Feminism: Concepts and Theories
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Feminism and Film

Feminism Concepts and Theories, welcome back to your second lecture for the week. I hope you enjoyed that wonderfully erudite lecture, by Dr. Siganporia on female impersonators. Just to give you the heads up, some of the themes that she visited are going to reoccur in our week on Queer Theory and post-structuralism in relation to gender fluidity. But for now, think about her lecture as a precursor to things that we are going to discuss today. As I mentioned earlier, our concerns are film, theater, and advertising and Harmony (Dr. Siganporia) gave you a wide view of the ways in which certain standards for Indian film and theater were set due to Parsi theater and its female impersonators, in tandem, in dialogue with the movements in the Indian reformist sphere.

Today, I am going to take you into a little bit more of a familiar territory in relation to films that you may have seen, heard about, questions of women and representation within a larger variety of studies known as Feminist Film Studies.

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In this, today, I am discussing very briefly a seminal essay by Laura Mulvey called "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in relation to how women are represented in cinema. The

link is here for those who would like to go and read the whole essay. But for the purpose of this lecture and this course, I am only briefly discussing a few aspects which draw from psychoanalytic theory.

From there, we will move on within the context of Indian films, to discuss Hindi film, and there are a couple of reasons for that. This is by no means to suggest that Hindi cinema is by far the most important kind of Indian cinema, or that it is necessarily representative of cinema across the country as a whole. However, it does bear striking relationship to the Indian nation state and the ways in which the nation states sponsors particular kinds of Hindi cinema and also the ways in which Hindi cinema has come to be a representative of India as a whole across its differences and linguistic spheres, as much as it may not be a realistic representation.

So, consider the set of examples that I am taking as representations, as exemplars for how you should analyze all kinds of cinema in relation to the depiction of women and not necessarily as one encompassing all possible representations of women. To a large extent, today I am only interested in a mode of analysis, a feminist mode of analysis if you will, that looks at how to gender the study of cinema. Therefore, Hindi cinema is something that I am familiar with, so, I am restricted by that. And it is not necessarily an example for you to follow. You can apply the same methods to your own interest in cinema of a wide variety.

So, without further ado, let me start with "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." That was one of the most seminal works in trying to understand what are the ways in which women are seen in cinema, not in terms of characters necessarily, or in writing, or the point of view of the creator, but just in terms of visually how are they represented and how does it matter to narrative cinema.

This essay came out in 1973. And since then, Mulvey has revisited it multiple times, in relation to the ways in which cinema itself has moved across the world. But her context was primarily Hollywood. Let us take a quick look at some of the main points, that she discusses which have now become almost a standard practice for anybody interested in Feminist Film Studies.

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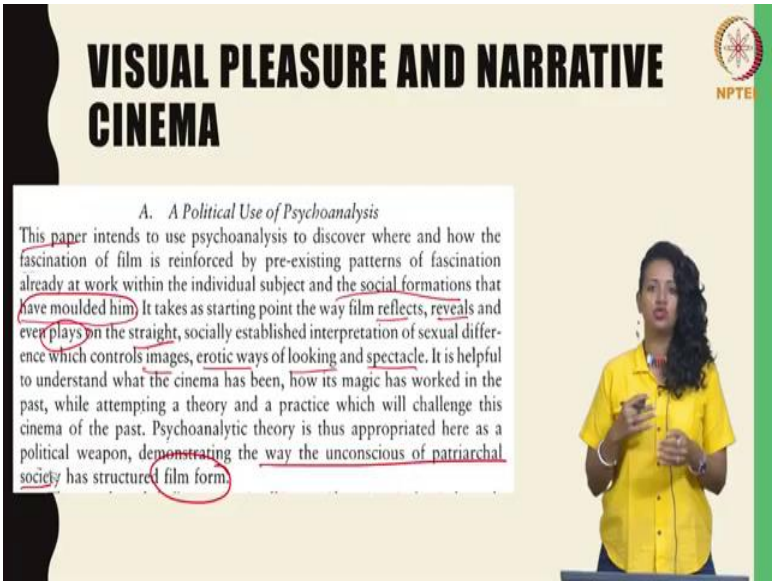

She introduces us to the goals of this essay thus: "this paper intends to use psychoanalysis to discover where and how the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him." Note here the use of "him." Him is very particular to trying to understand cinema as constructed for the desires and the orientation of the male viewer.

"It takes as starting point the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference, which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle." Couple of things to unpack over here, it takes as the starting point the way film reflects and this is considered almost like a standard answer for anybody asking "must film reflect society or change it?" and many filmmakers, creators of visual production will say, well, we merely reflect what is already ongoing, we do not have the power to change things. This is usually defensive. But that is another story. Reflects, it reveals, uncovers something already going on in society that people may not have paid attention to much like feminist theory. And even plays, it plays with it; it does not take it seriously; it is amused by it; it tries to loosen its power by playing with it. The straight, by this we mean heterosexual, socially established interpretation of sexual difference. How is it that sexual difference already existing in life plays itself out on the screen? How is it reinforced? How is it disturbed? How is it played with? How is it poked at? These are the questions that Mulvey is looking at.

"It is helpful to understand what the cinema has been, how its magic has worked in the past, while attempting a theory and a practice which will challenge the cinema of the past." The

goals of this essay therefore are not merely to analyze what has been going thus far in cinema, but also to attempt to find provocations to suggest that filmmakers, audiences, viewers should make and view differently.

"Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form." Remember in forms of difference, in our discussion we studied forms of difference in the sub-conscious. Sexuality as established through the sub-conscious and ways in which that led to subjectivity itself being formed, sexual subjectivity, that is, by way of difference. Here, Mulvey is using precisely that to speak about how is it that this unconscious, that is already differentiated into male and female finds its way visually into narrative cinema. She calls this a political weapon with very good reason, because there is a politics to changing the ways in which public culture, popular culture reproduces itself. And politically, it means that to change something on cinema, one would hope is to also change something in society.

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Broadly Mulvey's essay is concerned therefore with: The politics of representation. Representation is not an innocent, naive practice. It has the capacity to bring about real change in society. It has the capacity to be a propagandist, it has the possibility to subtly indicate the kinds of rewards that people will accrue, if they stick to the status quo. So, in many ways the politics of representation is a very well-established arena. And Mulvey was writing in the context of the 1970s. Look back over the series of lectures we have covered so far and think about what is happening in the 1970s, where there was a broadening of the context from the women's movement to feminist issues.

We are talking end of the…, sorry no, we are talking end of second wave, beginning of third wave. And Mulvey was very concerned with the ways in which cinema constructs the male gaze in relation to female passivity. The feminine as an object, the masculine as the subject that views the object. And Mulvey argued very importantly, that "the first blow against the accumulation of traditional film conventions is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate engagement.

Think about conventions. Cinema much like any other art form has its conventions, its conventional practices established over time, that unless questioned will solidify into habit. And Mulvey is trying to dehabituate, is trying to free that kind of conventional cinema from its deeply rooted assumptions that come in her argument from a patriarchal subconscious. Free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space - to be present in the current moment as opposed to in some kind of fantasmic moment; and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate engagement - not merely as passive consumers of whatever is going on, on the screen but as passionate onlookers that are also capable of engaging with the terms that cinema is presenting to them. In other ways, Mulvey is pushing viewers into the space of critique, into the space of trying to understand the classic social science question: what is going on?

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These are some of the arguments that Mulvey makes and some of the terms that she introduces into our vocabulary. Partly, it begins with the assumption that the unconscious structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking there are ways in which the unconscious is coded through patriarchy.

And therefore, we already know what is it that we want to seek pleasure from. Men are supposed to gain pleasure from looking. Women are supposed to gain pleasure from being looked at. We are already always coded into positions of subject and object. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order.

To repeat myself, just so that you have this point clear. What does this mean? Mainstream cinema has coded the erotic? Why must the erotic be coded? Do we not have natural capacity for erotica? Mulvey, many social scientists, cultural critics, will argue that this is not the case. Desire, much like anything else, has to be learned.

Heterosexual desire must be learned. It is through discourse, and cinema is very much part of this discourse, that we understand how to be desiring subjects and objects. So, the erotic has been coded by mainstream cinema into the language of the dominant patriarchal order. The subconscious is already coded within patriarchy. Our daily lives are coded into patriarchy. Mainstream cinema goes ahead and codes the erotic as well, into this language, so that now it is familiar. We continue as part of a larger spectrum of patriarchy, cinema becomes just another example that not only reflects it, but more importantly reinforces it. It becomes a way of trying to know how to be good male and female subjects.

And here, you might be able to draw upon some insights from Harmony's lecture on female impersonators, on the ways in which the actors were not allowed to function in certain ways in public, lest they break that understanding of erotica or that coding of erotica.

In this, Mulvey's essay is concerned with the central place of the image of the woman. What does the image of the woman do? What functions does it perform within a film? Why are there conventional practices for locating, seeing, constructing this image of the woman in relation to the position of the male both within erotic conventions in cinema and within the larger patriarchal social order.

She has also given us or rather placed more emphasis on the term "Scopophilia," the kinds of fetishization accompanying the seeing of the woman that are then coded into cinema: the ways that women appear, the ways that they enter the scene, the kinds of clothing that they wear, where the camera focuses in relation to their body parts, the kind of deification of certain figures, the hyper sexualization of certain figures. All of these form part of the complex called scopophilia.

And in all these, woman is the image, man is the bearer of the look and the woman is more often than not displayed as a sexual object. Now the terms of such sexuality are complex, as we will go on to discover in our examples. But it is an important sort of paradigm to keep in mind, as we evaluate cinema and the location of femininity, the female figure, and female characters.

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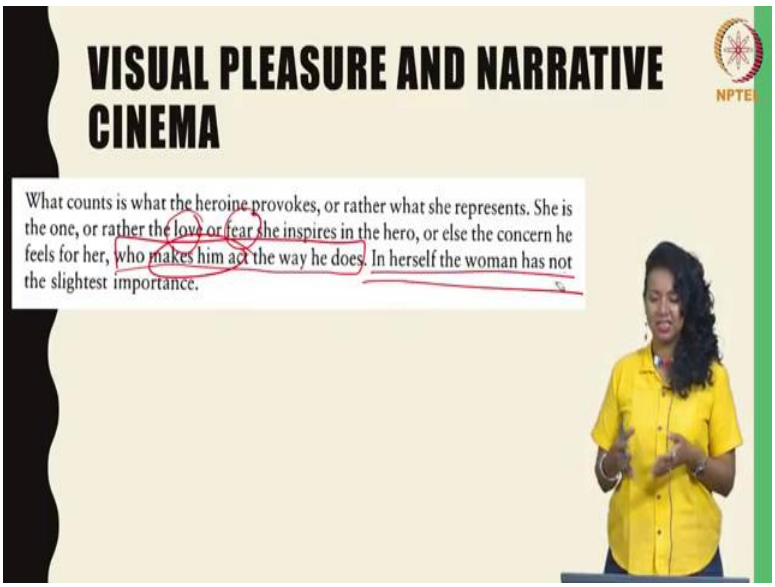

And this is what Mulvey has to say in relation to the central role played by the image of the woman. “What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents.” Never a figure in herself, “she is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance.” And this is, this might be difficult to apprehend, because surely everybody represents something in the cinema. But why is it that in many ways, most films that we know are hero centric with the woman always playing somebody that is a catalyst in his narrative arc, in the way that he develops.

Most cinema has made an entire industry out of this. And therefore, pay attention to the two kinds of affects that Mulvey details, love or fear, that are ways in which the hero is willing to change himself, change the world, burn the world, interfere in the world, attend to provocation in relation to the love that he feels for the heroine or the fear that she inspires in him.

So, it runs across a swath of figures. It could be the woman in relation to whatever kind of kinship specificity: could be love in terms of heterosexual romance, could be family, could be forms of affection, could be forms of concern and the female could be a concrete material or abstract figure as we will go on to discuss.

And this makes him act the way he does – that is something about the force that this female figure exerts, that makes him act the way he does. Now if you remember, this used to be a pretty standard narrative in films across the 80s and 90s. This question of the hero that is so madly in love with the heroine, that he pursues her in spite of being asked to stay away, again-and-again-and-again.

And the excuse always was love made him act that way. And instead of being called stalking, which is far more common in terms of our vocabulary today, we used to call it love. The idea of persistence was so important and the persistence came from something that was outside of the hero. The woman was the catalyst that gave rise to these feelings of love in him, which makes us question the very idea of love itself. But that is another story, maybe another course called Love in Indian cinema. Very importantly, in herself the woman has no importance. She is only important for what she can do for the hero, one way or the other.

Now keep this framework in mind, as we take it to a much more specific context in relation to Indian cinema and the field is wide. There are multiple ways in which to look at Indian

cinema. So, I already gave you one caveat that I am going to look at the development of Hindi film cinema, rather than the entire gamut.

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The other caveat is, I am not drawing a history per se. This is not necessarily a chronological understanding. Although some of it will fall into chronology for reasons that will become obvious. But I am going to work through a bit of a limited strategy, by looking at figurations. And I am interested in figurations, because the meanings behind these figurations also change over time, but they share certain characteristics that allow us to see what becomes a film when we apply a feminist lens.

I am fully aware that women in Indian cinema are a changing set of signifiers. But I am arguing by way of a number of sources and a number of studies of Indian cinema that these commonalities allow us to excavate, the ways in which Indian cinema has produced women in a particular set of images. And therefore, I am using Mulvey essay as a set of inspirations, more than as a particular form of analysis specific to Indian cinema.

Therefore, for the purpose of this essay, we will work through 4 sets of figurations. Let us start with the first and this one should be fairly obvious. We are looking at the national woman or the mother figure. This will also recall to you the woman's question, as we discussed it earlier.

And the woman's question was very much to do with this understanding of, what does the Indian woman stand for, especially in a newly independent India. This follows on the heels of a larger debate on women's reform in pre-independent India, where a number of social

reformers were responsible for multiple changes in Indian society, such as those related to child marriage, raising the age of consent, as Harmony mentioned, widow remarriage, education for girls, so on and so forth. And part of the question that they were reacting to or addressing, was the colonial charge that Indians were not ready to govern themselves, because they were so far behind in relation to woman's position in society.

And the ways in which they responded to this, was very much through literature, through public discourse, and through social reform, to say that Indians were carrying out modes of social reform, meant to catch up with this idea of modernity, primarily through creating the Indian modern / traditional woman.

Where on the outside, India would emulate all of these kinds of strictures of modernity; education, capacity to vote, capacity to work all of these things that signify that we were ready for modernity but at the same time, in order to signify proper difference from the west, women also had to be the bearers of tradition within the house.

They had to have the capacity to don both garbs, depending on whether they were outside or inside. And part of this is excavated, in Partha Chatterjee's book and essay, *The Nation and its Fragments* being the book and "The Nationalist Resolution of the Woman's Question" being the chapter within the book.

Now, think about the national woman or mother very much in relation to this context, where what is it that the woman of Indian cinema could signify to be continuous with this truth. So, we will explore some of that. We will look at parallel cinema, art-house cinema or social realist cinema from the 1950s to the 1970s that created particular images of womanhood.

We will also examine continuity between the vamp or the female villain and the vixen as she used to be called and the contemporary item number. And lastly, we will have a brief set of discussions, in relation to the question of the heroine across post independent India. So, before we get into these figurations, let us have a brief look at what was happening in Indian cinema, in relation to the depiction of women in the 1920s.

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1920s were responsible for a number of films made through Indo-German collaboration by the filmmaker Himanshu Rai, who later marries Devika Rani, a costume designer and later heroine. And both of them established one of the first film production houses, Bombay Talkies. They are concerned with the depiction of Indian mythology and social issues. So, their hope is for social realism and they are responding as ever to the colonial experience.

Therefore, you can see why the choice of themes, Indian mythology and social issues are very much responding to these questions of modernity and tradition. And inevitably, they are quite orientalist they do produce India as exceptional in particular ways, they play on certain tropes and they glamorize Indian history. And not to be too harsh about it, remember at those times, cinema performed a very-very important propagandist in social function. It was responsible for creating a national imaginary. And much like, theorists like Benedict Anderson would have us remember a nation is an imagined community first and foremost.

The idea of India precedes India. And this idea needs content that must be produced from various sources and put together, like a Levis Straussian Bricolage. It is patched together from different sources and cinema is very much such an active patchwork.

During that time, cinema was inundated with the Eurasian actresses like Sita Devi and their names were signifiers of the ways in which they wanted to be seen as Indian, even as all other evidence pointed to the contrary. So, the 1920s, you already have global cinema of a certain kind, being part of the Indian cinematic scenario.

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Devika Rani and a young Ashok Kumar were responsible for the film Achut Kanya. Achut Kanya was very much as the name suggest about untouchability. And Devika Rani, an upper class, upper caste woman with global experience, lived in Germany for a while, portrayed a village belle and an untouchable one at that and pioneered what you can see here to be the village belle look. A certain kind of toned-down glamour, but including that seem to signify an Indian locale. And this became very popular around that time and it continues to have great impact on the ways in which villageness is portrayed on female bodies, in contemporary Indian cinema until very recently.

From Achut Kanya, which is very much about village woman, as signifiers of India or Indian exceptionalism, we move to one of the most important films of post-independence India.

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Mother India 1956, remember it is only been nine years since Indian independence at this point of time. And Mother India becomes the kind of Ur (meaning original, basic or earliest) signifier of the ways in which nation-state is superimposed on to images of woman straightaway. We have discussed this before in relation to popular culture, but also a very particular kind of mother figure.

Pay attention to the poster and the ways in which certain forms of suffering are inscribed on to the face of the female figure; what are the ways in which she is portrayed against the landscape of sky and land and village land at that.

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Mother India was made 10 years after India became independent. The socialist experiment initiated by Nehru was in his early years. So, India was very much in formation at that point of time. It needed myths, it needed fantasies, it needed signifiers. In this film, the director Mehboob attempts a marriage between socialistic ideals and traditional values.

As ever, film like anything else as must a feminist analysis of film, draws upon the social reality of that time, of the ways in which other kinds of discourses feed into it. So, we are looking at Nehruvian socialism, in relation to an already established set of conventions regarding traditional values.

The title of the film was chosen to counter American author Katherine Mayo's highly controversial 1927 work, *Mother India*, which was a polemical account of everything that was wrong with the country in multiple ways. So, Mother India sought to counter it, with this kind of representation of motherly womanhood, having high moral values, donning the figure of the mother above all else. But a very particular kind of righteous mother, as it is seen from the different attitude, she bears towards her two sons.

Her duty is paramount, the ways in which she produces national values, at the same time as motherly values are presented as almost a bit of a conflict and a contestation, which she ultimately wins and you will see this as through the paradigm of self-sacrifice.

Mother India testified to the changing role of women in modern Indian society, that they were mothers, but they were also national women. And it was incumbent upon them to be good mothers, to be a particular sets of mothers, beholden to the nation state. This might recall to

you Wollstonecraft's vindication of the rights of women, which was about how women were necessary to society, so that they could raise good children.

So, number of discourses that one can draw upon as familiar to this representation of Nargis in Mother India.

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Remember, also in relation to this changing role of woman, as to the ways in which the mother then goes on to be depicted in Indian society and Indian film, these are repeated in iconic dialogues like *mere paas maa hai* in the film *Deewar*, where there is a contestation between Amitabh, the criminal son, and Shashi Kapoor, the son who then goes on to become a policeman; where Amitabh is challenging Shashi Kapoor to say that there are so many things that I have gained in society, by virtue of the things I have been willing to do that are not necessarily for the law. I have *gaadi hai, bangla hai, paisa hai*, I have a car, I have a bungalow, I have money. What is it that you have? What have you gained by being so righteous? And what are the ways in which you could challenge me? And Shashi Kapoor shuts him down with the single iconic dialogue, *mere paas maa hai*, I have my mother. Thereby immediately producing for us two antagonistic…, two protagonists that are antagonistic to one another, one of which is lawless, one of which is lawful, and therefore with the nation, and the ways in which gaining the mother's love is the prize for the man.

Remember our earlier discussion a few slides ago, which was all about the ways in which some woman is there in order to allow the man to act in particular ways? Lo and behold! *Mere paas maa hai*!

In this is also important to note that the figure of the mother cannot also ever be depicted as a sexual figure. Sexuality must be separated from this figuration and she has to primarily and only be a mother across the length of the film.

Salman Rushdie's analysis in the *Moor's Last Sigh* is particularly interesting for our discussion. And he says, "in *Mother India*, a piece of Hindu myth-making, directed by a Muslim socialist, Mehboob Khan, the Indian peasant woman is idealized as bride, mother, and producers of sons, as long-suffering, stoical, loving, redemptive and conservatively wedded to the maintenance of the social status quo. But for bad Birju, the son who is not capable of receiving her love, cast out from his mother's love, she becomes as one critic mentioned 'that image of an aggressive, treacherous, annihilating mother, who haunts the fantasy of Indian males.' Use this in relation to Mulvey's analysis to try and understand how is it that reading cinema differently could also allow us to read the figure of the woman differently.

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This is Nargis in Mother India, here is the good son, here is the bad son. You can tell almost immediately from the ways in which the poster organizes their faces, as to who is who. And there are ways in which Mother India, which is a remarkably interesting, but also lovely film to watch, really long one, will tell you particular things about the Indian nation state at that point of time, even in its highly stylized iteration.

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Here for you on the screen are some images of mothers across time in Indian cinema. See if you are able to see anything familiar to them. Be it in these markers like bindis or lack thereof, the parting of the hair in the middle, the crying, the slight consternation, the ways in which they are always old.

What do these signify for the ways in which we understand the role of mothers also in Indian society and the standards that they will be held up against? Also remember that the actresses who played these mothers, then went on to become typecast only in mothers' roles. So, Nirupa Roy see here, is pretty much a meme. Reema Lagu became well-known for playing Salman Khan's mother across films. Farida Jalal became an aunt figure or a mother figure, depending on which film she was cast in. And very interestingly, Aruna Irani used to play the figure of the vamp. And then went on to play either bad mothers-in-law or mothers in Indian cinema, Hindi cinema.

So, think about these figurations as also lessons, for how is it that women should conduct themselves in everyday life; much like the ways in which Harmony spoke about women learning lessons on proprietary, from the Parsi theatre.

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Before we move on to our next figure, here are a couple of resources on screen for our discussions after this point. Sangita Datta's "Globalization and Representations of Women in Indian Cinema," Vikrant Kishore's "Bollywood Vamps and Vixens: Representations of the Negative Women Characters in Bollywood Films." So, a couple of things that I am discussing have been taken from these articles. They are available online. Please feel free to go, look for them.

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Let us start with something entirely different before we move on to this question of the vamp. So, remember when we said that representations run a wide spectrum and we are looking for commonalities. So, one of the things that is important to discuss is also the parallel wave in

Indian cinema, which was inspired by Italian neo.., which was inspired by Italian neo…, Italian neorealism and led to the Indian new wave of the 1960s.

And this form of cinema was very interested in studying contemporary Indian society, rejected song and dance routine wholesale, did not want to produce fantasy, wanted a clear engagement with what was understood as serious issues on the ground, with a real material of everyday life among a wide variety of populations. And women became part of this analysis of the developments, as also disappointments of independent India, of the ways in which the nation state was not living up to its promise and the ways in which it was producing disempowerment and marginalization. And often, the effects of these were felt disproportionately by women. And so, neorealist cinema depicted middle-class and rural women, more often than not. And they were produced in much less glamorized fashion. They had their own kinds of aesthetics, but they were not part of any kind of fantasy-like depiction of reality even as each of these films struggled with complex structure agency negotiations, for the female characters.

By this, I mean that there was no attempt necessarily to stereotype things. But at the same time, each of these films are easily recognizable as particular kinds of tropes, even for the female characters.

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Much of the cinema depicted feudalism, corruption, nepotism, patriarchy, and religious intolerance. They were also concerned with modernization and class warfare and the ways in which morality and the nation-state were not necessarily coterminous.

That we could speak about other kinds of morality, practiced by people in the everyday. Even as there was a rejection of popular forms, they were not meant for entertainment necessarily, they were serious cinema. They were meant for thought.

In keeping with the seriousness, a number of actors that came to prominence in parallel cinema were method actors, who were often trained in theatre traditions, and these showed on stage in their capacity to depict realism. And very importantly, almost always funded by state-owned institutions, much as these forms of cinema were considered a critique of the state. Remember, in modernization or modernism, the state is also invested in its improvement, in self-critique, in the ways in which it can depict to the world what it is doing to improve its lot.

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Couple of familiar figures across realist cinema: Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, the late Girish Karnad, the late Smita Patil also. And these figures began to show up again-and-again in parallel cinema, this is Mirch Masala, this is Swami. Both of which depicted, in Swami, perhaps the mofussil / rural woman. In Mirch Masala, very much a rural woman.

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This is the iconic, fabulous, wonderful Mandi and this is Bazaar. Both of these were depictions of prostitutes, courtesans, brothels - ways in which women at the margins of society were considered to be corrupt. But both sought to show the ways in which such forms of corruption were very much enmeshed within patriarchy, within middle-class double standards, within hypocrisy in Indian respectable society.

And in both cases, you see precisely these kinds of complex structure-agency negotiations that we are talking about, where women are not passive recipients of fate, but are active agents in trying to figure out what they can do within the circumstances that have been handed out to them.

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And here, you see Rajanigandha, which is very much about the travails of the middle-class. And the middle-class that parallel cinema is talking about, is very unlike the middle classes as we know today. It is very much what has been called the Nehruvian old middle-class, where there is a section, there is a very specific socio-economic character. There are constraints, there are boundaries, there are ways in which women are meant to be both modern as well as traditional, but in a particular mould and these are usually city-specific depictions. And here, you see Vidya Sinha playing the heroine in Rajanigandha.

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Also, remember that there were very particular aesthetics to such middle-classness in parallel cinema. You see a particular kind of blouse, a particular kind of saree, long hair, a big bindi. You see ways in which parallel cinema also gave rise to the figure of a particular kind of middle-class woman and middle-class aesthetics, to do with certain developments in textile industries during that time and certain developments in what can be considered the iconic figure of the respectable Indian middle-class woman.

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From here, let us move on to the other end of this spectrum, which is the vamp, or the vixen, or the female villain. This was very much part of popular cinema and not parallel cinema. And consisted of cabaret dancers, courtesans, prostitutes, and girlfriends of the villains. Now depictions of courtesans and prostitutes in these films was very different from those in parallel cinema. They might borrow from similar aesthetics, but their role in the narrative was completely different than parallel cinema, where the female characters were agents of their own destiny. And vamps and vixens were very much negative female characters.

Helen, Bindu, Aruna Irani, Kalpana Iyer and Shashikala became notoriously popular, playing vamps during the 1960s to the 1980s portraying an image of uninhibited, feral, and licentious female and predominantly having a westernized outlook. Let us underline a few important

things here: uninhibited, therefore having no limits, doing as they please, being women in themselves as opposed to women for the nation, or for the hero, or for the middle-class, or for the family. In other words, unstructured women. Faeral, feral or wild, closer to nature then culture, having the capacity to act spontaneously, giving into their feelings, being irrational and therefore immoral and licentious, taking license to do whatever they pleased and therefore not good state subjects and having a westernized outlook. Very much an extension of this kind of understanding of the western India, of the colonizer and the colonized.

And this was the sphere within which cinema could depict sexuality. Sexuality was accorded to the negative female character, almost as a lesson to say that hypersexualized women have a different fate than good Indian women. And the fate was depicted by the end of the film, as them coming to naught.

Please also remember that vamps smoked, danced, and sang. In other words, they were entirely completely unpredictable and uncontainable given into any and every form of vice.

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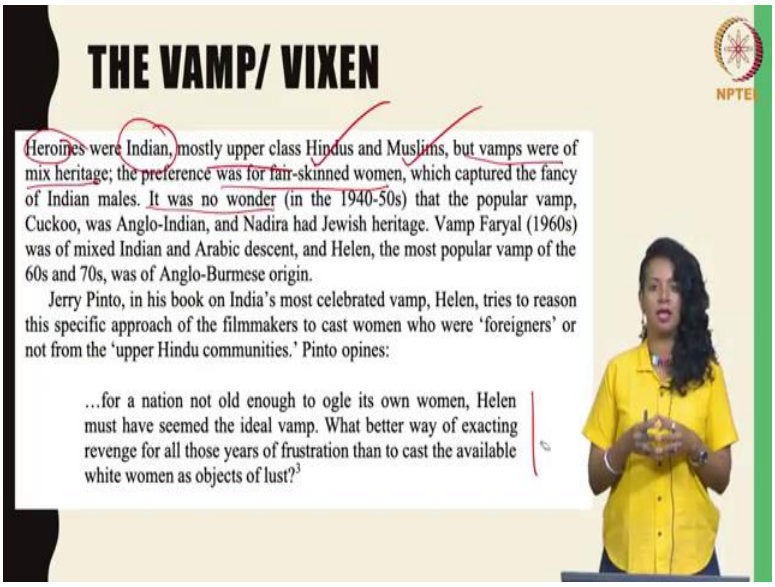

Heroines were Indian; mostly upper-class Hindus and Muslims. But vamps were of mixed heritage. This is important to remember. The continuity between everyday life or the real lives of the characters and their lives on screen.

Heroines were always Indian, mostly upper-class Hindus and Muslims. And upper-class seems to be something that was running through the spectrum in these times. Vamps were of mixed heritage. The preference was for fair skinned women, which captured the fancy of Indian males. And fair skin is something that we have discussed in relation to race in multiple

lectures. But this is something that should also be fairly obvious to you. The kind of obsession we have in the subcontinent, with fair skin, it was no wonder in the 1940s and 50s that the popular vamp Cuckoo was Anglo-Indian and Nadira had Jewish heritage.

Remember also the trope about corruption. Vamps are corrupt. And if we trace continuity between their quote-unquote, corrupt racial heritage and their capacity to play vamps, you see the ways in which the depiction of women in Indian cinema, is very much also a continuous critic from their real lives to the screen.

Vamp Faryal, 1960s was of mixed Indian and Arabic descent. And Helen, the most popular vamp of the 60s and 70s, was of Anglo-Burmese origin. Jerry Pinto, in his book on India's most celebrated vamp, Helen, tries to reason this specific approach of the filmmakers to cast women, who are foreigners or not from the upper Hindu communities. He opines, "for a nation not old enough to ogle at its own women, Helen must have seemed the ideal vamp. What better way of exacting revenge, for all those years of frustration, than to cast the available white women as objects of lust?" Now, people might have an argument with the suggestion. However, it does stand to reason in many ways that we are looking at the representation of white women on screen, very much in relation to colonialism.

You might draw a straightforward conclusion, that this is about reverse colonialism, is about taking back power. And that might, that could be argued for, argued against. But it does stand to reason that we are talking about white women exclusively playing vamps, are something specific to the politics of representation.

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This stereo typical approach to portraying vamps and heroines, witnessed some changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the advent of new-age westernized Hindi cinema heroines such as Sharmila Tagore, Dimple Kapadia, Parveen Babi, and Zeenat Aman. The elements such as smoking, drinking, wearing revealing outfits, performing in cabarets, that were earlier associated with vamps, were endorsed by these heroines. These elements depicted the changing mores of the society, especially in the urban centers of India, which represented the English educated, westernized new India.

I find the vamp or the vixen, one of the most important figures to trace in Indian cinema, because you are also seeing parallel developments in the Indian socio-political sphere. As ever, representations are a clue into changes elsewhere and are not about the women. So, when you see the kind of sidelining of the vamp, in relation to the advent of heroines such as Sharmila Tagore, who famously wears a bikini in a film with Shami Kapoor; Dimple Kapadia, who plays Bobby; Parveen Babi and Zeenat Aman, who are all of these kinds of really glamorous, western clothing wearing, smoking, drinking women, you are also able to imagine the parallel changes in India, with increasing westernization, western education and the focus on urbanity over rurality during this time.

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Lead actresses such as Sharmila Tagore, Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi, easily moved back and forth between the role of a heroine and a vamp with elan and were readily accepted by the audience. However, this should be remembered that often the narrative arc of such a heroine was very much a Shakespearean "taming of the shrew" that by the end of the film, you have agreed to become part of the structure of marriage, family, containment and Indianness. And all of these are merely sort of little bit of riffs against the standard figure of the heroine.

This was also an era, when the elements that separated the heroines from the vamps were blurring. So, there is a blurring, there is not a disappearance. And there is no kind of endorsement of the values of the vamp, in this newly licentious heroine as necessarily empowering. It is just something that is represented, it is not endorsed. The heroines were becoming free with regard to their sexuality and readily sported revealing attire. It should be said however, that such a sporting of revealing attire is not necessarily to do only with the character subjectivity it also has to do with the desires of this new Indian maleness.

No wonder then that Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi became the most sought-after lead actress of the 1970s. They presented a mix of Indian sensibility and western modernity, which was more enticing, hence desire, and appealing to the audience.

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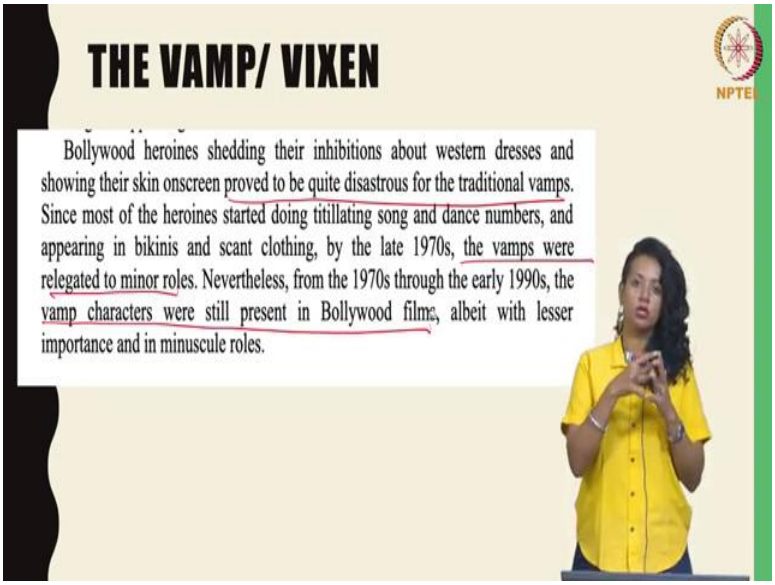

What happens to the vamp and vixen in this scenario? "Bollywood heroines shedding their inhibitions, proved to be disastrous for the traditional vamps. Since most of the heroines started doing titillating song and dance numbers and appearing in bikinis and scant clothing, the vamps were relegated to minor roles. Nevertheless, from the 1970s to the early 1990s, the vamp characters were still present in Bollywood films, albeit with lesser importance and in miniscule roles." So, you see, how changes in figuration also signify changes in forms of desire, changes in forms of acceptability and the blurring of boundaries also tells you something, about what new forms of desire are now invested in the form of the heroine.

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Here are a few examples of traditional vamp figures. Look at their clothing, look at their comportment, look at how they gaze at the camera, look at how direct they are and look at the forms of pleasure that they embody in their practices, in their clothing, in their smoking. Look at that wonderful cigarette holder over here. They are stylish women.

They are clearly in-keeping with the latest trends, but they are not respectable women. They do not get family, marriage, children, subjectivity, statehood by the end of the film.

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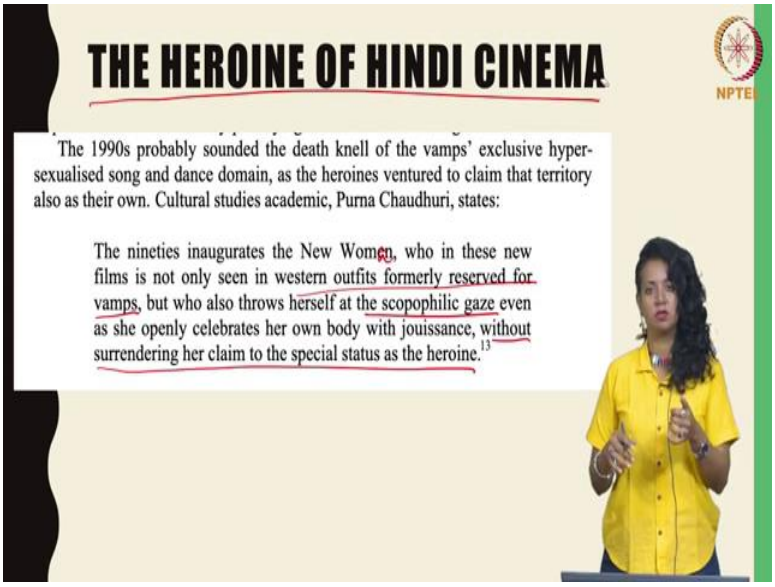

The 1990s sounded the death knell of the vamp's exclusive hypersexualized song and dance domain, as the heroines ventured to claim that territory, also as their own. Cultural studies

academic, Purna Chaudhari states, "the 90s inaugurates the new woman, who in these new films… the 90s inaugurates the new woman, who in these new films is not only seen in western outfits, formerly reserved for vamps but who also throws herself at the scopophilic gaze, even as she openly celebrates her own body with jouissance, without surrendering her claim to the special status as a heroine."

So, the new heroine, the new woman transcends the vamp status as deserving of the scopophilic gaze, who looks it back at such a scopophilic gaze, who confronts it with her own gaze while not surrendering her claim to the special status as heroine. She is able to inhabit both, as she transcends her own narrative arc within cinema, and this is where we locate the heroine of contemporary Indian cinema, who in many ways occupies a number of these figurations in one specific form of representation.

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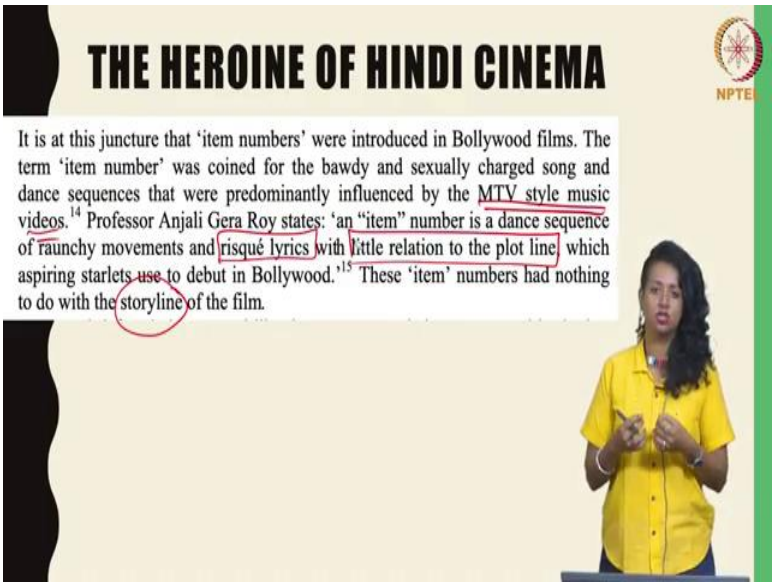

"It is at this juncture, that item numbers were introduced in Bollywood films. The term item number was coined for the bawdy and sexually charged song and dance sequences that were predominantly influenced…" and this is very important, because we are talking about post-economic liberalization India, post 1991 India, where "MTV style music videos" become popular for consumption. So, the item numbers are produced very much in that kind of production aesthetic. "Professor Anjali Gera Roy states an item number is a dance sequence of raunchy movements and risqué lyrics, with a little relation to the plot line, which aspiring starlets use to debut in Bollywood. These item numbers have nothing to do with the storyline…"

This paragraph is so interesting, because now you are delinking the sexuality of the vamp, from the narrative arc. There is nobody that performs a sexy and raunchy number that gets punished or that dies or that does not get to be part of a family. This has nothing to do with the storyline of the film. On the contrary, it is seen as something that aspiring starlets do, in order to gain visibility. So, they give in to the kind of scopophilia, to be able to establish themselves as worthy of consumption by mainstream cinema, before they actually get taken seriously and given the roles reserved for other actresses.

So, in many ways, the risqué lyrics, with little relation to the plot line, is very much part of what we might consider a post-modern reading of gender in mainstream Hindi cinema, where sex comes every now and then to be consumed as itself, not as something related to the plot line, not in relation to morality, no relation to anything, but itself and the consumer, the male consumer's gaze.

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Therefore, where is it that we land, in relation to how we understand heroines in contemporary Hindi cinema? All over the place. I would argue however, that one of the important things to remember with current Hindi cinema, is the question of consumption, where you see style, fashion, comportment, also then breaking off into many parallel realms of industry in consumption. All actors, actresses are also brand ambassadors. They are wide foreign relation to their personal aesthetic. They launch clothing, they launch perfumes, cosmetics, shoes, what have you. So, in many ways, the body of the heroine is also now consumed in a very-very different paradigm than just in terms of understanding morality or propriety.

As signifiers of modernity, they are also signifiers of new liberal globalization. But in a recent article, authors asked, do we still have working women in Indian film, in contemporary cinema? There are nods to the idea that they work but you barely ever see them actually working. So, in many ways, they are far removed from the ways in which we understood the rights of women and second wave of feminism.

They do depict mythological characters every now and then. And there is a resurrection of these kinds of films, in relation to the image of the nation-state. But they are primarily brand symbols and this is where there is a continuity with the depiction of women in film and the depiction of women in advertising.

And in all cases, in most cases, with very few examples, there is a promotion of the heteronormative, hypersexualized, consuming body, even as stories continue to reinvent the traditional-modern dyad, within the present socio-political context. The examples are rife; you look around you, you will find out.

And in many ways, I do not want to go too far into understanding what the heroine of the Bollywood cinema currently is, because I also do think that this is a moment of opportunity. We are seeing wide varieties of depictions. And perhaps, applying a rigorous feminist lens, might like Mulvey, give us ideas on how to reinvent possibilities and reinvent cinematic imagination, in relation to woman's representation.

That is all I have for you this week. I hope all of this was clear. Next week, we will continue this discussion into social media and a little bit more on advertising and brand symbolization. We will also talk about the ways in which new forms of feminism are critiquing popular culture and what are the possibilities that they signify. Until then…