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Laura Mulvey and Bollywood songs : male gaze and female spectatorship

Ananya Sensharma
San Jose State University

LAURA MULVEY AND BOLLYWOOD SONGS:
MALE GAZE AND FEMALE SPECTATORSHIP

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Ananya Sensharma

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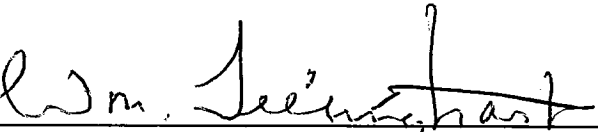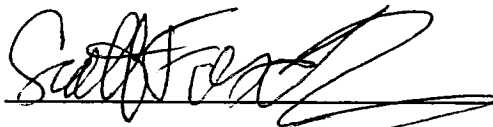
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Dr. Diana Stover

Dr. William Tillinghast

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ABSTRACT

LAURA MULVEY AND BOLLYWOOD SONGS:
MALE GAZE AND FEMALE SPECTATORSHIP

by Ananya Sensharma

This thesis examined Indian mainstream film songs
through the lens of Laura Mulvey's (1975) Lacanian
psychoanalytic argument concerning the male gaze and female
spectatorship in classical narrative cinema. The content
analysis was designed to determine whether Mulvey's
argument was applicable to songs in mainstream Hindi films.
The study found not only the presence of a strong male gaze
in the Hindi film songs but also the presence of a female
gaze although it is dominated by the male gaze. The
existence of a female gaze runs counter to Mulvey's
argument. The study also found that the female spectator,
whose presence and perspective is real, is unlike that of
Mulvey's female spectator who has to undergo transvestitism
to enjoy the traditional narrative cinema.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Cinema as a medium has a lot to do with how people

view the world and how people view others and themselves.

It is unarguably a strong medium in that it molds people's

perceptions and impressions. Being an audio-visual medium,

it has a wider reach than literature, and transcends

barriers of class, literacy, religion, and even language.

It strongly captures one's sense and sensibilities and its

verisimilitude definitely has an impact on one's

understanding of how things are and should be. This is

what makes cinema so likeable as well as so potent.

The Indian mainstream film industry has been a

thriving and a lucrative one. A trend in recent mainstream

Indian cinema has been the *Westernization* of the heroine.

In contrast to her predecessors she is more emancipated and

even looks more Western as Saidullah (2002, ¶ 4) noted:

> . . . for lack of a better word—white, with light hair
> dye and colored contacts, this new slew of actresses
> with their well-toned abs and perfect figures look
> neither fish nor fowl. They definitely don't look
> Indian, which I suppose was the intention.

Many critics including Prasad (2003) and Shabana Azmi

a successful actress, who has made her mark in the field of

parallel Hindi cinema, have attacked the new "look" of the
Indian screen heroine: "We are left to marvel at how far
the Indian femme has progressed from the wrapped up images
of yesteryear" (Prasad, 2003). Shaikh (2002) conducted an
interview with Shabana Azmi in which she explained her
views on the representation of heroines in Hindi films:

> I don't think there is anything wrong with women
> celebrating their sexuality provided they are not at
> the same time surrendering to the male gaze. This is
> what happens frequently in mainstream cinema, and this
> is a problem because women are still allowing
> themselves to be commodified . . . . In that famous
> song, for instance, "Choli key peechay kya hai?" there
> were images of a heaving bosom, a swiveling hip, and
> so on, which catered entirely to the male gaze. This
> is a serious problem. (Shaikh, 2002, ¶ 18)

Virdi (2003) noted that a film historian plotting the
social history of women in postcolonial India through
popular Hindi films confronts endless examples where women
characters are ubiquitous but they lack depth or dimension,
and are sexualized, victimized, or marginalized (Virdi,
2003). It has been noted by many critics that most of the
female actresses are depicted in an exploitative manner in
which their images in films cater to the gaze of male
moviegoers and in which their characters are sometimes just
reduced to glamorized presences in the films. Sue Thornham
(1999), in her book, *Feminist film theory: A reader,* noted
that it is difficult to envisage a utopian moment when

images of women will reflect the realities of women's lives because cinematic representations are far complex than this.

According to Pendakur (2003), male Indian stars not only dominate the narrative of the films but also the industry and stories revolving around the heroine are an exception to the rule (Pendakur, 2003). Pendakur noted that it has been an observable fact that roles given to actresses in Hindi films have almost always lived up to their stereotypical traditions (2003). She is mostly found to be innocent, long suffering, sacrificing, wronged but forgiving, understanding, sinful, and penitent (2003). More often that not, women of strength who have a career take a back seat as wives or mothers, are found guilty, or are punished (2003).

It is a fact that films produced in a country reflect its cultural and societal norms. India has come a long way from the time of its independence in 1947. Indian women have become more educated and self-sufficient than ever before. The Indian government has established numerous programs and measures for the advancement of the girl child who traditionally has been left behind, or has been given second-class treatment in comparison with her male

siblings. The modern urban Indian woman is a picture of confidence and self-reliance. Mainstream Indian films do depict this picture. The urban woman who is savvy, educated, has a job, and is also Westernized is not an uncommon sight in Hindi films of today. Westernization of the urban community is a visible phenomenon in Indian society and is strongly depicted in mainstream cinema in the way the actors/actresses are made to talk, dress, and behave. Indian actresses over the years have definitely become more adventurous with their on-screen personas and appearances. But Shabana Azmi explained that the intended sensuousness of the heroine ends up looking vulgar, forced, and crude and, when one looks at these images, the fact that they cater to the male gaze becomes apparent (Shaikh, 2002).

The question of how film plays both to and upon socially established systems of desire, fantasy, and fear received one of its most significant treatments in Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Originally published in 1975, this essay has become one of the most important and influential in film studies and feminist theory. Mulvey's objective in the essay is clear: she wishes to place questions of sexual difference at the

center of the debate surrounding the application of psychoanalysis to film studies. Mulvey is concerned with exploring, through psychoanalysis, the representation of woman as image in film and the concomitant *masculinization* of the spectator position. Much debate has taken place in the arena of feminist film theory regarding the concepts of *male gaze* and *female spectatorship.*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze feminist film theory in the context of concepts such as male gaze and female spectatorship from Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* and then relate these concepts to contemporary popular song sequences in Hindi mainstream cinema. A content analysis of Hindi/Bollywood film songs that have been major hits was conducted. The focus of the content analysis was to determine the nature of cinematic conventions in contemporary Hindi film songs when it comes to the phenomena of the male gaze and female spectatorship.

There has been considerable research on feminist film theories and a large number of content analyses of various Hollywood films have been undertaken to examine Laura Mulvey's contention in her essays. There have also been

some Indian popular cinema studies done with feminist film

theories as well as with other critical approaches. This

study was designed to empirically analyze mainstream

Bollywood film songs with the concepts of Mulvey's male

gaze and female spectatorship.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The growing trend of exposure of female bodies in Hindi mainstream cinema and their Westernized looks hardly match the image of the Indian woman on the street. The purpose and the need for depiction of these images lie with perhaps the demand and supply mode that is to be seen in any market. Film production is a business that, like any other business, will cater to what is popular and marketable.

The purpose of the literature review is to provide an overview of the theories of *male gaze* and *female spectatorship* in feminist film theory. The literature review will focus on two questions: 1) Is the male gaze so pervasive that it is the only way to view traditional cinema? 2) Does the female spectator, in the context of Bollywood songs, obtain cinematic pleasure without going through transvestitism, as suggested by Mulvey?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for the literature is based on the main contentions of Mulvey's 1975 and 1981 feminist film criticism essays, as well as the discussions and the critiques of the essay by feminist film critics. The literature review is divided into five sections. The first

section is a discussion highlighting the important concepts discussed by Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. The second and third sections are the review of literature on the two important concepts that are in Mulvey's essays, the concepts of male gaze and female spectatorship, respectively. The section on male gaze is further divided into sub-sections that will differentiate its proponent views from its opponent views. The section on female spectatorship is divided into sub-sections such as the *masculinization* of the female spectator and the real female spectator. The fourth section is a brief discussion of feminist film theory today and the fifth section deals with contemporary feminist discussions related to Hindi mainstream cinema. The final section is a summary of the literature reviewed.

Summary of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*

In her groundbreaking article, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey (1975) delineated the visual and thematic trend of Hollywood cinema. She developed the concept of the male gaze that has become one of the dominant paradigms in feminist film theory. Mulvey explained that she had used psychoanalytic theory as "a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of

patriarchal society has structured film form" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 6). Mulvey noted that fascination with the cinema could be explained psychoanalytically through the notion of "scopophilia", the desire to see, which is a fundamental drive according to Freud (p. 8). Sexual in origin, like all drives—the curiosity to see is the elemental fascination of cinema. Cinema, added Mulvey, stimulates the desire to look by integrating structures of voyeurism and narcissism into the story and the image. Voyeuristic visual pleasure is produced when the spectator gains gratification from indulging in unlicensed looking at an image, typically of a woman. Again, Mulvey pointed out that narcissistic (mis)recognition of self in an idealized figure on screen, typically the male hero, is the other visual pleasure.

Mulvey (1975) analyzed scopophilia in cinema as a structure that functions on the axis of activity and passivity, a binary opposition, which is gendered and is signified, through sexual difference: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly" (p. 11). Mulvey noted that, in

traditional cinema, the narrative structure clearly

establishes the male character as active and powerful for

he is the agent around whom the dramatic action unfolds and

the look gets organized (1975). Her essay showed how

narrative and filmic conventions in classical cinema make

voyeurism a male prerogative. Smelik (1998) noted that

Mulvey's essay brought out the point, that within the

narrative of the film, male characters direct their gaze

towards female characters and the spectator in the theater

is automatically and often unconsciously made to identify

with the male look, because the camera films from the

optical, as well as libidinal point of view of the male

character (Smelik, 1998). Mulvey (1975) reasoned that

there are thus three levels of cinematic gaze (camera,

character and spectator) that objectify the female

character and make her into a spectacle, and that in

traditional cinema voyeurism connotes women as *to-be-
looked-at-ness*:

> In their traditional exhibitionist role women are
> simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their
> appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact
> so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-
> ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-
> motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to striptease,
> from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look,
> plays to and signifies male desire. (p. 11)

Mulvey (1975) explained narcissistic visual pleasure with Lacan's concepts of ego formation and the mirror stage. There is an analogy between the way a child derives pleasure from the identification with a perfect mirror image and forms its ego ideal on the basis of this idealized image, and the way in which the film spectator derives narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the perfected image of a human figure on the screen (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey argued that cinematic identifications were structured along the lines of sexual difference. Representation of the "more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" of the male hero stands in stark opposition to the distorted image of the passive female character (Mulvey, 1975, p. 12). Hence the spectator is actively made to identify with the male rather than the female character in the film.

There are therefore two aspects to visual pleasure that are negotiated through sexual difference: the voyeuristic-scopophilic gaze and narcissistic identification. Both of these formative structures depend for their meaning upon the controlling power of the male character as well as on the objectified representation of the female character (Mulvey, 1975).

In psychoanalytic terms the image of *woman* is fundamentally ambiguous in that it combines attraction and seduction with an evocation of castration anxiety (Mulvey, 1975). Because her appearance also reminds the male subject of the lack of a penis, the female character is a source of much deeper fears (Mulvey, 1975). Now, the male unconscious has two avenues of escape, one through the narrative structure and the other through fetishism (Mulvey, 1975). The first course will need the female character to be found guilty and she should be punished or her guilt should be salvaged (Mulvey, 1975). The second course is fetishizing the woman, that is, turning her represented figure into a fetish or a hyper-polished object that will deflect the attention from the female *lack* (of the phallus) and transform her from a dangerous object to a reassuring object of physical beauty (Mulvey, 1975):

> The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look. (p. 14)

Male Gaze

The Proponent Views

With Mulvey (1975) and Johnston (1973), the notion of male gaze has become a shorthand term for the analysis of

complex mechanisms in cinema that involve structures such
as voyeurism, narcissism, and fetishism. The issue of *male
gaze* has been the subject of much debate among feminist
film theorists and critics.

Feminist film critics including Johnston (1973),
Devereaux (1990), and Smith (1972) echoed Mulvey's (1975)
position on the gaze being masculine. They all agreed that
within "a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema,
woman is presented as what she represents for man"
(Johnston, 1973, p. 33). The artistic canon is
"androcentric" and hence "politically repressive," which
further translates into the equation: "the medium = male =
patriarchal = oppressive" (Devereaux, 1990, p. 338).
Although the woman's role in a film revolves around her
sexual attraction and the mating games she plays with the
male characters, the man is not shown purely in relation to
the female characters but in a wide variety of roles
(Smith, 1972). Like Mulvey, Johnston brought in Freudian
psychoanalysis to explain the concept of fetishism, which
she pointed out, was a phallic replacement or a projection
of the male narcissistic fantasy (1973). Devereaux also
noted that women are "doubly victimized"; first, they are

positioned in a certain way in films by men, and second, they are eroticized (1990).

Mulvey (1975), Devereux (1990), and Smith (1972) asserted that in a male-dominated film industry, despite the existence of women filmmakers, a patriarchal way of seeing the world prevails and that few filmmakers think twice about their complicity in sex-role stereotyping. Smith noted that, even when the film has just one strong female character, it would invariably revert to clichéd actions and motivations for other female characters (Smith, 1972). But, Johnston (1973) suggested an alternative to the rigid structures of male-dominated cinema through the notion of films as both an entertainment and a political tool to "counter our (women's) objectification" and hence women's cinema should be a "counter-cinema" (Johnston, 1973, p. 36).

The Opponent Views

Critics, including Rich (1978), Rodowick (1982), Stacey (1987), and Carroll (1990), critically opposed the male gaze concept. In their views, Johnston (1973) and Mulvey (1975) were too pessimistic in their analyses of a women being absent in the audience (for she has to identify with the active male view of the film) and a woman being

absent on the screen (for she is nothing but a fetishism or representation of the phallus). Rodowick (1982) and Carroll (1990) objected to the use of psychoanalysis as a tool to study cinematic traditions. Rich (1978), Rodowick (1982), and Stacey (1987) brought in issues of sexual orientation to counter the concept of the gaze being masculine. Rodowick noted that Mulvey did not consider the fact that active sexual gaze could be directed towards the male figure in the film. Stacey questioned the psychoanalytic film theory of male gaze by pointing out a film situation, where the female protagonist is the agent and articulator of desire for another woman in the narrative.

Snow (1989) noted an interesting aspect of the problem of the notion of the male gaze. Snow noted that the masculine vision in feminist film theory/feminism almost always is characterized as patriarchal, phallocentric, and ideological and the term *male* remains an almost perpetual negative term (Snow, 1989). Snow reasoned that the concept of male gaze—where the masculine vision is reduced to terms such as power, violence, and control "can become an unwitting agent to the very forces of surveillance it wishes to oppose," and that this can help to vanish

whatever there is to the male gaze outside of "patriarchal," "guilty," "damaging," and "illicitly possessive every male view of women," because no other terms could have better served the "paternal superego" (p. 31).

Although Stacey (1987) and Rodowick (1982) focused on the problem of the psychoanalytic tool in the study of the *gaze*, postcolonial theorists such as Gaines (1988) and hooks (1992) directed the problem of the gaze towards issues such as race and class. Gaines noted that, although the concepts of male gaze and masculine spectatorial pleasure are unable to theorize a lesbian viewing position, they also they contributed to the omission of the specificity of black women's positioning (Gaines, 1988). Gaines revealed that the dominant feminist paradigm actually encourages one not to think in terms of any oppression other than male dominance and female subordination and that, women of color, like lesbians, are an afterthought in feminist analysis of films (1988). Gaines explained that, unlike white feminists, black feminist film critics/women do not necessarily see the black male as a patriarchal antagonist, but feel instead

that they share their racial oppression with men (Gaines,

1988).

> Finally the notion of patriarchy is most obtuse when
> it disregards the position white women occupy over
> black men as well as black women. In order to rectify
> this tendency in feminism, black feminists refer to
> 'racial patriarchy, which is based on an analysis of
> the white patriarch/master in US history, and his
> dominance over the black male as well as the black
> female. (Gaines, 1988, p. 295)

Although white feminists view the female image in

terms of objectification, fetishization, and symbolic

absence, their black counterparts describe the body as the

site of symbolic resistance and the *paradox of non-being*, a

reference to the period in Afro-American history when black

female did not signify 'woman' (Gaines, 1988, p. 303).

hooks (1999), like Gaines, explained that feminist film

theory, for its reliance on a psychoanalytic perspective

that places sexual difference as "the primary and/or

exclusive signifier of difference," allows the white woman

to believe that she is speaking for all women (hooks,

1999). hooks (1999) asserted that the black female places

herself outside the structures of cinematic visual pleasure

proposed by Mulvey (1975) and Doane (1982), developing

instead a critical or oppositional gaze:

> From 'jump,' black female spectators have gone to
> films with awareness of the way in which race and
> racism determined the visual construction of gender.

Whether it was *Birth of a Nation* or Shirley Temple
shows, we knew that white womanhood was the racialized
sexual difference occupying the place of stardom in
mainstream narrative film. We assumed white women knew
it too. Reading Laura Mulvey's provocative essay,
'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' from a
standpoint that acknowledges race, one sees clearly
why black women spectators not duped by mainstream
cinema would develop an oppositional gaze. Placing
ourselves outside that pleasure in looking, Mulvey
argues, was determined by a 'split between active/male
and passive/female.' Black female spectators actively
chose not to identify with the film's imaginary
subject because such identification was disenabling.
(p. 313)

Female Spectatorship

Masculinization of the Female Subject

McCabe (2004) noted that, since the publication of her

influential essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,*

Mulvey was repeatedly asked why she has referred to the

spectator as *he*; her response was that her interest lay in

the relationship of the woman's image on the screen to the

tendency of classical Hollywood cinema to masculinize the

spectator irrespective of gender (McCabe, 2004). Her essay

has been critically attacked for what some scholars see as

the blatant omission of the female spectator. In her

essay, *Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative*

Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*, Mulvey

(1989) clarified the position of the female spectator.

Mulvey contended that the heroine of traditional cinema is

unable to achieve a stable sexual identity and that her
oscillation between masculine and feminine positions is
"echoed by the woman spectator's masculine point of view"
(Mulvey, 1981, p. 30). In short, the female spectator
still has to adopt the male perspective, although this now
derives from the "grammar" of the film narrative and
traditions that make trans-sex identification habitual and
"second nature" (p. 32-33).

Like Mulvey (1981), Doane (1982) approached the issue
of female spectatorship with the help of psychoanalysis
through the concept of the masquerade. Doane argued that
the wearing of femininity as a mask could allow the female
spectator to create a distance between herself and the
image on the screen. Rather than over-identifying with it,
she can play with the identifications offered by the film,
manipulating them for her own pleasure and purpose (1982).
Whereas Mulvey's "transvestite" spectator must fantasize
masculinity to obtain cinematic pleasure, Doane's
"feminine" spectator can play at being a woman.

The Real Female Spectator

Although both Mulvey (1981) and Doane (1982) offered
solutions to the problem of the female spectator grounded
in psychoanalytic theory, Citron et al. (1978), Rich

(1978), Thornham (1999), Betterton (1985), Rodowick (1982),
and Mayne (1990) viewed female spectatorship as a real
experience that can both give pleasure and meaning. Both
Mayne and Rich explored the issue of women's experience as
film viewers. Mayne noted that women are objects of
spectacle in their everyday lives as well as in film, but
they are also spectators, and, as spectators, women are
caught up in relations of desire for, as well as
identification with, the female figures in film (1990).
Like Mayne, Betterton (1985) dealt with the question of
spectatorship, both male and female, in relationship to
representation of women's bodies. Betterton argued that
women can and do respond to images of themselves in ways
that are different from and cannot be reduced to masculine
ways of seeing. She further asserted that, if pleasure in
looking is split between the active/male and
passive/female, then how does one explain a woman's
enjoyment of certain images, especially within categories
such as the nude (1985). Like Thornham (1999) who objected
to the borrowed masculinization of the female spectator as
suggested by Mulvey (1981), Citron et al. (1978) asserted
that women satisfactorily account for the position as
female spectators.

As discussed earlier, with respect to the male gaze, hooks (1999) and Gaines (1988) not only legitimized the position of the female spectator but also that of the black female spectator.

Feminist Film Theory Today

Critics such as Fischer (2002), Petro (2004), and Hammett (1997) considered whether feminist film theory is relevant today. Both Fischer and Hammett questioned whether feminist film critics needed film theory. Hammet (1997) noted that feminists cannot and need not achieve a critical distance from their beliefs, or a realist epistemology, and feminists, to challenge patriarchy do not need a different epistemological relation to the real (1997). Petro (2004) noted that one should constantly rethink, refine, and recall feminist film theory because of the "impermanence of both modernity and our own histories" (Petro, 2004, p. 278). Like Petro, McCabe (2004) explained that feminist film theory is a discourse, which should continue to be analyzed and repeatedly discussed (McCabe, 2004). Columpar (2002) explained that the influence of postcolonial studies on film theory has led to the creation of concepts that bring forward racial and national difference and has recognized the role that race and

ethnicity played in "looking relations" (Columpar, 1997, p. 26). According to Columpar, postcolonial critics have asserted the existence of an ethnographic gaze as monolithic and have allowed for the emergence of a more nuanced feminist practice within film studies.

Kuhn (2004), summarizing the relevance of the psychoanalytical approach to feminist film studies, explained that it is sometimes abstruse and complicated and cannot explain certain realistic positions of desire nor can it help in the study of cultural ethnography and audience research—both important aspects of cultural studies; however, he stressed that it has a lot to offer to film theory (Kuhn, 2004).

Whatever the contentions of the critics, it is important to note that feminist film criticism paved the way for a reconstructed and innovative way of looking at cinema. As Smelik (1998) aptly noted, that feminist film studies opened up the powerful camera eye to new fields of vision and, "once the mirror has cracked, the silver screen will never look the same again" (p. 6).

Feminist Film Discussions on Mainstream Indian Cinema

Datta (2000) examined the process of gender representations in Indian cinema, primarily Hindi cinema,

and showed how ideological and market forces impact this
process. Datta examined the socio-political national
scenario in reading Hindi filmic conventions. Datta noted
that the advent of satellite television in the 1980s,
suddenly changed the Indian viewers' worldview, and foreign
images and culture came to be a part of everyday experience
for the viewers. Hence narrative cinema was quick to
accommodate the dominant image (Datta, 2000). Datta
(2000), used the theoretical argument that the post modern
can be seen as a result of the commodification of the image
itself:

> Postmodern strategies of parody and pastiche simply
> serve to maintain the male domination of
> representation. In Indian mainstream cinema we
> continue to see a patriarchal version of female
> sexuality. Masculinity is defined as the muscular
> body and physical aggression. (p. 73)

Virdi (2003) echoed Datta (2000) in her juxtaposition
of reading of films' narrative and representational
strategies with the sociocultural and political context
within which they were produced, circulated, and debated.
For this, Virdi (2003) used film theory, cultural studies,
and postcolonial theory. Both Datta and Virdi traced a
number of key periods of transition of Hindi cinema. For
instance, phases like post independence euphoria,
modernization and shift from a feudal to a democratic

social order, rise of the feminist movement, and liberalization. Virdi (2003, p.12) showed how discussions of nation, class, caste, and community rest on "the sharp hierarchy of institutionalized gender inequality."

Virdi (2003) noted that in Hindi popular films, the song and dance sequences stand in for sex scenes and that the focus is primarily on the heroine, "the fetishized female sexualized through close attention to her costumes, graceful body movements, and carefully angled shots that heighten scopic pleasure" (Virdi, 2003, p. 146). Both Virdi (2003) and Datta (2000) dealt with that facet in Hindi films where the woman, however emancipated or modern she might be, carries the onus of maintaining traditional values and culture for the family. Both Datta and Virdi criticized the way rape scenes in Hindi cinema attain a voyeuristic mode and the body of the heroine becomes an object of male gaze in a very masochistic manner.

Like Mulvey (1975), Virdi (2003) asserted that reading women's lives from film texts alone would be flawed. Virdi explained that texts of Hindi popular films remind one of how women are still doubly vitiated and subordinated by a nationalist patriarchy and a sexist film industry where women have no access to the means of film production, and

are still virtually unrepresented as directors, producers, or screenwriters.

Mishra (2002), who analyzed Raj Kapoor films, agreed with Mulvey (1975) in that "whereas the women are displayed as erotic objects, it is men who enjoy the look" (p. 95). Mishra (2002) differed from Mulvey (1989) on the point of female spectatorship. Although Mulvey insisted on complete foreclosure as far as the female spectator is concerned, Mishra contended that the look of the camera, which is patriarchal and male, can be freed if one were to radically postulate a female spectator and, if he/she were "to return to the centrality of the female character in the genre of melodrama" (p. 96).

Summary of the Literature Review

With Mulvey (1975) and Johnston (1973), the notion of the male gaze has become a shorthand term for the analysis of complex mechanisms in cinema that involve structures of voyeurism, narcissism, and fetishism. These concepts help to provide an understanding of how Hollywood cinema is tailor-made for male-desire. Because the structures of Hollywood cinema are analyzed as fundamentally patriarchal, these early feminist theorists declared that a feminist film should shun narrative and cinematic techniques and

engage in experimental practice: thus feminist cinema should be counter-cinema. Feminist film critics such as Devereaux (1990), De Lauretis (1984), and Doane (1982) supported Mulvey's (1975) claim that the gaze being masculine. Devereaux noted that the male gaze inscribed in art triggers women's deep-seated inclination to adapt themselves to the male viewpoint. Whereas Mulvey's transvestite spectator must fantasize masculinity to obtain cinematic pleasure, Doane's 'feminine' spectator can play at being a woman.

Since these critics focused on the spectator implied, imagined, or constructed by the text rather than on the socially constructed *woman in the audience,* their works were criticized by some scholars, including Mayne (1990), Rich (1978), Betterton (1985), Rodowick (1982), and Stacey (1982). They returned to the issue of women's experience as film viewers, asserting that the relationship between the female spectator and the screen cannot be a straightforward one and cannot follow the active male/passive female division proposed by psychoanalytic theory. Critics such as Fischer (2002), Petro (2004), and Hammet (1997) noted the issue of the relevancy of feminist film theory. Both Fischer and Hammet questioned whether

feminist film critics need film theory, but Petro noted
that film critics should constantly rethink, refine, and
recall feminist film theory because of the impermanence of
both modernity and mankind's histories.

In terms of the context of Indian mainstream cinema,
critics such as Virdi (2003) and Datta (2000) dealt with
the facet in Hindi films where the woman, however
emancipated or modern she might be, carries the onus of
maintaining traditional values and culture for the family.
Datta and Virdi criticized the way Hindi cinema attains a
voyeuristic mode and the body of the heroine becomes an
object of male gaze in a very masochistic manner. Mishra
(2002) and Virdi (2003) noted that women are portrayed as
erotic objects because of the patriarchal mode of filmic
convention. But Mishra (2002) differed from Mulvey (1989)
on the point of female spectatorship. Mishra stressed
that, although Mulvey insisted on complete foreclosure as
far as the female spectator is concerned, she is definitely
present when it comes to the centrality of the female
character in the genre of melodrama.

Research Questions

To analyze whether Mulvey's contentions about male gaze
and female spectatorship are applicable to Hindi mainstream

cinema, a content analysis of the song sequences of 7 films was conducted. The two research questions are as follows: 1) Do Indian mainstream Bollywood songs run on the 'male gaze' convention in a manner similar to that analyzed by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in her seminal essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*? 2) Does the female spectator, in the context of Bollywood songs, obtain cinematic pleasure without going through transvestitism, as suggested by Mulvey?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Since the focus of the study was film songs, the method most suitable for study was content analysis. A quantitative and a qualitative content analysis of the film songs were conducted to answer the research questions: 1) Do Indian mainstream Bollywood songs run on the male gaze convention in a manner similar to that analyzed by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in her seminal essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*? 2) Does the female spectator, in the context of Bollywood songs, obtain cinematic pleasure without going through transvestitism, as suggested by Mulvey?

Why Quantitative Content Analysis?

Holsti (1969) offered a broad definition of content analyses as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). Content analysis helps researchers to sift through a large amount of data in a systemic fashion. It also allows inferences to be made, which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection. Krippendorff (1980, p. 51) noted that "content analysis research is motivated by

the search for techniques to infer from symbolic data what would be either too costly, no longer possible, or too obtrusive by the use of other techniques."

Hocking, Stacks, and McDermott (2003) noted that quantitative content analysis is the systematic study and quantification of the content of communication messages, and it involves the creation of categories that are designed to allow a particular research question to be answered by counting the number of instances of content within a message that fall within a certain predetermined category (Hocking, Stacks, & McDermott, 2003). For the research, a quantitative analysis helped to determine, for example, the number of times of occurrence of a particular component of the camera, spectator, and character gazes throughout a film song.

Why Qualitative Content Analysis?

Buddenbaum and Novak (2001) noted that qualitative content analysis is used to reveal the latent meaning of messages (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). A qualitative content analysis does not need any statistical analysis but certainly needs some codes that form the key words to sift through qualitative texts (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). A qualitative/textual analysis for the proposed research will

help in studying the cinematic traditions that cannot be quantitatively grasped. Also, it was of special help in answering the second research question—Does the female spectator, in the context of Bollywood songs, obtain cinematic pleasure without going through transvestitism, as suggested by Mulvey?

It should also be kept in mind that the two fatal flaws that destroy the utility of a content analysis are faulty definitions of categories and mutually non-exclusive and exhaustive categories.

<div align="center">Sample Frame</div>

The songs chosen for content analysis consisted of all the songs of 7 top grossing mainstream Hindi/Bollywood films. That is, from the year 2000-2006, all the songs in each top grossing film of the year were content analyzed. The songs were content analyzed with reference to aspects such as the *male gaze* and *female spectatorship*. Table 1 provides a chart of blockbuster films, their corresponding year, and their number of songs.

Table 1 has been represented from the website: www.boxofficeindia.com and it has the list of the top grossing films from the year 2000-2006. A total of 43 songs were content-analyzed.

Table 1

Sample of Films Analyzed in this Study

Movie *n* = 7	Title	Year	Net Gross in Indian Rupees (In Millions)	Net Gross in U.S. Dollars (In Millions)	Number Of Song Sequences *n* = 43
1	KAHO NAA PYAR HAI	2000	340	7.6	7
2	GADAR: EK PREM KATHA	2001	700	15.5	8
3	DEVDAS	2002	360	8.0	7
4	KOI MIL GAYA	2003	430	9.5	6
5	VEER ZAARA	2004	420	9.3	5
6	NO ENTRY	2005	449	9.9	6
7	KRRISH	2006	640	14.3	4

Note. The English translations of the Hindi movie titles are as follows: Kaho Naa Pyar Hai = Say You Love Me; Gadar: Ek Prem Katha = The Uprisisng: A Love Story; Devdas = Devdas; Koi Mil Gaya = I Found Someone; Veer Zaara = Veer Zaara; No Entry = No Entry; Krrish = Krrish.

Coding the Content

Once it was decided that content analysis was the appropriate method of inquiry for the social research, the next step was setting up a coding scheme.

1. *Films/Songs:* This category listed the names of the 7 films, each of which have been top grossing films from 1997 to 2006. Each film had its corresponding songs listed alongside.

The next categories were the gaze categories. Mulvey (1975) noted that there are 3 levels of cinematic gaze (camera, spectator, and character) that objectify the female character and make her into a spectacle (Mulvey, 1975). Thus the aspect of male gaze was studied by breaking down the concept of Mulvey's male gaze into 3 components: the gaze of the camera, the gaze of the actor, and the gaze of the spectator, and such components were used to measure the prevalence or non-prevalence of male gaze in Hindi film songs. Hence the gaze categories following the Films/Songs category were:

2. *Gaze of the Camera:* This is the first voyeuristic-scopophilic element of the 3 cinematic gaze levels (Mulvey, 1975). This is the entity that records the pro-filmic event and, in the traditional cinematic tradition, there is

always a conscious effort to do away with the intrusive presence of the camera and hence prevent a distanced form of witnessing an event (Mulvey, 1975). As the camera filmed the male and the female lead in the film song sequences, 2 important components were coded: the Duration of Camera Gaze and Camera Gaze Focus.

2a. *Duration of Camera Gaze:* Since the study was about the phenomena of male gaze and female spectatorship, it was necessary to measure the total length of time in seconds that the Camera focused on the male and female actors in a particular song.

2b. *Camera Gaze Focus:* To measure whether the female actress is fetishized as Mulvey (1975) asserted, the focus of the camera on the actors' physical characteristics was coded. The characteristics that were coded were face, whole body, eyes, chest, lips, navel, bare back, muscles, and legs. It should be noted that, although the focus of the study was the male gaze, the physical characteristics of both the male and female lead actors were measured to maintain objectivity and for purposes of comparison.

3. *Gaze of the Spectator:* This is the second element of the cinematic gaze that Mulvey (1975) discussed in her essay. Mulvey theorized that the gaze of the audience as

it watches the film is male because a "woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude" (Mulvey, 1975, p 12). Thus, according to Mulvey, as "the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist," he focuses his look on that of the male actor, his "screen surrogate," so that "the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (p 12). Thus the gaze of the spectator was further subcategorized as:

3a. *Spectator Gaze Aligned with the Male Actor:* The number of times in a song, the spectator's gaze was aligned with the gazes of the male actor was coded. For instance, the number of times the spectator witnessed the camera and the male lead actor look at a female lead actor or any other object/view was coded.

3c. *Spectator Gaze Aligned with the Female Actor:* An example of this gaze would be the number of times the spectator witnessed the camera and the female actor looking at a male actor or any other object/view.

4. *The Gaze of the Actor:* The gazes of the lead male and female actors in the film song were coded. According

to Mulvey, "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female." Women, in their traditional exhibitionist role, are "simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (p. 11). Thus she asserted that the male actor in the film is the bearer of the look while the female is the image. The Gaze of the Actor was sub-categorized as:

4a. *Male Actor Gaze:* The gaze of the male actor was coded as the number of times he was the only bearer of the look while the female actor was the image, and the number of times his gaze was reciprocated with the gaze of the female actor, that is, both were at the same time the images and the bearers of the look.

4b. *Female Actor Gaze:* The gaze of the female actor was coded as the number of times she was the only bearer of the look while the male actor was the image, and the number of times her gaze was reciprocated with the gaze of the male actor, and both were at the same time the images and the bearers of the look.

The quantitative content analysis Code Book is in the Appendix.

A qualitative content analysis or textual analysis of the film songs was also conducted. The qualitative/textual analysis focused on the same segments as that of the quantitative analysis so that they would be complementary. Special attention was also given to the attire of the characters in the songs, their expressions and gestures, and the setting of the song.

<p align="center">Intercoder Reliability</p>

To ensure the accuracy of the coding categories, 10% of each film song was randomly selected and recoded by a second coder.

The index of reliability coefficient, Scott's pi, was used to adjust for the coder agreement that would occur by chance, and this pi was calculated by the following equation:

$$pi = \frac{\% \text{ observed agreement} - \% \text{ expected agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ expected agreement}}$$

where % observed agreement is the percentage of coding decisions agreed on, and % expected agreement is the proportion of items falling into each category of a variable and summing the square of those proportions.

The overall Scott's pi index of reliability coefficient was .83, with the coefficients for the 26 measures ranging

from .89 for the spectator gaze aligned with female, to .78
for both camera gaze focus on chest (male) and muscles
(male). The intercoder reliability coefficients are listed
in the Code Book in Appendix.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study's main objective was to determine whether Mulvey's theories of male gaze and female spectatorship hold true when it comes to Indian mainstream film songs. The song sequences of the top grossing Bollywood movies from 2000 to 2006 were coded so that the elements of male gaze as propounded by Mulvey could be analyzed. The components of the gaze were studied for both the male and female lead actors.

Research Question #1

Do Indian mainstream Bollywood songs run on the male gaze convention in a manner similar to that analyzed by Laura Mulvey in 1975 in her seminal essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*?

For the three levels of cinematic gaze (camera, spectator, and male character) that Mulvey (1975) asserted to be *male,* there was a statistically significant difference in the way the male lead and the female lead characters/actors were filmed. In addition, although there is a dominant male gaze, a female gaze is also present. The findings are discussed in the following three sections—

gaze of the camera, gaze of the spectator, and gaze of the actor.

Gaze of the Camera

The quantitative content analysis examined the elements of the gaze of the camera: (1) duration of camera gaze, and (2) camera gaze focus (See Tables 2 and 3). The results showed that, in the song sequences of 5 of the 7 Hindi movies, the camera focused more on the male lead characters than on the female lead characters. This supports Mulvey's assertion that the male character leads the film forward and he is the central theme around which the action unfolds (Mulvey, 1975).

Table 3 shows the extent to which the camera gaze focused on the male and female actors' whole body and body parts. The results support Mulvey's point of fetishism in her male gaze theory (See Tables 3 and 4). Mulvey (1975) wrote:

> The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look. (p. 14)

The camera gaze focus displayed the prevalence of the traits of Hindi cinematic focus on fragmented body parts. See Tables 3 and 4. The Camera focused on both the face

Table 2

Camera Gaze Duration: Amount of Time and Percent of Time the Camera Focused Exclusively on the Male and on the Female Lead Actors

		Male Actor		Female Actor	
Movie	n Total Time for Songs (In Seconds)	n Camera Time (In Seconds)	Percent Camera Time	n Camera Time (In seconds)	Percent Camera Time
1	2,595	931	36	475	18
2	2,432	523	22	508	21
3	2,231	276	12	900	40
4	2,198	466	21	199	9
5	1,530	291	19	389	25
6	1,897	438	23	239	13
7	1,481	294	20	190	13
Totals	14,364	3,291		2,900	

Note. In the movie column, 1 = Kaho Naa Pyar Hai (Say You Love Me), 2000; 2 = Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (The Uprising: A Love Story), 2001; 3 = Devdas (Devdas), 2002; 4 = Koi Mil Gaya (I Found Someone, 2003); 5 = Veer Zaara (Veer Zaara), 2004; 6 = No Entry (No Entry), 2005; 7 = Krrish (Krrish), 2006.

Table 3

Number of Times the Camera Focused on the Male and Female Lead Actors' Body and Fragmented Body Parts

Movie	Male							Female						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Whole Body	101	90	21	106	38	93	46	45	69	80	63	46	61	31
Face	83	68	63	63	48	79	42	94	138	120	63	50	53	52
Eyes			2		1	5		1	2	18	3	1	8	
Chest/Breasts								8	2	1	1		14	
Muscles	13	2		3		9	11							
Lips								9	5	7	2	2	2	1
Navel								7		3	1	1	3	
Bare Back									1	4	4	2	6	3
Hips								2	1	4	5		10	3
Legs								8		3	8	1	23	1

Note. In the movie column, 1 = Kaho Naa Pyar Hai (Say You Love Me), 2000; 2 = Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (The Uprising: A Love Story), 2001; 3 = Devdas (Devdas), 2002; 4 = Koi Mil Gaya (I Found Someone, 2003); 5 = Veer Zaara (Veer Zaara), 2004; 6 = No Entry (No Entry), 2005; 7 = Krrish (Krrish), 2006.

Table 4

Differences in Camera Focus on Male and Female Lead Actors'
Face and Whole Body, and Fragmented Body Parts

	Male	Female
	$n = 987$	$n = 1079$
Face and Whole Body	95%	82%
Fragmented Body Parts	5	18

$x^2 = 86.323$, $d.f = 1$, $p < .001$

Note. Fragmented Body Parts = Eyes, Chest or Breasts,
Muscles, Lips, Navel, Bare Back, Hips, and Legs.

and whole body of both the sexes. In terms of fragmented body parts, the camera focused mainly on the muscles and chest of the male lead actors (See Table 3). But it predominantly focused on the eyes, lips, breasts, navel, hips, bare backs, and legs of the female lead actors (See Table 3). A chi-square test was used to determine if there was a difference in the amount of camera focus on male and female body parts. The results of the statistical test showed that the difference was highly significant at < .001. The focus on fragmented body parts of females was more than 3 times higher than that of males. Also, as Table 3 shows, the incidence of camera focus on the face was higher for female lead actors than for male in all movies except movie 6, *No Entry*.

In *No Entry* there was a higher incidence of camera focus on the faces of the male lead actors because in two of the song sequences of the film, there were several close-ups of their expressions as they watched one of the female lead characters (a show girl) dance enticingly and seductively for them.

The textual analysis found that the lead female actor was dressed more conservatively after she was married or after any serious incidents, whereas no perceptible changes

in attire was noticed in the case of the lead male actor throughout the movie song sequences. For examples, the female lead character of Sonia in movie 1, *Kaho Na Pyar Hai (Say You Love Me)* dressed more conservatively and much less revealingly in songs that were sad and serious, a sharp contrast to her mini-skirts and dresses that revealed her midriff, shoulders, breasts, and legs in songs that had a joyous theme. This contrast in clothing was also noticed in Movie 6, *No Entry*, the only film that had more than one leading female character. The two married lead female characters were much more conservatively dressed than the other two unmarried lead female characters who wore hot pants, short skirts, and clothes that exposed their cleavages, legs, navels, and bare backs.

The textual analysis also revealed an element of unsynchronized clothing that did not blend with the setting. For example, in one of the songs of Movie 1, *Kaho Na Pyar Hai (Say You Love Me)*, the male lead character named Raj is seen dressed appropriately for the snowy backdrop while the character of Sonya is scantily dressed. Also, in movie 5, *Veer Zaara,* in the song where the character of Zaara imagines the male lead character, Veer,

as her bridegroom on her wedding night, Veer is shown fully clothed when he begins to undress Zaara.

The textual analysis found elements of female objectification in many of the songs where the female lead actors were shown in a fragmented manner. The camera gaze focused on their eyes, breasts, lips, hips, bare backs, legs, and navel. The study found that the female lead actors were somewhat fetishized and objectified. This supports Mulvey's contention of fetishism in narrative cinema. Tables 3 and 4 also show that the male lead actors are also shown in a fragmented way: some instances of focus on eyes and multiple instances of focus on pectoral muscles. The objectification of the latter served as an expression of male strength and attractiveness. The study indicated, through the content analysis, the presence of objectification of the male actor although not as frequent or numerous as that of that of the female. As Table 4 shows, that the camera focus on fragmented female body parts in the 7 film, stands at 18% in contrast to its focus on male body parts at 5%.

It was noted that, when the camera gaze closed in on the male lead actor's face, it captured his emotions and feelings. This was the case, especially when it came to

lead actors who are particularly famous for their looks and brawn and have a huge female fan following. For examples when stars like Hrithik Roshan and Shahrukh Khan were present in the film songs, the camera moved in for numerous close-ups of their faces.

The objectification of female characters was strongest when there was the presence of backup female dancers in songs. The dancers were generally scantily dressed and the camera had close-up shots of fragmented parts of their bodies.

<div align="center">Gaze of the Spectator</div>

The spectator in the audience views the entire film not only as just a viewer, but he/she also views it through the perspective of the characters. According to Mulvey (1975), the gaze of the spectator (while he or she watches the film) is male, because a "woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude" (p. 12). The study found that, many more scenes were shot in the song sequences that made the spectator see what the male lead actor was seeing than what the female lead actor was seeing. Table 5 shows that

Table 5

Total Number of Times Spectator Gaze Aligned With That of
The Male and Female Lead Actors' Gaze in the Songs of Each
Movie

Movie	Sp. Gaze aligned with Male *n*	Sp. Gaze aligned with Female *n*
1	40	18
2	37	15
3	35	19
4	18	5
5	17	6
6	37	3
7	27	3
Total	211	69

t value = 4.18, *d.f* = 12, *p* < .001

Note. In the movie column, 1 = Kaho Naa Pyar Hai (Say You
Love Me), 2000; 2 = Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (The Uprising: A
Love Story), 2001; 3 = Devdas (Devdas), 2002; 4 = Koi Mil
Gaya (I Found Someone, 2003); 5 = Veer Zaara (Veer Zaara),
2004; 6 = No Entry (No Entry), 2005; 7 = Krrish (Krrish),
2006.

there was a significant difference between the number of times the spectator gaze aligned with the gaze of the male lead actor, and the number of times it aligned with the gaze of the female lead actor. The t-Test was statistically significant at < .001. More often than not, there was a higher incidence of camera focus moving away from the male lead actor toward what he was observing, imagining, or witnessing, than the incidence of camera focus on what the female lead actor was witnessing. Although Mulvey did not address the combination of the gaze of the spectator and that of the female characters, the phenomenon is very much present even though its incidence is considerably less than when it is male-centric.

Gaze of the Actor

Mulvey (1975) posited that, in "a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (p.11). Women, in their traditional exhibitionist role, are "simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (p. 11). Hence she asserted that the male actor in the film is the bearer of the look while the female is the image.

The quantitative content analysis supports the existence of both a male actor gaze and a female actor gaze in Hindi film songs. The study found that in each movie, considering the sum total of all the songs in it, the number of instances of the male lead actor being the bearer of the look while the lead female actor was the image surpassed considerably the incidences of the female lead actor being the bearer of the look while the lead male actor was the image. A t-Test showed that the difference was highly statistically significant at < .001 (See Table 6).

It is also interesting to note that, in all the films, the number of times the male lead actor was the only bearer of the look exceeded the number of times his look was reciprocated by the lead female actor. However in contrast, the number of times female actor gaze was reciprocated by the lead male actor surpassed the number of times she was the only bearer (See Table 6).

Although there were instances where the lead male actor's gaze was reciprocated by the gaze of the female lead actress, there were several more instances where the male lead actor looked at his female counterpart whilst she turned her look shyly, submissively, or focused her gaze at

Table 6

*Breakdown of Male And Female Actor Gaze by Number of Times
They Are the Bearer of the Look and Number of Times Their
Look Is Reciprocated*

	Bearer of the Look		Look is Reciprocated	
Movie	n Male	n Female	n Male	n Female
1	46	27	23	28
2	32	17	36	18
3	35	11	26	24
4	24	6	21	17
5	31		22	13
6	42	1	22	14
7	32	5	13	23
Total	242	67	163	137

t-Test for the bearer of the look
t value, $t = 5.45$, *d.f* = 12, $p < .001$

t-Test for reciprocated gaze
t value, $t = 1.11$, *d.f* = 12, $p < .288$

Note. In the movie column, 1 = Kaho Naa Pyar Hai (Say You Love
Me), 2000; 2 = Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (The Uprising: A Love Story),
2001; 3 = Devdas (Devdas), 2002; 4 = Koi Mil Gaya (I Found
Someone, 2003); 5 = Veer Zaara (Veer Zaara), 2004; 6 = No Entry
(No Entry), 2005; 7 = Krrish (Krrish), 2006.

a distant direction. The data, to a great extent, are in line with Mulvey's contention that the male is the bearer of the look and the female is the image in narrative cinema.

This study contradicts Mulvey's contention that there is only a male gaze in classical narrative cinema. This study found that there is a female gaze, as both bearer of the look and reciprocator of the male look, though the former function is found to be considerably less than the latter (See Table 6).

Research Question # 2

Does the female spectator, in the context of Bollywood songs, obtain cinematic pleasure without going through transvestitism, as suggested by Mulvey?

In the context of narrative cinema, Mulvey (1989) suggested the idea of transvestitism in her essay *Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*. Mulvey (1989) clarified the position of the female spectator, maintaining that the heroine of traditional cinema is unable to achieve a stable sexual identity and that her oscillation between the masculine and feminine positions is "echoed by the woman spectator's masculine point of view" (p. 30). In

short, the female spectator still has to adopt the male

perspective although this now derives from the "grammar" of

the film narrative and traditions that make trans-sex

identification habitual and "second nature" (pp. 32-33).

Both the quantitative and the qualitative content

analyses of the Bollywood songs in the 7 movies have found

a definite place for the female spectator and, unlike

Mulvey's female spectator who has to go through a kind of a

sexual transfiguration, the position of the female

spectator in the context of Bollywood songs has a real

existence both in perspective and in reality.

The study showed that the female spectator could watch

cinema as a female and not by masquerading as a man as

suggested by both Mulvey (1989) and Doane (1982). The

study provided evidence that the camera gaze, the spectator

gaze, and the female actor gaze all go together to prove

the presence of the female spectator.

As shown in Table 2, in all films except for movie 3,

Devdas, and movie 5, *Veer Zaara,* the total amount of time

the camera gaze focused exclusively on the male lead actor

surpassed the total amount of time the camera gaze focused

exclusively on the female lead actor. Hence the trend was

found to be toward the male lead actors enjoying more

exclusive time on the screen, which is an opportunity for both female and male spectators to enjoy the image.

The textual analysis found that the female actor in the song sequences enjoyed the gestures, expressions, and the song wordings mouthed by the male actor. The female actor's emotions are easily identifiable by a female spectator. Also, Table 6 shows that the female actor's gaze is not only reciprocated by the male actor but she is also the bearer of the gaze while he is the image. This presents an opportunity for the female spectator to merge her look with that of the female lead actor.

Coming to the gaze of the spectator, the content analysis indicated that the spectator gaze coincided with that of the female lead actor although it was less than the number of times the spectator gaze coincided with that of the male lead actor (see Table 5). Nevertheless, the study demonstrated the prevalence of the coincidence of the spectator gaze with that of the female lead and this established the point that the spectator has the opportunity to identify with the female lead and hence a female spectator wouldn't have to view film/film songs with the male perspective through the process of transvestitism as suggested by Mulvey (1989).

The textual analysis found that songs that portrayed the emotions and feelings of the lead female actors were bound to establish emotional bonds with the female spectators. For example, female spectators could find empathy for Zaara's song of separation in *Veer Zaara*, for Paro's songs of celebration, of attraction towards her male counterpart, of playfulness, and of love in *Devdas*. Female spectators could also sympathize with Sakeena's songs of pain and of wedded bliss in *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (*The Uprising: A Love Story*), and also vicariously enjoy Bobby's songs of romance and seduction in *No Entry*.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The portrayal of Indian women in Hindi mainstream film songs has undergone a marked change in recent decades. Their looks, expressions, clothes, and gestures in the film songs have become perceptively bolder and Westernized. Critics have noticed and have debated the representation of women in films and film songs that cater to the male gaze, a term that is now quite ubiquitous and pedestrian in feminist discourse. With this in mind, this study looked at Laura Mulvey's contentions about the male gaze, which she had applied to classic Hollywood cinema, and applied thses concepts to film songs in Hindi mainstream cinema.

This thesis examined film songs in Indian mainstream Hindi movies from 2000 to 2006, each movie being the top box-office hit of the year. The researcher content analyzed 43 film songs in segments that were elements of Mulvey's male gaze theory: gaze of the camera, gaze of the actor, and gaze of the spectator, which according to Mulvey, fuse to form a single male gaze. This study also analyzed the issue of female spectatorship, which emerged when Mulvey wrote about the heterosexual male gaze.

Quantitative Content Analysis

The content analysis based on segments of gaze of the camera, gaze of the actor, and gaze of the spectator showed that the camera gaze definitely is strongly male.

The camera focused on women's fragmented body parts such as their eyes, lips, breasts, navel, legs, bare backs, and hips, while it focused only on the fragmented male body parts such as their eyes, face, and muscles. The results showed that the camera focus on the fragmented body parts of female lead actors was significantly higher than the camera focus on the fragmented body parts of male lead actors ($p < .001$). This indicates that Bollywood fimmakers deliberately film male and female actors differently. The reason could be that the patriarchal culture of India has been so ingrained in the Bollywood psyche that it has conditioned mainstream Hindi filmmakers to film male and female actors differently. This possibility is found in the argument of Mulvey (1975) in relation to Hollywood, and in the arguments of Mishra (2002) and Virdi (2003) in relation to Bollywood. Both Mishra and Virdi noted that women are portrayed as erotic objects in Hindi mainstream cinema because of the patriarchal attitude in the film

industry that, in turn, reflects Indian culture and society.

In the film songs of 5 of the 7 movies, the camera focused exclusively on the male lead actor for a longer duration than on the female lead actor, thereby signifying the importance of the male lead actor in the film. Thus, as far as the gaze of the camera is concerned, it is definitely predominantly male.

Mulvey (1975) had argued that, in classical cinema the woman performs within the narrative and the gazes of the spectator and the male characters are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. The study supported Mulvey's argument because it found numerous examples of the alignment of the spectator gaze with that of the male lead actor. The study found much fewer examples of alignment of the spectator gaze with the female lead actor gaze. This difference was found to be highly significant at $p < .001$. Thus, as far as the spectator's gaze is concerned, the dominance of the male perspective is clear, but, nevertheless the female perspective and the female gaze are also present. This point shall be more thoroughly discussed in the section on female spectatorship.

As far as the gaze of the actor is concerned, Mulvey (1975) theorized that in traditional Hollywood cinema, which is a sexist world, the pleasure in looking between the male and female characters in the film is split between active male and passive female. In other words, the male star is the bearer of the look and the female star is the image. But this study found several instances in which the female star was the bearer of the look and the male star was the image. However, instances of the male lead actor being the bearer of the look considerably surpassed the instances of the female lead actor being the bearer of the look. The difference was found to be statistically significant at $p < .001$. This signifies the dominance of the male actor gaze.

Qualitative Analysis

The textual analysis also found that the dominant gaze in the film songs was definitely male. Irrespective of the setting of the scene, in most of the songs, female lead actors wore much less clothing than their male counterparts, and there were numerous instances in which their clothes revealed their cleavage, navels, legs, midriffs, and bare backs.

The objectification of women's bodies was strongest when there was a bevy of female dancers in the background who gestured and moved in sexually suggestive ways. The objectification of the female actors was also apparent in settings such as a cold, snowy backdrop where the male lead actor was fully dressed as compared with the female lead actor who was inappropriately and scantily dressed for the scene.

The dominance of the male gaze was also reflected in the body language and expressions of the female lead actors who often looked away under the intense admiring looks of their leading men. In these cases, the passivity of the female look was noted and this was found to be in line with Mulvey's argument about the active/male and passive/female look. Although Mulvey (1975) doesn't admit to an active female actor gaze, it is very much present in Hindi film songs. Mulvey wasn't thinking about the seductress, which is not an uncommon sight in Hindi mainstream cinema. The gaze of the seductress as, for example, that of Bobby in *No Entry* and Chandramukhi, the courtesan in *Devdas* is strong and direct and there is nothing passive or shy about the gaze.

Female Spectatorship

In terms of female spectatorship, Mulvey (1989) denied the existence of the female spectator and asserted that the female spectator had to undergo transvestitism to appreciate the male perspective of traditional cinema. But, this study somewhat negated Mulvey's transvestitism concept because, as Table 3 shows, there was also an objectification of the male lead actors.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative content analysis provided evidence that the camera also focused somewhat on the male actor's fragmented body parts. This camera focus on the male body, face, eyes, and muscles, is clearly aimed at attracting a female spectator.

Qualitative Analysis

The textual analysis revealed that the Indian lead actor has his share of facial expressions and body language in the screen time that was exclusive to him, ranging from the romantic to the sad, and done with aesthetic precision and appeal. This attracts a major female fan following.

When the Hindi film songs dealt with the centrality of female characters, for example, the character of Sakeena in *Gadar: Ek Prem Kathha (The Uprising: A Love Story)*, the

female spectator can easily identify with Sakeena and needs no sexual transfiguration. This finding supports Mayne's (1990) argument that women are also spectators and, as spectators, they identify with the female characters in the film.

A metaphoric transvestitism might be possible when viewing a film. But although Mulvey (1989) asserted that it is the female spectator who has to view classical narrative cinema through transvestitism or male point-of-view, a male might also take the feminine point-of-view while watching (in this case) Bollywood song sequences. Also, as Rich (1978), Rodowick (1982), and Stacey (1987) noted, gay, lesbian and bisexual spectatorships might also be different.

Thus the findings of this study strongly supported Mulvey's contentions about the gaze being male as far as the camera gaze in mainstream Hindi film songs is concerned. But in terms of the spectator gaze and the actor gaze, both of which Mulvey had asserted to be male, the study found that although they were dominantly male, both the female actor gaze and the female spectator gaze were also present in the Bollywood film songs.

Critics such as Kuhn (2004), noted that the psychoanalytical approach to feminist film studies is sometimes abstruse and complicated. Kuhn (2004) asserted that the psychoanalytical approach cannot explain certain realistic positions of desire nor can it help in the study of cultural ethnography and audience research, nevertheless it has a lot to offer to film theory (Kuhn, 2004).

Alhough this study did not support all of Mulvey's contentions, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative* nevertheless is a landmark piece on feminist appropriation of psychoanalysis and semiotics that contributed immeasurably to the critical armory of feminist film theory.

Contributions to the Literature

A major contribution of this study to mass communications research is the empirical verification of Mulvey's (1975) concepts of male gaze and female spectatorship as applied to mainstream Bollywood film songs. As far as can be determined, there are no reported film studies on the male gaze or female spectatorship in which Mulvey's contentions have been subjected to empirical analysis.

Another major contribution of the study is that Mulvey's (1975) assertion about the male-centered

progression of story and theme was supported by empirical testing of Hindi film songs. Equally important, the content analysis also found female objectification and fetishism as pointed out by Mulvey (1975) in her groundbreaking article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Also, Mulvey's contention that the female spectator had to undergo transvestitism to enjoy narrative cinema was not supported by the data. Instead, the study found the prevalence of a female gaze—although it was dominated by the male gaze—and the legitimate existence of a female spectator.

<center>Implications of the Study</center>

Mainstream Indian cinema has been a barometer for Indian culture. Bollywood cinema has been a mirror for the changing times and the trends occurring in modern India. Hence portrayal of popular images is one of its fortes. The present study dealt with the Mulvian concepts of the portrayal of women in traditional narrative cinema as applied to Bollywood song sequences. That Mulvey's male gaze is strongly present in the film songs was not a very surprising discovery, given the way mainstream Indian cinema portrays women as sex objects in the song sequences. It is interesting to note that the concept of male gaze

described in an article/essay by Mulvey written in 1975 with regard to Hollywood classical cinema is applicable to a large extent to modern Bollywood songs. Now, the question that arises here is: Is Bollywood selling a realistic image of the modern Indian woman or is it just catering to popular taste? Closeups that show exposed bodies and reveal fragmentation of the female actors, such as camera focus just on cleavages, legs, navels, and lips, irrespective of the context of the scene are certainly derogatory because they objectify the female actor. But Indian society is still fairly conservative and, more often than not, these images do not accurately portray the modern Indian woman. Thus perhaps such a (mis)representation of women on screen is unrealistic, and is only done to cater to the fantasies of men in the audience.

The presence of a female gaze in Bollywood songs (though foreshadowed by the dominant male gaze), that this study found, gives feminist film theory a hope that this female gaze can get stronger. Perhaps the ubiquity of male-centric films and male directors/producers has given rise to such a sexist gaze. More women-centric films and more films by female directors will help to produce a stronger female perspective. Thus the male gaze can be met

with an equally strong female gaze, which necessarily does not have to trivialize or treat the male anatomy as a sexual object or commodity.

Directions for Future Research

Since Indian society is still largely patriarchal, it would be interesting to note how real life women view the aspect of male gaze and whether they discern the representation of women on screen as exploitative or as realistic images. This could be a significant addition to the literature on feminist studies, women's studies, and communication studies.

Media images have a profound impact on our lives and it would be valuable to study how the representation of women in Indian mainstream cinema influences adolescent girls—whether they copy the representation or ignore it. This could be an important aspect to study in the realm of the impact of media.

As discussed earlier, this study did not consider the male gaze in the genre of parallel cinema. A noteworthy study would be to compare the phenomena of male and female gaze in both Indian art films and mainstream films.

A similar content analysis as the one done in this study could be done for films/film songs directed by female

directors. It would be interesting to study whether the elements of male gaze are present in them.

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APPENDIX

CODE BOOK

The coding categories are as follows:

1) Movies/Songs

    1) Kaho Na Pyar Hai (Songs 1-7)

    2) Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (1-8)

    3) Devdas (1-7)

    4) Koi Mil Gya (1-6)

    5) Veer Zaara (1-5)

    6) No Entry (1-6)

    7) Krrish (1-4)

The Intercoder Reliability Coefficients are listed in parenthesis next to each of the measures used in the study.

2) The Gaze of the Camera:

    2.a) Duration of Camera Gaze

        2.a.i) Male (.83)

        2.a.ii) Female (.81)

    2.b) Camera Gaze Focus (Male)

        2.b.i) Face (.85)

        2.b.ii) Whole Body (.83)

        2.b.iii) Eyes (.86)

        2.b.iv) Chest (.78)

        2.b.v) Lips (.88)

        2.b.vi) Navel (.87)

2.b.vii) Muscles (.78)

2.b.viii) Legs (.87)

2.b.ix) Bare Back (.85)

2.c) Camera Gaze Focus (Female)

2.c.i) Face (.85)

2.c.ii) Whole Body (.83)

2.c.iii) Eyes (.80)

2.c.iv) Chest (.81)

2.c.v) Lips (.80)

2.c.vi) Navel (.85)

2.c.vii) Muscles (.84)

2.c.viii) Legs (.83)

2.c.ix) Bare Back (.85)

3) The Gaze of the Spectator

3.a) Spectator Gaze aligned with Male Actor (.82)

3.b) Spectator Gaze aligned with Female Actor (.89)

4) The Gaze of the Actor

4.a) Male Actor Gaze

4.a.i) Male as bearer of gaze and female as

image (.81)

4.a.ii) Male gaze reciprocated by concurrent female

gaze (.83)

4.b) Female Actor Gaze

    4.b.i) Female as bearer of gaze and male as

        image (.79)

    4.b.ii) Female gaze reciprocated by concurrent male

        gaze (.80)