health during the pandemic and it required one to be improving their immunity and ability to sustain. The response of the clients was, however, completely different. They became sceptical to come for a session even though we do our best to care for the hygiene of the clients. However, shared bathrooms and human contact made it somewhat detrimental for the people to put their faith in the hygiene of the centre at that point in time. It is extremely important that people took these things seriously, so we faced the backlash of the pandemic in a huge way. (Mukherjee)

Mukherjee's response gave us a perfect idea about the situations that the pandemic had caused. It was important to see the pandemic as a setback not only for fitness centres but also

for the academicians. Roy classified it thus –“Fitness of the body and brain were secondary priorities for the people, or at least it was made so by the pandemic and the response of the government towards it.” (Roy) In Kolkata, the issue was also taken up in social media. This shows the seriousness of the situation and the associated problems that sprang up surrounding the fitness industry. “People lost jobs and the corporate office could not be blamed for the same”, said an associate of the Vibes fitness centre. The severe screening of the staff and the fact that everyone had to prove themselves absolutely essential to the organisation made things even more difficult. ‘This created a different kind of dedication towards the gymnasium for the enthusiast. We understood how the sessions helped us in being mentally happy and contented. This was the time when we understood the necessity of being in a fitness regime’. What Ray states has clarified that the social presentation of the person going to the gym is not limited to the influence Bollywood as an industry has on it.

When asked about the same Ms. Dutta said:

Pandemic was tough and to keep the already enrolled clients was a different kind of challenge. The new entrants were hardly any. We could sustain because all our clients make advance payment for packages but at one point in time the pandemic became a threat to the most secured positions in the industry. It has changed the way people perceive fitness now. They are not taking long and slow packages but opting for the more effective and short date packages for they anticipate the recurrence of the pandemic. (Dutta)

This has made the situation worse for the associated industries as well. The food and beverage sellers who had earned a lot with the help of the fitness enthusiasts in office areas had to close down shops due to the prolonged work-from-home mode that the corporate industry had turned to. This had a great impact on the shacks of office area that turned to

home-delivery of food but with little success. One of the prominent food sellers, who was interviewed informally, pointed to the lack of residential complexes in the office areas. This made a big difference to their business that did not suffer much loss in the pre-pandemic time. With the pandemic, perspectives changed completely. The concept of body building, and fitness was now a luxury for many.

A regular in Yoga classes, Rita, a resident of Shyamnagar, said – “We practice yoga as a ritual of physical and mental fitness. It involves the mind and body in equal proportion and gives us a fresh insight into life.” (Rita) This thought has infiltrated into the minds of the people whom she helps in their practice of the yoga-asanas. She has students from all age groups. People go and spend hours discussing the health benefits of yoga and also perform the asanas. “It’s a performance that gives us immense pleasure”, said Sumana, another yoga enthusiast. She claims that her skin texture has improved with yoga sessions and her belief is that she has been working more after she has enrolled herself in the yoga club. The way in which this has consumed the mind of the youth and the aged alike, yoga is indeed here to stay.

It is interesting to note that the forms of fitness that people tend to follow are mostly made popular by the film actors and actresses. The gender disparity, however, is very blatant. While gyms and bodybuilding were most popularly associated with male film stars, the women were into the softer practices of yoga and free hand exercise. This gendering of exercise was, however, changed by the likes of Katrina Kaif who during the promotion of her film *Dhoom 3* (2013) talked about her fitness regime and how it was integrated with her time spent at the gymnasium. This was a change in the way gymnasiums were seen by women.

But the promotion of gyms and body building still largely relies on male models and popular male faces. The objectification of women in cinema has been age-old but muscles have

always been associated with the male performers. The politics of space has been observed in the film posters to be predominant. The larger-than-life cut-outs have often been of the hero or the male protagonist and seldom has it been of the female lead. *Dream Girl* (1977) was an exception at that time. The reason for this towering presence of the male lead actor was because of the fan following that was associated with the male hero. It is astonishing to see the kind of work that goes in the printmaking and VFX behind the cinematic image of the stars. Also, the use of artificial enhancers and reducers popularly called the Botox treatment done by the film-stars were either inaccessible to the common people for their cost of treatment or were not recommended on the ground of health-hazards.

The perfection projected is, therefore, unreal. It is a fact that the body projected in films is practically unattainable. This cannot really be communicated to the people watching the films or the consumers as we may choose to call them. The instinct of the people looking at the cinema posters and wanting a similar body has also resulted in the shaping of the salons in a particular way. The brands like 'Javed Habib' and 'Lakme' are opening their branches across the city and the suburban locality. The local salons are gradually shaping up in a modern and updated set up with specialized individuals that give the clients a make-over according to the latest trends shown in cinema.

When interviewed about the importance of the trends of the film industry and their effect on the customer's demands, Kakoli Ghosh, the proprietor of a local beauty salon in Shyamnagar named, Golden Stick, said – "The trend is to go to the expensive places, the service quality is not compromised in a local salon, but people still go for the branded salons since they are endorsed by the film-stars and models." (Ghosh)

This example of commodity fetishism is observed to be caused amongst the consumers because of two reasons. One obviously is the one mentioned by Mrs. Ghosh about the kind of

marketing that is associated with the bigger brands and the other obviously is social media and the craze around the making of reels on them. These reels are integrated video clips that people make and circulate on social media to make themselves a part of the semi-known community of celebrities who are popularly known as the social media celebs. This term introduces the idea of a “lesser-known face” that they tend to become and as a result, their YouTube page or Instagram handle earns revenue on the amount of ‘Likes’ and ‘Shares’ they get. This semi-social pressure that they are subjected to makes them visit the more glamorous places for their grooming and also to ensure that the viewership is endorsed by influences. These social media enthusiasts are also at times influencers of various brands and their videos go ‘viral’ because of the endorsements that they do. We should remember that they are not recognized performers but their presence in the social media makes them celebrities in their own right. People recognize them, tend to get photographs clicked and also think about them as role models. Thus, stardom and fandom take a new definition with the imbibement of the social media and its term, ‘influencer’. These influencers also play an important role in the brand-conscious audience’s life. A certain section of influencers tends to make reels with statement jewellery and designer dresses as the stars sport in the films. They endorse online stores which sell a replica of the dress for half the price and thus a Zara brand gets an endorsed first copy advertised on these social media handles. It is interesting to note that the social media influencers are now becoming a lucrative exposure that became popular especially in the lockdown surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **Case Study 6: Interview of a Food Joint Owner**

Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (vol. I) famously wrote: “Where there is power, there is resistance.” (Foucault). The greatest resistance to the fitness industry was the food industry. However, gradually, people are changing. In the month of December 2022, I had the

opportunity to interview Mrs. Haimanti Rajbanshi, the owner of a small food joint in New Town. This food joint is a part of a shack that is very popular with the office goers. I asked Rajbanshi a few questions. Here are some of the answers she gave. “What do you think makes your shop different from others?” (Basu) to which she replied – “We offer fruit salad, stew, and some other healthy snacks and lunch for the people working in the offices here. We have a permanent set of customers during the office days.” (Rajbanshi) I next asked her – “Do you make the healthy food to cater to any particular age group of customers?” (Basu) She answered – “We make food for people who have changed the menu according to their needs. We used to make Chinese cuisine, but the people now ask us to make Cantonese, South-Indian and Tibetan food for them. We also have a fruit salad counter, and it makes a huge sale since people trust us with the food quality.” (Rajbanshi) She further added that “women are not the only ones who want oil free food, men too want food that is healthy. We have designed our menu in a way that can cater to taste and health alike. We have recently started delivery to offices, this has many takers as well.” (Rajbanshi) The office canteens and the local shacks are serving diet platters and fruit salads. Very economically designed, the salads are causing a huge stir among the office goers of the IT sector in New Town and Salt Lake City, Kolkata. When asked about their food regime and fitness routine, an office goer, Pinaki Hazra says – “We are staying in office for such long hours that we need to have breakfast and lunch here. After the office hours the rush to gym and the subsequent workout tires us out but we are kept alive by the nutritional food available in shacks, that is, because of the availability of fruit salads in the shacks.” (Hazra) Locating gyms near the office or sometimes in the office premises is a very smart move on the part of the IT industry. This is also pointed out by Hazra. This ensures that the employee is not in a hurry to leave for exercises and remains in the premise till a later hour. The shacks on the other hand earn better, while selling a fruit salad over a random rice bowl from a popular eatery. So, it’s a profitable situation for

everyone including the economy of the food sector. The fact that one industry overlaps with another and the economy of one is dependent on the other is clearly seen in the situation.

Rajbanshi says – “Swiggy and Zomato are causing stiff competition for brands like ours. We can now deliver food to almost all the offices of New Town and Sector V, but there are more shack-stalls like ours.” (Rajbanshi) Therefore, in the market of food too, the competition is tough, but the quality of food is getting better since the consumer is more conscious of what is being offered to them. While we have been talking about the concept of presentation in a more passive medium till now in this research, we should be aware that the active area of human conduct too is impacted by the presence of the influence of body. While referring to the passive medium, the discussion would be limited to posters and other one-way interfaces. These are mediums that appeal using the visual sense and do not have any two-way interaction whatsoever. The other medium being called the active area of human conduct is how the application of these influences impact the different body corrective centres and the food industry.

### **Conclusion**

The influence of the film poster and associated advertisements is to such a great extent that the words of Jeff Hearn seem to be true in the context of the Indian male being looked at. He says, in the ‘Foreword’ titled “Pluralizing Perspectives: The present and the past”: “We are no longer private. We are not private. For better and for worse, we, men are public, and increasingly so.” (Hearn 1)

He is talking of the idea of being followed and considered to be an object of desire and the eyes of the society with its constant surveillance on woman has now started looking at men too for reference. This has led to the evolution of the mindset of men as onlookers to the self. They do not tend to just look at the women and think of the body as a site of beauty for the

women but have realized the importance of their presentation of themselves. In an interview with Mrityunjay Chatterjee, he says, ‘One of the most important ideas that developed with the concept of body building was the fact that posters were now covering (he meant included) the body of a hero and not just a face or a scene from the movie. In the time of the great film-stars like Shammi Kapoor and Dev Anand we have seen that the woman’s body was voyeuristically analysed but the male body remained oblivious to the idea of being gazed.’ (Chatterjee) I would like to point out here the posters that were made of Dharmendra, who had a popularly denoted body built to attract attention, did not have any bare-bodied poster in his time. Laura Mulvey had, in the essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) talked about the male gaze and tried to categorize the idea of the narration of the life as seen in cinema to be a replica of the desire of the masses. This is somewhat replicated in the construction of the reverse gaze that looks at men and makes women finally look beyond the patriarchal way of self-derogatory mannerism.

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## **Conclusion**

The thesis has been an attempt to make the study of the metropolitan as a space for film enthusiasts. People associated with films are intricately working here as well as anywhere in India. The Hindi film industry is not limited to Mumbai. My fieldwork has been varied. I have conducted a series of interviews with cinema hall owners and proprietors. I have interviewed people from the fitness industry. I have interacted with poster makers, art-house consultants and fashion designers. The interviews have been conducted in Kolkata and the suburban areas of West Bengal. The place here has acted as a metonym for the entire pan-Indian audience. The extent of the influence of the Hindi film industry is no less in any part of the country. My geographical location has enabled me to base my observation and interaction to the people in my state. This has helped me bring into discussion additional and new material on the important work that the people outside Mumbai do in relation to the Hindi film industry. The active participants have given their opinion on different aspects of the Hindi film industry. Sometimes, they have been comfortable in disclosing their names and sometimes not.

The interviews have been conducted on multiple interfaces. Some of the interviews were in person, while some were over the phone. Some hardly like an interview initially and some were conducted over small interactions and meetings. People have been uncomfortable at times, because the range of interviewees was wide. In this process I have come across some interesting aspects of fieldwork that has been a part of my work. The interviews also form a qualitative research of the people working closely with the industry.

My initial approach was to conduct the only qualitative research and with time the methodology was implemented. The changing trends and the subsequent reactions of the people working on the outside had been related. It was interesting to make a study of these

trends and developments. The data collection for the research was primarily through interviews. However, when I began to research the 'OTT' platforms, I started working with a thick description of the changing face of fragile masculinity seen in films that are being released there. The overall analysis in the thesis is mostly based on evidence and interaction. Sometimes different methodologies have come together in some chapters.

This outlook obviously hints at the things pointed out in the chapter so far but if we go into the interview with Chatterjee a little deeper, we will get into the crux of the matter that artists think has happened with the art of poster making.

This is where the influence of the Hindi film industry makes a mark. The fitness industry and food industry might be independent of influences now, but the initial change and major permutations and combinations of how people perceive their fitness is originated in their notion of the cinema of their nation. The visual impact that films cast on the people is remarkable for reasons more than one. Also, it transpires into normative representation of the perfect image of the body. This can be seen when we try to see these standardizations through the lens of patriarchy and understand how the social norms are detrimental to the presentation of these stereotypes. As the fitness industry becomes influential, it becomes more intolerant towards the people who decide not to join the industry in one form or another.

Film promotions have seen a dramatic shift of focus from posters to the promotional events and from there on to advertisements and endorsements. It has drastically shifted and crafted itself from the realms of old world film publicity that had the content of the film in mind while promoting itself for the audience. To the new age multidimensional propaganda of films that twists the sinewy plots to accommodate the stardom of the actors that would eventually lead to the improvised endorsements and better promotion of the film among the audience.

The notion of Film poster had primarily been a negotiation for the function that it perforates the idea of the content of the movie or its prime focus into the mind of the prospective viewers. But the phenomenon underwent a change during the progress of the film industries around the world. In the Hindi Film Industry, which is primarily based in Mumbai, the trend of content based production of posters has been observed in the late 1900. The projection of the prime character, or the hero or heroine in the posters has been penned highlighting their character portrayal on screen. The crucial issue being the exploitation of ‘Brand Bollywood’ and the hype surged by a certain actor/actress during a certain period of time, the Film Industry has seen the larger-than-life ‘Hero-Worship’ that has resulted in the evaluation of an actor in terms of the box-office reviews.

The recent modification in the trend has been primarily associated with the idea of an unattainable perfection that has been a companion of the actors and actresses. This idea of perfection primarily starts off with the kind of role that one enacts and continues till the technicalities of the project, for example the editing and the cinematography makes it absolutely unbelievable to relate to. The concept of ‘Perfection’ however just does not end here; it further proliferates to the realm of the ‘Body’. The body of the actor thus becomes a very important issue in the entire project. The certain body type that becomes ‘in-fashion’ and the certain that goes ‘out-of-fashion’ could be typical ‘stereotype’ of the conception of the *dèfēro*, the mirage that is impossible to reach.

The constant objectification of the body is a challenge for the bearer of the body as well as the body beholder. A particular body feature has gained importance in a particular genre of cinema. The present generation is torn between the muscular ‘pack-building’, when one screen persona comes with a ‘six-pack’, the other pops up an ‘eight-pack’. The criteria however, remain unfulfilled. The women on the other hand have been subjected to ‘zero

figures' and wafer-thin waistlines, which are attainable only by a generous help of photo editing if not starving their bodies to death. Now the question arises as to why do the posters and associated presentations at all formulate a pictorial reality which is hardly a truth? The lifestyle of modern society claims a certain competition in matters of presentation.

The concept that packaging is the actual rendering of value is a fake condition aroused by the presenters of this packaged-reality. However, the publicity moves in their continued effort to establish themselves as an automated residual emergence of the ideas that the west finds fit to gulp, is also acting as a mouthpiece of a change in society. The idea of merely objectifying women is somewhere lost in the changed scenario. In the present times it is primarily the body that becomes objectified, and is not necessarily the female-body; it is the male body that joins the clan.

The idea of objectification results in a kind of quest and therefore a kind of possession and oblong desire towards that specific body. The objectification thus primarily being sexual, the aim of the publicity houses becomes very specific, 'the object of desire being presented as bait for attracting audiences'.

Thus, the men meet market and what they capture is mediating them as the object of desire where the gaze is reversed and the female is included in the turned table. While talking of the objectification we also have to keep in mind the fact that the eyes on the poster are not necessarily of those who see a body on the poster essentially desiring it. The poster attracts eyes of the self-objectifying mass as well, who would idealise the body and hence look forward towards attaining the 'body'. Designating the body as a goal and in the process taking decisions about drastic diet control and practically starving themselves into getting into the 'perfect shape' and thereafter hating their own bodies and being dissatisfied about the body, no matter how healthy they be. The differently able person has more to lose here. In the

market for the perfect body, an already dysfunctional body has to be permanently marginalized. Hence the villain becomes one who is at some point a handicapped and hence he seeks revenge from the possessor of the perfect body, the hero. The heroin here becomes much desired since her body is claimed both by the villain and the hero as the site of power politics. Thus the game of bodies and associated identities are much on the lines of a tug of war between the two men while they loom over the woman in question. The treatment of the villainous body is sometimes taken as a target for the hero to achieve during the reel time of the movie, in order to win back the woman and prove his supremacy.

In my research arena, my temporary plan had been to inculcate the role of film posters in the presentation of the male body in mainstream Hindi movies, but eventually as I delved into the arena of publicity and tried to look more closely at the posters, and what I came across was the intertwined axis of other modes of publicity that reached out to the public more than the posters at different levels. I would like to talk about the problem discussed above and also talk about the objectification and gaze ‘of the society, on the society’. Therefore I dealt with the concepts of culture, objectification, body, masculinity, gender roles, subversion and stereotyping. I have been precisely adhering to the concepts behind film posters but have worked on commercials and clippings that are a part of the marketing strategy of a film as well. This included the role of public in the publicity and how the ‘need’ of the audience is addressed in the realm of publicity.

I have looked into some vital allied industries while working on this thesis. My research included the fitness industry, food industry, poster makers and cinema hall owners. Other than these I have covered case studies on films screened on ‘OTT’ and exclusive ‘OTT’ content. The wide range of the Hindi film industry’s reach has made this thesis an effort in presenting a metonymic account of the vast influence this industry has on the people of my

nation. I have looked at the work from the perspective of a masculinity studies scholar who wanted to follow the changes closely and understand the way in which human emotions function as a fan. Allied industries and their socio-economic influence on each other is a very important part of this study. The most interesting part of the research was the fieldwork, where I have been interacting with so many people from different fields and expertise. The way human interaction has been a boon, it has been a bane as well. The challenges that Covid-19 posed to a researcher was largely unnoticed because there were more pressing issues that had an impact on the human race. However, for a researcher in cultural studies, it is difficult to limit their thought to the bracketed topic chosen initially for research. My work took a turn and I started revisiting the same fields and talking to the people I met before the pandemic. Their worlds had been affected too. The impact of the pandemic on the entertainment industry has been crucial. Films shifted ground to the new 'OTT' platforms and people became reluctant to go to the theatre. This made a huge impact on the economic aspect of the film industry. This was a setback but was better than a complete showdown for the industry. I went on to read the difference in the approach of the cinema hall owners after 'OTT' added to their already pandemic-affected business. These perspectives presented a shift from my original presentation and made me devote a chapter on the trends of 'OTT' productions. The thesis has been a learning experience that shall be continued long after the work is produced.

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### Notes

<sup>i</sup>This notion is developed by Bhabha to commemorate the concept of the particular and the universal in different light. It is important that one is seen in comparison to the other. This results in the presentation of the unique notions of people who are looking at a hero and imagining themselves in the spot of the hero. This is done by the Hindi film industry to create the image of a perfect person to idolize and devour aesthetically.

<sup>ii</sup>Timepass is a notion of leisure that involves the people of a certain age group who do not wish to rest but want to be entertained in some form or another.

<sup>iii</sup> In the beginning of the chapter, Raghavendra talks about the system of making films that are basically in sync with the system of the much established Hollywood industry since it is a mark of the Hindi film industry being in a way equivalent to the system used in the largest international film industry.

<sup>iv</sup>The shelf-life of an actor in Bollywood is something to be worried about since it comes at an unexpected time and with just three unsuccessful films one after the other. This makes it problematic for the actor to survive once the film career is suffering and the income degenerates. Being in the production of films, make it easier for the people to look at the larger picture of secured future in the industry.

<sup>v</sup>Plastic because it is created artificially and made popular through methods that are designed with the objective of making the audiences believe that they are demi-gods.

<sup>vi</sup>Audience is adjusted to certain comforts like the air conditioned cinema halls and availability of recliners instead of seats.

<sup>vii</sup>The concept of newfound interest of the young in the building of their muscles and the associated popularity of the same name as a fashion show primarily targeting men in India is known by this name. It has recently been a popular chain of gymnasiums that have used the tag to popularize their franchise chain of fitness studios.

<sup>viii</sup>Apparently the projection of a hall determined the interest of the audience. But I would like to differ from Bose here since, the projection basically talks about the technical knowledge of

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a film's presentation and what the people rather like to see on screen is the certification from their known brands and that makes all the difference to them, not the quality of the execution.

<sup>ix</sup>Once again, in an interview, the stereotypes are extremely pronounced. While Bose confirmed to most of them, Mallick did not. The rusticity that the cinema hall had was balanced by some of the more opinionated answers that Mallick gave me.

<sup>x</sup>The hall has old fashioned wooden seats which can be hardly comfortable.

<sup>xi</sup>Mallika is a video hall. It screens the cinema after it has been in the other theatres for a while. They get pirated copies of the film and play it in their hall. This gives Mr. Mallick the ease of screening the film at a low cost.

<sup>xii</sup>Before 2010 it did not have a fire exit and a fire alarm service installed in the main hall. It just had two fire extinguishers which was not in the best of state.

<sup>xiii</sup>People who do not have the eagerness of waiting for a video of a film to be released before it is watched by them. Film enthusiasts are popularly called film buffs. It's a more commonplace term for a film enthusiast.

<sup>xiv</sup>People who stay in the Nadia district of West Bengal consider Barrackpore to be the nearest city. They come here to eat at restaurants and watch movies and sometimes do their shopping. They need to travel around three to four hours to reach Kolkata but they reach Barrackpore within two hours.

<sup>xv</sup>Names of two heroes of the Bengali film industry who have similar categories of films marketed. These are almost like duplications of the Hindi films that had the concept of six-pack and eight-pack at the basis of its popularity. They have been functional in making Tollywood (the Bengali film industry) be at par with the Hindi film industry and its current content.

<sup>xvi</sup>Atindra turned into a multiplex in the year 2020. It was a huge step for the owners who did the renovation during the pandemic and started operating after the government declared it safe for cinema halls to open.

<sup>xvii</sup>The variety is everywhere but what makes Kolkata a typical case study is that the local films are hardly the pronounced challenge here. The influence of the Hindi film industry is

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what determines the status of a cinema hall. The most number of shows are run for the Hindi films and the prime slots are given for the same.

<sup>xviii</sup>It's a far-fetched comment perhaps but the honest opinion about the cinema hall is that it caters to the taste of the revenue earners and business professionals who look into the realm of cinema as a market of earning more compared to the otherwise melting market.

<sup>xix</sup>A docu-fiction is a genre of films that documents as a documentary does and fictionalizes the presentation. *Jamtara* (2020) was a very popular example of this kind of film. It is based on a true story in a true setting but has actors enacting the roles of the real characters.

<sup>xx</sup>The families in the industry that have been intricately related to film making generations after generations are called the film families. These families therefore are branded as film families, where everyone is related to one or the other aspect of film making.

<sup>xxi</sup>The hero who is not socially a superman and can be identified as a common man located among the audience. This hero is not the anti-hero of *Gangs of Wasseypur*, who has to fend on power in order to show his supremacy but the notion of normal is overtly explicit in him. Shah Rukh Khan in *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (2008) had started the trend of making the common man's image as a heroic self-satisfied middle class working individual.

<sup>xxii</sup>The reference to these industries is mentioned in Chapter IV and the fact that these are associated with the film industry has been explicitly commented upon. What is interesting is the fact that the associated industries are supposed to be visible as separate ideas but they are integral to the Hindi film industry in its present notion.

<sup>xxiii</sup>The film industry clearly does not look at women from the perspective of a woman. It takes a glance at woman with the doubt of the patriarchal stance of the society that judges men and women using certain standards of judgment. Many films, starting from *Mother India* (1957) has been talking about the woman protagonist. But the notion of women-centric films is problematic and shall be difficult to deal with in a short footnote. Chapter 1 talks about the problem further.

<sup>xxiv</sup>Baburao Krishnarao Mestry, popularly known as Baburao Painter was an Indian filmmaker and artist who conceptualised the notion of posters for the Hindi film industry.

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<sup>xxv</sup>Source: Introduction to *Indian Cinema Superbazaar* by Aruna Vasudev and Philippe Lenglet (1983)

<sup>xxvi</sup>In 1950's in Britain, a group of working middle-class British playwrights was the torch bearers of the movement in original. After the movement sank into the evolution of British Drama, it is said to have been revived in the Hindi film industry with the release of *Deewar* (1975) which projects the protagonist to be a rebel against the unfair society and its unjust ways of treating the poor.

<sup>xxvii</sup>The films in question present female protagonists. While the film industries round the world were generating male dominated content, the names of these films gave an impression of their being centered on women.

<sup>xxviii</sup>Source: Film Poster Exploitation: Edited by Tony Nourmand and Graham Marsh. Evergreen Publishers (Singapore), 2006.

<sup>xxix</sup>Shri Mrityunjoy Chatterjee is a popular name in the world of Advertising and Media Communications. With over 40 years of experience, he has been the Founder Director of Thoughtshop Communications Pvt. Ltd and Former Creative Director of Clarion McCann Advertising Ltd.

<sup>xxx</sup>The politics of exclusion at times leads to surprise element like a guest appearance of a 'high star valued' actor in an otherwise low budget film. The opinion regarding guest appearances have undergone a drastic change especially after the introduction of the plot centric cinema in the Hindi film industry. In fact de-glamorization has been a very pertinent idea in the films after 2018 with films like *Sui Dhaga: Made in India*, *Badhai Ho* and *Padman*. The so-called popular faces of actors and actresses working in the films of lesser known directors was a trend that made it absolutely impossible to cross-out the small budget films that added to the list of successful films in the years after this.

<sup>xxxi</sup>The popular word for the success of a film is the word pull. The idea is the lack in plot and execution and most importantly the story line is overlooked by fans under the pretext that the star-power associated with the film never lets the fan feel disappointed with a movie.

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<sup>xxxii</sup>Sourav Basu, the joint proprietor of Basushree Cinema Hall in South Kolkata has been interviewed during the research. His interview is a part of the first chapter. Here is a snippet from the same.

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Mrityunjoy Chatterjee has already been mentioned in this chapter. He too was interviewed for the research regarding posters in Hindi cinema.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>With the rise in electronic transportation of documents via different agents like email et cetera, physical carrying cost and the hazard associated with it is lessened. Posters are printed in every city and sent to the adjacent towns. They are being centrally distributed by the film's post-production team and technicians.

<sup>xxxv</sup>The art colleges do not necessarily contribute to the aspect of the poster maker. Those who have been in the poster making industry are not necessarily into formal training. Chatterjee's generalized comments are therefore not acceptable for the common perception. It makes itself very categorized and discreet when the artists are being incorporated in the background of the film poster making, which is more like a lineage of artists coming from family of poster makers.

<sup>xxxvi</sup>Near the Minerva Repertoire Theatre, there are small outlets that design posters. The source of this information, Bablu da was a part of these outlets. He refused to be named (his original full name is not mentioned) as this may create a difficult situation for him in his workspace. He is an artist and not an owner of these establishments. I could contact him in 2019 after trying to talk to one of the artists who are in the poster making industry for a long time. He was not really comfortable talking to me but he helped me understand the situation better for a poster making artist.

<sup>xxxvii</sup>Information initially taken from *The Times of India: Flashback* published in 2013 by the Times Group Books. This was a complimentary copy given by RePACE: A Sun Pharma Lab initiative.

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Used in the political rallies and during elections. They have presentations of the leader and sometimes the most famous leader of a particular political party. It is created with the perspective of attracting voters. While only names are not enough for the voters to create the

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connection to a particular candidate for elections, photographs on posters are very effective in creating the candidate-voter connect.

<sup>xxxix</sup>A poster created for an event like a festival, a cultural programme and a non-political assembly is a social poster. It is aimed at presenting the news to the audience and prospective participants of an event.

<sup>xl</sup>The audience has to approve of a film in order for it to be able to market itself. Some films with popular actors and actresses have often been subjected to absolute bad reviews from the audience and therefore it has been integral in downsizing the career of such actors. It is important therefore to look at film posters as the first review that the audience gets about the film and the actors get back the response prior to the marketing of their films.

<sup>xli</sup>Information gathered from *The Pather Panchali Sketchbook* by Satyajit Ray, published by Harper Collins India in 2016.

<sup>xlii</sup>The plot of the film is the driving factor in such films. There is no way in which the film can be a successful one merely on the star power. Such films are not a rare sight in the recent years.

<sup>xliii</sup>The concept cinema as a form is a part of the new wave of experimental plots and new trends in film subjects. The concept in the film mentioned is that of a dyslexic boy who is an underperformer in academics but is a brilliant painter. The function that Khan plays here is that of a voice of reason. He brings out the best out of the boy and makes his parents realize his brilliance.

<sup>xliv</sup>Audience today are more exposed to interviews, social media and therefore the point of view of a film-maker and a film-star is much easily available for the audience. With changing time, interaction between a fan and a star has not been limited to film magazines and articles. Therefore, the informed audience is someone who can find out more about the film before they decide to watch it.

<sup>xlv</sup>In an interview taken in the stall of Sister Nivedita University during the Kolkata International Book Fair of 2023 Dr. De had talked about the importance of the book cover. This is an excerpt from the said interview.

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<sup>xlvi</sup>These are effectively used spaces that people make use of to click photographs. This is made to cater to the social media addicted audience who feels it compulsory to update their whereabouts on the social media page. This gives the space a kind of acquired importance in a movie theatre.

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