Universiteit Antwerpen
Faculteit Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen
Academiejaar 2013-2014

MASTERPROEF

FROM WHITE DEVIL TO WHITE EMANCIPATOR

Representation of white Western women in Indian cinema

Lisa van der Waal
Master in de Filmstudies en de Visuele Cultuur

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Paolo Favero
Medebeoordelaar: Prof. Dr. Kevin Smets

Universiteit Antwerpen

Abstract

Times are changing in India's film industry. While Bollywood remains the biggest film industry in the world, a new Indian cinema genre is rising nowadays, a cinema that tries to find its position between Bollywood, Western and parallel cinema. One of the striking things of this new Indian film genre, that I call New Indian Cinema, pays attention to the way white Western women are treated in India's contemporary society. New Indian Cinema depicts white Western women as survivors of this tough society they are living in. This representation differs from the way India's popular cinema, Bollywood cinema, has depicted the white Western women until now. From the 1950s onwards, they have been represented as immoral 'devils'; the opposite of moral Indian women. Although Jane Dark has noticed a development in the representation of white women in Bollywood cinema, it seems that it is New Indian Cinema that contributes to the emancipation of this particular kind of film character in Indian cinema. This thesis is focused on the development of the white Western female character during the last decades. Based on the concepts of whiteness and the male gaze, three New Indian Cinema films have been analysed in order to discover how this new Indian film genre depicts Western women and if this representation contributes to the development of this character. It can be concluded that New Indian Cinema takes the next step into the emancipation of the white Western women, both in Indian cinema and society.

Keywords: New Indian Cinema, Western women, whiteness, sexuality, male gaze, emancipation, Bollywood

Introduction

As one of the few white women in Mumbai, Ruth is searching for her father, a man she barely knows but cannot forget. While Ruth finds out it is not easy for a British woman to live in India, she earns money in a massage salon, giving men 'hand shakes'[1]. It is probably unimaginable that this is the story of an Indian film, though it is. In 2011, director Anurag Kashyap released *That Girl in Yellow Boots,* an Indian thriller with the white skinned actress Kalki Koechlin as Ruth. Because of the controversial themes the film deals with, such as child abuse, drug addiction, assault of (white) women, and a more explicit representation of sexuality, 'nobody wanted us to make this film' (Kashyap in Q&A of the British Film Institute). The director did not receive any funding and hence borrowed money to make *That Girl* because he had the feeling that this story had to be told. The film was shot in only thirteen days and premiered at several film festivals before its commercial release in 2011.

Not everyone in India appreciated the film. A review on the Box Office India website calls *That Girl* shocking and inappropriate: 'If movies are made to entertain or educate or make you think, Anurag Kashyap's TGIYB is disturbing' (Review, 2011). Reactions like this could have been expected in a country where controversial themes such as abuse and sexuality are not addressed by its national cinema. However, times are changing as Kashyap shows. Nowadays, a new Indian cinema, which dares to deal with controversial topics as whiteness and sexuality, is developing. New Indian Cinema, as I will call this new movement for reasons I will explain later, distinguishes itself from mainstream Indian cinema, not only regarding topics but style, narrative and representing characters too.

In this thesis the focus will be on the depiction of one particular kind of character in New Indian Cinema, namely the white Western women. Beside that this character has being more visible in Indian cinema, she recently has been given another role as well. According to Jane Dark, one of the few authors who has written about Western women in Indian cinema, the Western female character is nowadays depicted as a representative of modernity and an example for how Indian women in Indian society should deal with the process of modernisation, instead of a sex object for man (2008: 127). The Western female character (for example in *Lagaan: Ones Upon a Time in India* (Gowariker, 2001) and *Rang de Basanti: a Generation Awakens* (Mehra, 2006)) shows how to find a balance between staying true to Indian traditions and adapt modernity in your life as an Indian woman.

This thesis will go beyond Dark's research. She only paid attention to the representation of white Western women in recent Bollywood films. The main goal of this research is to discover how

1 Ruth uses the term 'hand shakes' when she asks her male clients if they would like a hand job.

the Western female character is represented in New Indian Cinema and if this representation contributes to the emancipatory development of this specific kind of film character in Indian cinema. In order to achieve this, attention will be paid in the first chapter to Mulvey's concept of the 'male gaze', the relation between Indian and sexuality and how having a white skin are valued in India. The second chapter will be devoted to the representation of white Western women in Bollywood cinema, whereas the third chapter will focus on the representation of the white Western female character in New Indian Cinema. It is in the latter where three New Indian Cinema-films that depict a white Western woman played by Koechlin (*Dev D.* (Kashyap, 2009), *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (Kashyap, 2010) and *Shaitan* (Nambiar, 2011) will be analysed. In both chapters, the focus will be on how white Western women deal with sexuality and with what meaning their white skin is connected. The results of the analysis of the New Indian Cinema films will be compared with the way in which Bollywood cinema has depicted white Western women in order to discover a development in the representation of these women in Indian cinema.

This thesis will contribute to the field of feminist film studies. With the arrival of Western media such as cable and satellite television, magazines and the Internet in India from the 1980s onwards, not only the diversity of media in India increased. Concerns about the treatment of gender in these new media within media studies raised too, since women are major consumers of mass media in India (Tere, 2012: 1). The role of Indian women within media structures and the way these women are represented in media became main issues within this scientific field. This especially counts for the feminist film studies, a field that emerged in the 1970s from the concerns about the under- and misrepresentation of women in cinema (ibidem: 2). Feminist film studies pay attention to the way in which women are represented in cinema, how women's issues are treated in cinema and how female characters are positioned vis a vis male characters, among others. Therefore, the case of the representation of white Western women in Indian cinema fits into this particular kind of scientific field.

This research is relevant for both scientific and social reasons. Dark states that the white Western women in Indian cinema has been overlooked by both Western and Indian critics (2008: 142). Although the Western women have been presented regularly in Indian cinema from the 1950s onwards, very little has been written about her presence and representation in Indian cinema, let alone in New Indian Cinema. This results in the fact that it is still quite unknown what characterises this character in this yet undefined new kind of cinema. This thesis will try to define both the new Indian film genre and the way New Indian Cinema depicts the Western women. Moreover, film is a very important and influential medium in Indian society because it shapes the cultural, social and political values of its society in some way, according to Parameswaran and Cardoza (2007: 2). Film functions as an educator for Indian people and as a contributor of cultural, social and political

values too. New information about how Indian Cinema depict Western female characters may give some insight in how film producers in India think about representing Western women. Since white Western women who live in contemporary Indian society are often victims of abuse by Indian men, it is important to find out if their depiction in Indian cinema is related to the way these women are valued in Indian society.

Sexuality and whiteness in India

In this chapter attention will be paid to one of the first feminist film theorists, Laura Mulvey, who invented the term 'male gaze' to indicate the function of women in cinema. Although this term was intended for research on Hollywood cinema, several scholars have proved that it can be used in analysis of Indian cinema as well. Thereafter, the paradoxical relationship between India and the depiction of sexuality will be explained. The last paragraph of this chapter will be devoted to the concept of whiteness and how having a white skin is valued in India, since it is the depiction of white women that is the central issue of this thesis.

Male gaze in Indian cinema

The term 'male gaze' was used for the first time in 1975, when Mulvey published her groundbreaking article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In this article, she states that women in mainstream narrative Hollywood films function as elements of spectacle: as passive erotic objects on which the active man (both character and spectator) can project his fantasies (Mulvey, 1999: 487). The male gaze exists at three levels according to Mulvey: the male character, the male spectator and the camera (that makes it possible for the male spectator to identify with the male character; to look through the eyes of the male character to the female character) (ibidem: 488-489). By gazing at a female object, both the male spectator and character contribute to the film's story (ibidem: 488). This idea emanates from the notion of 'scopophilia', the desire to see, which is an element of people's sexual instinct according to the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (Cited by Mulvey, 1999: 485). This desire can also be noted in cinema. Film gives spectators the illusion that they can look into a private world and in this way, voyeuristic pleasure is produced (ibidem: 486). When men watch a film, they can look at women depicted on the screen and fantasise about them without expecting any consequences.

Mulvey's concept of the male gaze has been discussed a lot by film theorists and her feminist film theory is still used nowadays. However, what is important here is the question whether or not this theory can be applied to Indian cinema too, since Mulvey's theory is based on conventions of Hollywood cinema. Datta, Mishra and Virdi prove that Mulvey's theory can be used for analysis of Indian cinema. Datta argues that 'in Indian mainstream cinema we continue to see a

patriarchal version of female sexuality', which has only been reinforced by the spread of Western images through satellite television after the 1980s (2000: 73). Virdi used Mulvey's theory in her analysis of Bollywood films and concluded that in song and dance sequences, the female heroine is fetishised through the way she moves and the way she is dressed and filmed (2003: 146). This kind of depiction heightens the scopophilic pleasure of the male spectator. Moreover, Mishra shows that women in Raj Kapoor's films are represented as erotic objects for men to look at (2002: 95). Therefore, it can be concluded that the male gaze can not only be traced in Hollywood but in Indian cinema too.

Depiction of sexuality in India

'Sexuality in India is a paradoxical issue' argues' Chang (2008). On the one hand, sexuality has been regarded as a taboo topic in the 20th century, something Indian people should not talk about in the public sphere (Chang, 2008). On the other hand, sexuality has been represented in many different forms of ancient art, for example through depictions, sculptures and literature as the well known Kamasutra. This text was written approximately AD 200 and is considered as 'world's oldest and most widely read guide to the pleasures and techniques of sex' (Danielou cited by Roy, 2000: 52). It deals with all aspects of love and sexual life, even prostitution, homosexuality and transvestism. This text is still present in today's Indian society through different kinds of media (2000: 52). However, referring to the Kamasutra seems less accepted. In 1991, the Kamasutra was visible in the groundbreaking KamaSutra condom campaign that gained a lot of protest because it expressed sensuality and pleasure rather than safety. In 1996, Mira Nair named her controversial film about the relationship between two women after this ancient Indian text and received resistance. Her film was banned in India because of the erotic scenes with both hetero- and homosexual characters (McGirk, 1996). It may be clear that India's relationship with the depiction of sexuality is indeed contradictory.

The history of the Indian government's attitude towards the depiction of sexuality only empowers this paradox. Mankekar, for example, thinks that the arrival of media such as cable television in the 1990s has had an important influence on how Indian society and media treat sexual topics nowadays (cited in Chang, 2008). Due to these new, Western, media, people came in contact with a more open portrayal of sexuality, through American soap series, the television network MTV and several magazines among others. Indian media reacted on these global imports and started to incorporate sexual themes in both image and linguistic usage. In this way, sexuality became less taboo and cultural norms towards this subject became more modern (Mankekar cited in Chang, 2008).

However, the Indian government regarded this new, open, way of depicting sexuality as

obscene, vulgar and harming for the Indian traditional values. Subramaniam agrees with this. According to her, Indian Cinema promoted vulgar Western practices that were presented by Western media (Subramaniam cited by Mehta, 2011: 44). Hence, Hindi cinema threatened the norms and values of Indian society. In order to avoid this, the government set up a censorship that was based on the idea that globalisation is welcome as long as it fit into the boundaries of India's norms and values (Chang, 2008). By censoring media, the government stayed true to Indian traditions and the conservative values regarding sexuality. This, in fact, only reinforces the paradoxical relationship between India and sexuality, since the censorship contradicts the openness about sexuality of the Kamasutra.

Sexuality has always been one of the main concerns of film censorship in India. In 1952, the governmental Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) was established, an organisation that still has the task to assign certifications to films, television shows and advertisements, among others. Only after the CBFC has certified a film it can be exhibited in India. After the introduction of Western media in India, the government became afraid that depictions of sexuality would harm the Indian audience. Therefore, the government asked the CBFC to prohibit sexuality (including kissing and nudity) in Indian cinema (Mehta, 2011: 16). Because of the anxiety that the depiction of sex in films would only increase, the government established a committee in 1969 that had to examine the procedures for certifying films for public exhibition (ibidem: 42). Beside fulfilling this task, the committee advised censors to allow the depiction of sexuality and nudity as long as it was relevant for the film's narrative and, moreover, the depiction was aesthetically delicate and avoided all suggestion of lust (ibidem: 43). The committee and the government regarded kissing and exotic love scenes in cinema as 'un-Indian' and as elements of people's private live that should not be presented in the public space by a film screen (ibidem: 43-44). In the beginning of the 1990s, the government revised the censorship guidelines and reinforced its authority in the national film industry (Mehta, 2011: 55). The government asked the CBFC to ensure that characters in films are not offended by vulgarity and women are not raped or denigrated, among others. Moreover, the CBFC had to assure the government to refuse scenes that explicitly show obscenity and sexual violence (ibidem). These scenes included song and dance sequences, despite that they are intended for sexual and romantic feelings and thoughts of both characters and audiences. How the government's censorship has influenced the way Bollywood cinema has represented sexuality will be discussed in the second chapter.

Meaning of whiteness

According to Richard Dyer, 'white people are systematically privileged in Western society' (1997: 9). They are considered as more powerful, have more material well-being and dominance, all

gained without having paid for it (ibidem: 9, 52). During the history, whiteness has become connected with order, rationality and rigidity, hence non-whiteness automatically became a reference to the opposites: disorder, irrationality and looseness (Dyer, 1988: 47-48). Moreover, having a white skin has long regarded as a beauty ideal, by both white and non-white people (Dyer, 1997: 71). Not only in daily life white has been a beauty ideal: in art, for example in photography and film, whiteness was even constructed. With a little help of light, clothes and make up, the skin of especially women has been made more lighter (ibidem: 122). Already in the silent area special lighting and compositions were used in order to emphasise the whiteness, and hence goodness, of actresses such as Lillian Gish (ibidem: 86). Making women's skin lighter was considered as making them more beautiful and moral good. In this way, an idealised woman was created.

Not only in the West is whiteness connected with beauty. India is one of the Asian countries where having white skin is regarded as an essential element of female beauty too (Li et al., 2008: 444). This ideal dates back from the time of colonialism and the introduction of Western thoughts on beauty, however, this only counts for the recent advertising discourses of fairness (Parameswaran and Cardoza: 2007: 3: footnote). Parameswaran and Cardoza state that the origin of regarding whiteness as superior lies around 1500 BC, when light skinned Aryan tribes from Eurasia invaded India. Since Aryans possessed weapons and knowledge the primitive dark skinned Indians did not have, whiteness was associated with being more powerful (ibidem).

Having a white skin became connected with the Indian class and caste system: the lighter the skin the higher the class you belong to. White skin is nowadays still a symbol for beauty, purity, cleanliness, happiness, well-being, power and privilege, according to Hakim Arif (2004: 584). On the contrary, black skin has been negatively associated with darkness, dirtiness, wrongness, unfairness and the hell. The Hindu religion even knows a dark-skinned goddess, Kali, who symbolises ugliness, cruelty and destruction and confirms the negative thoughts about dark skinned Indian women (ibidem: 589). Dark Indian women developed a desire to have fairer skin and nowadays there is a large market for bleaching products which pretend to make dark skin lighter and people's life better (Sinha, cited by Parameswaran and Cardoza, 2007: 2). Even India's film industry glorifies white skinned women by representing more women with fair skin than women with dark skin (Parameswaran and Cardoza, 2007: 9).

The fact that having white skin was and still is regarded as a privilege by Indian people does not immediately involve that white Western women are seen as role models for Indian women. During the British occupation, white women were both regarded as goddesses and Western devils (Jayawardena, 2011: 2). The good white women were the ones who were interested in India's culture and religion, who supported local nationalism and even fought against colonialism. White female devils, on the contrary, were social reformers. They tried to introduce Western norms and

values into India's society and encouraged the British imperialism (ibidem). Although a division was made by India's inhabitants, between good and bad Western women, a dominating stereotypical view of white women existed. Jayawardena writes that Indian men considered white Western women as 'not much better than a prostitute' because of her immodest way of dressing, inappropriate behaviour (including drinking, smoking and dancing) and Western way of thinking (ibidem: 8). They were women of the enemy and more attainable than the enemy himself. Therefore, white women were often victims of violence and abuse. According to Ware, Indian men thought that their 'black lust' could save white women from their immorality (1993: 182). The dominant stereotypical thoughts about Western women that existed during the British occupation are also noticeable in both India's contemporary society and popular cinema, as will be explained in the next chapter.

Representation of white women in Bollywood cinema

In this chapter, the way Bollywood cinema has represented the white Western female character, regarding sexuality and whiteness, will be discussed. Attention will be paid to the development her depiction has been through: from a white threat to a supportive white sister (and attraction). However, it is important to explain what Bollywood cinema is first, since this genre of Indian cinema is still ill defined nowadays.

Definition of Bollywood cinema

Although I will not discuss the concept of genre in dept, it is relevant to know what this term means and what it includes before I will define the genre of both Bollywood and New Indian Cinema films. Barry Keith Grant writes that 'genre' refers to three factors (2007: 2). Based on the definitions of genre of Ryall and Neale, he writes that on the one hand the film industry uses a categorical mode of film production that is dependent on genres. On the other hand, genres cause expectancies by spectators regarding pleasure. Moreover, as a critical concept, genre functions as a tool for categorising films and understanding the complex relationship between popular cinema and popular culture (ibidem). Genre movies are always connected with the time and place they are created in and therefore influenced by a particular popular culture and ideology (ibidem: 6).

The definition of a genre depends on several elements. First, a genre relies on conventions: aspects of style, narrative and sound that are associated with the genre by both producers and consumers (ibidem: 10-11). The second element is iconography, a term that refers to particular objects, characters and actors which contain a specific cultural meaning (ibidem, 12). Moreover, the setting (the space and time where and when a film's story is situated), the stories and themes a film addresses and the characters and (star) actors that appear in the film should also be taken into

account (ibidem, 14, 15, 17). Finally, because of the expectations viewers have regarding films, which are based on conventions, the role of the audience should not be forgotten when defining a genre (ibidem, 21).

According to Kush Varia, Bollywood is one of the leaders in world's film industry (2012: 1). However, the term 'Bollywood' is still ill defined and incorrectly applied. It is often used to indicate Indian cinema in general, although Indian cinema contains more than Bollywood alone, and the term suggests that this kind of film is a derivative to Hollywood (ibidem: 4). Varia defines Bollywood as a 'Hindi-language based and populist cinema produced by major studios in Mumbai' (ibidem) and it is this definition that will be used in this thesis too.

Bollywood cinema is well-known for its overflow of music and dance sequences, its multiple storylines, highly emotional scenes, over-the-top acting and glamorous decors, among other things (Figure 1) (ibidem: 31). This may not be surprising, since Indian cinema has been influenced by the conventions of Indian Parsi theater, which contains a lot of music, dance and drama (ibidem: 5). Three major genres emerged in Indian cinema during the silent area, namely the mythical, the historical and the stunt picture (ibidem: 15). Indian filmmakers remained inspired by traditional Indian stories and theatrical plays but meanwhile adapted editing conventions of Hollywood cinema. In this way, Indian cinema became a mix of tradition and modernity. Nevertheless, Indian films' narrative remained based on plays and religious epics until the 1950s, when the Bombay-based Hindi film industry began to rise (ibidem: 5, 15). Filmmakers, such as Guru Dutt and Mehboob Khan, dared to create new myths for their films and began to develop a new film style that was both unique to India and the rest of the world (ibidem: 15-16). In this way, they obeyed to the call of the Indian government for the creation of a national cinema. This new kind of film became a commercial success in India and abroad; Bollywood was born (ibidem: 16).

Figure 1: Screenshot from a dancing scene of *Kal ho naa ho*

Bollywood characterises itself by films that contain music, dance, costumes and settings that promote the idealistic morals and values of Indian society and reach an all-Indian audience (ibidem: 17). Bollywood films, such as *Kal ho naa ho* (Advani, 2003), are focused on the stereotypical traditional Indian values, such as love for your family and religion. These films give their spectators an idea of what they should regard as important in their life. Bollywood films often contain not one but several main characters who play the same roles, such as the hero, the mother, the renouncer, the temptress et cetera. Therefore, these films often start with introducing these characters and the corresponding storylines. The ending is often a happy ending, which means that the social order is reconstructed by the end of the film (Dwyer and Patel: 2002, 22).

Bollywood cinema is known for its high grade of melodrama as well, which means that it tries to stir up the emotions of the viewer through tragic sequences in a film (ibidem: 28). According to Dwyer and Patel 'melodrama needs to be read metaphorically to understand its typical focus on the family' (ibidem: 29). Melodrama in Bollywood cinema is often connected with the illness of a family member, a family break up or misunderstandings within a family. There are several elements that evoke a melodramatic sphere. Beside song and dance sequences, both grandiloquent monologues and dialogues and an exaggerated way of acting through which characters express their emotions, more cinematographic elements such as close ups, camera movements and slow motions are used too in order to intensify the emotional feeling (ibidem). These elements can all be noticed in the scene of *Kal ho naa ho* when Aman gets a telephone call about the wedding of Naina and Rohit. In order to stress the feelings of Aman, dramatic music plays while the camera zooms in on Aman's face and turns around him a couple of times, in slow motion (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Screenshot from a melodramatic scene in *Kal ho naa ho*

However, Bollywood cinema cannot be equaled with the genre of melodrama. Each film contains a mix of genres: one scene may be more dramatic, while others may contain more action, romance or comedy. A shift in focus on particular genres can be noticed through the history of Bollywood cinema. After the arrival of colour in the 1960s, Bollywood's style became more spectacular and a lot of romantic and traveling stories were produced in this decade. Bollywood films of the 1970s, however, are rather characterised by violence, crime and stories situated in the underworld (Varia, 2012: 21). Some films produced from the 1990s onwards, on the contrary, deal with controversial and political themes (ibidem, 26). Nevertheless, Bollywood films remained 'Masala' formula's, a term that actually refers to a mix of spices but is used here to indicate the mix

of genres (Mooij, 2006: 30)

Due to the government's censorship Indian film directors had to assimilate romanticism and eroticism in their Bollywood films in a suggestive and symbolical way. They filmed their characters in slow-motion while they were running towards each other and suggested they would kiss at the end of the scene. However, the kiss was rarely shown directly to the audience. Eroticism received a separate place in Bollywood films, in what Varia calls the 'dream sequence' (2013: 40). Here, in this imagined world, erotic fantasies of both characters and spectators could be presented. In this way, these fantasies are separated from the emotions within the narrative, as if sexuality is something that belongs outside the film's real world. Through dance and music items, characters express their sexual feelings. During these scenes, it is mainly the female body that is represented, by close-ups of her face and fethistic shots of her erogenous zones (ibidem). Varia does not necessarily regard the government's censorship as a restriction for film makers (ibidem). It actually has allowed them to create a unique way of representing sexuality, which now can be considered as a characteristic of Bollywood films.

Film maker Shyam Benegal, however, thinks that the censorship has been too exaggerated. Sexuality in Indian cinema is something that is not allowed to be shown, hence it should be depicted 'in the air' so that the audience knows that sexuality is present in the film's story world (cited in Jain 2013). Moreover, director Aparna Sen found difficulties during the production of her film, when she decided to depict eroticism in a more realistic way (Jain, 2013). Instead of letting her actors run around trees, she introduced mouth-to-mouth kissing in *36 Chrowringhee Lane* (1981). She got in trouble with the censor board for this and received an A(dult)-certificate for her film, although it was just a kiss (ibidem). Kalki Koechlin, regarded as a sex-symbol in contemporary India, is also indignant about the representation of sexuality in Indian cinema: 'Why do we have such trouble portraying prostitution or sex in a mature and straightforward way?' she wonders in her article about the representation of sexuality in Indian film (Koechlin, 2012). Although Indian cinema depicts women in very little clothes and men in tight pants, sexuality is still a taboo topic that cannot be discussed in Indian films. This is a very paradoxical case and Koechlin even thinks that Indian cinema ignores the real issues in life (2012).

Bollywood itself refused to depict sexuality too. According to Bhatt, a lot of Indian film makers believe in the idea that 'good people fall in love and bad people have sex' (cited in Jain, 2013). However, despite of the censorship and the believe of the binary good and bad regarding sex, it seems that the liberalisation of sexuality in Indian cinema increased during the 1990s and 2000s. According to Bhatt, Bollywood is 'leaning towards making sexual pleasure guilt-free on the celluloid at least' (cited in Jain, 2013). Actor Rahul Bose adds that nowadays 'sex is also used as an

integral part of the story' and that 'the politics of sex is very much a part of the comment on what the new generation is pre-occupied with' (cited in Jain, 2013). It seems that depicting sex in Bollywood is less uncommon now than it was in the previous decades, though Bose thinks that Bollywood has not went far enough yet in the depiction of sexuality (ibidem). If New Indian Cinema does go further in representing sexuality will be discovered in the third chapter.

From white devil to supportive white attraction

Apparently, the fact that India's film industry prefers fair skinned women only counts for light skinned Indian actresses and not for white Western women. Western women have been barely visible in Indian cinema and if they were they had been portrayed in the same stereotypical way. According to Kumar, Western female characters were always scantily dressed (2013). They only wore thin, garish mini-dresses or mini-skirts; clothes that Indian women were not allowed to wear. Moreover, they were often smoking, drinking and playing the same roles, namely those of vamps, dancers, arm candy and candidates for one-night-stands. In other words, they functioned as sex objects for the male gaze. In this way, the Western woman distinguished herself from the sweet Indian female characters, who never smoke, drink and have one-night-stands (Kumar, 2013).

According to feminist Geetanjali Gangoli, this was exactly what film makers tried to do: present the differences between Western and Indian women (2005: 145). Cinema is regarded as a medium that both reflects and creates values of Indian society and educates people about the good and the bad. Western women were considered as 'the Other', as something different than Indian women, and by representing her as the opposite of how Indian women (should) behave, a clear boundary was drawn between the immoral West and the moral East (ibidem). This clear division not only idealised Indian women, and India in general, but also taught these women how they should and should not behave. The Indian woman was considered as the bearer of traditional Indian values; she should protect them by rejecting influences of Western modernity (ibidem).

A well known character that often played the role of vamp, prostitute or dancer in Bollywood cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, is the Anglo-Indian cabaret-girl Helen. In 1951, she debuted in Raj Kapoor's *Awara* (Figure 3) and thereafter performed as a solo dancer in *Alif Laila* (Amarnath, 1954), *Hoor-e-Arab* (Arora, 1955) and *Howrah Bridge* (Samanta, 1958) among others. Because of her Anglo-Indian origin, she was considered as more accessible than Indian women and therefore more suitable for the

Figure 3: Screenshot from Helen's performance in *Awara*

roles of dancer and vamp (Gangoli, 2005: 143). Dark acknowledges that Western women, such as Helen, were always represented as the opposite of Indian morals and ideals of Indian femininity: ‘The vamp role echoes Western Orientalist fantasies and fears that placed the white European woman into erotic, exotic rapacious scenes with the Asian or Eastern male.’ (2008: 126). However, a development in the depiction of white Western women in Indian cinema can be noticed. According to Dark, the Western female character nowadays functions more as a representative of modernity in a contributive way. Instead of an embodiment of immorality she represents the 'good' West (ibidem). The Western female character functions as a role model for Indian women, ideally protectors of Indian culture and tradition, for how they could behave in contemporary modernised or Westernised Indian society while staying true to traditional Indian values (Dark, 2008: 127).

This type of character can be noticed in *Rang de Basanti*, a film about the white British woman Sue who wants to make a documentary about four revolutionary young men who fought for the independence of India during the dominance of Great-Britain. During the production of her film, she and her Indian friends have to deal with several political and social problems such as corruption and class/ caste differences. In the end they find out that the situation of India has rarely changed after the independence and that fighting for revolution is still needed. According to Dark, *Rang de Basanti* scripts Sue in a catalytic and pedagogical role regarding the adaption of modernity in the life of Indian women (Dark, 2008: 133). She functions as a 'moral authority': 'Sue acts as a catalyst for unity and entrenched gender roles' (ibidem). It is she who resolves conflicts within the group during the production of the film and who listens to her friend DJ when he talks about his fear for the future. Sue also lets the Indian woman Sonia know that she thinks that traditions are important to retain and she herself even goes to an Indian temple together with her friends.

When we involve Dyer's thoughts about whiteness here, it can be noticed that Sue's white skin is allied with bringing order in the group of friends. Moreover, she seems more rational than her Indian male friends, who want to resolve disagreements with fights while Sue prefers a conversion. However, her whiteness is connected with beauty as well, since several men look at Sue when she walks along. Especially DJ is impressed by her appearance. Therefore, Sue is represented as a sex object for male gaze too. The male characters are still more powerful than the female main characters who seem smart independent women in the beginning of the film. However, when DJ and his friends fight for the rights of their generation Sue and Sonia are absent: they are almost removed from the last part of the film's narrative.

Dark notices that what counts for Sue in *Rang de Basanti* can also be noticed in *Lagaan*, a film that is set in colonial India, 1893. The English commander Captain Russell has imposed a bet on the villages under his control: the Indian male inhabitants must play a game of cricket against the English garrison and if they lose they have to pay three times the year's tax. Elizabeth, Captain

Russell's sister disagrees with her brother's way of ruling and decides to teach the Indians how to play the game. With teaching Indian people a Western game, Elizabeth acts like a supportive white sister, just Sue. She indeed incorporates Western modernity in India's traditional culture, however, her intention is good: she wants the Indians to win the competition. In *Lagaan*, the male characters are dominant in the narrative too since the game of cricket is only executed by men. Elizabeth functions as an object for Indian men to look at, especially for Bhuvan, with whom Elizabeth falls in love. On the other hand, the Indian woman Gauri conceives Elizabeth as a threat, as a white devil. She mistrust the white lady's good intentions. In the film, Elizabeth turns into an object for the Indian women too, an object that they frown away when it is nearby. Hence, Elizabeth's whiteness is connected with both beauty, goodness and threat.

Dark especially paid attention to the representation of Sue and Elizabeth in the narrative of *Rang de Basanti* and *Lagaan*. However, it can be noticed that the dominance of male characters in is also expressed visually. When Sue and Sonia are sitting in a classroom, Pandey walks in and stands still beside the women. During their conversation, Pandey is shot from a low camera angle while the women are filmed from a high camera angle over the Pandey's shoulder (Figure 4). The women have to look up too Pandey and so the hierarchy between men and women is not only notable in the narrative of *Rang de Basanti* but in its mise-en-scene too. In *Lagaan*, it is rather the fact that Elizabeth is often surrounded by both Indian and English men that expresses the male dominance in the film (Figure 5). However, Sue and Elizabeth are not represented in the way Bollywood films in general do regarding sensuality. As Varia states, sexuality in Bollywood cinema is always banned from the narrative and depicted in song and dance sequences (2012: 40). In these scenes, the faces and the erogenous zones of the dancing women are often filmed in close up. In *Rang de Basanti* and *Lagaan*, however, this is not the case. Sensuality is depicted in some dancing sequences but Sue does not always join the dancing

Figure 4: Screenshots from the shot-reverse-shot between Pandey and Sue in *Rang de Basanti*

Figure 5: Screenshot from Elizabeth surrounded by Indian men in *Lagaan*

of her friends. Sometimes, she observes them through her camera and in this way becomes a kind of spectator. Moreover, when she does dance in this film, close ups of her body are rarely made. Elizabeth is not present in any of the dance sequences in *Lagaan*. Therefore, it seems that Sue and Elizabeth are less sex objects for the male spectator than their predecessors.

However, not everybody agrees with Dark about the improved portrayal of Western female characters in Indian cinema. Kumar argues that Western women are still represented as sex objects in Bollywood cinema (2013). It even got worse: 'Even films with more liberated Indian characters […] showcases the white women encountered by the main characters as overtly sexual and/or controlling.' (2013). The way white Western women are represented in *Rang de Basanti* and *Lagaan* confirms this statement, although the depiction of Western women in *Kal ho naa ho* makes the fact these women still function as objects for the male gaze even more clear. During the disco scene, Western women are depicted as dancers and vamps, who wear very little clothes and try to tempt the Indian man Aman (Figure 6). Apparently, not all Bollywood films depict the Western woman as a supportive white sister.

Figure 6: Screenshot from white dancers and Aman during the disco scene in *Kal ho naa ho*

According to Kumar, Bollywood is to blame for the fact that Western women are often victims of violence and rape. Since the 1950s, Bollywood depicts Western women as sex objects and this results in the idea that Western women are easy to access. Kumar interviewed several Western actresses who have worked in India about their living circumstances and they all said that it is not easy to make career as a white Western actress in India. They often receive minor roles and much less salary than Bollywood star-actors (Kumar, 2013). Moreover, these women are often teased, threatened or even attacked and raped by Indian men, both at the set and beyond. In this case, the whiteness of Western women is rather connected with sexuality than with power and well-being.

Actress Kalki Koechlin, 'blessed' with a white skin, acknowledges that white women have to work hard to prove themselves as an actress in India. Although Koechlin became famous after her debut with *Dev D.*, she was not immediately offered another role. Hence, she became unemployed for one-year-and-a-half and had create work for herself ('Kalki had to', 2011). Because of her skin colour and accent, Koechlin can only play certain roles in Indian films ('Kalki Koechlin says', 2001). Moreover, she has had to deal with difficulties all her life as a white girl living in India: 'On one side people treat you specially because you are fair, on the other hand you are treated like an alien' (ibidem). However, although she is treated differently in both Indian society and film industry,

Koechlin disagrees with Kumar on blaming Bollywood for the rapes of white Western women. She think this is unreasonable since women who wear saris and even children are getting raped too ('I've a deadpan': 2013). 'In such cases, rape has nothing to do with women dressing provocatively' (Koechlin in 'I've a deadpan': 2013).

Somaaya, Kothari and Madangarili too think that female characters (in general) still function as entertainment for the male gaze, although they have been given other roles in the last two decades (2012: 240). However, according to them, it is only alternative Indian cinema which pushes the boundaries of Hindi cinema. Independent directors, such as Anurag Kashyap and Dibakar Banerjee, dare to represent female characters in a non-stereotypical way. In their films, these women are not dancers, vamps and prostitutes but everyday people who deal with developing circumstances (Somaaya et al., 2012: 244).

Although there is no consensus about whether or not the representation of Western female characters has improved, a little development of this phenomenon can be noticed. From the 1950s onwards, the modern white Western women has been represented as the opposite of the traditional Indian woman. She dressed and behaved in the way Indian women would never do and hence a clear boundary was made between immoral Western women and moral Indian women. However, recent Bollywood films depict white women in another manner, namely as supportive white sisters as Dark calls them. In these films, Western and Indian women are not each other's rivals anymore (though *Lagaan* shows that tensions between Western and Indian women still can exist). White women are representatives of Western modernity but instead of a threat they are examples for Indian women how they could combine modernity with Indian traditions in their lives. However, it may be overdrawn to say that these white women are emancipated since male characters still dominate in recent Bollywood cinema. Moreover, the white female character still functions as an attraction for the male gaze and in this way the development from white devil to white supportive sister may not be such an emancipatory improvement as Dark stated. If the depiction of white women in New Indian Cinema is an emancipatory progression will be discovered the following chapter.

Representation of white women in New Indian Cinema

Whereas the previous chapter was devoted to Bollywood cinema and the way in which this Indian film genre has represented the white Western women until now, this chapter will pay attention to the depiction of this female character in an Indian film genre that has recently emerged. Since both a name and a proper definition of this genre are still lacking, it is necessary to explain what characterises this new Indian film genre. This will be done by comparing the seemingly characteristics of this genre with the conventions of Bollywood cinema. Thereafter, the depiction of

white Western women in the New Indian Cinema-films *Dev D.*, *That Girl in Yellow Boots* and *Shaitan* will be discussed.

Definition of New Indian Cinema

As has been written, Indian cinema is not only Bollywood. In the 1970s, several filmmakers, such as Satyajit Ray and Mani Kaul, started to distinguish themselves from Bollywood cinema by producing an alternative kind of Indian cinema (Karena, 2003: 134). This so called 'parallel cinema' addressed social and political issues, for example the caste system or corruption, and received more attention from abroad through the international film festival circuit. Nowadays, another kind of Indian cinema is rising, a cinema that is neither Bollywood nor alternative cinema. There is no consensus of how this new kind of Indian cinema should be called. Varia calls it 'Mumbai New Wave' (ibidem: 112), Mooij 'New Bollywood'(2006: 33) and Karena 'Crossover Cinema' (2003: 135) and sometimes the term 'Hindipendent cinema' is used. However, not all New Indian Cinema films are made in Mumbai. Besides, New Bollywood might be confusing because of the lack of many Bollywood characteristics in this new kind of Indian cinema. Crossover Cinema might be mixed up with Indian diaspora cinema, Indian cinema made outside India. Moreover, the language used in these new films is not only Hindi but also other Indian dialects, and even more English. Since new Indian film makers are not always independent but also work together with film companies, the term Hindipendent cinema is not suitable either. Because the characteristics of this new Indian film movement are still vague, a more open and broader term will used in this thesis, namely New Indian Cinema. In this way, exclusion of characteristics of New Indian Cinema will be avoided.

When we look at New Indian Cinema, we notice that this genre is characterised by low-budget films made by young directors (graduates from film school) outside the major studios. These are Anarug Kashyap, Anant Balani and Abhinay Deo, among others. According to Karena, these independent film directors are influenced by Western ideas and lifestyles exposed by modern media technologies as satellite television and the Internet (2003: 134). These sources of new, Western, information have inspired film makers to produce a kind of film style that is a mixture of traditional Indian cinema and Western cinema. This new generation of film makers focuses on new subjects which are often based on social and political issues in Indian society, for example abuse, violence, addiction and suicide. Besides, their films are often situated in urban settings which are less colourful than the décors in Bollywood cinema. Directors dare to address the real problems in Indian urban society and to show these explicitly in their films. They do this by depicting one main character who is dealing with a specific issue. Kashyap, for example, shows his audience with *Dev D.* (2009) that character Dev is addicted to drugs and drinks by letting him use drugs and drinks

alcohol a lot during the film. A large part of this film is positioned in a dark urban setting (Figure 7). Therefore, New Indian Cinema can be considered as more realistic and less melodramatic than Bollywood cinema.

Figure 7: Screenshot from the dark urban setting in *Dev D.* At the right: Dev using drugs.

Another difference between Bollywood and New Indian Cinema is the length of the films. Whereas Bollywood films are at least 2,5 to 3 hours, New Indian Cinema films are approximately 1,5 to 2 hours. The narratives of New Indian Cinema films are linear more often, although *Dev D.*, shows that this should not necessarily be the case. This film is based on the Indian novel *Devdas*, but instead of telling the story in a linear form, *Dev D.* is divided in three parts, each focusing on one of the main characters (Paro, Chandramukhi and Devdas). Moreover, New Indian Cinema-directors move away from stereotypical characters like heroes and villains and let their actors act more neutral instead of over-the-top. This reinforces the realistic style of New Indian Cinema. Besides, the English language is used more often than Bollywood films (Mooij, 2006: 33, 35).

In contrast with Bollywood cinema, sexuality is present in the narrative of New Indian Cinema-films. Sexuality is something that exists within the story world and not only in dreamy song and dance sequences. This taboo topic is addressed in the daily lives of the characters and not in song and dance sequences. In this way, the films show that sexuality is part of young people's life and that it can (or should) be addressed in India's society. Moreover, on the one hand, sexuality is addressed in a loose way by characters, for example by making fun of it (in *Shaitan*), or, more seriously on the other hand, it is connected with problems in Indian society such as prostitution, abuse and rape (in *Dev D.* and *That Girl in Yellow Boots*). Besides, New Indian Cinema directors

have the courage to depict sexuality more explicitly and extreme, compared to the prudish way in which Bollywood depicts the taboo.

Although it seems that these new directors move towards Western cinema, since they are influenced by elements of Western cinema and television practices, they often incorporate some Bollywood elements in their films too, for example a few dance and music scenes or Bollywood star actors (Varia, 2012: 112). However, because these directors make films about social and political problems in Indian society, they also have something in common with the parallel cinema movement of the 1970s. In this way it can be concluded that New Indian Cinema tries to find its position somewhere between Bollywood cinema, Indian parallel cinema and Western cinema. This is a phenomenon that is comparable with Indian media (and society) in general, which tend to be a mix of traditional Indian and modern Western elements too.

Important to note is that not only Western media, Bollywood and parallel cinema influenced this new Indian film style. In 1997, the first multiplexes arrived in India, film theater situated in big shopping malls which do not only screen big Bollywood films for an audience of 500 people but also have smaller rooms for independent low-budget cinema (Verma, 2011). This new kind of film theater gave independent directors a place where they can show their films to an audience with a different taste that wants to see other films than those of Bollywood. Moreover, Indian film corporations started to co-operate with these young film makers, some of whom established their own production company, in order to provide better production circumstances and to prevent them from financial problems (ibidem).

The distinction between Bollywood and New Indian Cinema is not black-and-white, as can be noticed. New Indian Cinema does contain some Bollywood elements, hence the question is how many or how little Bollywood characteristics a film is allowed to contain in order to be regarded as New Indian Cinema. Beside that a consensus about how this new film movement should be called is missing, it is difficult to decide whether a film is Bollywood or New Indian Cinema since the latter is in-between of Bollywood, alternative Indian cinema and Western cinema. This issue will be illustrated by the film *Rang de Basanti.*

For her research on the representation of Western women in Bollywood cinema, Dark analysed *Rang de Basanti* because of the fact that this film depicts a Western female character: Sue. Hence, Dark regards *Rang de Basanti* as a Bollywood film. However, Dark mentions that the film was aimed for a specific audience, namely 'young people in urban areas, specifically upper middle-class college students' (2008: 134). Here, Dark seems to contradict herself. Because of its aim to reach a specific kind of spectator, *Rang de Basanti* would rather fit into the definition of New Indian Cinema, since this genre is meant for a niche audience and Bollywood cinema is made for all

Indian people.

Mooij, who calls *Rang de Basanti* an 'edgy drama with a political message', adds that '[a]lthough it has a few highly infectious and celebratory dance items, *Rang de Basanti* is not about extended families and big weddings' (Mooij, 2006: 35). On the contrary, Mehra's film is more concerned with historical, social and political issues, something which may be regarded as a New Indian Cinema characteristic. The emotional scenes and colourful dance sequences cannot be ignored, though. Mooij, however, thinks that every film about social issues should pay attention to the way in which characters express their emotions (ibidem). In other words, the (melo)dramatic scenes in *Rang de Basanti*, such as the funeral of Sonia's fiancé and the protest against the Indian government at the India Gate, do not necessarily mean that it is a Bollywood film.

In the new millennium, film makers began to use different techniques in order to make their films' temporal and spatial transitions more fluid. Somaaya et al. describe *Rang de Basanti* as a coming of age film and regard Mehra as one of these first film makers who dared to experiment with the way of telling a story through their film (2012: 196, 192). In *Rang de Basanti*, scenes from the film's narrative shift seamlessly to the scenes of the documentary the protagonists are making. Moreover, Mehra's film is quite innovatory in the sense that it depicts two powerful female characters: Sue and Sonia (Somaaya et al., 2012: 202). Both the fluid narrative shifts and the new way of representing female characters seem more characteristic for New Indian Cinema than for Bollywood cinema.

In my opinion, *Rang de Basanti* cannot be regarded a Bollywood film for several reasons. Indeed, the film is not focused on an individual but on a group of characters and it contains some storylines beside the main one about a group of young people. Moreover, the film lasts almost three hours. However, the film does not have a clear happy ending but more an open one that leaves the audience with the question whether or not the social order is reconstructed. Besides, the actors act in a more realistic way compared to the actors in Bollywood films as *Kal ho naa ho* for example. As Mooij has written, melodrama is present in *Rang de Basanti* but it does not turn into sentimentality (2006: 35). The melodramatic sphere is needed to evoke the viewers' emotions. Music is used to reach this aim but the difference is that the characters do not playback the songs themselves and rarely dance when the music plays. Songs are used to create a particular sphere instead of letting the characters express their emotions through dances and songs (that are often more Western than Indian). Moreover, beside the beautiful wide Indian landscapes, darker settings are used in *Rang de Basanti* too. Especially during the scenes which show the past (reenacted by Sue's friends) are

darker than the parts of the film that are set in the contemporary, due to the fact that they are shot in an olive colour (Figure 8). On the one hand this is done in order to separate the past from the present but on the other hand the colour contributes to the ghastly sphere of these scenes.

Figure 8: Screenshot from an olive coloured scene of *Rang de Basanti*

However, the most important difference between *Rang de Basanti* and most Bollywood films is that this film is about (historical) socio-political themes such as corruption of the Indian Government, Western and Indian thoughts about issues in Indian society, rebellion and revolution. The Western Sue wants to make a documentary about four revolutionary young men who fought for the independence of India during the dominance of Great-Britain. During the production of her film, she and her Indian friends find out that the situation of India has rarely changed after the independence. Members of the Indian government turn out to be involved in illegal practices, protests are roughly broken up and fighting for revolution is still needed nowadays. The film presents a lot of violence and several people die in a harsh manner, which is shown explicitly. This would rather be characteristic for New Indian Cinema (in for example *Shaitan* people are killed in a comparable harsh way) than for Bollywood Cinema.

Because of the combination of several typical Bollywood elements and more New Indian Cinema characteristics, it is hard to decide to which genre *Rang de Basanti* belongs. However, because of the joke made by the youngsters about Bollywood film (after the group youngsters has watched a Bollywood film in the cinema, one of them says that he has learned why trees grow: because everyone dances around them) it seems that Mehra tries to distinguish herself from Bollywood cinema. The kiss between Sue and DJ maybe confirms this thought, since kissing in Bollywood cinema was forbidden at the time the film was released. Therefore, *Rang de Basanti* could be regarded as a first step to New Indian Cinema since it criticises the conventions of Bollywood cinema, although it contains more Bollywood characteristics than the New Indian Cinema films of Kasyap for example. Nevertheless, it may be clear it is not easy to decide whether a film in New Indian Cinema or not.

Kalki as the white emancipator

In contrast with Bollywood filmmakers, Koechlin herself does not ignore social issues in India's society. In 2013, she and VJ Juhi Pandey worked together with the stand-up comedian group AIB to make a satirical video on sexual assault in India. The campaign was called 'It's Your Fault' and in

the video Koechlin and Pandey explain in a satirical way why it is women's own fault if they are raped. The message is that Indian women cannot do anything good. It does not matter what they wear, what they do and with who they are: women themselves are the reason why they are raped by men, simply because they do exist. The video reached a big audience and Koechlin received many positive reactions. The actress noticed that 'there is a growing audience for films that address women's issue' ('We all are', 2012). Therefore, she hopes that the 'It's Your Fault'-video encourages actors and directors to finally take their social responsibility and make films about sexuality and women (ibidem).Also about white women since they are victims of rape in contemporary India too. It seems that New Indian Cinema-films obeys to Koechlin's call.

In order to discover how the white Western female character is depicted in New Indian Cinema, the films *Dev. D, That Girl in Yellow Boots* and *Shaitan* have been analysed. *Dev D.* is based on the Bengali romance novel *Devdas*, although director Kashyap has made his very own version of the story. In *Dev D.*, the young man Dev meets his childhood lover Paro after he came back from London, where he studied. When Dev hears the rumours about Paro's love life, he decides to leave her. Dev turns into the world of drugs, violence and alcohol and it is here where he meets the prostitute Chanda (Leni), a Delhi student of half-European, half-Indian descent. This character is played by Kalki Koechlin.

Figure 9: Screenshots from the sex tape scene in *Dev D*

In the beginning of *Dev D.*, Koechlin plays the role of the innocent schoolgirl Leni, who gets a lot of attention of Indian men. When Leni leaves her house to go to school, men look at her and whistle when she walks along. Leni herself seems to enjoy this male attention, since she smiles when she is in such a situation. However, the attention she receives when she arrives at school is less pleasant. Her schoolmates whisper 'Leni, you're the best!', when Leni walks along. Leni starts crying and runs away from the crowd. Through flashbacks it becomes clear why she does not enjoy this situation: a tape that shows Leni having oral sex with her Indian boyfriend has leaked out. The viewer sees how Leni's boyfriend had filmed Leni, both from the point-of-view of a third person and from her boyfriend's perspective through the camera, while he says 'Leni, you're the best'. It is notable that during this scene Leni is filmed from above and her

boyfriend from below (Figure 9). A hierarchy can be noticed her: the Indian man is more powerful than the white girl and she has to do what he wants.

After Leni's father committed suicide, Leni stays at her grandmother, where she reads a book called 'Contempt' (Figure 10). On the cover of that book, a white woman with blond hair is depicted. It seems that there is not only a relationship between the title of the book and Leni, who is considered as an immoral 'witch' by her family because of the sex-tape and the suicide of her father, but between the title and the woman on the cover of the book too. In other words, in India, white Western women are regarded as disdain and Indian woman as the moral good. The way in which Leni and her grandmother are depicted in this scene confirms this thought. Leni is placed in the front of the frame but during the conversation with her grandmother, who is filmed from below, Leni has to look up to the well-mannered traditional Indian woman (Figure 11). Whiteness as superiority is clearly not the norm here and Leni cannot be seen as a role model for the modern Indian woman such as Sue in *Rang de Basanti* is.

Figure 10: Screenshot from Leni reading the book 'Contempt' in *Dev D*

Figure 11: Screenshot from Leni who has to look up to her grandmother in *Dev D*

After a short stay at her grandmother, Leni goes to Delhi, where she becomes a prostitute (and calls herself Chanda). Because of her Western look, she receives the biggest room and has to serve the highest-paying customers, who want nothing but the best. Leni is considered as a woman who can give men the best, only because she is not an Indian. Her whiteness may be considered here as superiority, but not regarding well-being or power, but regarding sex. The film does not show Chanda when she is having sex but it does depict her when she hits a man with a wipe, has phone sex and flirts with Dev. Sometimes, Chanda is filmed from below or placed in front of or higher in the frame and this makes her look more powerful during her work (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Screenshot from Chanda filmed from below during her work in *Dev D*

Moreover, she does not serve her customers all the time. When Dev is in her room, he asks

Chanda for a drink but she refuses to get it for him. What is notable in this scene is that Chanda is placed in the front of or a little higher on the screen than Dev and often filmed in sharp focus. Within her room, Chanda is the one who controls the men. It can be concluded that Chanda is rather depicted as a survivor, a smart woman who is not obedient to men instead of an object for male lust. At the end of *Dev D.*, Chanda turns into a kind of supportive sister for Dev. She cares about him, despite his addiction to alcohol. Maybe she is the one who can save Dev and bring order in his life again. On the other hand, Dev may be the one who has brought order in Leni's life. After Dev left her room, Leni left it the same day and stopped working as a prostitute. Hence, Indian men can be supportive to white women too.

A development of Leni's character can be noticed her. In the beginning of the film, she is an innocent schoolgirl that soon turns into an immoral witch because of the sex tape and the death of her father. When Leni arrives in Delhi, she becomes a prostitute in order to earn money for her living. Leni, or Chanda, is considered as 'the Other', as different than Indian women. Because of her foreign look, men belief that Chanda is more sexually experienced than Indian women are and therefore she is treated differently. However, Chanda stops being a prostitute when she falls in love with Dev. It can be concluded that Leni transforms herself from a white devil to an emancipated woman who controls her life.

In *That Girl in Yellow Boots* Koechlin plays the role of the main character: the British Ruth, who came to Mumbai to search for her father. During her stay, she finds out that it is not easy for white Western women to live in India. It may not be surprising that the story of Ruth is based on Koechlin's own experiences with living in India as a white woman. Ruth's whiteness is clearly connected with sexuality. During a conversation with an Indian man who wants to help Ruth to find her father, she says: 'I just get a bit paranoid, being a white girl in Bombay. Get a lot of dirty questions.' With this statement, Ruth let the viewer know that it is hard for white women to live in India, if he had not already seen it in the film. A lot of Indian men seem to think that Ruth is just an easy and stupid white girl, although she proves she is not. She stands up for herself and carries on with the search for her father, despite the misfortunes such as the theft of her money.

Meanwhile, she works in a massage salon to earn money for her living. Ruth gives men massages and hand jobs, however, this is not shown explicitly. The spectator only knows this because she asks her clients if they want a 'hand shake', which they often do not refuse. In contrast with Chanda in *Dev D.*, Ruth does serve men during her work. Moreover, she is depicted as a fetish object for the male gaze, especially for her father. When he is in the salon where Ruth works, he

looks at her while she is washing her hands. This is made visible by a shot-reverse-shot between the father and Ruth's body. Through the camera movement, the spectator can see how her father observes Ruth's body, especially where her bra is visible (Figure 13). Moreover, in the film it turns out that her father has followed Ruth and has made pictures of her, without she being aware of it. The fact that pictures of Ruth are made is represented through freeze frames. With the knowledge that Ruth's father has had sex with her sister, it can be concluded that he makes a sex object of Ruth by observing her and probably wants to have the same with his older daughter.

Figure 13: Screenshots from shot-reverse-shot of Ruth's father and Ruth's body

However, a man Ruth does not serve is her boyfriend. In the beginning of the film, he forces Ruth to have sex with him, something which Ruth refuses. This scene is more explicit than the scenes in the salon. It shows how he lies down on Ruth and holds her, while she tries to escape from him. More harsh violence against Ruth is shown in *That Girl* too. Ruth is hit several times by her boyfriend and the men who steal her money. However, Ruth shows assertive behaviour during the film. She tightens her boyfriend after he tried to have sex with her, she makes one of the thieves who stole her money cry when she gives him a hand job in the salon and she nearly kills her father after she discovered that he has abused Ruth's sister. Ruth does not let things go by, she does not give up and punishes the men who treated her badly.

In *Shaitan*, Koechlin plays the role of the traumatised Amy, who has left Los Angeles after her mentally disturbed mother committed suicide. At a party of her father and stepmother, she meets KC, who introduces her to his gang. Together with her new friends, Amy starts living a life full of fun, drugs, alcohol, driving around in a Hummer and making jokes about vibrators and flavour condoms. Amy seems to be the supportive sister in the group. During a random race, the gang run over two people on a scooter. After the fatal traffic accident, the group decides to collaborate with a police man who asks a lot of money. In order to receive the money, Amy sacrifices herself and proposes to let the group kidnap her, hoping that her father will pay for Amy's liberation.

Unfortunately, he does not. Instead of paying the group for his daughter he calls the police to

search for Amy. The gang has to hide for the police and get caught up in several violent situations. However, in contrast with Ruth, Amy is hardly involved when there is a fight nor is the violence against her. It is for example the Indian woman Tanya who almost gets raped and who gets into the hospital after her friend hit her head against the wall, not the Western woman. This is comparable with *Dev D.*, where the Indian Paro is hit by Dev, while Western Leni is not hit by anyone during the film. Since Amy and Tanya are hardly present in the fighting scenes of *Shaitan*, it can be concluded that the male members of the gang are dominant in this film. Nevertheless, differences in the composition of the male and female characters in the frame are not noticeable, hence a hierarchy between men and women is not presented in this way. Despite of the dominance of the male characters, it is Amy who is one of the few members who survives the fights and the difficulties they have been through, although her idea has failed. Her friends blame Amy for the fact that everything has gone wrong but it is she who proves to be a strong white women. This corresponds with the characters Leni and Ruth: they experience difficulties in their life but they all are present at the end of the films (although the states they are in differ).

Amy's whiteness too is connected with foreign and sexuality. The first question Tanya asks Amy is 'So Hollywood. How many guys have you slept with?'. Hence, Tanya supposes Amy to have had a lot of bed partners because she is not an Indian. Despite that Amy was asked with how many guys she has slept, sexuality in *Shaitan* is not necessarily connected with Amy. Indeed, she kisses Tanya during a drinking game but two male members of the gang kiss with each other too. At one moment, she can be regarded as an object, namely when she is playing the game eye lock with one of her male friends. She wants to show her breasts in order to distract her friend from the game but only uncovers her shoulder (Figure 14). However, it is she herself who pretends to be an object for her friend. Amy's way of dressing can be considered as a way of making an object of her too. During the film, she often wears in mini-dresses, mini-skirts and little T-shirts but since the Indian woman Tanya does the same, this cannot be regarded as a typical way of dressing for white women (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Screenshot from Amy who pretends to show her breasts in *Shaitan*

Figure 15: Screenshot from the gang in *Shaitan.* Amy and Tanya wear little skirts and dresses.

What Koechlin's characters have in common is that they all smoke and drink alcohol. Leni and Amy even use drugs. Apparently, the stereotypical depiction of Western women in Bollywood cinema can be traced in New Indian Cinema too. However, not only Western women drink, smoke and use drugs. Dev, an Indian man, drinks much more alcohol than Leni for example, just like the gang in *Shaitan*. Therefore, the behaviour of Koechlin's characters cannot be regarded as specific for white Western female characters in New Indian Cinema, which was in Bollywood cinema.

With the exceptions of a few cases, Koechlin's characters are not placed at a different level within the frame than the Indian people she meets. This can be interpreted as if she is equal to Indian people, however, she is treated as 'the Other' because of her whiteness. She is not necessarily more powerful or in better material circumstances but Indian men regard her as more beautiful and sexual experienced than Indian women. Therefore, the whiteness of Koechlin's characters is rather connected with beauty and sexuality instead of order, power and well-being. In this way, they differ with the Western women in recent Bollywood cinema, for example with Sue of *Rang de Basanti*, whose whiteness was connected with order and rationality as well.

However, Koechlin's characters seem to be more dominant than the male characters in New Indian Cinema. Indeed, male characters in *Shaitan* are dominant during the fighting scenes and in all three films the Western woman is surrounded by men. However, in all three films the white Western female characters do survive: they are all still present in the end of the narrative. In *Shaitan*, some male characters even pass away during the film and in *That Girl* Koechlin plays the role of the main character. Therefore, it can be concluded that Koechlin's characters are more emancipated than characters like Sue and Elizabeth, since they turn out to be strong, independent women who try to survive in the tough Indian society. They stand up for themselves in situations when it is needed, for example when Ruth's boyfriend wants to have sex with her while she would not. Because of their more dominant and more powerful position in these films, it may be concluded that white Western women in New Indian Cinema are better examples for women in Indian society than the white Western female characters represented by recent Bollywood cinema.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to find out what New Indian Cinema is and if the way New Indian Cinema depicts the white Western woman contributes to the emancipation of this specific kind of female character in Indian cinema. It can be concluded that New Indian Cinema is a mix of elements from Western, Bollywood and parallel cinema-films, since this genre contains elements from these three kinds of cinema. New Indian Cinema addresses problems of Indian society and taboo topics (sexual abuse, addiction, suicide for example) more explicitly, contains raw and

realistic style elements (such as darks settings), and sometimes incorporates Bollywood characteristics (dance and song sequences or star actors). As Grant states, actors and characters are two of the several elements the definition of a genre depends on (2007: 17). Since Kalki Koechlin acts in several New Indian Cinema films and plays quite the same characters, these elements can be regarded as characteristics of New Indian Cinema too.

What her characters have in common is that they all act as emancipated, independent and strong young women, who try to survive in the tough Indian society. These female individuals find difficulties during their stay in India, primarily because of their whiteness. They are considered as foreign, as 'the Other' and treated differently than Indian people. In contrast with what Dyer says about whiteness, their white skin is not connected with power and order but rather with foreign, immoral, beauty and sexuality. All three films show how Indian people (men in particular) think about white women: they consider these women as more sexual experienced and more willing to have sex. However, Koechlin's characters show they are not easy accessible women who do what Indian men want them to do. They are emancipators: women who will survive in India on their own, although this is not an easy task.

In both Bollywood and New Indian Cinema the white Western female character is connected with sexuality but the way this is depicted differs. Whereas Bollywood hides sexuality through song and dance sequences, and hence places this taboo topic outside the story world's reality, New Indian Cinema addresses the topic within the films' society. New Indian Cinema shows that sexuality is part of the daily life of young people by letting characters talk about it and present that prostitution and rapes really happen in India nowadays. New Indian Cinema directors demonstrate what roles sexuality plays in contemporary Indian society, especially how white women deal with several aspects of sexuality during their everyday life. In contrast with Bollywood film makers, these directors do take their social responsibility (something what Koechlin was hoping for) by addressing social issues in their films, such as the bad treatment of white Western women in contemporary India.

Although white Western women are regarded as sexual experienced and sometimes are depicted as objects for the male gaze in New Indian Cinema, they do not play the role of vamps, arm candy or candidates for one-night-stands nor that of role models for modern Indian women. Indeed, Leni becomes a prostitute in *Dev D.* but ceases when she falls in love with Dev. Amy does act like a supportive white sister but fails to be in the opinion of her Indian male friend. In essence, these characters are independent women who have to deal with difficulties during their stay in India and hence are different than the characters white actresses have played in Bollywood cinema from the 1950s onwards. However, Koechlin's characters may be regarded as emancipated supportive white sisters. These women show how women in contemporary Indian society should behave: as

emancipated, independent women who have to fight for their rights. This may count for both Western and Indian women since they are both victims of violence nowadays. Hence, New Indian Cinema presents how emancipated women should act if they want to survive in Indian society, more than recent Bollywood cinema does. In this way, New Indian Cinema can be considered as a next step in the emancipation of women in both Indian cinema and society.

However, a lot of research still has to be done, both on New Indian Cinema and on the representation of white Western women in Indian Cinema. In the beginning I discussed that a consensus about how the new Indian film genre should be called and decided to use New Indian Cinema as long as its characteristics would be unknown. In this thesis, I took a first step in trying to define New Indian Cinema but this does not mean that it is the right definition that counts for all New Indian Cinema films. My definition is largely based on my own experiences with New Indian Cinema films since literature about it hardly existed. Hence, more research should be done on defining this new Indian film genre. Moreover, when more attention would be paid to New Indian Cinema's features, this broad term could probably be replaced by a more sophisticated name.

Moreover, previous research on the representation of white Western women in Indian Cinema has only focused on Bollywood cinema until now. As already has been said, Indian Cinema is more than Bollywood, so it may be an idea do look to the depiction of Western women in parallel cinema or diaspora cinema for example. Again, results could be compared with Bollywood (and New Indian Cinema) and differences and resemblances can be discovered. This may give a more complete overview of how the white Western woman has been represented in Indian cinema and hence this character in Indian Cinema would not be overlooked anymore.

Bibliography

Arif, H. (2004). Woman's body as a color measuring text: A signification of Bengali culture. *Semiotica 150.1,* 579-595. *doi: 0037–1998/04/0150–0579.*

Chang, E. (June 2008). Contemporary Sexual Represtations and Discours in India [Article]. Retrieved from http://merylmohan.tumblr.com/post/2702955295/contemporary-sexual-representations-and-discourse-in

Chatterji, S.A. (2013). The evolution of representing female sexuality in Hindi cinema 1991-2010. In K.M. Gokulsing & W. Dissanayake (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas* (pp. 179-192). New York and London: Routledge.

Dark, J. (2008). Crossing the Pale. Representations of White Western Women in Indian Film and Media. *Transforming Cultures eJournal, 3.1,*124-144.

Datta, S. (2000). Globalization and representation of women in Indian cinema. *Social Scientist, 28, 3-4,* 7-82.

Dwyer, R. & Patel, D. (2002). *Cinema India. The Visual Culture of Hindi Film*. London, Reaktion Books.

Dyer, R. (1988). White. *Screen 29.4, 44-65. doi:10.1093/screen/29.4.44*

Dyer, R. (1997). *White*: *Essays on Race and Culture.* New York: Routledge.

Gangoli, G. (2005). Sexuality, Sensuality and Belonging: Representations of the 'Anglo-Indian' and the 'Western' Woman in Hindi Cinema. In R. Kaur and A.J. Sinha (Eds.), *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens* (pp. 143-161). New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Grant, B.K. (2007). *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*. London: Wallflower Press.

I've a deadpan sense of humour: Kalki. (2013). Retrieved February 12, 2014, from http://www.deccanherald.com/content/360686/i039ve-deadpan-sense-humour-kalki.html

Jain, G. (November 5, 2011). Shooting Sex [Article]. Retrieved from http://archive.tehelka.com/ story_ main 50. asp?filename=hu051111SHOOTING.asp

Jayawardena, K. (1995). *The White Woman's Other Burden*: *Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule.* New York and London: Routledge.

Kalki had to strive hard for success. (2011). Retrieved April 11, 2014, from http://www. hindustantimes.com/Entertainment/Bollywood/Kalki-had-to-strive-hard-for-success/Article1-746913.aspx

Kalki Koechlin says Shanghai pushed her to her limits. (2011). Retrieved April 11, 2014, from http://daily.bhaskar.com/article/ENT-kalki-koechlin-says-shanghai-pushed-her-to-her-limits-2601815.html

Kalki, K. (2012). Let's talk about sex: Kalki Koechlin [Article]. Retrieved from http://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/tabloid/let-s-talk-about-sex-kalki-koechlin/article1-831100.aspx

Karena, C. (2003). Beyond the Bollywood Blockbuster. Independent Indian Cinema. *Metro Magazine, 138,* 132-135.

Kumar, V. (2013). "O Gori Gori": Foreign Women & Bollywood [Article]. Retrieved from http://www.sunday-guardian.com/artbeat/o-gori-gori-foreign-women-a-bollywood

Li, E.P.H., Min, H.J., Belk, R.W., Kimura, J. & Bahl, S. (2008). Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Cultures. *Advances in Consumer Research, 35,* 444-449.

McGirk, J. (December 18, 1996). Kama Sutra [Article]. Retrieved from http://www.independent. co.uk/news/world/indian-censors-lay-down-the-reel-position-on-kama-sutra-1315037.html

Mehta, M. (2011). *Censorship and sexuality in Bombay cinema.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Mishra, V. (2002). *Bollywood cinema: Temples of desire.* New York and London: Routledge.

Mooij, T. (2006). The New Bollywood. No Heroinines, No Villains. *Cineaste, 31.3,* 30-35.

Mulvey, L. (1999/1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In S. Thorman (Ed.), *Feminist Film Theory, A Reader* (pp. 483-494). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Parameswaran, R. & Cardoza, K. (2007). Fairness/Lightness/Whiteness in Advertising: The Mobility of Beauty in Globalizing India. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, TBA, San Francisco, CA, May 23, 2007. 2014-4-11. Retrieved from http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/6/9/8/ 8/p169882_ index.html

Review- That Girl in Yellow Boots. (2011). Retrieved April 11, 2014 from http://www.boxofficeindia.co.in/review-that-girl-in-yellow-boots/

Roy, K. (1998). Unravelling the Kamasutra. In M.E. John and J. Nair (Eds.), *A Question of Silence: The Sexual Economies of Modern India* (pp.52-76). London: Zed Books.

Somaaya, B., Kothari, J. & Madangarli, S. (2012). *Mother Maiden Mistress. Women in Hindi Cinema, 1950-2010.* New Delhi, HarperCollins Publishers India.

Tere, N. S. (2012). Gender Reflections in Mainstream Hindi Cinema. *Global Media Journal-India Edition, 3.1,* 1-9.

Varia, K. (2012). *Bollywood: Gods, Glamour and Gossip.* New York: Wallflower Press.

Verma, R. (2011). Beyond Bollywood: Indian cinema's new cutting edge [Article]. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jun/23/india-independent-cinema

Virdi, J. (2003). *The cinematic imagination: Indian popular films as social history.* Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ware, V. (1992). *Beyond the pale: white women, racism and history*. London: Verso.

We all are so frustrated by the rampancy of rapes: Kalki Koechlin. (2013). Retrieved April 11, 2014, from http://www.firstpost.com/bollywood/we-all-are-so-frustrated-by-the-rampancy-of-rapes-kalki-koechlin-1148703.html

Filmography

Advani, Nikhil. (Director), & Iyengar, Niranjan (Writer) & Johar, K (Writer). (2003). Kal Ho Naa Ho [Motion Picture]. Dharma Productions.

Gowariker, Ashutosh. (Director and writer). (2001). Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India [Motion Picture]. Aamir Khan Productions.

Kashyap, Anarug. (Director), & Koechlin, Kalki (Writer). (2010). That Girl in Yellow Boots [Motion Picture]. India: Anarug Kashyap Films.

Kashyap, Anarug.(Director), & Abhay Deol (Writer). (2009). Dev D. [Motion Picture]. India: Anarug Kashyap Films.

Mehra, Rakeysh Omprakash. (Director). & D'Silva, Renzil (Writer). (2006). Rang de Basanti: A Generation Awakens [Motion Picture]. India: ROMP.

Nambiar, Bejoy. (Director), & Deshpande, Abhijeet (Writer) & Krishnan, K.S. Shaitan [Motion Picture].
India: Anarug Kashyap Films.

Samanta, Shakti. (Director) & Bose, Ranjan. (Writer). (1958). Howrah Bridge [Motion Picture]. India: Shakti Films.

Audiovisual sources

British Film Institute (Producer). (2011, July 7). *That Girl in Yellow Boots + Q&A* [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.bfi.org.uk/live/video/683