Item Girls and Objects of Dreams:

Why Indian Censors Agree to Bold Scenes in Bollywood Films

Tatiana Szurlej

The article presents the social background, which helped Bollywood film industry to develop the so-called "item numbers", replace them by "dream sequences", and come back to the "item number" formula again. The songs performed by the film vamp or the character, who takes no part in the story, the musical interludes, which replaced the first way to show on the screen all elements which are theoretically banned, and the guest appearances of film stars on the screen are a very clever ways to fight all the prohibitions imposed by Indian censors.

Censors found that film censorship was necessary, because the film as a medium is much more popular than literature or theater, and therefore has an impact on all people. Indeed, the viewers perceive the screen story as the world around them, so it becomes easy for them to accept the screen reality and move it to everyday life. That's why the movie, despite the fact that even the very process of its creation is much more conventional than, for example, the theater performance, seems to be much more "real" to the audience than any story shown on the stage. Therefore, despite the fact that one of the most dangerous elements on which Indian censorship seems to be extremely sensitive is eroticism, this is also the most desired part of cinema. Moreover, filmmakers, who are tightly constrained, need at the same time to provide pleasure to the audience to get the invested money back, so they invented various tricks by which they manage to bypass censorship. The most widely used ways to trick the censors are movie songs, so often underestimated, especially in the West, which however are not, as some would like to see them, only an unnecessary addition.

Bollywood films are often called musicals, but the examples show that all the songs, not only *item numbers* and *dream sequences*, play quite a different role in Indian movies than in the classic Hollywood musicals. There is a very deep logic lying behind film production, and popular Indian cinema uses its songs to show everything that is impossible to show in the story. Filmmakers know very well that songs are the element of fantasy, which when used in a story about everyday life, can show things that are impossible in natural experience.

One of the most significant element, usually appearing with descriptions of Bollywood cinema, is its association with strong subordination to censorship, which seems to accompany it from almost the

beginning, causing many problems to filmmakers[1]. Of course it is not an Indian invention, but the governmental certificate, shown at the beginning of every movie, makes the work of the censors from Subcontinent more visible than those from other places. At the same time, as rightly observed by Mira Nair, whose film *Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love* (1996) met many difficulties, before it finally got permission to be shown to Indian audience, the situation in the Subcontinent is very much hypocritical, because the same censors, who ban some elements in one film, seem not to see them in another and often allow to depict rampant vulgarity, especially in so called romantic songs (Mohammed 1997, 34). Indeed, the censorship office in India is a really powerful institution, which appeared early, with first Cinematograph Bill introduced already by colonial administration in 1917. Then, with no objections of the Indian members of the Legislative Council, the colonial state created the first Cinematograph Act in 1918, which was then implemented in the biggest Indian cities two years later. The Indian government changed it after Independence, in 1949 by adding two categories of certificates: films labeled as "A" (for adults, above 18 only), and those with "U" certificate, which could be watched without any restrictions[2]. The next step was the decision to set up one, central board, which would replace the provincial ones, and then in 1951 the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting established the Central Board of Film Censors. However it is 1952 that is considered to be the year of birth of Indian censorship in the form it is known today, when the consolidate statue called the Cinematograph Act of 1952 was created (Mehta 2012, 28–34). The Act established the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) by claiming that film censorship is necessary, because the film is a medium much more popular than literature or theater, and therefore has an impact on all people, often, or maybe foremost, the uneducated masses, who may sometimes become very easily confused by what is reality and what belongs to the screen fiction. Therefore, even if the majority of audience watched and still watches films just for entertainment, the members of the government thought that the things seen on the screen might have a big impact on the tastes of the viewers and their outlook on life (Mehta 2012, 33). It seems that this, rather controversial record, which treats the majority of habitants of the Subcontinent as very naive people, with not much understanding of the nature of the cinematic spectacle, has in fact some deeper meaning, and it was not caused by just the

[1] For a detailed history of CBCF in India see: Bhowmik 2012, 33-65.

[2] The other two are: "U/A" label, which means: universal with adult supervision, and "S" for specialized films, created for doctors, etc. with some elements of scientific purpose (Ganti 2009, 91). There are of course similar limitations in other countries as well, but in India they seem to be more confined, especially against nudity and sex.

popularity of the medium and its easy accessibility. CBFC simply discovered[3] that in fact it is much easier to believe in the truth of what is seen in the cinema hall, than in case of, for example, the theater. Today's film experience has changed a lot since the first show, but even if nobody runs away, seeing an arriving train on the screen, cinematic stories are still treated as factual by many spectators. The perception of the film world is obviously constrained by the frame of the screen, but, because of the natural aspect of photography, the viewer perceives the presented story as the world around him, so it's easy for him to accept the screen reality and move it to everyday life. That's why, despite the fact that montage, close ups, other elements of the cinematic language, and even the very process of creation of the movie is much more conventional than, for example, the theater performance, film is the medium, which still seems to be much more "real" to the audience than any story shown on the stage, and, as such, had always big impact on its viewers. Of course today the situation changes again, and cinema is slowly beginning to lose its "truth" upon the television, which seems to have better methods of manipulation with its *reality show* formula or documentary series about co called everyday life, but that is a topic for another discussion.

The most important issues for the Indian film censors are: sex, violence and politics[4]. However, as Monika Mehta rightly observes, sexuality was, and still may be seen as the key element of the

[3] Some film theorist, especially from France, has also noticed this interesting fact from almost the beginning of scientific reflection on the film. For more information see: Ervin Panofsky, *Style and Medium in the Motion Picture* (1934), Hugo Münstenberg, *The Photoplay* (1916), Rudolf Arnheim, *Film als Kunst* (1933), Henri Wallon, *De quelques problèmes psycho-psychosociologiques que pose le cinèma* (1947), Jean Jacques Rinieri, *L'impression de réalité et les phénomènes de croyance* (1953), Albert Michotte van den Berck, *Le caractère de "réalité" des projections cinématographiques* (1948), Cesare Musatti, *Les phénomènes stéréocinéthiques et les effets stéréoscopiques du cinèma normal* (1957), Emile Schaub-Koch, *Supervie du cinèma* (1947), René Zazzo, *Espace, mauvment et cinèmascope* (1954), R.C. Oldfield, *Perception visuelle des images animées* (1947), Jean Mitry, *Esthétique et psychologie du cinèma* (1963), Christian Metz, *A propos de l'impression de réalité au cinèma* (1965), *Le film de fiction et son spectateur* (1975), Jean Louis Baudry, *Cinèma effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil du base* (1970), Edgar Morin, *Le cinèma ou l'homme imaginaire* (1958), Michel Marie, *Impression de réalité* (1979), Stephen Heath, *Questions of cinema* (1981).

[4] The whole list includes: (1) anti-social activities such as violence; (2) the modus operandi of criminals; (3) scenes showing: involvement of children in violence as victims or as perpetrators or as forced witness to violence, children as being subjected to any form of child abuse, abuse or ridicule of physically and mentally handicapped persons, needless cruelty to animals; (4) pointless or avoidable scenes of violence; (5) scenes which have the effect of justifying or glorifying drinking; (6) scenes tending to encourage or justify drug addiction and consumption of tobacco; (7) vulgarity, obscenity or depravity; (8) dual meaning words as obviously cater to baser instincts; (9) scenes degrading or denigrating women in any manner; (10) scenes involving sexual violence against women like attempt to rape, rape or any form of molestation or scenes of a similar nature, and if any such incidence is germane to the theme, they shall be reduced to the minimum and no details are shown; (11) scenes showing sexual perversions and if such matters are germane to the theme they shall be reduced to the minimum with no details; (12) visuals or words contemptuous of racial, religious or other groups; (13)

disputes about censorship in Indian cinema, and it seems to be the worst "enemy" of moral values. The distinction between elements being part of Indian and other traditions may be then the reason why sometimes Indian censors use double standards for Indian and Western films, and let the foreign movies show much more than Indian ones can, but in any explanations of censors about their decision of banning some scenes it is always clear that it is the women's body, which is marked as the sexual one, and it has become both, the symbol of so called "Indian tradition", and the threat to it (Mehta 2012, 16–17). The observation of Mehta may be not much surprising in the context of female body, the most interesting elements of many definitions, used by Indian censors, are however those, which seem to imply that some of the citizens of India need to be cared of, just like children and that the "Indian tradition" started to be used as a very wide, and comfortable term because of being in fact very hard to define. The mentioned Mira Nair's film was also inspired by the text of Vātsyāyana, which is part of Indian tradition, but it seems that the cinema and censors from the Subcontinent entangled themselves in a rather difficult situation, which makes them both: willingly referring to the tradition or glorious old times, and showing it on the screen, but at the same time making a very clear choice of material, which considers to be this tradition. In effect, although the majority of laymen from every part of the world sees India primarily as the birthplace of the *Kāmasūtra*, India itself tries to push this element to the margins of its culture, especially when it comes to cinema, and often uses a very Victorian method to decide what is proper and what is not. This schizophrenic situation, in which colonial values suddenly became more important, than some elements of old tradition, the one which should be preserved, causes many difficulties to film directors.

The struggle with the Central Board of Film Certification is usually a very hard task. Some artists try to sue censors, while others seem to have much better idea by inventing all sorts of ways to get around censorship, and show on the screen exactly what they intend. They don't have to do it all the time, because, what is also very common behavior, being probably the most frustrating thing for many filmmakers, is the fact that the work of many censors usually miss any rules, and most of their opinions are dependent on their personal whims. For example, no one had cut the famous waterfall scene from the film *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (Raj Kapoor 1985), in which the breast of actress Mandakini is

---

visuals or words which promote communal, obscurantist, anti-scientific and anti-national attitude; (14) calling in question the sovereignty and integrity of India; (15) jeopardy or endanger of the security of the State; (16) strain of friendly relations with foreign States; (17) endanger of public order; (18) scenes that tend to create scorn, disgrace or disregard of rules or undermine the dignity of court; (19) showing national symbols and emblems in accordance with the provisions of the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950 (Bose 2005, VII–X).

visible, while at the same time the work of much more innocent directors have been treated harshly. The truth is also, however, that established artists, such as Raj Kapoor, were often left alone by censors, because of their status and international stardom, but not only them; on the other hand low-budget films, in which there are no stars, and therefore those that would not attract large crowds to theaters, are also usually considered slightly more leniently (Mehta 2012, 19). It is also worth noticing here that violence in Indian cinema is treated much more comfortably than sex, especially the domestic one, which seems not to be problematic for censors at all.

However, as already mentioned, one of the most dangerous elements about which Indian censorship seems to be extremely sensitive is eroticism, and the reason of this strong alert may lie in the fact that it is also the most desired part of the cinema itself. The uniqueness of communicating with film lies in the fact that it allows the viewer to enjoy the great pleasure of voyeurism[5]. The audience lost in the darkness of movie theaters sees only part of the picture, as if they spied through binoculars and there is nothing more thrilling than watching private and forbidden things. This is a big problem for filmmakers who are tightly constrained by the rules of censorship and, after spending so much money for making the film, they need to provide pleasure to the audience to get their invested money back. So they have invented various tricks by which they manage to bypass censorship.

The most widely used ways to trick the censors are movie songs, so often held in no esteem, especially in the West. The inclusion of six or more songs in Bollywood films may make them similar to the genre of Hollywood musicals, but while both film music and film songs are diegetic, only songs are the product for sale, used in promotional videos. Additionally the songs from Bollywood films are often shot in exotic locations and can present many festivals, which allows them, as Jayson Beaster-Jones observes, to be the dominant element in the field of Indian popular music. They are also very often associated not only with the singers and music directors but with actors as well and, although viewers know that actors don't sing in the film, they would find in many music stores not only compilation albums of the "songs of R.D. Burman" who was a music composer or the "song of Kishore Kumar", a famous singer, but also "songs of Raj Kapoor" or the "songs of Sridevi" who being actors never sang anything themselves (Beaster-Jones 2009, 427–429).

The first sound films, not only in India were very much intoxicated with music and the possibilities offered by the presentation of dance on screen. Classic Hollywood scheme, by which most musicals of the thirties and forties were made, was to tell the story of a group of people trying

[5] See Mulvey 2009, 14-27.

to put a show on a stage, who after some initial failures, achieved great success. Indian filmmakers, even if, especially in later years, they were inspired by the American achievements in this area, were never interested in these types of stories. They focused mainly on love affairs, mixed with a few songs to entertain their audience. The inspiration for these rich musical interludes became, as emphasized by historians of cinema, home theater, which also began to provide themes for the stories to filmmakers. What is however unique in Indian cinema is the fact, rightly observed by Sangita Shresthova, that dance sequences, accompanying film songs, have been one of the most important part of mainstream cinema in India for a long time, and there are even some examples of silent films showing that many rhythmically choreographed scenes existed already in those screen stories (Shresthova 2011: 12), which may sound a little bit strange but was probable in the time when live music was played in cinema theatres during shows.

At the same time it is necessary to remember also that being an actor and especially an actress was a very problematic thing in the first years of Indian cinema and this situation had also an impact, not only on the form of the Indian film, but also on the censors' concern about the new medium. There are many anecdotes about not only famous courtesans, but even common prostitutes refusing to play in first films, which is beautifully shown for example in the *Harishchandrachi Factory* (Paresh Mokashi 2009), the film about Dadasaheb Phalke, the pioneer of Indian cinema. In this difficult situation, as Neepa Majumdar notes, the first women, who played in Indian movies, were actresses of English background, because at that time cinema was perceived as a moral taint, and only after the appearance of the first Muslim and then Hindu women it came to be seen as a more respectable thing (Majumdar 2010, 6). Cinema in the twenties was thus dominated by such girls as: Patience Cooper, Ermeline, Madhuri (Beryl Klaison), Sita Devi (Irene Gasper), Sulochana (Ruby Meyers)[6], and others. The female sex appeal in the twenties was never again equaled or surpassed in the next fifty years; there were passionate kisses and revealing dresses, which started to vanish slowly with the appearance of the sound and other heroines (foreign actresses couldn't speak Indian languages). However, it is important to note that even in the times of the Anglo Indian women's domination on the screen, there were also some exceptions, like: Gauhar, Sultana, Zubeida, Shehzadi, Fatima, Sharifa, Tara, Dulari and Nalini, who were actresses of Indian origin, but still Muslim, not Hindu. The entry of Hindu girls, especially those from upper classes and castes like: Durga Khote (first Brahmin actress), Devika Rani and Leela Chitnis toned down the previous, open approach in films. They still did kiss in

[6] Sulochana, awarded the 1973 Dada Saheb Phalke Award – India's highest cinema award for lifetime achievement, was a real star of silent era, earning 5000 rupees as monthly salary, which was a fortune that time (Sharma 1992, 3).

movies, but exposure of the body was limited. The talkies also brought soft, sexy and suggestive voice, which became another aspect of sex appeal. At that time playback was not established yet and singing actresses were the norm. It was the only period then, when physical appearance played second role to singing skills, that's why Nurjehan for instance could achieve unmatched stardom in spite of her obesity (Sharma 1992, 3).

With the Independence and accomplished playback singers the situation changed and cinema started to emphasize "Indian" values with new codes to express sexual tension (Somaaya, Kothari, Madangarli 2012, 11). Filmmakers began to learn from other traditions, referring especially to the work of the courtesans, who were great performers of that time and, like some big stars of the screen today, were often subject of both: admiration and resentment. Therefore, as rightly observed by Ira Bhaskar, one of the most common types of conventional screen songs started to be *mujra*, performed primarily by courtesans, being used mainly in films about them. Of course, courtesans and *mujra* shown in films are not necessarily related with Islam, however, since the Muslim aristocracy and Lucknow have such a huge impact on Bollywood cinema, dance numbers performed by a courtesan were usually immediately connected with Islam in the minds of creators and audience. Exceptions did occur, already before Independence, for example in *Nartaki* (Debaki Bose 1940), *Chitralekha* (Kidar Sharma 1941), *Raj Nartaki* (Madhu Bose 1941), and later, in the sixties (for instance: *Chitralekha* repeated by Kidar Sharma in 1964, and *Amrapali* by Leh Tandon made in 1966) embedded in pre-Islamic times, which refer rather to the tradition of courtly and temple dancers (*rāja nartakī*, *devadāsī*) in their presentation of courtesan figures (Bhaskar, Allen 2009, 45), and which were used in different purposes. It is however impossible to show public women only, so, in spite of some exceptions like shocking appearance of Begum Para wearing trousers and T-shirt or Nalini Jayant in a one-piece swimming suit, shown in films of that time, new, restrained Bollywood cinema has developed the so-called *item number*, wishing to provide a little thrill to the audience.

Item number or *item song* is a song that does not have any connection with an action of the film or may just have a little correlation with the story. It is used primarily to attract a larger audience to the cinema or to help promote the musical blockbuster. *Item number* is usually a song combined with a sensual dance, performed by a character, who is quite unrelated to the storyline. This could be, for example, a cabaret dancer, who appears just at the time, when the hero looks into the night sanctuary, as is shown in the film *Barsaat* (Raj Kapoor 1949), a beautiful Gypsy girl entertaining a group of outlaws as it is in the later *Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy 1975) or a woman, who plans to impair alertness of a dangerous criminal while waiting for the police, an example of which is the famous *item number* from the movie *Don* (Chandra Barot 1978) performed by Helen and repeated by Kareena

Kapoor 28 years later in the remake of *Don* made by Farhan Akhtar. The additional role of *item number*, being first of all connected with vamps, and the reason why it usually passes censorship, is its role in emphasizing the difference between a Hindu "morality" and Western "evilness", which is not so simple because cinema itself mixes national elements with Western incorporations. As Neepa Majumdar notes, post independence Hindi films usually show West as a place, where there is no space for traditional values, and where culture is corrupted by decadence, signified by whisky, bikinis and prominently an uncontrolled sexuality, but at the same time all these elements have big visual potential, which is desired and then exploited in song and dance sequences (Majumdar 2010, 191). That's why many *item numbers* show cabaret dancers or other women, with strong associations with the West. It is also not coincidental that the most famous *item girls* of Indian screen were Cuckoo and Helen, both of mixed origins: the first was an Anglo-Indian actress, the second of Franco-Burmese descent. As Jerry Pinto remarks in his biography of the most famous *item girl*, Helen appeared in times when memsahibs were not distant memory in Subcontinent, and while they were never real white goddesses to all Indian men, as some Britons wanted to see them, there was still an old colonial hangover of the woman, whom you could not touch, because she belonged to the ruling class. And, according to Pinto, it was not simply the fascination of white skin, but it had a deeper root in the situation where forbidden becomes so attractive simply because of its being forbidden, and if the heroine of the film was the ethereally unavailable Hindu woman, there had to be also an object of male lust, which made *item girls* the ideal vamps. Even if other dancers like Azoori and Kuldeep Kaur were less "foreign" than Helen or Cuckoo, they were still not Hindu women, and it took many years since Independence before a Hindu vamp became accepted in the form of Bindu in late 1960s (Pinto 2006, 47–49).

The vamp remains popular in sixties, having sometimes even more screen space than heroine and providing the sexuality that the heroine was not allowed to show. As the authors of *Mother, Maiden, Mistress* observe, the fact, that the country was ruled by the powerful figure of Indira Gandhi was not a reflection of the status of women in Indian cinema (Somaaya, Kothari, Madangarli 2012, 45). At that time however some professional dancers, like Padmini, Vyjayanthimala or Waheeda Rahman, become popular, which pushes filmmakers to look for new themes, connected with classical era. Even if heroines, played by those actresses, wear sometimes a very daring outfit, like for example Amrapali in mentioned Leh Tandon's film, their dance, being "classical", seems to be less vulgar and as such, appropriate for the protagonist (Shankar 1966, 25). The introduction of colour infused interest in costumes and beautiful sets. The sari remained dominant, but with the new way of double-wrapping. It was bound twice tightly above the knees, with the pleads opening like a fan below, causing

difficulties in walking. The heroine could take only short steps, but the sway of her hips widely increased. The vamp's dresses were similar to the cabaret or Latin American carnival costumes, and despite of the daring scene from *An Evening in Paris* (Shakti Samanta 1967), in which Sharmila Tagore wears bikini, the division between "good" girls and vamps persists. The heroine of that time is glamorous and there is not much place for the girl-next-door, which disappears for some times (Somaaya, Kothari, Madangarli 2012, 59–62).

The sexual revolution of 1970s influenced popular cinema, in which there was no need for vamp any more. In this period the female protagonist started to be exposed like never before, thanks to miniskirts and short frocks, because at that time "good" women could often wear western clothes without punishment. Of course some stories, like *Purab aur Paschim* (Manoj Kumar 1970) show the transformation of the heroine, who wears short skirts on the beginning and then turn to "decent women" preferring sari, but her past behavior (which included drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes), and costumes do not spoil her reputation, which is a new element. In other stories however, like *Hare Rama, Hare Krishna* (Dev Anand 1971), the heroine commits suicide after spending some time with Hippies, so we cannot say that at that time, and in any other decade, there was only one way of presenting heroines, although there was some standard. *Item numbers*, previously performed mostly by vamps, remain after their disappearance, but they can't be identified with negative characters any more. The new *item girls* are the mentioned dancers, who are not related with the story, like the Gypsy girl from *Sholay*. The most important is however the fact, that the viewer recognizes actresses specializing in such dances, and when he sees their name on film poster, he knows that there will be a "hot scene" in the movie. *Item number* takes also a new form since some authors manages to weave this kind of entertainment into the film narrative, which provides additional pleasure, being performed by the main character of the story, the girl already known to the audience. Such a procedure is not an easy task, requiring some favorable circumstances, and one of them is a situation, in which the character is used as bait, and forced to pretend to be a dancer to gain the trust of the villain. The motives of the girl are usually good, so no one can accuse her of misconduct, even if the situation requires her to wear a skimpy outfit. An excellent example of such use of *item number* is the *Khalnayak* made by Subhash Ghai in 1993, a later, but also legendary movie thanks to its *item song Choli Ke Peechhe Kya Hai* (What is under the blouse?), which became a huge hit after the censors ordered it to be cut from the film. Despite all objections *Khalnayak* finally passed by the censors, who conceded that the song could be controversial, but only at the time when it is taken out of context. Another, quite untoward way to trick the censors, and to introduce the *item song* in the film was always the use of Holi, popular mostly in older films. Incorporation of the rituals associated

with this festival is a very good excuse to show romance between main characters, and by the way let the hero touch his beloved with impunity, while sprinkling her with colored powder. Spraying water, which accompanies the fun, additionally emphasizes the shapes of the heroine, dressed of course in white, as tradition dictates, and since Holi is the festival, during which any prohibition and social conduct are forgotten for one day, film characters resort to a variety of activities that are commonly banned by the censors, such as the treatment of longitudinal sprinklers as phallic symbol, or the full text undertones. One of the best examples of that strategy is *Silsila*, made by Yash Chopra in 1981, a story about a married man (Amitabh Bachchan), who is in love with another woman (Rekha). During the festival the hero shows great affection toward the girl he loves, which helps his wife to understand that he may be involved in relationship with the other woman. The film story may be not so daring as it looks, since viewers know that the hero met his beloved before he got married with the other girl, his dead friend's fiancée, just because she was pregnant, but the Holi sequence became very famous because of the out screen romance between Amitabh Bachchan and Rekha, and the fact, that Jaya Bachchan, the real wife of the actor, plays his wife in the film.

The only problem with the *item number*, however, seems to be its usual association with a particular place and time, by being played for both: the eyes of the hero of the film, and the audience gathered in the cinema. It is always a particular performance unfolding in here and now, which does not give filmmakers so much freedom as in the making of its famous successors, which is the *dream sequence*. The difference between an *item number* and a *dream sequence* is often very much blurred, because both shows have exactly the same objective, which is to provide voyeuristic pleasure to the viewer. However, it seems that a *dream sequence*, at least for a time, was a much spicier element than an *item number*. The heyday of the *dream sequence* occurred in the 1990s, but dreams of film characters naturally appeared in some movies before. It is hard to say when the first *dream sequence* was shown, because we can find some examples already in classical movies, like *Awaara* (Raj Kapoor 1951) with one of the most famous dreams of the Indian screen, presented in the form of an eight minutes long song, or *Jagte Raho* (Amit Maitra, Sombhu Mitra 1956), the story about a poor villager, who comes to a big city, wanders in the night looking for water, and then is lost in a big building. Accused of being a thief, he tries to hide, enters different apartments and meets different people. One of them is a drunken husband, who has just come home after visiting a brothel. He asks his wife to sing for him and, being bored by her sad, traditional song, plays more cheerful, modern tunes. The villager tries to escape while the drunken husband sees his wife in him, dressed as a courtesan and performing a seductive dance. This scene explains exactly what the *dream sequence* is; the drunk man sees things, which are not part of the reality, but the spectator sees them both, which gives him additional

pleasure with no harm to the female character, who is shown in a courtesan outfit, but in fact she hasn't done anything immoral.

The 1980s were not a very favorable period in the film history, not just in India. During this time, through the development of video technology, the audience stopped going to the cinema, preferring domestic screenings. The new situation caused the development of the production of cheaper-made movies, shot only for the video. The films that henceforth began to appear in the cinemas significantly changed its structure as well. Most of the Indian cinemagoers in the 1980s was an audience originating from the lowest casts, whose tastes differed very much from other viewers. Of course, they used to watch the movies before, but only now they become the majority. Not wanting to discourage their new audience, the filmmakers have begun to adjust their work to the plebeian tastes, which caused the huge popularity of the violent stories, or mad, senseless comedies (Lipka-Chudzik 2009, 253–254). The films made at that time show physical violence against women, which then slowly vanish thanks to new chapter in Bollywood film history with family sagas and virtuous heroines appearing in 1990s. The popularity of *dream sequence* at that time was first of all the result of social changes caused by enormous popularity of willingly watched music videos on MTV. From the mid 1980s there was slow development of commercial media with colour television, home videos and then the Internet. At the same time this is this period, especially from 1992 to 1995, that was characterized by a huge number of letters to CBFC describing the potential danger of violence and vulgarity in Hindi cinema. Filmmakers were the people often blamed for many violent crimes, sexual harassment and any other degenerations of Indian society, and this situation was cleverly used by some political parties like BJP to mobilize public outrage and panic regarding any sexual elements in films (Bose 2010, 69–76). In those circumstances it is not hard to imagine the influence of that political situation on cinema. The attempt of producing only "moral" films caused the development of the *dream sequence* which is a show performed by the characters of films, and though it remains as detached from the story as the *item number*, usually confirms the viewer's belief that the characters have great affection to each other. In the 1990s the image of a modest and pious virgin became again very important for every film heroine, which did not leave too much space for any thrilling elements. However, because the spectator, as already stated, is always very eager towards deeper excitement, which doesn't change in any political situation, the *dream sequence* became a perfect godsend, because with it a girl-next-door could suddenly afford to freely express her erotic potentiality[7]. In the 1990s

[7] Censorship is often contradictory, since the fact that the hero has such dreams means that he is prone to sexual excitement, which is not a bad thing, but should be, if one wants to say that movies cause sexual violence and the like.

screen vamps and villains were already dead and since there was no need for vamp for a long time already, nobody seemed to remember that in 1970s many film heroines could do many things which were forbidden before, like drinking, smoking or having sexual relationship with the hero before marriage. Suddenly however there was no place for this kind of freedom, and not even for any anarchic potential of love, which was always a strong part of any Hindi film. Now every hero was of course able to win the fight with many bad characters but still he could marry his beloved only after the permission of her father. As Thessa Mooij notes, anarchy is a luxury only few people can afford in real life, which makes it so vulnerable for cinema themes (Mooij 2006, 32); still in that time Bollywood cinema forgot about its old vamps, great heroines and scary villains and chose to present family dramas with not much space for sex appeal. In those films the *dream sequence* was a projection of the fantasy of a hero, who dreams about his loved one. He sees her, therefore, in not necessarily modest circumstances, but everything is all right and there is nothing against the girl's morality, because the whole scene is only a dream. This way of presentation is evident in the song *Suraj Hua Madham* from the movie *Kabhi Khushi, Kabhie Gham* (Karan Johar 2001), in which the characters suddenly move from Delhi to Egypt and perform the passionate dance over there. These *dream sequences* were one of the performances that brought a bad name to Bollywood and its songs, which are often believed to have come on suddenly and completely without any logic, taking heroes to the farthest corners of the world (Gopal, Sen 2008, 147). The detachment from reality, also in geographical terms, is very important, created simply to highlight the fact that this is now a dream and just because of that the characters behave so freely. The new type of presentation allows also for dynamic montage, and frequent changes of costume, which was impossible in the previous *item number*, because anything is possible in one's dream.

Both film songs formulas, the *item number* and the *dream sequence* are so rooted in the consciousness of filmmakers and viewers, that sometimes they appear even in the works that criticize them. Perhaps this is why even censorship often quite unconsciously turns a blind eye to certain things, because those elements are so heavily inscribed in the entertainment, being the key determinant of successful production since 1970's. A good example of evidence of this phenomenon is the story shown in *The Dirty Picture*, a movie made in 2011 by Milan Luthria showing the life of the famous South Indian *item girl*. The film quite clearly criticizes all the film tricks showing woman's body and providing cheap entertainment for a crowd, but at the same time it also shows what is criticized, which is a very intelligent procedure, similar to the one used in *Jagte Raho*, that allows filmmakers to provide the same entertainment they find at fault, because, as already mentioned, this is the best way to attract the audience. In telling the story of their infamous character filmmakers

show her outrageous behavior in snippets of hot scenes of the movies where the actress plays, which has of course an explanation in the story and cannot be treated as a vulgar exposure of the body. At some point, however, the film protagonist and another character, a movie director, fell in love, and he dreams of her dancing in a rather boldly-cut gown, which is exactly the same cheap entertainment against which the film is about, this time however incorporated quite uncritically. This situation reminds of another one, described by Shoma A. Chatterji, who shares a very interesting observation in her book about women in cinema, when she writes about the famous or infamous *Bandit Queen* (Shekhar Kapur 1994), the story of Phoolan Devi. One of many controversies about this film was showing the stripped heroine forced to bring water from the well, which was of course a very important part of the story, being one of the reasons of the later Behmai massacre, committed next to the same well by previously tortured and perpetually raped Phoolan, but at the same time in Chatterji's opinion this scene can be seen as another assault of real Phoolan Devi, who was alive at the time when the film was made (Chatterji 1998 150). More than that, since this scene was the only reason to see the film for many spectators and *Bandit Queen* is often being advertised as the first Indian film showing a naked woman[8], it can also be seen as a kind of cheap entertainment that turned the attention of the audience from other important elements of the story. Of course, it was probably no intention of Shekhar Kapur to make this kind of entertainment from his story, but this example shows very well that popular movies, or those that, as *Bandit Queen*, became popular among the masses, are always first of all considered to be such entertainment, no matter what the intention of filmmakers is. Probably this is the reason why the reaction of censors is sometimes too much hysterical and other times they don't react at all being fooled by skillfully added *item number* or *dream sequence*.

Currently, cinema seems to again move away from the *dream sequence* to the *item number*, which is becoming more and more popular due to the guest appearances of stars and their special way of performance, being first of all a presentation of the perfect body, especially of the female stars. This new kind of entertainment is a result of the fact that most Indian actresses today are subjected to numerous plastic surgeries as contemporary cinema favors the type of beauty assimilating screen stars to Barbie dolls. In the 1950s and 1960s, the situation was quite different, and despite the existence of real beauties, onscreen personality was much more important than the appearance of the actresses. Considered one of the finest contemporary women, Madhubala had a little crooked,

[8] The scene showing full frontal nudity appears already in English version of Girish Karnad's *Utsav* (1984), which could be however unnoticed, because the Hindi version of the film, which was showed in India, is devoid of this element.

ironic smile, but her perfectly oval face and expressive eyes were enough for the audience. Nargis, in turn, had gaps between her teeth, boyish figure and short hair, but she was the goddess of the screen due to her acting skills. The dance itself also changed a lot from moving the necks and eyes in 1950s and adding some small movements of hands in 1960s and 1970s. In 1980s there came the disco era, but as Sangita Shresthova notes people were still not much glamorous or at least not that much as in Hollywood at that time. The Bollywood dancers were not really fit and there were often mistakes in the chorus line. The change came with the film *Dil To Pagal Hai* (Yash Chopra 1997) where for the first time in Bollywood film history professional dancers were used. Since then nobody wants imperfect bodies any more (Shresthova 2011, 46–47), which has an impact not only on film stars, but very often also on the acting quality. Of course it doesn't mean that good-looking people cannot be good actors and actresses, but this kind of emphasis changed the whole film formula, which started to be more kind of a show than a screen story. Interestingly, in spite of being a quite new way of entertainment, for many spectators this and only this is real Bollywood, and they are really surprised when they see old films and find out that there were Indian movies in which the story was the most important element.

The look for glamorous heroes and heroines changed also the way of thinking in the middle and upper class in India. The first changes in body consciousness started in early 1980s and were at least in part motivated by the discussion around India's hosting of the Asian Games in 1982. During the preparations it became evident that many Indians are in a very bad shape, in danger to be overweight, which may sound strange in the country where there is such big percentage of malnourishment. Then, in early 1990s beauty contests appeared as one more factor which helped Indian people to think more about the physical beauty and when in 1994 Sushmita Sen won the international Miss Universe contest and then Aishwarya Rai Bachchan the Miss World competition, this double victory lead Indian women to think that their beauty is their asset (Shresthova 2011, 56–59). The film characters of that times helped to create this way of thinking and may have long-lasting effects on on-screen image of the ideal, passive Indian heroine who had little opportunity to show anything than her beautiful face. Indian cinema in 1990s glorifies Sati and Savitri[9] as ideal heroines and all differences between them are based on their relations with men; they can appear as good daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. No matter of their role, those characters rather appear than act (Kabir 2001, 56). In effect since a long time (twenty years is quite a long time for the medium

[9] Some scholars add Sita to that list as well.

which is a hundred years old[10]) the film heroine was required only to look nice, a lot of actresses made the look their greatest asset, which of course does not mean that there are no talented women in Indian cinema, although it is actually hard to meet them too often. The pursuit of the perfect look is reflected in the mentioned extremely popular guest star appearances, which can be recently found in many mainstream productions. It is a new type of *item number*, which like its predecessor is not related to the action of the movie, but which, however shows viewers the well-known figure seen not only in other films, but also in the popular magazines.

The good examples of such performances are the guest appearances of: Deepika Padukone in the film *Dum Maaro Dum* (Rohan Sippy 2011), Shilpa Shetty in *Dostana* (Tarun Mansukhani 2008), Aishwarya Rai Bachchan in *Bunty aur Babli* (Shaad Ali 2005) or Urmila Matondkar in *Ram Gopal Varma Ki Aag* (Ram Gopal Varma 2007), which is indeed a repetition of the famous *item number* from the film *Sholay* performed by Helen in 1975. On the occasion of the last show, however, it is easy to see the difference between the old and the current *item number*. It is not a dress that is as stingy as before or voluptuous movements in former and current performers; the main difference lies in the fact that the modern temptress from *item songs* seems to be in some way similar to the women from *dream sequence*, for which dancing skills were not so important as the name and face. In the previous *item number*, performed in *Sholay* there is a Gypsy girl dancing next to the fire in the forest, in front of dangerous criminals. The scene is ascetic, with a very static montage and not much instruments used in the song to make it more natural, and the only motion is the girl's sensual dance. The new version of the song shows again dangerous criminals who go to the forest, but this time they suddenly become part of some video clip with many instruments, lights like in a nightclub and girls in the waterfall. This time there are more dancers swaying in the water and Urmila Matodkar prefers to rather stay in different sexy poses than to really dance. There is a dynamic montage with extreme close-ups showing different parts of the dancer's body and perfect make up, which tries to mask the lack of dancing skills, and probably that's why the filmmakers decided that their Gipsy girl will not only dance but also sing, which might explain her rather static performance. The guest appearance of Urmila Matodkar was probably not enough for filmmakers, who decided to put another one, Abhishek Bachchan, in the song. Moreover, in one moment the villain himself also starts to dance, which makes the scene more ridiculous than actually sexy, especially after comparing it with the original one. The special appearance may be similar to the *item number*, even if the difference lays in the fact that guest stars are not permanent *item persons*, but they become ones when they are guests. *Item girls* were

[10] India celebrated 100 years of cinema in 2013.

famous, and when they appeared on the screen, audience knew exactly that there is a sexy dance break now. There is a similar way of presenting guest stars; they are not part of the screen story, they are recognizable, but this time there are also Indians, known as pious heroines from other films, and even if they, as guests, come to the film just as bodies, these bodies must be treated in a little different way. With the development of the media and the growing number of celebrities, who are famous simply because they are, the sexiest part of modern Indian stars seems to be their name. Thanks to the development of Indian star-system, most of newcomers are children of stars or film directors. Some of them are well known, being shown in film magazines already as children, and thus much more open to media than their parents. In this situation, censorship is not even too much of the fight, not only due to the fact that Bollywood moves away from popular, especially in the 1990s false portraying of women as incarnations of Sita (Chatterji 1998, 31), but also because censorship itself seems to be obsolete in the Internet age, where only one click is enough to have access to everything, against which the censors are.

Item number and *dream sequence*, as already shown, usually present women's performance but interestingly, as Charu Gupta notes, recently there are also some films which offer visual pleasure to the female spectators by presenting sexualized male bodies in the form of nude images of Shah Rukh Khan in *Om Shanti Om* (Farah Khan 2007) and Ranbir Raj Kapoor in *Saawariya* (Sanjay Leela Bhansali 2007) (Gupta 2007, 19), but this, quite marginal erotic spectacle is slightly different from the one presented by the female characters and being rather a kind of playing with the cinematic conventions. Both films, *Saawariya* and *Om Shanti Om* appeared at almost the same time and both show a man's naked body. It is however hard to agree with Charu Gupta's opinion about erotic spectacle for female viewer in case of the performance of Ranbir Raj Kapoor who stays in front of the big window wearing only a towel and then suddenly takes it off. This is more a little surprising moment than a real delight, maybe because this performance is a song, not a dance and in spite of showing naked body, Ranbir Kapoor slightly moves, and the montage is too static to treat this song as a real *item number*, which requires some motion. The dance of Shah Rukh Khan is different, being a typical *dream sequence*, similar to the mentioned one of Urmila Matodkar, with many changes of clothes, close-ups and sexy poses. The actor, who is not a very good dancer, rather presents his newly made muscles, created especially for the film, than really dances, but apparently he moves more than the hero of *Saawariya*.

As already mentioned, first heroines of Indian screen were Western women, who were not ashamed of working in the films and doing the job, which was refused even by Indian prostitutes as something too shameful. At that time also there were more Western films shown in India than Indian

ones, but in 1920s Britons from England and India started to protest against screening foreign movies in the Subcontinent because of sexualized presentation of white women at that time. This kind of presentation would, in their opinion, undermine the moral authority of England, and by showing white women as an object sexually available they could be cause of molestation of Western women by "wild, brown men". That was, as Neepa Majumdar notes, probably the only time when the protestor asked for censorship not because of the content of the films but because of the audience (Majumdar 2010, 29). Today the situation changed and maybe no one really needs to watch Western films in India so much, and India is one of those rare countries in which, as rightly described by Chowskey, "the all-conquering *ashwamedh* [*aśvamedha*] of Hollywood was successfully stopped" (Chowskey 2012, 44), but there is still a strong need to watch Western bodies. This need always existed and was the reason why, as already mentioned, the most famous *item girls* were of foreign origin. The most interesting thing however is the fact that today this tendency didn't disappear, and, as observed by Sangita Shresthova the Indian audience still wants to see "half-naked skimpy-clad white women". There is then no coincidence that Western dancers wear much smaller costumes than Indian ones, but their frequent appearance on the screen however may be also the effect of Indian preference for fair skin, which connotes higher caste and status. But of course the colour of the skin is not the only explanation and even if in today India fair skin is still perceived to be a great asset for woman with all the market selling special cosmetics for fairness, fair doesn't mean white. "White" is the term reserved historically for the British colonizers and contemporary for Caucasian foreigners. There is a big difference between "fair" which is synonym to beauty and "white" which is evidently foreign, reserved for chorus lines in songs (Shresthova 2011, 68–69). The female body however remains the female body, no matter of nationality and thus the colour of the skin, so this kind of presentation is then another way to trick the censors who may be not as restricted with foreign dancers as they would be with the Indian ones. As it can be seen from this aspect, some things haven't changed in Bollywood much since when the Western actresses, who played in the films in the beginning, were replaced by Indian ones. Of course, as Priti Ramamaurthy observes, there were also pragmatic reasons of those changes in old times; better light replacing the earlier, eye-level one reflected off whiter skin more effectively, or coming of sound which caused the need of actors who could speak Indian languages, but in spite of them the most important factor was still the appearance of mentioned Durga Khote, Devika Rani and Shanta Hublikar, all Brahmin girls, who, despite of their status were not ashamed to enter the profession (Ramamurthy 2006, 209). Indian cinema chose its own actresses then, but even now in some scenes there is still a need for other bodies, which are easier to trick censors with, and dance numbers are the best methods to provide this kind of

entertainment mainly because the dancing body doesn't have to be part of the story. As we can then see Indian film songs are a very important part of movies, mainly because they are the best way to blind the censorship thanks to a special status of film song itself. Songs in Bollywood films are not only an unnecessary, annoying addition and even if sometimes, but not often, they appear without any logic, they are so connected with the film story that nobody sees them as an additional, unimportant element. A very interesting example of the perception of Bollywood songs is shown in the short letter written by a reader of "Filmfare", one of the most popular Indian film magazines. There is a column there, which allows the readers to share their observations about mistakes made by filmmakers or other illogical elements, which they found particularly funny. In one of those remarks, written about the film *Salaam Namaste* (Siddhart Anand 2005) we read:

> Preity Zinta [who plays the heroine] is more than eight months pregnant in the song *What's going on*, yet she is shown dancing and prancing about ever so nimbly throughout the song. Ask any eight-month pregnant woman if she can believe this! (Sinha 2005, 143).

The author of the remark is absolutely right, but at the same time she doesn't seem to be aware of the fact that dancing on the street is as much illogical as dancing being pregnant, so if the viewer accepts one of those elements, he has to do the same with the other one. Still the author of the letter accepts only the presence of song on the screen and doesn't find impossible the situation in which a couple looking for a shop in the middle of the night decides suddenly to sing and dance. Why? Because this is the primary role of dancing numbers in the contemporary Bollywood cinema. Many people who see Bollywood films for the first time often say that they don't like the idea of songs appearing suddenly and without any logic. They don't seem to realize that there is a very deep logic lying beyond film production and popular Indian cinema uses its songs to show everything that is impossible to show in the story. Filmmakers know very well that songs are the element of fantasy, which when used in a story about everyday life, can show things that are impossible in natural experience[11]. The person who criticized a pregnant girl dancing on the screen accepts of course the typical Bollywood film formula but at the same time probably doesn't understand the need of this kind of performance. She became then also a kind of victim of the cinema who is not aware of the fact that film has taught its viewers so much of its language and iconography that they unconsciously started to expect some things to be repeated. This may be therefore a reason why some Indian censors, so restrictive sometimes, are very often keen to allow showing many shocking scenes only

[11] Lars von Trier applied a similar formal solution in his *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). Despite of being compared with *Dil Se* (Mani Ratnam 1998), this film however refers to the rich tradition of musicals in Czechoslovakia.

because they appear in form of a song and their decisions help then to build new stereotypes and prejudices.

References

Beaster-Jones, Jayson. 2009. "Evergreens to Remixes: Hindi Film Songs and India's Popular Music Heritage." *Ethnomusicology* 53.3: 425–448.

Bhaskar, Ira, Allen Richard. 2009. *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema*. New Delhi: Tulika Books.

Bhowmik, Someswar. 2012. *Cinema and Censorship. The Politics of Control in India*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan.

Bose, Derek. 2005. *Bollywood uncensored. What you don't see on the screen and why*. New Delhi: Rupa.

Bose, Nandana. 2010. "The Central Board of Film Certification Correspondence Files (1992-2002): A Discursive Rhetoric of Moral Panic, "Public" Protest, and Political Pressure." *Cinema Journal* 49.3: 67-87.

Chatterji, Shoma A. 1998. *Subject: Cinema, Object: Woman. A Study of the Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema*. Calcutta: Parumita Publications.

Chowskey, Jayaprakash. 2012. *Mahatma Gandhi & Cinema*, transl. Meenal Baghel. Mumbai: Morya Arts.

Ganti, Tejaswini. 2009. "The Limits of Decency and the Decency of Limits. Censorship and the Bombay Film Industry." In *Censorship in South Asia. Cultural Regulations from Sediction to Seduction*, edited by Raminder Kaur and William Mazzarella, 87-122. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University.

Gopal, Sangita, Sen Biswarup. 2008. "Inside and out: song and dance in Bollywood cinema." *The Bollywood Reader*, edited by Rajinder Dudrah and Jigna Desai, 146-157. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Gupta, Charu. 2007. "Visual Pleasures for the Female Gaze." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42.50: 19–20.

Majumdar, Neepa. 2010. *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kabir, Nasreen Munni. 2001. *Bollywood. The Indian Cinema Story*. London: Channel 4 Books.

Lipka-Chudzik, Krzysztof. 2009. *Bollywood dla początkujących*. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka.

Mehta, Monika. 2012. *Censorship and Sexuality in Bombay Cinema*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black.

Mohammed, Khalid. 1997. "Sex Seriously. The complete story of Mira Nair's Kama Sutra." *Filmfare* 1: 28–34.

Mooij, Thessa. 2006. "The New Bollywood: No Heroines, No Villains." *Cinéaste* 31.3: 30-35.

Mulvey, Laura. 2009. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 14–27.

Pinto, Jerry. 2006. *Helen. The Life and Times of the H-Bomb*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Ramamurthy, Priti. 2006. "The Modern Girl in India in the Interwar Years: Interracial Intimacies, International Competition, and Historical Eclipsing." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34.1/2. The Global & the Intimate: 197–226.

Sharma, Attam. 1992. "Sex Appeal. It's What Keeps The Stars Twinkling!" *Cine Advance* 10.1: 3.

Shankar, Vijay N. 1966. "Dance in Cinema. Gimmick or Necessity?" *Filmfare* 15.4, Issue 8, 23–25.

Shresthova, Sangita. 2011. *It Is All About Hips? Around the World with Bollywood Dance*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Sinha, Amisha. 2005. *Filmfare* 12: 143.

Somaaya, Bhawana, Kothari Jigna, Madangarli Supriya. 2012. *Mother, Maiden, Mistress. Women In Hindi Cinema, 1950 – 2010*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India.

Filmography:

Amrapali (Leh Tandon, 1966).

An Evening in Paris (Shakti Samanta, 1967).

Awaara (Raj Kapoor, 1951).

Bandit Queen (Shekhar Kapur, 1994).

Barsaat (Raj Kapoor, 1949).

Bunty aur Babli (Shaad Ali, 2005).

Chitralekha (Kidar Sharma, 1964).

Chitralekha (Kidar Sharma, 1941).

Dancer in the Dark (Lars von Trier, 2000).

Dil Se (Mani Ratnam, 1998).

Dil To Pagal Hai (Yash Chopra, 1997).

Don (Farhan Akhtar, 2006).

Don (Chandra Barot, 1978).

Dostana (Tarun Mansukhani, 2008).

Dum Maaro Dum (Rohan Sippy, 2011).

Hare Rama, Hare Krishna (Dev Anand, 1971).

Harishchandrachi Factory (Paresh Mokashi, 2009).

Jagte Raho (Amit Maitra, Sombhu Mitra, 1956).

Kabhi Khushi, Kabhie Gham (Karan Johar, 2001).

Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love (Mira Nair, 1996).

Khalnayak (Subhash Ghai, 1993).

Nartaki (Debaki Bose, 1940).

Om Shanti Om (Farah Khan, 2007).

Purab aur Paschim (Manoj Kumar, 1970)

Raj Nartaki (Madhu Bose, 1941).

Ram Gopal Varma Ki Aag (Ram Gopal Varma, 2007).

Ram Teri Ganga Maili (Raj Kapoor, 1985).

Saawariya (Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2007).

Salaam Namaste (Siddhart Anand, 2005).

Sholay (Ramesh Sippy, 1975).

Silsila (Yash Chopra, 1981).

The Dirty Picture (Milan Luthria, 2011).

Utsav (Girish Karnad, 1984).

Currently working at Manipal University, Department of European Studies, Tatiana Szurlej is a graduate of Indian philology and film studies at the Jagiellonian University and a PhD graduate at the Faculty of Philology of the Jagiellonian University. She is interested mainly in Indian popular culture, especially cinema. She is the author of essays on Indian popular cinema, written in Polish, English and Hindi and published in several journals such as the "Cracow Indological Studies", the "Hans", and the "Pahal", as well as a doctoral dissertation titled: *Tradition, stereotype, manipulation. The courtesan figure in Indian literature and popular cinema.*