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FILM

As a popular means of entertainment, films serve as one of the most effective channels for the production and dissemination of ideology. They recreate reality in the darkened cinema hall through the triangular relationship between the audience or spectator, the image on the screen and the narrative perspective set up by the 'eye' or angle of vision of the camera.

In addition to enabling this "willing suspension of disbelief," the cinema also provides an experience which is both personal and private, yet public and impersonal. Insulated from the known and external world by the particular space and structure of the cinema, the spectator is allowed entry into a world of fantasy where s/he can, through a voyeuristic identification with the main protagonists in the story, experience her /his own repressed desires. It is public and impersonal because the act of viewing a film in the cinema is a collective act and one in which the audience participates as a group. This creates a distance between the spectator and the screen image and releases her/him from the guilt that might result from a confrontation with these repressed desires, as it deflects them onto the impersonality of a shared experience based on common cultural assumptions and fantasies.

The ways in which the camera projects the image on the screen is not only instrumental in showing the spectator an image but in telling her/him how to look at it and what meaning to read in it. According to the feminist critic, E.Ann Kaplan,[xxviii] this 'gaze' is built upon culturally defined notions of sexual difference. Therefore the act of gazing or looking, which is played upon in the dominant cinema, creates pleasure that is ultimately erotic in its origins. And because patriarchal cultures designate the woman as 'object of desire', the eroticism of such cinema projects the woman as the legitimate object of male desire and fantasy. Thus, films are never benign – a prescriptive 'reality' gets created and recreated in the darkened hall, through the interplay of various cinematic components and their ideological underpinnings.

Films in Pakistan

Pakistani cinema caters to a predominantly illiterate and economically disadvantaged class. Subsequently, film producers operate within the belief that the simplest form of entertainment, for an audience who in 'real' life finds little or no reprieve from the pressures of daily living, is to grant people a brief entry into a world where the fulfilment of desire is possible. Thus, films are made to provide 'entertainment' in the form of escape

for viewers (whose sense of alienation may be intensified by rapid urbanisation and internal migration). Whether or not the medium is perceived as a creative means for provoking critical thinking by film makers, it certainly is not used as such.

Further, not only are the viewers and producers predominantly male, but almost all scriptwriters, and camera crew are also male. They are, with the exception of a negligible few, uneducated (in the wider sense), and reflect a middle-class morality in their work. This confluence of context and interests positions women's bodies as the major means to commercial success. All the possible ways in which a woman can be exploited visually are deployed. The choice of roles, the costumes, dance, songs, dialogues and camera treatment emphasise the fact that the film industry has a steady eye on the box office. Thus even those themes or subplots that could be considered 'social' (a local term for creating consciousness of social problems) are treated in a manner that yet again exploits the woman and her body (e.g. rape scenes, violence, honourable vendettas etc.).

The commercial aspect is also reflected in films made by women film producers who conform to male oriented stereotypes. The failure of even the few films that are seen as 'alternate' (but were basically in the same mould from a feminist point of view, despite their social and political messages) is a validation of the above observation.

Given this context, we can begin to understand why (1) Pakistani films are sexist and based on an affirmation of patriarchal norms and (2) why they rely so heavily on voyeurism (an active perversion, practised primarily by men with the female body as the object of their 'gaze'), exhibitionism, (the passive counterpart of voyeurism, and therefore, presumably practised more by women) and fetishism in their representation of the female image on the screen.[xxix]

The Impact of Films

The impact of films on attitudes and behaviour of women and men has not been systematically studied. However if one were to observe the more superficial aspects of the cinema world, the conclusion would certainly be that films *do* have a strong impact. For example, film songs and the concepts of romance, romantic behaviour and motherhood, to name a few, appear to have permeated the attitudes of all classes of Pakistanis. It is interesting to note here that film songs are very popular and retain a nostalgic quality for even the so called 'intellectual', upper-class women and men. The attitudes of masochistic, self-sacrificing unrequited love, the scenarios of *barsat* romances (monsoon), the subjugation of a women's entire life to the whims of her father, brother, husband, lover, son, the *zalim zamana* (cruel world) that obstructs and destroys romance, are all part and parcel of the Pakistani film 'love life'. It can of course be argued that

society has influenced these depiction's of the film world. But through the idealisation that takes place in films, negative, and ultimately, anti-woman attitudes and values are projected and reinforced.

It has been noted with amusement, that among the conscious feminists, while singing romantic film songs in a group, suddenly a woman will stop and laughingly protest at a line that romanticises women's suffering and martyrdom in and through loving men! But 99.9-1/2% women do not question any of these projections because in a strongly patriarchal society these values and attitudes have been internalised so well that they are not challenged.

A breakdown of the different constituent parts of the film will be made in the following sections. This will both substantiate the arguments presented in the introductory section and will show how male fantasy is narrativised in ways that reinforce sexual hierarchies in society.

Roles Women Portray

Of course the plot determines the roles in which women are portrayed, but certain attitudinal and behavioural categories do emerge. Simplistically put – and their portrayal in Pakistani films is simplistic in the extreme – there are the virtuous women and there are the whores. In the final analysis, as in television drama, women fall into either one or the other category. However, they do cross over, though normally from the whore to virtuous category, thus establishing the triumph of the moral order. That a whole genre of films about prostitutes in Urdu and Punjabi exists on this theme is significant, and such preoccupation in a segregationist society that sets a high premium on female chastity requires an in-depth study in itself.

But to generalise, there are major roles in each category – the mother, the sister, mothers and sisters-in-law, friends, rivals, daughters, maid servants. These are stereotyped roles which, depending on the urban or rural setting, have predictable characteristics. Most, if not all, are 'good' women who of course betray negative characteristics associated with women in our culture – they are jealous, petty, scheming, harsh, stupid, silly, passive, helpless and conformists to the bitter end. The second category consists of the 'bad' women – these are the prostitutes, gangsters molls and more recently, the independent working woman who is shown as being 'westernised', a term which is more or less synonymous with moral depravity, and the absence of emotions associated with motherhood, such as nurturance and self-sacrifice.

Here again the similarity between women in films and women in TV drama, as discussed in an earlier chapter, is clear. The greater latitude allowed to the cinema enables an inclusion of prostitutes who, in the Zia era were debarred from the miniscreen which is more geared to 'family' entertainment. The post-Zia era, however, has seen a slight shift in TV drama in this regard.

Heroines

The stereotype emphasises docility, domesticity, self-sacrifice, a readiness to accept all the patriarchal values with great endurance, and of course femininity, as desired and desirable characteristics for women to project. The last quality is often characterised by frivolity and a focus on dressing up. The plots generally revolve around the naive, coquettish and spoilt young woman (rural or urban) who falls in love and then weeps and wails and sings and dances her way to marriage.

Urdu films often have 'social' themes such as the abandoned woman with a child (married of course, but misunderstandings abound). Generally, class and money play villains, and the errant husband, the sacrificing mother among others provide the back-drop for these films. If the film is a 'tragedy', the heroine either dies or marries the man she does not love for reasons of family honour. If not, then she finally marries the hero and lives happily ever after. Some of the most popular Urdu films in earlier decades portrayed the 'heroic' sacrifice of one woman for another. For example, *Baaji,*(Older Sister) and *Saheli* (Friend) to name two, depicted the sacrifice of elder sisters for younger sisters as both loved the same man, while a recent Punjabi box office hit *Mehndi* (Henna), involved two close women friends, with the poor woman opting out through suicide.

Rarely are women portrayed as real heroines. That is, they are not allowed 'real' deeds of heroism. Even in films based on folk stories, where the heroines were in fact powerful characters like Umrao Jan Ada and Anarkali, the stories and their outcome are structured so as to lessen the impact of their real deeds of heroism. In other words, the heroine is 'appropriated'. 'Patriarchy cannot tolerate violations of its representations and constructs and she must be 'sacrificed' to patriarchal ends'· Thus what reaches the audiences is a distortion of facts, based on a particular point of view.

Another significant factor that emerges from the analysis of 'heroines' is that even when they are on strong ground in conflictual situations, they do not seem to have the language to express themselves. An example of this is the betrayed wife in *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki* (My Husband's Wedding). She objects to her husband's love-affairs and in particular to a serious involvement with a young girl. She argues with him, but on the emotional basis of being his wife. She does not talk about the situation in legal terms, or even moralistically

as the man certainly would have in a reverse situation. When she finally gathers enough courage to leave home in protest, even giving up her eight year old son, she does so in an emotional manner, rather than by settling matters rationally and/or legally. Towards the end of the film when she barges in on her husband's second marriage ceremony, she resorts to using rhetoric and a gun, and does not refer even once to the laws of the land, which do not allow a second marriage without the permission of the first wife. The fact that this law has been in force for almost three decades over-rules ignorance about this matter on part of the producer and script writer. This argument is corroborated by the fact that in the third or fourth frame of the film, the script establishes that the son is eight years old and that if the wife leaves, she forfeits custody of her child. The knowledge of law thus being clearly demonstrated in favour of the man right from the start.

This treatment is not only a reflection of the script writer's selective use of knowledge but is also a reflection of the society we live in – it does not allow women to voice their legitimate protests or fight for their rights because of an apparent lack of knowledge and power.

The Bad Woman

She is the 'loose' woman who is either a victim or villain, as the plot eventually determines. But by definition she is a woman who has broken (or has been made to break by force of circumstances) the rules of the social order. Yet paradoxically her being 'loose' is in the service of men. That is, she is economically dependent on them and either sells herself or serves their ends. Prostitutes, dancing women, gangsters molls, 'madams' fall into this category as does the 'liberated' woman. The latter is considered 'bad' as she defies the norms and values of 'tradition'. Whatever the case might be though, a virulent moralism is played out in the issue of her fate. That is, she either repents and reforms, or else is killed off, commits suicide or goes mad. Or less dramatically, her retribution is worked out through the loss of social 'respectability' as well as love and intimacy within the family (husband, children, home).

Subsidiary Roles

The women who are cast in supporting roles usually function as foils for the heroine and are rarely projected as positive characters. They are echoes of the male world in that in one way or another they uphold existing hierarchies. For example in *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki,* the sisters-in-law exhort the wife to go back to her husband and home despite his unfaithfulness. The wife's arguments are belittled by the minimal support and approval that one sister-in-law, unmarried and young, gives to her act of independence. Very soon both sisters-in-law are on the same platform – that good wives do not leave home.

In other subsidiary roles women are coquettish and stupid, or serve as maidservants, victims of poverty and age, as rivals or as gyrating chorus members. They generally provide more female forms for the male gaze.

Motherhood

Motherhood is glorified in Pakistani culture. It is supported by religious scriptures according to which 'heaven lies at the feet of the mother' and that on the Day of Judgement men and women will be known by the names of their mothers. These edicts are used to indicate the high status given to women as mothers.

However, instead of giving women a high position within the system of power-relations, this valorisation of the mother is used to limit women. The ultimate goal and source of fulfilment in a woman's life is perceived to be 'motherhood'. From the time a girl is born she is considered a temporary family member or 'guest' who has to go to her 'own home', which is in fact a euphemistic term for her husband's home. She is also told that she must only leave this home on her funeral bier.

But marriage alone is not enough. Bearing children (specifically male) is perceived as integral to this social and economic contract. Infertility is a curse and infertile women are considered 'bad luck'. They are debarred from many ceremonies related to marriage and child birth. The fact that a man is permitted to divorce his wife on grounds of infertility is further substantiation of this cultural precept. And according to popular interpretations of Islam, the funeral of an unmarried woman is *najaiz* (unlawful). In other words marriage is 'necessary', and the infertile or single woman is considered and treated as abnormal.

Films dramatise and idealise, and subsequently reinforce the values underlying this conception of motherhood in our society. The conflicts and doubts, the special burdens of motherhood are systematically ignored. Perhaps this is just as well as these would be portrayed from a male perspective, and we see the results, especially in television plays, where real problems (e.g. balancing energy and emotions between home and work) are denigrated by the women being shown as opting for one or the other. In either case the stereotype is reinforced – in one case she is a 'bad' mother, in the other a 'good' one. Complex realities are seen in black and white terms, and the multiplicity of experience is ironed out by the unilinear structure of the narrative.

The portrayal of women as good mothers is usually based on the image of the self sacrificing, hardworking woman who suffers intensely for her children. She is allowed to be aggressive and even violent in order to protect her children or their interests, thus reflecting the cultural reality of a woman gaining status and voice in decision-making through motherhood and age. In the role of the mother-in-law, the woman is often shown

as tough and uncompromising, though again it is in the context of patriarchal values of honour, class, property and social norms.

The special relationship between mothers and sons is a recurrent factor in our films. The fact that in reality women find companionship, affection and respect through their sons is portrayed in highly emotional terms. And if these very same indulged sons are shown as behaving crudely and sometimes cruelly towards their mothers, it is also shown that the 'cause' is another woman. She is often the sweetheart, wife or another scheming woman who influences the man. Thus the blame for the poor treatment of the martyred mother and good woman is laid at the doorstep of another woman, and not on the male.

This raises the question of bonding between women. In a segregated society where the joint and extended family is common and desirable, where tribal/ethnic bonding, close relationships with neighbours in villages and urban areas are part of the way of life for the majority (the only exception and those too, only in degree - are the urban, upper-class, professional elite), the relationships between women are close. There is sharing at all levels and affection and caring is expressed spontaneously. Even in the delicately balanced relationship of the mother and daughter-in-law, areas of sharing and dependency do develop. Further, the cultural factor of respect and affection for older women has some bearing on this relationship.

However, while depicting friendships between women, Pakistani films tend to play down the solidarity between them. The scenes where women are shown as friends are often shot in a fashion that serves more as a means to titillate the audience rather than to show emotional bonding among women. Scenes with women dancing together often involve gestures having definite sexual connotations. This kind of body contact both fetishizes and objectifies the women's bodies and gets past the censors who would object to similar contact between a man and a woman.

A recent Punjabi release *Mehndi* (still running to a packed house while this report was being written four months later), is apparently an unusual film given this context. It shows intense emotional bonding (rather similar to that of lovers) between two friends, one rich and the other poor. However, they both fall for the same man and there is a conflict in each regarding loyalty to the friend and desire for the man. Both, separately decide to commit suicide but the poor woman succeeds, thus simultaneously resolving the dilemma regarding the lover and maintaining the sanctity of class relations.

It is interesting to note that the women viewers interviewed before, during, and after this film all stated that the film was about a "beautiful friendship." On the other hand, the two

men viewers interviewed said it was a film with "excellent dances and about the sacrifice of one friend for another."

Mothers and daughters are not often shown as being close to one another. Rather, the daughter is portrayed as being spoilt by her father. This is a fact that grass-roots workers of a development agency put across very well - that mothers in our society are compelled to be harsh in dealing with their daughters as they understand the problems that lie in store for them. Therefore, they have to train their daughters to be pliable like "wet clay pots," for if they become like "fired clay pots they would shatter at the first impact instead of adjusting to the potters wheel".[xxx]

Thus, overall bonding between women is construed in marginal and undesirable ways so that both women and their relationships remain "manageable", and the power differences in the existing social order are neither questioned nor threatened.

Women and Violence

Violence, whether it is glorified in war, *jehad* (holy war), 'honourable' vendettas and feuds or simply as a symbol of male strength and virility, is very much a part of Pakistani vocabulary. Successive repressive regimes in the country have used violence, overtly and covertly, to subdue people into accepting the status quo. That women are one of the main targets of this violence is seen by the almost daily newspaper reports of abductions, rapes and murders, often in vendettas or property disputes.

Making it more acceptable, Pakistani films reflect this worldview of violence. This is regardless of whether the narrative is based on a folk story (almost all have a vendetta aspect), a nationalist theme (*Aag Ka Darya, Nishan-e-Haider* etc.), a populist point of view *(Zulm da Badla, Maula Jat, Wehshi Jat* etc.) or just plain romantic themes. Even the few, so called 'alternative' films (*Blood of Hussain, Mela, Neend, They are killing the Horse* etc.) have their fair share of violence. The influence of Westerns, Italian, Japanese, and Indian 'action' films has also had a visible effect on the amount and kinds of violence in Pakistani films.

However with regard to women in films, violence assumes two distinct forms. First, there is the more obvious kind - that is violence because of or on behalf of' women. Within a patriarchal frame of reference, woman are projected as property in need of protection, and in turn, males are projected as their protectors. Subsequently, upholding 'morality' necessitates/legitimises revenge for crimes of honour - rape, abduction, insult of and/or injury to women. (The fact that in the course of such honourable vendettas the women of the rival party are subjected to maltreatment or insult appears to excite no comment)[xxxi].

From fist fights to floggings to dagger and gun fights, audiences are treated to audio-visual orgies of violence. It should be noted that the sound effects and volume-level during such sequences is increased manifold! And with the predominance of colour films for over two decades, the impact is even more gory.

The woman in such situations is generally portrayed as a victim. She is either shown losing her sanity (the rape victim in *Maula Jat* who gives the feud a start, becomes insane and dies after dancing her feet to a bloody mess, significantly without her *dupatta*, a symbol of modesty and honour); or, ostracised by society, she retreats to her home to weep out the rest of her days as a victim of circumstances. In recent films (1980s) the victim is often present in the frame of action. But generally, as in the earlier films (both Urdu and regional), she is a passive onlooker or a helpful aide doing the cheer leading.

Even though the thriller genre tends to depict women as more active in the business of avenging their interests, this is only an interim measure and they collapse in the arms of the beloved as soon as the narrative permits. In instances where the victim actually takes up arms to avenge her honour herself, most often she is either killed off or sent to jail. It appears as though a woman cannot take on men to avenge her honour without the support of other men. These men come in the roles of fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and lovers. 'Adopted', 'instant' brothers – a common feature where a stranger will be moved by a situation to call the woman his 'sister' – are also given the protective role prescribed by society.

An interesting observation is that while the 'very good' women rarely take on the business of avenging their honour with violence, the 'bad' ones do. Here, the rape victim also qualifies. A related observation is that cinema hoardings and other publicity channels use images of women in aggressive poses and decor as marketing ploys. For example, the hoardings and advertisements of *Zameen Aasman* (The Sky and the Earth), an Urdu film released in December 1985, depicted blow-ups of the heroine wearing trousers and wielding a whip!

This film itself differs from others in that the footage given to the woman in a violent role is longer than in most films. The heroine is an arrogant, 'modern' daughter of a feudal lord who rules the area while her brother is away. She is portrayed ordering and enjoying the crucifixion of rebellious peasants and whipping men, including the hero, who is a peasant leader. But as the romance between the hero and the heroine develops, she becomes docile and passive – that is, 'true feminine' aspects begin to dominate her behaviour. It is significant that the romance is only established after the hero abducts the heroine, takes her to a peasant hovel on a mountain and forces her to do 'menial' tasks that she has never

previously done, such as chopping wood, collecting cowdung, milking the cow, cooking, fetching water, sweeping etc.[xxxii]

Despite her 'reformation' however, or perhaps because of her new-found sympathies for the oppressed, she now becomes the target of her brothers' violence. And so even though the earlier part of the film establishes the heroine as a 'tough' woman, capable of using and enjoying violence, she soon becomes its victim. Thus, when women are portrayed as 'courageous', it is still in the loser's fashion.

In another instance in *Zameen Aasman*, the poor but upright peasant's son grows up to become a peasant leader mainly because of his mother's encouragement and strength of conviction. Yet this aspect of her personality remains confined to speech alone and does not include action, except in two episodes where her 'courage' is demonstrated by her braving a stampede of cavalry who kill off an entire village; or while she is desperately looking for her son who is hidden in a field of haystacks that the soldiers set on fire. This point deserves emphasis.That is, the self-sacrificing woman can take risks, especially for her son or husband, but she is rarely an active and equal partner in uprisings or revolts against an oppressive class system.

In relation, when women are portrayed as 'aggressive' characters (e.g. Maula Jat's rival's sister) they take on the mannerisms and 'language' of men. For example, this woman competently rode a horse and walked with a distinct swagger (like the male hero), with a rifle resting on her shoulder. She used taunting, 'male' idioms, when talking to her jailers and police officers while goading her brother and tribe to fight to the bloody end. She also shot her own brother after an emotional speech in which she berated him for his cowardice in returning home without killing off their rivals and himself getting beaten up in the process. Thus, in certain roles women are permitted to take on male attributes along with the appended attributes of violence, competitiveness and heartlessness. This 'latitude' serves to reinforce patriarchal values of property and honour.

In the final scene of '*Maula Jat*', this very same 'bold' woman allows herself to be meekly 'handed over' to the rival's family in marriage, so that 'brave sons' of these brave rivals can be born to unite the tribes and fight oppression. (It is interesting to note here that the audience responded very warmly to the heroine and this finale was considered appropriate!)

In some films, especially older ones like *Zerqa* and *Aag Ka Darya* or (The River of Fire), women are shown as being tortured for a noble cause. But the ways in which these scenes are portrayed diverts attention from their sacrifice by focusing the viewer's gaze on costumes (torn in appropriate places), and on the instruments and methods of torture.

The camera treatment of all this and the use of the heroine's body are too much in the realm of sado-masochism for comfort. This mode of portraying the female body is similar to the countless rape scenes in Indian films; they are given footage on the apparent justification that people need to be made aware of antisocial behaviour, even though in fact they operate as a mechanism for introducing titillating frames in the film. Due to the presence of strict censorship codes for Pakistani cinema, rape is depicted in symbolic but extremely provocative ways. Ultimately both explicit and implicit treatments reinforce the norms of sexual violence and focus on women as potential victims.

The second distinct form of violence against women is depicted through occurrences in 'ordinary life'. This form is more subtle and therefore more dangerous. Actions range from abusive and harsh language, to unabashed beatings, to confinement to a room or house by fathers (real or step), brothers or villainous uncles/guardians. Often this violence is shown as being in the interest of the woman. Further, daily violations are not only portrayed as justifiable but are often also construed and viewed as 'fun' in romantic episodes. For example, ear and hair pulling, or the depiction of women fighting women physically is often considered humorous. This perception is important, as regardless of context, it is still a violation of the female body and person.

Women and Humour

Women are often the targets of 'humour' in Pakistani films. This is usually done through the use of glib and chosen stereotypes such as the naive village woman, the stupid wife or more often through conflicts between women – mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law – usually as rivals for a man's attention.

In 'action' scenes where the woman is an admiring spectator, her 'contribution' in the fights (even on behalf of her honour as is often the case) is ineffectual and serves as an occasion for laughter. An example that comes to mind is in *Choo Mantar* (Abracadabra) a Punjabi film of the '50s where the heroine (otherwise a strong fisherwoman) takes off her sandal and hits the villain ineffectively during a fight between the hero and the villain. The audience found this highly amusing.

In the current films, between the late 70s and 80s, apart from humorous posturing, even the dialogue has become more barbed. Emotional scenes, where women are shown expressing their pain or are briefly in command, are almost always immediately followed by 'witty', 'light hearted' comments that serve to 'distance' or trivialise the charge of the situation/ dialogue. It is almost as if a woman cannot 'say her piece' unless it fits into the pattern of the 'patriarchal plot', with regard to the honour (*izzat*) of the man, the family or the tribe or kin-group. In *Shadi Mery Shohar Ki* (rated as a comedy) when the wife

strongly objects to her husband's extra marital affairs, the power of her emotional dialogue fizzles out (as judged by the audience's laughter), when the husband trivialises her grievance with the quip, "The wise were right! After marriage a woman should be dumb and a man deaf."

From a feminist point of view it is also striking how films are billed as 'comedies'. A prestigious English magazine, the 'Herald' (April 1986), reviewed *Shadi Mery Shohar Ki* as follows:

> This...is a rare example of a film that refuses to run out of steam midway but continues to spring surprises on the audience all the way to its hilarious finale...The movie is a delight, with more laughs per minute than any recent film-local or imported.

The film was viewed for this study on the third day of its release, in a packed cinema in the city. To begin with, the audience reaction did not tally with the review as it did not produce 'more laughs per minute...'. Perhaps it was the reviewer's idea of what the film was supposed to be in a stereotyped situation where the poor, errant husband was 'tormented' by his wife who made his extramarital escapades more 'difficult'.

Transgressions of gender roles is another site for the production of humour, for example, when men take on feminine/womanly roles by ineptly attempting to take care of a child – holding a crying baby, trying to amuse or console a child, or by trying to cook. It is as if the male role is yet again being emphasised as *outside* of all the caring, nurturing, giving realms of living, where by implication, female roles are denigrated.

On a different tangent, regardless of the type of film genre, language or period, the appearance of hermaphrodites (*khusras*) on the screen is a call to laughter. The fact that they almost always have very witty and biting dialogue enhances the humour. This is a reflection of reality where hermaphrodites as a group or class traditionally earn their living as entertainers at weddings, births and other festive occasions. It would seem that their 'neutral' situation in a world so sharply defined in female/male roles, is one that allows them to observe and comment on aspects of both roles and situations. The other obvious aspect regarding hermaphroditic roles is that the dialogue is invariably overtly sexual or full of sexual innuendo. Again it seems that the sexual ambiguity of hermaphrodites releases them from verbal taboos and inhibitions associated with clearly demarcated gender roles.

Western theorists suggest that the representation of transvestites and cross dressing in films marks a search for an androgynous ideal through the blurring of sexual differences. This is an aspect that needs more research and analysis in our context, considering that there is no apparent ambivalence in female/male roles and identities here.[xxxiii]

Finally, women's 'own' humour is restricted to short and flirtatious dialogues. Significantly few jokes are made at the expense of men. And in situations where there is humorous repartee between women and men, the man seems to always get the last word, thus once again establishing male superiority within male/female relationships.

Women in Romantic and Courtship Episodes

Irrespective of genre, language or period, romantic/ seductive overtures are almost always initiated by the woman. Though the 'type' of woman determines the specific posture and language of seduction. In the case of the 'good woman', this is done in a childish, 'innocent' or coy manner, with much camera focus on eye and body language. A measured amount of explicit resistance to the male is also displayed. This is especially true of films in the recent decade where the 'liberated' woman is scornful and even rejects the hero's advances. However, she 'succumbs' soon enough and that too, in a gesture of total submission. She gives up her identity and her desires and even her style of dress changes. The colours change dramatically as well, from the flamboyant to the more subtle and subdued shades! In contrast, the 'bad woman' is shown as actively pursuing or ensnaring her desired man.

Invariably, the 'chasing' involves dancing in an overtly seductive, if not obscene manner. Heavy doses of sexual symbolism are deployed in these instances, while gestures and lyrics are openly and often crudely provocative. For example, in a scene from *Chan Varyam* (Beloved Hero), the hero is on a huge black stallion - the camera angle making him dominate the scene - while the heroine writhes suggestively on the ground, singing a song with the following lyrics: '*Mein ik dharti sard di bal di tu ik badal bay parwa, dil di nagri minta kar di meray des we wasda ja'*. Roughly translated, it means, 'I am the thirsty earth burning and parched, you are a careless cloud, I beg you to come and rain in my land too'. The heroine is in yellow - a colour associated, among other things, with revolt and the renewal of spring[xxxiv] especially in the Punjab.

The pursuit and 'appropriation' of the heroine by the hero takes place in an equally basic, though violative manner. Courtship allows the male protagonist to touch, fondle and even manhandle her; gestures which are otherwise considered taboo in the Pakistani context. Significantly, there is a marked contrast between the earlier and latter part of every film in this regard. Once the woman submits, either through acknowledging the man's power

over her or through an engagement/ marriage, these aggressive gestures are barely seen. Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that once a woman becomes part of the family unit, she needs to conserve her time and energy for the service of the man and the family and cannot waste her time in 'love' scenes. The only exception to the relinquishment of her identity occurs in relation to patriarchal norms of *khandan* (family), *khoon* (blood ties) and *izzat* (honour).

In such instances, commonly recurring obstacles to romance are conflicts between family honour and class, inter-tribal feuds and the inherent injustice of a *zalim zamana* (cruel world). Pakistani films tend to resolve this complex interplay and antagonism that arise from a conflict of interests with simplistic panache. The poor hero/ heroine marries his/ her rich counterpart, and this generous and unrealistic wedlock apparently signifies the victory of humanistic values.

Many if not all films tend to resolve the crisis of honour and class through action that entails some sacrifice of the woman's dreams and desires. Where 'bad' women happen to be involved with the hero, audience emotionalism is heightened by dramatic gestures such as the hero's father placing his turban, which is a symbol of his honour, at the woman's feet as he pleads with her to release his son from the snare of her undesirable love. In turn, the woman submits, through self-sacrifice. The cliché of the bad, socially undesirable woman with a good heart is repeated ad nauseam.

Returning to the question of the impact of films on behaviour, this kind of portrayal of romance, hardship and ultimate happiness exercises a definite influence on male behaviour. In reality, codes of behaviour are so rigorous that women do not normally dare to take initiative in most matters, especially in the romantic and sexual encounters. The break with the norm in films is perhaps an expression of male fantasy, especially in a society where there is segregation between the sexes. And the fact that films are either made by males, for males or from a male perspective allows full expression of these fantasies. Further, the way young men in particular pursue women, the gestures, the style, even language is almost identical with that found in films. It is assumed that they also expect the same results! For instance, that the woman will stop being coy and give up the pretence of being irritated or angry and will submit sooner than later to their demands. The way men pester women, especially in holiday resorts (where most of the romantic episodes are shot – the use of foreign locations is a new phenomenon) strongly supports this observation.

Fantasy and Pornography in Films

What is especially interesting about fantasy in film is that women are permitted to say and do more in dream sequences than in the main film text. *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki*, discussed earlier, demonstrates this kind of unactualised expression. Over half the film is in dream sequence - the unfaithful husband dreams that his wife dies in an accident (after he has very easily brought her back to his home which she left in protest in the main text of the film), so he decides to marry the woman he was having an affair with. However, the ghost of his wife proves to be a disruptive presence. The wife, who in 'real life' is a fairly stereotyped 'good' wife, takes on a very aggressive and vengeful persona in the dream, asserting her identity and her desires with dialogues full of sarcasm. The final shot in the dream sequence has the hero repenting and swearing fidelity to his dead wife. Needless to say, he wakes up, relieved to find his wife has merely left home again and promptly proceeds with arrangements for his second marriage!

Do images (invariably stronger than dialogue) of women as assertive and strong have more impact on the audience, or are the scenes of her final submission or 'taming' more provocative? This kind of question is crucial to feminists – not just in terms of analysis and interpretation of mainstream symbolism but also with regard to possible means and implications of expression in repressive situations.

On a different tack, dream sequences allow male fantasies to play themselves out, because after all, dreams need not pander to daylight moralism. Representations of women in these scenes are fraught with sexual connotations – way-out costumes as they lie around in gardens or fabulous bedrooms awaiting lovers on horses; floating from clouds on moonlit nights, the hero playing a flute while over twenty women float onto the screen around him, singing and dancing with abandon (*Choo Mantar*) – such images speak volumes about the nature of repressed and not-so-repressed male desire.

Like other forms of representation, pornography is a social construct and as such is subject to cultural, political and historical variations. Westerners, especially women viewing Pakistani films for the first time have defined them as 'soft porn'! Such reactions, even years before one consciously looked at films from a feminist point of view, helped bring symbols, and through them the ways in which women's' bodies are objectified, into a more critical focus. Though at this point in time, there is no doubt regarding the on-screen objectification of women. The length and life of fantasy sequences, including costumes, props, romantic music, erotic dances and so on, 'reveal' much more about the male world than the realist aspect of the film does.

Dance and Songs

Despite the current ban on women dancing publicly, a film has to have at least half a dozen dances if it is to be a 'hit'. The style of these dances is vulgar and has little connection with the rich traditions of classical and folk dance in Pakistan. The dances, usually to good music, but with very suggestive lyrics, are, to put it bluntly, a form of symbolic sexual intercourse.

Structurally, the plot is often developed through songs, and even dances. The music, lyrics, flashbacks, dream sequences all develop the theme and give it continuity. They provide information on emotional states and on the development of the relationship between the hero and the heroine. Apart from this facilitative service, film soundtracks also draw audiences to the cinema halls.[xxxv] Thus music is an integral part of Pakistani films.

Film Dialogue – Its Usage and Impact

It is not uncommon for people to memorise whole dialogues and remember them for years (in a society with a strong oral tradition this is not a surprising ability). For example, a young man interviewed on his views on the portrayal of women in Punjabi films was able to repeat complete chunks of dialogues from films seen over ten years! Apart from the films themselves, booklets on films and hit songs sometimes include and make available popular film dialogues.

Further, humorous dialogue more so than other types, is absorbed into everyday speech. From a feminist point of view, the damaging point here is that no matter how transient they are, such dialogues provide slick clichés that are thoughtlessly or even deliberately used, thus making negative attitudes and behaviour towards women current and acceptable.

Dress

Aesthetics are never neutral. In a society driven by materialistic ideals, dress is more than mere utility or decoration. Amongst other things, it represents the confluence of both class and gender-based 'morality'. And this morality prescribes and regulates normative (as well as digressive) self-construction, behaviour and relationships.

The life styles projected through films tend to glamorise and subsequently reinforce ostentatious living and its underlying value system. Images of palatial houses, gardens, servants, rich food, clothes, and jewellery belie the reality of a majority that cannot even

aspire to these 'essentials'; and they contradict the official posture regarding Islamic values of simplicity. Thus, films perpetuate double standards and in doing so, serve to maintain existing social stratifications.

As for gender roles, despite strict censorship codes regarding dress, women in cinema are made to wear vulgar clothes in materials that are either gauzy or satiny and that emphasise the curves of their bodies. The use of strategic surface decoration such as sequins and embroidery is an important part of this emphasis as it caters to the general obsession with big breasts and buttocks; it helps focus eyes, male and female, on these parts of the female anatomy. Further, the elaborate tassels of the *lacha* (a kind of sarong) emphasise the waist and buttocks and so on. The *dupatta*, a long scarf/veil meant to cover the head and upper half of the body, is also often used to 'tantalise' the male. The only exception to this usage is when the 'bad' woman reforms or the 'good' woman is reduced to poverty, is chastised or is sorrowing - then her *dupatta* is worn 'modestly'.

Women in western dress – clad in trousers or long dresses, and wearing hats - are immediately labelled as 'liberated', a word that is synonymous with the 'bad woman' who has shed all social and familial restraints. In more recent films though, the heroine in western dress may be associated with affluence or exposure to travel abroad. In this sense, she occupies an ambivalent moral area until she submits to the hero, and subsequently demonstrates her reclamation by the social order through a demure shift in dress. Thus by the end of the film, the same woman who was earlier seen in vulgarised versions of western dress now wears traditional clothing and has her head modestly covered!

Cross dressing – women masquerading as men – is also fairly common in films. It sanctions further fetishization of the female body through extra-ordinary costumes. And it apparently provides titillation to the audience in scenes of women relating to women dressed as men, in 'illicit' yet provocative ways.

By highlighting aspects of sartorial style, films influence dress codes for the majority of people, especially young women and men. The only exception is the small urban elite who tend to be influenced by western fashions (perhaps through western films). The 'delicate' beauty (*nazook haseena*) is idealised while the earth-bound, ordinary woman, if ever projected, is not worth emulating. In fact she serves as a foil for the idealised images. The Punjabi heroine is of course anything but delicate, because of her physical stature, but her clothes and mannerisms are meant to enhance her charms. In relation, Urdu films exercise greater influence as they are considered more sophisticated (emphasis on 'rich and respectable') than those made in provincial languages. Regional films tend to vulgarise ethnic dressing to the level of the absurd, so that they are not really imitable.

Nevertheless, ostentation and flamboyance are shown as being integral elements of the heroines' role. These 'feminine' images are especially imbibed by lower middle class women – during interviews, women from this income group specifically commented on film costumes. A glance at female film audiences also validates the weight of this influence. Imitations are manifested through clothes, hair styles, and accessories (bangles, jhoomar, earrings, kajal etc.) that are very often sold with brand names of popular films and/or heroines.

What is more insidious is that the coy mannerisms of heroines tend to be adopted by women viewers. The particular *adas* (mannerisms of a coquettish nature) and speech with specific lip and eye movements are evident among lower middle class urban girls. Since their mothers do not behave in this way, it can be safely assumed that this is due to the influence of the films they view.

The danger of this apparently harmless (and perhaps universal) pattern of imitating popular film stars is that in a segregated and repressed society like ours, young women are often unaware of the sexual implications of their gestures and mannerisms. Thus they unwittingly invite unpleasant male attention and are then seen as responsible for both deliberately 'seductive' behaviour and its repercussions.

Cinema Audiences

Since the advent of video films, the bulk of the cinema-going public is drawn predominantly from among working class and blue collar males. They are usually single labourers and domestic servants for whom this is the only available entertainment. Small towns and rural areas draw in even greater numbers of men. Though in some rural areas complete villages often turn out to see a film or reels of songs and dance clips from popular films. In such audiences, both men and women may arrive together but then they sit separately. At matinee film shows that are specifically held for women, men may be present, though in smaller numbers and on the sidelines. Their presence may be to ensure that the women are not watching 'obscene' films. In market (*mandi*) towns/villages, the audience is entirely male – share croppers, small farmers, middlemen, truck and tractor drivers. The tickets here are cheaper and films serve as a relaxing way to wait for markets to open. There are all-night shows, sometimes with a number of old films shown consecutively.

Overall, women audiences are smaller in size than they were a decade ago. Eighteen interviews with women at various cinemas in Lahore revealed that the main reason why women did not come as often as they previously did was because they could see films (mostly Indian) on video at home, which was cheaper, more 'entertaining' and saved them

the hassle of getting out of the house. This substitution of the VCR (in terms of Indian and Western films), for shared public entertainment is further substantiated by the general absence of the upper middle and upper classes at the cinema - they express a lack of interest and even contempt for Pakistani films.

On the other hand, lower middle-class families take special pride in stating that their women folk do not watch films. It is an implicit acknowledgement of film being a male preserve and that its illicit pleasures are forbidden to women for fear of their being 'corrupted'. Even video films are often viewed separately by women. This is stated to be a personal choice, as women feel uncomfortable while viewing films with even close male relatives. They also report that men, sometimes even sons, ask them to leave the room when there are romantic scenes. This is especially true when Indian films are viewed, as they are more explicit than Pakistani films.

For those who do watch films in the cinema, the main reasons, as gauged from interviews, were advertisements of new films on television and radio, recommendations by neighbours and friends, and reviews in women's magazines and newspapers. A trip to the cinema meant an outing, especially affording privacy to newly-married couples, those meeting surreptitiously (very few), and groups of relatives and friends from a neighbourhood, school/college. The latter group has become less common in the last decade.

Family melodramas, common to all Pakistani films, but the special preserve of Urdu films (called *'gharaeloo'* - literal translation 'domestic'), appear to draw women viewers most. For viewing this genre of films family males give permission to their women folk more readily than for other genres. According to Laura Mulvey, the melodramatic form deals with processes of repression as well as the status of repressed content. Thus, in her view 'family melodrama' is geared to probing pent-up emotion, bitterness and disillusionment well known to women'.[xxxvi] Given this theoretical context, the popularity of melodramas can be understood – in that they serve a useful function for women who lack any conscious and coherent culture of oppression. This may be so despite the fact that the plots never provide solutions to women's problems outside prescribed patriarchal norms.

Interviews with two women who had just viewed *Shadi Meray Shohar Ki*, exemplifies this situation. They were asked to respond to the heroine's pain and dilemma in view of her husband's infidelities and her subsequent protest in terms of leaving home. While the two viewers thought that the husband's behaviour was unfair, they also felt there was no other solution for the heroine but to return home to him, as he was a man and had his pride to contend with. Given these responses, it is apparent that a simplistic

understanding of catharsis and women viewers' identification with projections of others in similar situations, does not adequately explain the popularity of melodramas. Psychoanalysts and feminists need to further explore this area.

The Film Industry and Censorship

The socio-political situation has had a distinct impact on the film industry in the last decade. The industry has had to absorb fallouts from heavy taxation and the video boom. Further, strict censorship codes have not only been concerned with 'obscenity', but have also laid emphasis on nationalist themes and on the brand of Islamisation that is propagated by the present regime. The Scripts Scrutiny Committee, or the next tier, the Censor Board is empowered to reject segments or entire narratives if they do not conform to the injunctions prompted by state-sponsored morality. That this has placed a definite limitation on the industry was highlighted by the Chairman of Pakistan Film Producers Association in an interview when he stated that "you can't make a hundred films on nationalism or religion."[xxxvii] It is interesting to note that due to this one dimensional policy, in the recent past only three films won tax rebates and all these were on explicitly propagandist themes.

Despite official 'restraint orders' regarding obscenity, the last decade of films have not portrayed women more positively. There may be less exposure of a woman's body but the objectification is even more noticeable in the obvious attempts to 'cover up'. It could be argued that more subtle ways of titillating the audiences have been opened up. For example, an unidentified Lahore film producer was overheard talking to his colleagues about a problem with the censors regarding a scene in an ongoing production. He suggested that if the well-built heroine was shown riding a horse in slow motion, they would beat the censors and have the whole cinema hall masturbating in no time!

Films thus provide expression for the insidious coupling between official and market 'interests'. And due to this, hypocrisy abounds. Dancing by women is banned in Pakistan; alcohol, gambling, drug peddling and prostitution are forbidden; rape and abduction are punishable by death (although such judicial decisions are rare); adultery is punishable with floggings, imprisonment and stoning to death. Yet as a reflection of our society, current films are brimming with such censured narrative images and their violent accoutrements. Though of course, given the double standards, digestion of these images necessitates a suitable moral glaze. Talat Aslam[xxxviii] has suggested that in Pakistani films the emphasis on the 'call for respectability' has resulted in:

> .....this balancing act, forcing film makers to produce images of pleasure and desire only to show their defeat at the hands of the forces of decency. Both the images of pleasure and the moral condemnation have become accentuated. If the

> degeneracy of certain characters is allowed to plumb new depths, the moral tone of condemnation was made loftier than ever before. This explains why films these days are such a beguiling mix of prurience and puritanism. But this does not imply a moral victory for decency. Messages go out visually as well as through dialogue.....images of pleasure hold the attention more than any number of pious speeches. What remains embedded in the audiences' consciousness when the lights come on are those very same condemned images, offering as they do a glimpse into a world they dare not ask for.

Alternative Films and Documentaries

From a feminist point of view, the present retrogressive socio-legal trends have resulted in insecurity, contradictions (especially at the official level), and an obsession with the subject of women. Recent Pakistani films reflect this mood. Challenges to it may be posited using the same mediatic channel. But for such interventions to be effective, the reach and limitations of existing alternatives must be examined.

Since the '50s, about a dozen films have been made that can be loosely defined as 'alternative'. They were produced by some of the best known intellectuals in the country, comprising leading poets, film-makers and politically aware producer-directors. However, not a single one of these films was a 'success' in conventional box office terms. This is one of the reasons why it has been impossible to access copies for review for this study.

All these films attempted to project aspects of specific social and political problems in the country. However, only a few of them made any attempt to address problems faced by women, or to explore progressive representations of women in their narratives. These were *'Ghar Pyara Ghar'* (Home Sweet Home) by Shamim Ashraf Malik, where a women struggles to make independent decisions; and *'Neela Parbat'* (Blue Mountain) in which sexual problems were discussed. *'Mela'* (Carnival) by Salman Pirzada, briefly featured women as prostitutes and performers in a circus. As their function in the film was to serve as metaphors for a corrupt and dehumanised society, they hinted at the problem of women's status in society only in a peripheral way. The film was banned in Pakistan because of its anti-army, anti-establishment stance.

The only film to have come out in the last decade or so, that specifically focuses on one of the issues that confront women was *They Are Killing The Horse*, by Mushtaq Gazdar. This film is about the repression, both sexual and otherwise, of an educated middle-class girl. She is not allowed to work because a 'working' daughter is seen as an indication of the family's inability to provide for her, and therefore is not in keeping with their sense of pride and honour.

Incarcerated in the home, she views the outside world either through the latticework of a window or through the netted grill of her *burka* (veil). Gradually, she begins to relinquish her hold on reality and takes recourse in dreams where a hero on a horse will come and take her away from her claustrophobic world.

The breaking point comes when the young woman watches a *moharram* [xxxix] procession from her window. The combined presence of the ceremonial horse with its trappings of martyrdom, and the customary self-flagellation and violent emotions associated with moharram are too much for her. She can no longer take the blood and violence and loses her hold on sanity. Although the theme in itself is important, in the final analysis the film is disappointing. Apart from her treatment by a psychiatrist as well as *pirs* and *fakirs* (holy men said to be endowed with healing powers), the only solution that the film has to offer is marriage with the 'right' man.

So far no 'alternative' films have been made by women and certainly there are none that deal with feminist issues.

As for documentaries, government departments such as health, population, the ministries of tourism and information and so on, have made some contributions. Television has also produced documentaries of a fairly high standard. However, the few concerning women's problems have been predominantly propaganda films, where women are shown working at home, at arts and crafts, engaged in agricultural activities. It was amusing to note that in a recent series of videos made by an ngo, for the promotion of breast feeding, male puppets are used to advise the female puppet, who listens from the roof-top. In more general propaganda films, women are maintained in the background, or else are made to fit in with familiar notions of femininity.

Incidentally *'Shana ba Shana'* (Shoulder to Shoulder), the only positive documentary as far as women are concerned, was made in the early '70s, by two of the best TV producers who also happen to be women. The programme was based on a compilation of interviews with professional women.

Conclusion

This review of Pakistani films and the portrayal of women in them is depressing. As discussed before, however, we need to study and analyse our situation and the role of the media, especially film, before we can even begin to find viable answers to this problem. In other words, we have to formulate the right questions before we can hope for useful answers. But this cannot be an isolated endeavour.

Recognising the enormous financial and state constraints on film making, as well as an absence of non-governmental agencies' support, it is perhaps unrealistic to suggest that women should begin to make their own films. But a beginning has to be made. Even if video films are made on more 'acceptable' issues such as health, sanitation, income generation or education, this can be done from a feminist perspective. Funding for such ventures should be relatively accessible through international and national agencies.

Encouraging and influencing men and women within the film industry or in its periphery to critically contribute is another way of trying to correct the slanted vision of the camera. This can be done by viewing and reviewing existing films – mainstream, documentary and alternative – from a feminist point of view. The exchange of alternative films from other countries, especially in the region, would be another way to help raise the consciousness level regarding the image and role of women in and through films. Feedback on this activity is essential.

The formation of film societies and clubs in all possible forums could prove useful as well. And the dissemination of the results of ensuing discussions could generate new ideas and serve as a baseline for further activity.

Finally, the video boom should be taken seriously as an alternate and cheaper means of getting across our perspective to the general public. There are some theatre groups that are run by women. As they have women members as well as talented writers, they can be encouraged to work with this medium. Women television producers and directors can also be tapped.

It is clear though, that even if all these activities were to be implemented, they would only represent a small attempt and a relatively small group of people would be influenced. Significant and far-reaching changes in the media can only come with a change in the conceptual framework in which we live. As long as established myths about women retain their credibility, the cinema, as a popular means of entertainment will continue to propagate them. Thus as part of our immediate plan of action, something might he achieved if the 'target' group for these activities were to include those who wield influence in the film industry, the press and the state machinery.