

The Theory of Pleasure-Pauses Making Sense of 'Interruptions' in the Indian Film Narrative

Ranjit K. Kumar

Journal of Creative Communications
6(1&2) 35–48
© 2011 Mudra Institute
of Communications
SAGE Publications
Los Angeles, London,
New Delhi, Singapore,
Washington DC
DOI: 10.1177/0973258613499106
<http://crc.sagepub.com>



Abstract

Scholars like Ganti (2004), Mishra (2002) and Desai (2004) have described how Bollywood has its own unique structure with a focus on its song-and-dance sequences but Gopalan (2002) in her book *Cinema of interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema* provides a framework of interruptions specifically detailing the narrative features that render Indian films unique. She notes that Indian films can be understood as an assemblage of interruptions that halt the linear narrative and flow of the film. Since Bollywood films differ from the diegesis of other film narratives they need to be analyzed from a uniquely Indian perspective rather than a Western critical perspective. The aim of this article is to first take these interruptions and rename them as 'pleasure-pauses' to better explain their presence within an Indian context and then analyze their functional aspects from a Bollywood perspective.

Keywords

Bollywood, narrative, framework, India, cinema

Gopalan in her book *Cinema of interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema* (2002) proposes a new theoretical framework for understanding the narrative of Indian films. She notes that Indian films can be understood as an assemblage of interruptions that halt the linear narrative and flow of the film. Other scholars like Ganti (2004), Mishra (2002) and Desai (2004) have described how Bollywood has its own unique structure with a focus on its song-and-dance sequences but Gopalan provides a framework of interruptions specifically detailing the narrative features that render Indian films unique.

Gopalan says that, '...Indian popular cinema....undercut[s] the hermetic universe developed in Hollywood films by interrupting it with song-and-dance sequences, comedy tracks, and multi-plot narratives' (2002, pp. 17–18). She lists three 'interruptions': the interval, censorship and the song-and-dance sequences. These factors can either work within an extra or intra-diegetic space wherein the viewing pleasure, which is usually derived in Hollywood from the linearity of its narrative and structure, in India is located in the segmented structuring of the film experience. Nayar says that these interruptions proposed by Gopalan are 'an almost codified set of gaps that have become the stuff out of which, and around which, expectation in Indian film is built' (2004, p. 60). The narrative of Indian films is interrupted by a seemingly non-narrative related pleasure-inducing device or by breaks in narrative to either heighten plot anticipation or to be spectacle-inducing diversions.

Gopalan's use of the term 'interruptions' suggests that narrative pauses that occur in Indian films constitute a negative stalling of audience viewing pleasure. She says that 'just as continuity in classical Hollywood narrative offers us both pleasure and anger, in this cinema, too, we find pleasures *in* these interruptions and not *despite* them. Indian cinema is marked by *interrupted pleasures*' (2002, p. 21). Although Gopalan acknowledges the enjoyment derived from these 'interruptions', the term can too easily be misunderstood because of its negative connotations. The compartmentalization of Bollywood narrative into segments of the narrative, the song-and-dance sequences and the interval offer multiple pleasures that are enjoyed by audiences who have learned the conventions and thus do not just acknowledge but also anticipate these 'interruptions'. To emphasize the positive nature of interruptions, I will substitute the term 'pleasure-pauses' (which are what they are from a local Indian audience perspective). Nayar says that 'such constellations [interruptions] and their innumerable effects are of course never addressed in contemporary film theory, overly grounded as it is in a Western sensibility' (2004, p. 60). The difference between my theory of pleasure-pauses and Gopalan's theory of interruptions is more than mere wordplay. I add two more interruptions to the theory, namely sub-plot (Bollywood films contain numerous sub-plots that may or may not be related to the narrative of the film) and the 'item' song (songs featuring skimpily dressed girls who are not part of the film's plot-line). Gopalan acknowledges both of these for their interruptive nature, yet doesn't actually include them in her list of interruptions. This article also seeks to take her theory further, by looking at what happens within each interruption, providing some context for how they work, and assessing whether they advance, complement or break the narrative.

Gopalan introduces the song-and-dance sequences in the first chapter of her book and focuses on their economic importance (due to the income film soundtrack CDs generate) and details their effects, including 'delaying the development of the plot, distracting us from the other scenes of the narrative through spatial and temporal disjunctions, and being an integral link to the plot' (2002, p. 19). Thus, each song might have a different narrative and structural function and may or may not be an actual 'interruption' to the narrative if it is indeed an 'integral link to the plot'. As seen earlier in this chapter, songs are an obligatory part of the narrative in Bollywood films but can be situated in an alternate world. Song-and-dance numbers have existed in Hindi films since 1931 and since then almost all Bollywood films have included songs (Morcom 2007, p. 63). Gehlawat proposes the bifurcation of text wherein the songs and narrative exist in two parallel worlds (2006, p. 337). However, some songs are 'integral' to the plot and some can exist within the narrative of the film rather than being an extra-diegetic 'interruption' in a bifurcated world. Morcom says that in some song-and-dance sequences, 'many characters may sing in a single song, involving a number of different points of view, and flashbacks and simultaneous scenes and actions are also common' (2007, p. 44). Morcom believes that even the spectacle and tourism interlude in Bollywood films are narratively justified and 'even contribute to narrative meaning and effect' because 'being transported to a beautiful location that is different from everyday life focuses and isolates the feelings of the romantic couple and their desire to be alone together and also visually creates poetic images commonly used in song lyrics' (ibid., p. 59). As Dwyer writes, 'These locations not only fulfil the lyrics' requirement for an earthly paradise, but by their remoteness allow the characters to step outside the confines of their everyday lives, to savour movement and freedom but also to show the universal, spaceless nature of love' (2004, p. 119, cited in Morcom 2007, p. 59). Thus, Gopalan lists the song-and-dance sequence as one type of interruption, Gehlawat says that the song-and-dance does not operate within the narrative, while Morcom and Dwyer

believe that the songs can contribute to ‘narrative meaning’. These differing views may suggest that these are just different opinions of these scholars, but can also mean that song-and-dance sequences in Bollywood do not have one singular narrative or spectacle function. A case in point would be the item song as interruption. An item song is one where a character unrelated to the plot (and who does not make another appearance in the film) performs a highly sexualized number. The item song, in most cases, has absolutely no relevance to the plot and usually exists outside the narrative. For example, in the film *Dil Se* (Mani Ratnam 1998) the character Amarkanth is shown sipping tea with rain droplets falling on his head. In the very next scene he is atop a train with a beautiful village woman, dancing with an array of synchronized background dancers. At the end of the song the film returns to the narrative but there is no mention of the existence of that song (or his dancing atop the train) by the character. This song does exist in the bifurcated world that Gehlawat talks about; its presence is purely for spectacle.

On the other hand, songs like ‘Ghanan Ghanan’ (Lord Ghanan) from the film *Lagaan* exist within the narrative and propel it forward. A religious song like ‘O Palanahare’ (O Lord), also from *Lagaan*, invokes the Gods and is part of the narrative of the film, but at the same time has no relevance to the plot and does not propel the narrative forward. Thus, the song-and-dance sequences seem to have distinct spectacle and narrative functions and they can either break the narrative (like the item song), propel the narrative (like the love song) or complement the narrative (like the religious song).

The next interruption that Gopalan mentions is the interval. Gopalan talks about how the interval (the ten minute break between two halves of a film or between an introductory film and the feature) is not just arbitrarily placed but is ‘regulated by genre constraints and directorial style’ (2002, p. 20). Film director Rakesh Roshan, of films such as *Koi...mil gaya* (2003) and *Kkrish* (2006), says that, ‘the interval point should be a turning point, so that when people come out they can say “Whats [sic] going to happen now?” this is going to happen, no this is going to happen, when they discuss then they are interested in the film’ (in Ganti 2004, p. 175). In that sense the interval may be a break in a film, but the point at which this interval occurs is not random. The positioning of the interval needs to complement the narrative of the film and that is why the interval itself is a pleasure-pause. By occurring at a pivotal moment in a film and by providing audiences with a talking point during this break, it can be considered an extra-diegetic part of the experience of viewing the film.

In addition to the interruptions of the song-and-dance sequences and the interval, Gopalan has listed censorship as another type of interruption. Indian films are censored by the CBFC (Central Board of Film Certification). Gokulsing and Dissanayake say that the Board has confounding double standards where artistic erotic scenes are censored, but ‘lewd’ dancing and suggestive songs and dances are left uncut (2004, p. 124). They give the example of films such as Vikram Bhatt’s *Raaz* (2002), Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* (1996), Mira Nair’s *Kamasutra* (1996) and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which were all censored by the CBFC (ibid., p. 124). Neu (2007, p. 28) says that ‘The Cinematograph Act actually explicitly calls for clean and healthy entertainment as well as that the film is of aesthetic value and cinematically of a good standard’. Due to the largely unwritten censorship rules and the ambiguity of what ‘clean and healthy entertainment’ is, filmmakers have attempted to dodge censorship rules by including extra-diegetic scenes, suggestions, metaphors and other ploys. To avoid films being censored and censored by the board, filmmakers adopt specific methods to depict kissing, sexual activity and to sexualize seemingly virginal female characters without compromising on the unwritten code of the Censorship Board. The result can be a pausing of the narrative to avoid depicting sex by providing a narrative replacement for

sexual activity. Gopalan says that filmmakers over the years have devised techniques by the ‘withdrawal of the camera’ (2002, p. 21) to depict sex and sexuality. She says the withdrawal-of-the-camera technique is instantly recognizable in various Indian films: the camera withdraws just before a steamy love scene ensues, and the film replaces it with extra-diegetic shots of kissing flowers or thunder and lightning.

Censorship can work in two ways, first by forcing directors to find new ways of advancing the narrative. For example, when the diegesis is interrupted with an extra-diegetic shot of kissing flowers or thunder and lightning, it is a recognizable technique that implies that the characters are kissing or involved in some sort of sexual activity. Thus, it provides audiences with the information and advances the narrative without breaching the censorship guidelines (which we shall study in more detail in later sections). Second, censorship can break the narrative by having characters that are not part of the plot, being highly sexualized in an ‘item song’ for purely spectacle reasons.

Often in Bollywood films you will find characters and storylines not related to the main storyline of the film. Satyajit Ray, director of *Pathar Panchali* (1955) and *the Apu Trilogy*, says that commercial cinema has a ‘penchant for convolutions of plot and counterplot rather than the strong, simple unidirectional narrative’ (Ray 1976, p. 23). Comedic sub-plots, romantic sub-plots and action sub-plots swirl around each other within the movie. Morcom (2007, p. 72) believes that directors are often forced to add songs and romance to their films, even if it is an action film and thus the romantic sub-plots can halt the narrative. However, for poor audiences seeking maximum entertainment in a limited space of time, such variety is expected and pleasurable; for more sophisticated audiences, there is the pleasure of being able to mock the ridiculous aspects and appreciate the level of skill with which the sub-plots are orchestrated.

In the next section I will analyze the pleasure-pauses and their different narrative and structural functions.

Pleasure-Pauses that ‘Advance, Break and Complement’

In this section I look at the functional aspects of the pleasure-pauses and how they work within the context of different popular Bollywood films. My textual analysis of the various pleasure-pauses in Bollywood films reveals that they can either advance, complement or break the narrative of the film. All song-and-dance sequences or sub-plots do not have the same structural or narrative function. However, to the extent that Gopalan’s interruptive pleasure-pauses are commonly present and expected, they all mark out an Indian identity for films and have implications for how well a film can cross over into a global market. This section looks at structural and functional aspects of the pleasure-pauses that Gopalan does not look at in her theory of interruptions.

Song-and-Dance Sequences: The Functional Aspects

‘Advance the Narrative’ Songs

Songs in Bollywood films can advance the narrative either by being part of the narrative, outside the narrative or both. They can advance the narrative by providing explanatory characteristics of the

protagonists or by providing a back-story or to replace romantic dialogues with songs and poetic lyrics. Dwyer (2000, p. 113) observes that:

Songs fulfil several important functions, including advancing the narrative, by setting the scene for future action or enacting crucial turning-points in the narrative. They also allow things to be said which cannot be said elsewhere, often to admit love to the beloved, to reveal inner feelings, to make the hero/heroine realize that he/she is in love.

The lead actors falling in love are often depicted through song. The lead actors falling in love (or imagining requited love) are also depicted through dream sequences where he or she imagines romancing his or her co-star. In such a scenario, deletion would result in an overly abrupt falling in love between the lead actors. These songs can therefore advance the narrative of the film. Take, for example, the popular action film *Dhoom 2* (Sanjay Gadhvi, 2006), which made over ₹ 800 million and was the highest grossing movie of 2006 (ibosnetwork.com). The film begins with the attractive, muscled villain Aryan, played by Hrithik Roshan, in a set filled with random dancers who begins to gyrate to the thumping beats of a song. The song is the title sequence and there is no information as to why the character is dancing in this place or who the people are he is dancing with or how the song relates to the narrative. Seemingly, this song has absolutely no connection to the narrative, but it not only introduces the main character to the audiences but also sets up the audience to expect a Bollywood villain unlike many in the past. Hrithik is suave, sexier and more charismatic than the protagonist hero and this song showcases the characteristics that he will possess within the film's diegesis. So, although this song does exist outside the narrative, it plays a significant role in establishing narrative framework.

In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar 1998), the biggest commercial success of the year 1998 (ibosnetwork.com), the song 'Ladki Badi Anjani Hai' (There is a strange girl), is used to establish 'chemistry' between two friends who drifted apart but are reunited after ten years. The song begins as a natural progression of the narrative where one character is shown to be upset after losing a basketball game and the other character begins to sing a song to make her feel better. The song then shifts to another location where the two characters dance and the song intermittently shifts from inside the narrative to outside the narrative. In the same film, the song 'Tujhe Yaad Na Meri Aaye' (You did not remember me) is used to establish the hurt and pain of unrequited love. The character, Anjali, realizes that Rahul is love with another woman, Tina. With this realization an unrelated set of singers perform a morose song which is intercut with a montage of how Anjali is dealing with this realization. Again, this song shifts from within the narrative to outside the narrative of the film. These emotions could be established for audiences through dialogues, but songs of love lost or love found add a lyrical, romantic quality and their deletion would affect the appreciation of audiences attuned to understanding such emotions through song.

Many other song sequences, like those in the film *Lagaan*, are similar to the Hollywood musical dramas like *My Fair Lady* and *Mamma Mia*; they bring the narrative forward and are part of the narrative rather than an extra-diegetic sequence with no consequence to the narrative. For example, in the song 'Ghanan Ghanan' (Lord Ghanan) in *Lagaan*, all the villagers leave their huts to join in song to celebrate the incoming rain clouds. This song maintains time-space unity and is within the diegetic of the film. However, such songs are not inspired or copied from Hollywood musicals, but are an established type of Indian literary and cinematic tradition.

'Break the Narrative' Songs

Songs that break the narrative of the film are also not just arbitrary, but have functional and structural reasons for their presence. These include the sexual spectacle, tourism interlude, the religious function and the spectacular audio-visual experience. 'The feigned sex dream' sequence, for example, can have a 'sexual spectacle' function that pauses the narrative to indulge the voyeur within the audiences through sexuality that dodges the censorship guidelines. These song sequences sometimes do not include the masculine hero, and if present he is usually only an observer, redoubling the voyeuristic quality of the audience experience.

The 'religious or festival celebration' songs function as means to showcase the deep traditional and religious Indian ethos. They work to showcase the vibrancy, *joie de vivre* and festivity of religious celebrations in India. Sometimes these sequences attain a somber ambience with the 'pooja' sequences where characters pray to the Gods in a temple and sing bhajans (hymns). Such scenes help the film attain the richness of multiple, layered pleasure effects.

Some song sequences function purely as spectacular pauses to the narrative. For example in *Rangeela* (Ram Gopal Verma 1995), the song sequence 'Mangta Hain Kya' (What do you want?) is an appropriate example of the visual spectacle that Bollywood song sequences often indulge in. The fantastic nature of the song, with multiple locations and imagined and constructed environments, is an ode to the primeval and unapologetic visuality of the song sequence in Indian films. The song begins with a silhouette of Milli inviting Munna into the utopia-like movie world. Milli, a backing dancer, uses this song to convince Munna (and critics of the song sequences in Bollywood) of the magic of the song-and-dance sequence in Indian film. The chorus translated literally means, 'Whatever you want you will be able to see. We (the film industry) are so magical that whatever you want you shall get'. Simple as the lyrics may be, they underlie the nature of Indian films as giving everything that audiences want to see. Munna is convinced as he falls into this magical song where temporal and spatial unity have no bearing and 'spectacular' takes precedence to realism. They turn into world travellers, flying over New York on a yellow sofa. The absurdity of the flying sofa is countered by the acknowledgement of the song that the sequence is within the imagination and within that imaginary realm anything is possible; thus visually the spectacular is given credibility because it provides the audience with an 'imagined reality'. Anything is possible if it is imagined and thus temporal and spatial unity fails to be important within the few minutes of the song sequence. Even something natural is made to look artificial with constructed sets and this is done as an acknowledgement of the artifice of the song sequence and in such cases, making the natural look unnatural is all part of the 'imagined reality' of the song. The song ends with Munna and Milli back on stage, still dancing and still trapped in the fantasy, but Munna falling down brings back the reality of their natural surroundings and the realism of the narrative.

The 'tourism iconography' song sequence indulges the tourist within the audience. It functions as a 'voyage within a song' where time and space unity are overridden by the spectacle and the narrative is paused to indulge in the beauty of spectacular foreign locations. It is the perfect opportunity for a change of surroundings, and because these songs exist in an alternate world there is no need to explain why an actor and actress are suddenly dancing atop the Swiss Alps and how they just as quickly revert to their natural surroundings at the end of the song. Many of the foreign locations are decidedly different from the local Indian terrain and thus are spectacular in their uniqueness and exotic visuals. For the local audience perspective, the visual spectacle of foreign locations is a pleasurable interlude to the film's narrative. The tourism interlude is another type of pleasure-pause albeit within a song-and-dance

sequence. An example of the tourism iconography song is *Khuda Jaane* (God Knows) from ‘Bachna Ae Haseeno’ ([Beware, girls] Siddharth Anand 2008) which is shot in different locales of Italy, from the beaches to ancient monuments.

The Interval: The Case of the Premature Climax

For the interval, the film’s screening is halted, audiences can leave the cinema for a snack, toilet break or to chat about what occurred in the film until that point. Ganti (2004, p. 138) says that ‘The films (Bollywood films) are presented in two halves, with an intermission referred to as the “interval” placed at a point of suspense or at a dramatic turn in the narrative’. Ganti also notes that ‘the interval is a crucial punctuating device, producing two opening and closing sequences and structuring narrative expectation, development and resolution’ (ibid., p. 139). Thus, the interval is not an arbitrary pause within the film but is well planned and provides a talking point. Audience members can talk about, analyze and rate pre-interval portions or attempt to conceptualize and predict the post-interval proceedings of the film. The pre- and post-interval portions of the film complement the presence of the interval and when taking into consideration its presence in the film’s narrative, the interval can work as a complement to the narrative pleasure-pauses.

In many film reviews, some film critics analyze films with separate appreciation of the pre- and post-interval portions. Taran Adarsh, film critic and film analyst at bollywoodhungama.com usually has a special paragraph in his film review that reviews the pre-interval portions of films. In the film *Om Shanti Om*, he says (Adarsh 2007),

The first twist in the tale [Arjun–Deepika’s heated confrontation, with SRK listening to this important conversation] comes as a bolt from the blue. The second *jhatka* (shock) comes slightly before the intermission, when Arjun takes Deepika to the set of his film *Om Shanti Om* and the entire episode that follows, right till the intermission, is spellbinding. That’s a brilliant stroke from the writing... The post-interval portions only get better and better.

Adarsh appreciated the ‘*jhatka*’ that occurs prior to the interval, and this would be an example of a film with a good use of the interval as an exciting ‘punctuating device’. Dudrah says that the lead female protagonist in the film *Purab aur Paschim* is tamed by the interval, where she goes from being Westernized in appearance and behaviour to appearing as a real Hindustani girl in the post-interval portions of the film (2006, p. 67), and this would be another example of an exciting, eventful pre-interval portion. However, if films reveal their narrative’s most important climactic moments prior to the interval, they may be negatively viewed. For example in *Jurm*, Adarsh (2005) says that, ‘the problem with *Jurm* (2005) is that the suspense is revealed at the intermission point itself. Even then the identity of the villain doesn’t quite come as a shock’.

Ploys to heighten the post-interval portion of the films include: i) the increase of dramatic crescendo or a ‘twist’ in the plotline, as is the case in *Ek Hasina Thi* (Sriram Raghavan 2004), where the character overcomes rat-phobia in jail and signals a transition from the pre-interval portions where she is the victim, to the post-interval portion of the film where she is the avenger; ii) the entry of a mysterious character or a character who has been alluded to prior to his or her entry, for instance, an ex-husband re-enters his wife’s life in *Kuch Naa Kaho* (Rohan Sippy 2003); iii) a shocking revelation or an ending with a sense of finality that is resolved post-interval through a premature ‘*deus ex machina*’, as is the case in *Om Shanti Om* where the lead characters die. *Ex machina* dying is a solution to an impossible

situation; it usually occurs in the final portions of films, dramas or plays. In Bollywood film, this mechanism occurs prematurely to explain and resolve the events that transpired prior to the interval. Interestingly, many a time there is a certain level of finality with the film's proceedings pre-interval. To understand how Bollywood films use the interval as a pleasure-inducing device I have studied three popular Indian films released in the new millennium. Apart from their popularity, these films are chosen to show that the pre-interval portions are not arbitrary, that they can have narrative and structural functions and to show three different types of modern Bollywood films and their use of the interval as an important 'punctuating device'.

In *Kaho Na Pyar Hai*, the male protagonist dies pre-interval and his look-alike surfaces post-interval, thus filling the void left by the first character. To the audience, the second character must be good because his looks resemble the first character, thus allowing audiences to instantly empathize with the second character. This provides a multi-pleasure ploy of having two different characters in each half of the film, but the instant-identification that is created by the same actor playing both roles helps in establishing the character's morality and integrity. Thus, a 'premature deus ex machina' helps in attaining a sense of completion and finality in both segments, but the ultimate resolution is one where the wrongs of the first half are made right and the characters live happily ever after, even though the characters' happiness has sometimes to be relived with the help of reincarnations or look-alikes.

In *Om Shanti Om* both the main characters die before the interval. In many other circumstances, death of the main characters would be the ultimate resolution to the film's narrative. In the post-interval portion of the film, the male character is re-incarnated and is united with a look-alike of the female character. What the interval in *Om Shanti Om* provides the audience with is an ending to a storyline that can be a movie in itself, but also a second storyline with re-incarnated characters in a more indigenous trajectory, with a happy ending and the triumph of good over evil, thus satisfying the audience with an ending where the characters live happily ever after.

In the case of *Devdas*, the pre-interval portion provides audiences with the knowledge that the male protagonist's downfall will occur post-interval. The 'Romeo and Juliet' storyline provides an unusually tragic ending with Devdas' death. Paro's mother blows into a religiously symbolic conch and predicts the imminent doom of Devdas. The tragic death of Devdas at the end of the movie is something local audiences would not be able to predict thanks to the happy endings and cheerful resolutions of most Indian movies. So, the interval's structuring allows for a more acceptable movement of narrative.

The sense of completion and unexpected re-incarnation, look-alikes and other premature deus-ex-machina moments are unique narrative techniques and there can be separate appreciation of pre- and post-interval portions in a Bollywood film and, as is the case in *Om Shanti Om*, a film set in two parts with a separate set of characters (albeit characters played by the same people) set in two different eras.

The Voyeur's Imagination in Censorship in Indian Films

Indian films as stated earlier are censored by the CBFC of India, and according to S.5B(1) of the Cinematograph Act,

a film shall not be certified for public exhibition if, in the opinion of the authority competent to grant the certificate, the film or any part of it is against the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security

of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality or involves defamation or contempt of court or is likely to incite the commission of any offence.¹

Section 1 of the act meant that censorship was conducted by the CBFC with largely unwritten guidelines except for the aforementioned instructions. On 6 December 1991, the following guidelines were issued under S. 5B(2) of the Act:²

- (a) The objectives of film certification will be to ensure that:
 - the medium of film remains responsible and sensitive to the values and standards of society;
 - artistic expression and creative freedoms are not unduly curbed.
- (b) In pursuance of the above objectives, the Board of Film Certification shall ensure that:
 - Scenes –
 - showing involvement of children in violence as victims or as perpetrators or as forced witness to violence, or showing children as being subjected to any form of child abuse;
 - human sensibilities are not offended by vulgarity, obscenity or depravity;
 - scenes degrading or denigrating women in any manner are not presented.
 - Visuals or words contemptuous of social, religious or other groups are not presented.
 - Visuals or words involving defamation of an individual or a body of individuals or contempt of court are not presented.
- (d) The Board of Film Certification shall ensure that the film:
 - is judged in the entirety from the point of view of its overall impact; and
 - is examined in the light of the period depicted in the film and the contemporary standards of the country and the people to which the film relates, provided that the film does not deprave the morality of the audience.

Words such as ‘depravity’ and ‘vulgarity’ are open to interpretation and the guidelines are not specific as to what can be shown on screen. Most of the time the ‘guidelines’ lead to self-censorship by the producers and filmmakers themselves. Bose (2009) says that, ‘It is interesting to note from a historical survey of cinema and censorship the astonishing fact that at no stage has there been any concerted action for the abolition of censorship per se, despite the film industry’s prolonged resentment of the CBFC’s discriminatory policies and practices’.

Varma (2006) says that ‘The problem is that India has long had a climate where it’s considered perfectly acceptable for the state to meddle in what its citizens can watch, and listen to’. Two examples of the CBFC censoring Indian films are *Black Friday*, Anurag Kashyap’s film about the 1993 attacks on Mumbai, which was held up for two years by CBFC after those on trial successfully argued that the film would prejudice jurors; and *Zakhm*, a movie by Mahesh Bhatt, which examined Hindu–Muslim strife. It made its debut only after the director changed the colour of headbands and flags in the film from saffron to grey (Sengupta 2008).

Mehta (2001) believes that:

what prompts this decision [of censorship] is the committee’s uncertainty about whether children will be able to acquire a *proper* understanding of the film, specifically sequences containing sex and violence, without parental guidance. The classification serves as a signpost to parents, urging them to exert their authority and regulate how the film is understood. The mechanisms of cutting, certifying and classification contribute to regulating meaning.

This family-oriented film-viewing experience where children should not understand what is occurring on screen but adults can, leads to either implicit portrayals of the sex act (by being fully clothed and wriggling around on the ground) or by extra-diegetic scenes of kissing flowers and shaking bushes that would be understood by the adults. Thus the cutting process leaves the audience to imagine what occurs on screen. Dwyer (2000) believes that the wet sari sequence is a perfect example of dodging censorship guidelines and being family friendly, yet depicting sexuality. She says about the wet sari sequence:

Directors, whether seeking sensual or pornographic effects, may well wish to maximise the eroticism of the female body, and they have found the most successful way to do this in the famous wet sari sequences, where the semantics of the sari, the form of the female body come together in ways which can be construed as ‘tasteful’ by the family audience, the most important audience for the box office, and the censors, while being simultaneously erotic. (Dwyer 2000, p. 151)

She adds that the ‘film was still regarded as family viewing, not transgressing any of the censors’ codes on sexual display’ (ibid., p. 159).

In *Mr. India* (Shekhar Kapur, 1987) the main character is invisible and the female lead is clad in a transparent blue sari dancing in the rain. The film dodges the unwritten censorship rules of no depiction of copulation, nudity and kissing. The female lead remains fully clothed throughout the song and the male lead is invisible for a large part of the song. The film and uses his invisibility to openly show the ‘sex act’ without the male lead being shown on screen. Apart from the shaking bushes, thunder and lightning and kissing flowers, there are other ploys and tactics to work around the largely unwritten but well known censorship guidelines, and yet invoke erotic pleasure-inducing images without the actual depiction of copulation or even kissing. The implicit censorship guidelines require filmmakers to refrain from showing sexual intercourse, nudity and even kissing; everything else was tacitly open to representation. David (2007, pp. 260–261) says that:

dance and song have become the vehicles for generating moods and fantasies of eroticism and sexuality.... During the dance sequences, the viewer’s gaze is directed frequently to the lips, eyes, breasts and pelvis of the female dancers’ bodies, through the use of specifically choreographed movements and the direction of the camera views. Shots are angled from above to show more cleavage, or from below to emphasize the pelvic movements in the dance. These pelvic thrusts are familiarly known as *jhatkas* and *matkas*.

Here dance is used as a metaphor for sex, the pelvic thrusts in dance replace the same movement during sex. The frequent close-ups of the woman’s clothed but wet and sexualized body parts allows audiences to only see what they are allowed to see; but what they are seemingly allowed to see is not sex or nudity but a sexualized female form.

The ‘kissing flowers’ (a metaphor for the two actors kissing) and the ‘shaking bushes’ (there might be more than kissing occurring) are not interruptive in their nature to the audiences because the kissing and other sexual acts do occur and are metaphorically represented on screen, but the implication is that these acts are extra-diegetic. Thus, such metaphors advance the narrative by showing audiences what may be happening, and by giving vital information that would be otherwise impossible, thanks to the censorship guidelines. As far as censorship that advances the narrative of the film, the ‘meta-simulation’ and ‘stimulation’ works in three ways: first, it gives privacy to the films’ lovers to indulge in sexual acts without the voyeurs. Prasad says that a Bollywood film not showing kissing ‘is a blocking of the representation of the private’ (1998, p. 100). Second, it dodges Censorship Board censure; and third, the

voyeuristic quality of the audiences is replaced by implication, leading to imagination. This construction is a pleasure-inducing device in itself as what is implied is imagined and what is imagined is pleasurable. The dream sequence and the wet sari sequence are two infamous ploys to imply and even depict sexuality without the depiction of nudity, copulation or kissing. The narrative can be broken with the 'feigned sex dream' or the item songs that exist purely as titillation devices and neither advance nor complement the narrative.

The 'feigned sex dream' song sequences in Indian film are noticeably sexualized mainly because overt intimacy in such a sequence is permissible, because it is not really occurring within the reality of the film—the characters maintain their chasteness because if it is a dream it only occurs within the character's imagination. In *Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi* (Umesh Mehra 1996), the main character is being seduced by the film's femme fatale, the villainous Maya. At first he remains an unwilling participant but gradually gives in to her advances. There are numerous sequences of writhing around the swimming pool and even mud wrestling, but the song never shows any actual copulation or kissing, thus dodging the censorship guidelines. At the end of the song it shifts back to the first scene and Khiladi rejects Maya's advances, making the whole song sequence an imagined one. This helps maintain the main character's moral and sexual integrity because the 'imagined' is not real and thus within the reality of the narrative, he is a faithful and chaste man. The function within the narrative is the spectacle of sexuality, but though the audiences cannot accept such behaviour from the masculine hero, they will be more likely to accept it if it occurs within the fantasy realm. The sequence also works to emphasize that the masculine hero possesses a sexual drive, emphasizing his masculinity, but sexual morality prevents him from acting on it.

Item Song: The Fourth Type of Pleasure-Pause

Another way of depicting sexual activity without having the main female character take part in it is through the 'item' song. The item song breaks the narrative of the Bollywood film and is not usually part of the central story line. The mise-en-scene consists of characters whose appearance may not feature in any other part of the film. The Bollywood 'item' girl is usually a vampish woman who embodies the sexy attributes that traditional Indian heroines usually do not possess. The 'item' girls are usually very Western-looking. One early and famous example was Helen, who had an Anglo-Indian background and would wear blonde wigs and skimpy clothes to entice the main character or the villain (and mainly the audience). At one level these characters were presented in a Western manner because of their overt sexuality and the film's needed to attract the male gaze by sexualizing a female character that wasn't the main (recognizably Indian) female character. At another level, the item girl is used because of the Indian fascination with lighter skin, a possible by-product of prior colonization, but also a traditional Indian perception of beauty. Modern-day item girls usually have a darker skin tone and are usually dressed in rustic clothes. This differs from the depiction of the usually fair and virtuous main actress who is usually de-sexualized. In the new millennium, item girls are not just Westernized-looking Indian woman or dark women, but are quite commonly Caucasian women. The intra-diegetic gaze is usually that of the villain or sometimes even the male protagonist. The male character is allowed to be sexually stimulated by the erotic visuals of a woman as long as he is not looking at the virtuous female character with a similar gaze. Derné and Jamdwin believe that 'driven by their anxious anxiety about their Indianness, men do not make *all* women the objects of the gaze, but instead distinguish between those whom they see as

legitimate objects of the gaze, and those who they feel should be protected from it' (2007, p. 47). This is why the item song is such an imperative part of the Bollywood narrative; it allows for the male gaze to indulge in sexual desire without compromising the values of the 'moral' female protagonist.

In this project, I have considered the 'item' song as a different type of pleasure-pause than the song-and-dance sequence because in it there may be a character or characters who are not part of the narrative but make an appearance only during the duration of that song. As already mentioned, Gehlawat (2006) believes the songs exist in a 'bifurcated' parallel world and more so the item song that does not establish the chemistry of the main characters nor showcase heartache; its very presence is to take a break from the film's proceedings.

The presence of censorship and item songs means that the depiction of sexuality differs greatly from the straightforward feigned copulation of the Hollywood film. The complex (sometimes extra-diegetic) cues mean that the neophyte viewer cannot derive pleasure from what is being depicted on screen, partly due to being accustomed to relatively open depiction of pre- and post-marital sex in Hollywood.

Sub-plots and Character Background

Sub-plots in Bollywood films can complement the narrative and can also provide audiences with the 'multiple pleasure ploy'. Sub-plots in Bollywood films are another 'interruption' that differentiates them from Hollywood cinema. Ganti (2004, p. 293) says that:

Hollywood films are frequently described as 'single-track' and filmmakers express their amazement and envy at how films can be made on 'one-line'—a phrase conveying that a story's simple plot can be related in one sentence. However, such films are considered inadequate for Indian audiences.

While talking about sub-plots that exist in Hindi films, lyricist Javed Akhtar says that 'The difference between Hindi and Western films is like that between an epic and a short story' (quoted in Thomas 1985, p. 123). Ganti (2004) believes that the presumed need for audiences to have complex plots and 'an entire Hollywood film could be merely a scene' is what 'bestows a sophistication and mastery to the audience' (ibid., p. 293). We can see the difference when Bollywood adapts a Hollywood story and introduces multiple pleasure-pauses and sub-plots to create a convoluted narrative. It can be presumed that the avid Bollywood fan experiences pleasure from the 'sum of all parts' of Bollywood films.

Dissanayake and Sahai (1992, pp. 10–11) state, 'although... Indian cinema was heavily influenced by Hollywood, the art of narration with its endless digressions, circularities, and plots within plots remained distinctly Indian'. While unrelated sub-plots complement the Bollywood film by adding drama or comedy to a film, flashbacks and backstories advance the understanding of the main narrative and the character's actions. A sub-plot might, for example, explain why the main character is a criminal—usually due to a tragedy when he was younger, or to avenge his parent's/lover's death. In *Ghajini* (A.R. Murugadoss 2008), a remake of the Hollywood film, *Memento* (Christopher Nolan 2001), the backstory forms a major portion of the film. *Ghajini* is about a man with a short-term memory that lasts 15 minutes, wanting to exact revenge upon the villain who murdered his wife. In *Memento* the romantic 'angle' in the film is almost non-existent and although the film contains flashbacks, they are directly related to what is occurring in the main narrative. In *Ghajini*, establishing the love story is essential so that audiences can understand the protagonist's actions and why he is exacting revenge. Also, the romantic sub-plot allows

the film to contain romantic songs and feature lighter comedic scenes in an otherwise solemnly dramatic film. Even romantic comedies can have sub-plots; *Kismat Konnection* (Aziz Mirza 2008) is the story of two people from different worlds falling in love, but has an unrelated sub-plot about two geriatric people attempting to keep their old-age home intact.

Many actors in the film industry have a specific role of comedic relief and they usually appear in pre-interval portions of a dramatic film to lighten the film's proceedings. In films like *Asoka* (Santosh Sivan 2001), an epic costume drama, the otherwise dramatic war film has comedic interludes featuring actors Johnny Lever and Raghuveer Yadav. These characters are not related to the main plot and their presence is intended to allow the audiences to have a comedic interlude. The comedic sub-plot and the characters in this sub-plot are more often than not dispensable as far as plot is concerned, but multiple pleasures are derived from multiple genres within a single diegesis.

This chapter serves to identify the uniqueness of Bollywood films and particular elements of Indian cinematic narrative structure and content. This gives us a basis on which to better appreciate the nature of newer modes of Indian film as national cinema takes in overseas influences and begins to disseminate its own product in the global marketplace. The uniqueness of Bollywood and its narrative renders it immune to the overpowering charms of Hollywood and needs to be studied and analyzed from an Indian genre perspective to fully understand and appreciate its narrative traditions.

Notes

1. The Cinematograph Act, 1952 is available in full at <http://indiacode.nic.in/fullact1.asp?tfnm=195237>
2. Through S.O. 836(E) of the Government of India, Ministry of Information and broadcasting; dated 6 December, 1991.

References

- Adarsh, Taran. (2005). *Jurm: A movie review*. Retrieved from <http://www.sify.com/movies/jurm-review-bollywood-13674653.html>
- (2007). *Om Shanti Om: Review*. Retrieved 9 January 2009, from <http://entertainment.oneindia.in/bollywood/reviews/2007/om-shanti-om-review-071107.html>
- Bose, Nandana. (2009). The Hindu Right and the Politics of Censorship: Three Case Studies Policing Hindi Cinema, 1992–2002. *Velvet Light Trap*, 63(Spring), 22–33.
- David, A. R. (2007). Beyond the silver screen: Bollywood and filmi dance in the UK. *South Asia Research*, 27(5), 5–24.
- Derné, S., & Jamdwin, L. (2007). Male hindi filmgoers gaze: An ethnographic interpretation of gender construction. In Ghadially, Rehana (Ed.), *Urban women in contemporary India: A reader* (pp. 46–63). New Delhi: SAGE.
- Desai, J. (2004). *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film* New York: Routledge.
- Dissanayake, W., & Sahai, M. (1992). *Sholay: A cultural reading*. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern.
- Dudrah, R. (2006). *Bollywood: Sociology goes to the movies*. New York, London: SAGE Publications.
- Ganti, T. (2004). *Bollywood: A guidebook to popular hindi cinema*. London: Routledge.
- Gehlawat, A. (2006). The Bollywood song and dance, or making a culinary theatre from dung-cakes and dust. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 23(4), 331–40.
- Gokulsing K., & Dissanayake, W. (2004). *Indian popular cinema: A narrative of cultural change*. Oakhill: Trentham Books.
- Gopalan, L. (2002). *Cinema of interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema*. London: British Film Institute.

- Mehta, M. (2001). *What is behind film censorship? The Khalnayak debates*. Retrieved 18 October 2008, from <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v5i3/mehta.htm>
- Mishra, V. (2002). *Bollywood cinema: Temples of desire*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Morcom, A. (2007). *Hindi film songs and the cinema*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Nayar, S. (2004). Cinema of interruptions: Action genres in contemporary Indian cinema by Lalitha Gopalan. *Film Quarterly*, 58(1), 60–61.
- Neu, T. (2007). Bollywood is coming! Copyright and film industry issues regarding international film co-productions involving India. *San Diego International Law Journal*, 8.
- Prasad, M.M. (1998). *Ideology of the Hindi film: A historical construction*. New York, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Rachel, D. (2000). The erotics of the wet sari in Hindi films. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 23(2), 143–159.
- Sengupta Somini. (2008). *Response to the film Parzania raises the Question: Can Gujarat confront its brutal past?* Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2007/02/21/arts/21iht-indfilm.html
- The Cinematograph Act, 1952*. Retrieved 3 April 2008, from <http://indiacode.nic.in/fullact1.asp?tfnm=195237>
- Thomas, R. (1985). Indian cinema: Pleasures and popularity. *Screen*, 23, 116–131.
- Varma, A. (2006). *India's censorship craze*. Retrieved 2 March 2008, from http://online.wsj.com/article/SB115982397211080416.html?mod=opinion_main_europe_asia.

Ranjit K. Kumar is Lecturer and an Assistant Manager, Cass Training International College, Sydney. He has a PhD in English Literature from the University of Wollongong, and a Master's in English from the University of Pune. He is the author of *Real English* and co-author of a Workbook on *Communication Skills in English*. Email: ivankumar82@gmail.com