

THE CONSTRUCTION AND (RE)PRESENTATION OF INDIAN WOMEN IN RECENT
MAINSTREAM WESTERN CINEMA

By

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Abstract

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Previous research has demonstrated that the media perform several important functions in our lives, including shaping our opinions about ethnic minorities. In the absence of intercultural contact, people tend to believe media representations of minority groups as accurate although it has been established that the media are instrumental in disseminating dominant ideologies and suppressing minorities.

Cinema is a complex ideological apparatus because of its reflective nature and its enduring popularity. Informed by the tenets of Critical Race Theory and Orientalism, this thesis investigated the representation of East Indian women in recent mainstream Western cinema by undertaking a Critical Discourse Analysis of five contemporary Western films.

Two research questions were posed in this study:

RQ1: What cinematic stereotypes or conventions are used to represent Indian women in Western cinema?

RQ2: How has the 'ideal' Indian woman been constructed by Western cinema?

This thesis took a critical stance in its analysis and interrogated how the plot, dialog, and characterization within the dataset cumulatively constructed Indian women and situated their femininity within the White patriarchal framework. Critical Discourse Analysis was

used to analyze the dataset because it helped explicate how mediated discourse (such as cinema) originate from and are shaped by the organized power dynamics of society.

Findings of the study revealed a constellation of seven thematic categories or tropes upon which the depiction of Indian characters was based. These categories were: domesticity and marriage, self-sacrifice, entertainment and servility, virginal purity, hypersexuality, unambitiousness, and the (White) male gaze. The 'ideal' Indian woman was thus constructed by the movies in the dataset as docile, family-oriented, selfless, and bereft of ambition. The analysis also revealed that Indian women were re-presented as ethnic-exotic (serving to entertain the male gaze) and hypersexual but that they also existed in a state of virginal purity – uncontaminated by sexual knowledge or experience – until they are initiated into sexuality by White masculine agency. Finally, critical media literacy was recommended as a potential tool that can help audiences interrogate media manipulations such as stereotypes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	x
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
a. Statement of Problem.....	2
b. Gaps in Past Research.....	3
c. Purpose of the Study.....	7
d. Significance of the Study.....	8
e. Scope of the Study.....	9
f. Methodology.....	10
g. Summary.....	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
a. Introduction.....	12
b. Theoretical Framework.....	12
i. The critical tradition.....	12
ii. Critical Race Theory.....	14
iii. Orientalism.....	16
iv. The social construction of reality by the media.....	18
c. Media and Culture as Instruments of Dominant Ideology.....	22
i. The production of ideology and culture by the media.....	23

ii.	Mediated communication, stereotypes, and ideology.....	25
iii.	Orientalism in film and the politics of visual culture.....	27
d.	Stereotypes of the Subaltern in Mainstream Media.....	28
i.	The functions and impact of stereotypes.....	29
ii.	The politics of representing the marginalized in mainstream media.....	31
iii.	Representation of Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream media.....	34
iv.	Representation of women of color in mainstream media.....	35
e.	Research Questions.....	41
f.	Summary.....	42
3.	METHODOLOGY.....	43
a.	Introduction.....	43
b.	General Methodological Approach.....	43
c.	Qualitative Textual Analysis.....	45
d.	Critical Discourse Analysis.....	46
e.	Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodological Approach.....	49
f.	Research Dataset and Selection Criteria.....	52
i.	Strengths and weaknesses of the dataset and selection method.....	53
g.	Data Collection and Analysis.....	54
i.	Implications of collecting data through Critical Discourse Analysis.....	55
h.	Summary.....	55
4.	ANALYSIS.....	57
a.	Introduction.....	57
b.	Brief Overview of the Films.....	57

i.	<i>Bollywood/Hollywood</i>	58
ii.	<i>Bride and Prejudice</i>	59
iii.	<i>The Mistress of Spices</i>	61
iv.	<i>Outsourced</i>	62
v.	<i>Slumdog Millionaire</i>	64
c.	Analysis.....	66
d.	Major Thematic Categories.....	66
i.	Marriage and domesticity.....	66
ii.	Self-sacrifice.....	70
iii.	Entertainment and servility.....	75
iv.	Virginal purity.....	78
v.	Hypersexuality.....	81
vi.	Unambitiousness.....	83
vii.	The (White) male gaze.....	85
e.	Summary.....	89
5.	DISCUSSION.....	90
a.	Introduction.....	90
b.	Summary of Findings.....	90
c.	Significance and Implications of the Findings.....	91
i.	Discursive racialization.....	93
ii.	Racial passing.....	95
d.	Recommendations based on Findings.....	98
i.	The consumption of everyday culture.....	99

ii. Critical pedagogy.....	101
iii. Theory and practice of media literacy.....	101
e. Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Further Research.....	103
f. Summary and Conclusions.....	104
Notes.....	106
References.....	107

Dedication

For Peter and Rex

Chapter 1

Introduction

We live in an era of media proliferation where most of what we know, learn, and take for granted is contingent upon our media exposure (Hall, 2003; Kellner, 2003; Ono & Pham, 2008). It has been theorized that while education and media were primary influences of social trends and habits even three decades ago, people are increasingly turning to mass media to gain an understanding not only of things immediate to them but also about all that is unfamiliar (Spencer, 2006). Among the various functions of the media, the communication of issues pertaining to race and stereotypes is particularly crucial (Croteau & Hoynes, 2002). In their seminal study about mass media and racism, Hartmann and Husband (1974) found that children as well as adults based their opinions about ethnic minorities based on what they witness in the media. This was found to be truer for people in areas with no or few minority groups than in areas characterized by high intercultural contact.

This finding has been subsequently substantiated by scholars such as Artz & Ortega (2000), Bandura (1976), Barker & Galasinski (2001), Berger (1997), and Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, and Shanahan (2002) who concur that many people believe the representations of groups and individuals in the media to be 'objective' reality or 'The Truth'. This is a cause for concern, given that previous scholarship has also demonstrated that media (such as the news, television, radio, cinema, and advertisements) are predominant channels of disseminating ideology or propaganda (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney, & Wise, 2005). The mass media are also being increasingly recognized as realms where the struggle for identity is played out by contesting notions of race, class, and gender (Louw, 2001). Since

the mass media depend on dominant groups of society for resources, they are situated among the broader contexts of social, economic, and political power (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Within the mass (popular) media, therefore, messages about individuals or groups that favor the powerful and privileged are usually given precedence over alternative discourse that might champion the causes of marginalized communities. The perception that the mass media are autonomous and unbiased is therefore erroneous and necessitates the exploration of the manner in which the media portray what we perceive to be objective and accurate reality. In keeping with this need to critically evaluate mediated 'realities', this study explores how a specific ethnic/cultural minority (Indian women) are represented in Western cinema.

Statement of Problem

Previous scholarship in the domain of race, stereotypes, and the media indicates that minority group members are deliberately subordinated, silenced, and marginalized by dominant groups through conduits of social, economic, and political oppression, primarily among which are the mass media (Downing & Husband, 2005). Indeed, activist organizations such as NAACP have demonstrated the lack of representation of minority group members in mainstream television and cinema (Shohat & Stam, 1994). Additionally, research has suggested that even when minority group members are featured in such mainstream media, they are presented in a heavily stereotypical manner (Devine, 1989; Lee, 1999; List, 1996). Hence, media texts characterize Latinas/os as shrewd and deceitful, African Americans as lazy and irresponsible, Native Americans as primitive and simplistic, and Asians as conniving, violent or sensuous. In terms of gender, women are also *used in/as* entertainment in a heavily stereotypical and distorted manner.

Further, scholars such as Meyers (1999) have argued that representations of women in popular media work cumulatively to reinforce patriarchal ideologies that seek to symbolically annihilate women through “condemnation, trivialization, and absence...” The representation of minority populations is therefore problematic and warrants continual critical interrogation that can potentially expose politically-laden nature of representation and offer recommendations for change.

Gaps in Past Research

Previous research pertaining to representation, media stereotypes, and ideology has suggested that media images and words shape our worldview to a large extent, often facilitating the meaning-making and interpretation of the messages we are exposed to on a daily basis (Turner, 1999). For instance, a person who has never been to Egypt can be expected to make use of media to know about its terrain, culture, people, customs, languages, and cuisine. Among the several types of media available to people, cinema makes for a particularly powerful conduit because of its ability to tell an engaging story through pictures, words, symbols, and myths within a limited amount of time. As a reflection of society, cinema often helps people know about or form opinions about things that they are not familiar with in real life. Scholars such as Willis (1997) argue that the cinematic medium is also an effective channel for indicating power dynamics and cultural nuances of society. In a similar vein, researchers such as Gose (2006) and Kellner (2003) have posited that cinema (especially films that reaffirm the common value systems of society) is one of the most important sources of information from which people learn social and cultural mores. Hence, much of the traits we associate with being male or female, straight or homosexual, rich or poor, and other such binaries are deliberately constructed

by the cinematic medium and eventually internalized by audiences who fail to see beyond the entertainment offered by popular (and usually escapist) cinema.

Taken together, previous literature on cinema and representation suggests that cinema is a potent source of cultural pedagogy that is often used to gain knowledge or reduce uncertainty about unfamiliar places, people, and things. Since people construct their realities about cultural 'Others' based on the images of these 'Others' in popular media, it is crucial to unpack and interrogate these mediations to be able to better understand the trends of the media industry as well to bring about changes in social 'norms' about racialized and gendered groups in society.

Prior research has consistently revealed that women and cultural minorities have been historically portrayed on Western screens in a hackneyed and formulaic manner. Significant work has been done on mediated representations of women in general (see Meyers, 1999; Rabinowitz, 1989; Willis, 1997) as well as collective media stereotypes (see Shaw, 1995; Taylor et al., 1995). Scholars have also investigated how Whiteness and patriarchy are championed and reified through media discourse (see Tierney, 2006; Vera & Gordon, 2003; Wilson et al. 2003). Further, several studies have looked at specific media portrayals of ethnic minorities such as Asians (Shim, 1998; Taylor & Lee, 1994; Taylor & Stern, 1997; Taylor et al., 2005), Latino/as (Merskin, 2007; McGrath, 2007; Mendible, 2007), Native Americans (Marubbio, 2009; Merskin, 2001), and African Americans (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Brown-Givens & Monahan, 2005; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Scholars such as Bogle (2001), Hill-Collins (2004), and Lee, Bichard, Irely, Walt, & Carlson (2009) have argued that the most common conventions used for depicting African American women on screen are that of the desexualized mammy, the Jezebel, and the sassy and sarcastic black

woman. List (1996) argued that Mexican women have been traditionally portrayed as the 'dark lady' who possessed great sexual knowledge and prowess, the "half-breed harlot", and the unsophisticated or clownish woman who induced laughter and mockery. Merskin (2007) found that Latina identity is usually deployed on television as sex object, a self-sacrificing woman, or as a promiscuous vamp. Further, Ono & Pham (2008) argue that Asian women are represented in the American media in a manner that renders them sexually experimentative, obedient, and male-glorifying. Again, Marubbio (2009) found that the two most dominant imageries used for portraying Native American women on screen was to use the tropes of the Native American Princess and the sexualized maiden, both of whom usually 'suffer' in some way because of their allegiance to a White male.

However, this researcher found that scant scholarly attention has been paid to the issue of re-presentation of men and women belonging to the East Indian community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau¹, the East Indian population in the United States grew by 53% between 2000 and 2007. This is the highest growth rate among Asian American populations in the US. Indian Americans are not only the third largest ethnic group in the US (after Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans) but also among the most rapidly growing ethnic groups in the US. Indians are the most highly educated among national origin groups in the United States and have the highest full-time annual earnings (Reeves & Bennett, 2000), indicating that Indians contribute significantly to the economy of the US. As one of the largest ethnic communities in the United States therefore, issues of media representation of Indians need to be analyzed and investigated.

While scholars such as Prashad (2000) and Desai (2005) have explored how India and Bollywood have been recuperated in the Western imagination, they have not

interrogated how East Indian subjects are dealt with in mainstream Western media. Given that most cultural minorities and women in general are represented in mainstream Western media in a reductionist, derogatory, and parochial manner, one may ask questions such as: “What cinematic stereotypes or conventions are used in Western cinema to represent Indian women?” and “How has the ‘ideal’ Indian woman been constructed by Western cinema?” This study seeks to answer these questions.

The Indian Hindi-language film industry, better known as Bollywood, is “the world’s busiest movie industry” (Corliss, 1996) and “the largest producer of feature films globally” (Desai, 2005), producing more than 700 films annually. Many Indian actors or actors of Indian origin (such as Dev Patel, Kal Penn, Mindy Kaling, Naveen Andrews, and Rhona Mitra) frequently appear in Western films. Conversely, several Hollywood stars such as Sylvester Stallone and Denise Richards are now making their presence felt in Bollywood commercial fare. Even on the production front, more and more movies are increasingly products of collaborations between India and the US, Canada, or UK. Movies such as *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), *Water* (2005), and the recent blockbuster *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) are instances of such collaborative work. Thus, the cultural exchange between India and the West is difficult to ignore. It is from movies such as these that the world has learned (and continues to learn) about Eastern Indian culture and its people. The Indian ‘characters’ in these movies act as embodiments of Indians for audiences the world over that have never been to India or met Indians. Essentially, these representations tell audiences what it is like to be in India and what Indian men and women are like. As a minority that has a relatively strong diasporic presence, this implies that Indians the world over are believed to be similar to their on-screen portrayals.

Purpose of the Study

Given the stereotypical portrayal of minority groups in mainstream Western media, the depiction of East Indian women is likely to be doubly problematic – first because they belong to an ethnic minority, and second, because they are women. This study used recent cinematic productions to argue that recent Western cinema represents Indian women in a manner that relies on Orientalist stereotypes, thereby denying realistic complexity and multivalence to Indian female characters on celluloid. The purpose of this study is therefore to interrogate the portrayal of Indian femininity or womanhood in Western cinema to understand if such portrayal reproduces the conventions of racism and sexism found in the depictions of other women of color in mainstream media. The study investigated whether or not Western cinema renders Indian female characters in a reductionist manner by undertaking visual and discursive distortions that rely on cultural fragments or myths. This study is based on the following three theses:

- i. From a Critical Race Theory perspective, racism (and hence racist portrayals in the media) is commonplace and not something that can be ‘cured’ because it affords material advantages to the dominant and powerful groups of society. Therefore, media representations of the subaltern tend to be stereotypical in order to confine, marginalize, and suppress them.
- ii. Cultural minorities occupy an interstitial ‘third space’ (Gutiérrez, 1999) – a constantly shifting and culturally hybrid space that the dominant group is threatened by and finds difficult to define. As a result, the occupants of the third space are obfuscated and limited through ambiguous and expedient discourse. This third space, according to Gutiérrez (1999), is where cultural minorities “mediate the profound sense of

displacement and other stresses raised by their daily existence as members of a racialized and marginalized minority”. The third space is hence a metaphor for the deracinated situation of colonized populations where they negotiate their cultural similarities with the hegemonic groups as well their socially constructed Otherness.

- iii. Said (1978) argued that the West seeks to manage the East ideologically and politically through discourse. The practice of Orientalism, according to Said, defines the Oriental man and woman through simplistic binaries (loathing/desire) that situate them ambiguously and exemplifies them in terms of what the Occidental man or woman *is not*. The Oriental, then, is simultaneously symbolic of the Western world’s fantasies as well as its apprehensions. As a result, Orientalist discourse seeks to *other* the Oriental by distancing it from mainstream society.

Based primarily on these arguments, this study explored the intersections of visual, linguistic, symbolic depictions of Indian femininity as undertaken by Western cinema in recent years. In so doing, this thesis is essentially an argument for media literacy in that it recommends a critical engagement with the media, specifically cinematic content so that the codes of meaning put forth by the media such as cinema are not unquestioningly assumed to be accurate and objective descriptors of how things are and how they should be.

Significance of the Study

Given the plethora of images that we are exposed to, the attainment of media literacy is of crucial importance if individuals are to critically engage themselves with media content in order to judge what can and cannot be believed as reality. Knowing how media such as cinema, frame their messages and learning to read and criticize these

manipulations can also help an individual resist the seductive appeal of the media. Given that this study deals with representations of a minority population in Western media, it might also help individuals to attain a certain amount of sovereignty when it comes to their cultural environment, thus stimulating awareness and media literacy by helping individuals disengage themselves from cultural stereotypes and prejudices.

This study also hopes to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about mediated stereotypes and representation of minority communities in mainstream Western cinema by addressing the representation of East Indian womanhood – a topic that has received scant research attention. Therefore, through the results of this analysis, theorists and researchers might gain fresh insights and be able to provide new explanations about how minority identities are constructed and played out in cinema. Practitioners such as movie producers and studio heads may also benefit from this study by understanding how stereotypical cinematic conventions and portrayals impact an increasingly intercultural world.

Scope of the Study

Hall (2006) argued that there is a split between textual encoding of a movie and the way it is decoded by the audience, and as a result, there is always the possibility that multiple readings would emanate from a single cultural text such as a movie. Therefore, this study is only one possible interpretation from a somewhat subjective point of view, informed by the researcher's own race, class, gender, and ideologies. A primary limitation is therefore the attainment of the elusive balance between the objective and the subjective. Further, the movies under consideration might demonstrate how visual images and discursive practices perpetuate stereotypes about the minority group in question. In so

doing, this study assumes an a priori homogeneity about that group, which admittedly limits the scope of this study. While this thesis critically interrogated the portrayals of Indian women in Western cinema, it did not look at what challenges and barriers might need to be overcome in realizing a coherent and yet complex Indian female identity. Nor did this study explore that cultural, social, and political aftermath of such a realization. Lastly, describing cinema as an agent of change is a debatable claim since there is a dearth of evidence that would prove a causal relationship between the two and because there are too many variables that can potentially moderate the relationship between cinematic exposure and one's attitudes or values. However, because this study undertakes a critical analysis of images pertaining to Indian women and because it seeks to recommend changes in the construction of these images, it is essentially an argument for media literacy. Hence, this study urges viewers to watch films featuring ethnic minorities through a critical lens – a practice that can help audiences understand that many cinematic images attempt to normalize and sustain dominant ideologies.

Methodology

For the purposes of investigating how Western mainstream cinema depicts Indian women and womanhood, this study used movies produced in the US, UK, and Canada as cultural and rhetorical artifacts. The researcher undertook a Critical Discourse Analysis of images, narratives, dialogs, and characterization as presented in the movies under consideration. Critical Discourse Analysis was especially suited for answering the questions raised in this study given its critical approach toward exploring the process through which meaning is created and ideology is propagated through words and images (discourse). Further, because Critical Discourse Analysis provides “a profound interrogation of the

precarious status of meaning” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002), it enabled the researcher to see how essentializations and stereotypes of Indian women and femininity (what does it mean to be an Indian woman) were woven within the dataset without overt references to issues pertaining to race or ethnicity.

The dataset for this study was arrived at through case study logic and was comprised of the following five major films produced between 2002 and 2008:

Bollywood/Hollywood (2002, Canada), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004, United States), *The Mistress of Spices* (2005, United States), *Outsourced* (2006, United States), and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008, United Kingdom).

Summary

This chapter introduced this study pertaining to the representation of Indian women in Western cinema. A general background of the portrayal of ethnic minorities in mainstream Western cinema was outlined and crucial gaps in previous research were identified. The purpose, scope, and significance of the study were discussed along with the methodological approach to be used in this study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter examines previous literature relevant to this study about the representation of East Indian women in Western mainstream cinema. First, the theoretical framework that guides this study is discussed and its aptness for this study is assessed. Second is a discussion about media and culture as complex and multi-faceted artifacts of dominant ideologies. The third section contains a detailed overview and analysis of past literature pertaining to the problematic re-presentation of minorities in mainstream Western media, the functions served by stereotypes, and representational politics as played out in the media. This chapter concludes with a statement of the research questions.

Theoretical Framework

The critical tradition. Communicative phenomena can be studied within a wide array of theoretical traditions ranging from semiotics and cybernetics to the socio-cultural and socio-psychological traditions. The choice of using one tradition or the other depends almost entirely on the questions that researchers seek to investigate. Because of its focus on issues of power, oppression, and privilege, the critical tradition (the approach taken in this study) is most often used by scholars for explicating the taken-for-granted systems that have become a part of a society's 'culture'.

The critical tradition has its origins in the work of German scholars and the Frankfurt School and is heavily informed by post-colonial discourse, post-modernism, and feminism. The critical tradition is generally used to highlight inequities of social, economic, and political power in society as well as the power structures that systematically facilitate

such disparities. It holds that all thought and action is fundamentally predicated upon power dynamics which inhabit a socially, economically, and politically landscaped terrain. As Littlejohn & Foss (2007) argue, the critical tradition “seeks to understand...the ideologies that dominate society, with a particular eye to whose interests are served by...power structures.” They further note that one of the primary goals of critical scholars and theorists is to uncover “oppressive social conditions and power arrangements in order to promote emancipation, or a freer and more fulfilling society.” The present study argues that Indian women and womanhood is presented in a manner that is in keeping with Eurocentric ideologies that seek to frame women of color in a manner that renders them eligible and available for consumption. To uncover this representational arrangement and perpetuation of power through the media, the critical tradition makes for an apt framework within which this study can be situated.

Further, much like structuralists, critical researchers analyze the *status quo* to reveal hidden structures where conflicts among competing interests are most often resolved in ways that benefit only some sections of society. Indeed, this study argues that within the status quo, the representation of Indian women lacks the complexity, depth, and intelligence, with which *real* women conduct their lives and live their struggles. Instead, the media (as an established social institution that serves social, economic, and political functions) reduces these women to caricatures, which begin to assume an aura of truth because of the persistence with which the media circulates these stereotypical images.

Further, within the critical tradition, there is a clear emphasis on narrowing the gap between theory and praxis and attaining what Craig (1999) defines as “theoretically reflective social action.” Critical scholars therefore seek to “accomplish change in the

conditions that affect society” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2007), instead of simply theorizing the causes and solutions of social problems. The critical tradition supports the assertion that the oppression of minorities and the privileges enjoyed by the dominant classes are in part a result of specific media practices. Since this study pertains to problems and politics of representation of cultural minorities in the media, it recommends the development of media literacy and a critical consciousness among those who consume media. In the realm of media messages, therefore, critical theory can help theorists, researchers, and even practitioners fathom how seemingly innocuous media messages surreptitiously advance and reinforce the subjugation of social minorities. It also helps in prescribing solutions that can mitigate the oppression of the subaltern and help narrow the gap between theory and practice, as this study demonstrates. As Griffin (2008) notes, critical theorists interrogate three primary features of contemporary society – the control of rhetoric to reinforce asymmetries of power; the role of mass media in desensitizing people to suppression of minorities; and accepting empirical data uncritically, believing that it is unbiased and not value-laden.

Critical race theory. Within its fairly comprehensive scope, critical theory contains the dynamics of another scholarly trend or school of thought known as Critical Race Theory. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Critical Race Theory is part of a larger movement where scholars and activists investigate the intricate and problematic relationships among power, race, and racism – three concepts germane to the present investigation. Critical Race Theory contains many of the issues that are typical to traditional ethnic studies and radical feminism, but it puts these issues in a larger economic, historic, and legal framework. Matsuda et al. (1993) in the introduction to their

book, *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*, posit that racism is endemic to American life and therefore the objective of Critical Race Theory is not to question how racism can be mitigated or eliminated but to examine how prevalent ideologies propagate racism (overt or covert) and embed it into the status quo – a central thesis of this study. One of the main conduits of disseminating such ideology is, of course, mainstream media, that according to McPhail (1991), are complicit in highlighting the ‘negative’ differences between the privileged (White) part of society and racialized minorities.

One of the most fundamental tenets of Critical Race Theory according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) is that racism is difficult to redress because the larger section of society has little reason or motivation to tackle racism since the *status quo* serves their vested interests. Also, Critical Race Theory also contends that race and its connotations are socially constructed fluid concepts that evolve over time, depending on larger social and political cross-currents. For example, Flores (2003) demonstrated this fluid nature of racial categories through her study about Mexican immigrants in the US. She found that Mexican immigrants were discussed in the US in the media along two tropes (the narrative of need and the narrative of problem) depending on the labor needs of the US at different times. When there was a shortage of labor in the US during the 1920s and 1930s, Mexican immigrants were framed as docile peons – uneducated people willing to work for very little money and quite unlikely to rebel. They were also seen as a controllable and temporary source of labor that could be conveniently disposed of when the need for cheap, productive labor diminished. Eventually, when middle-class Americans felt their jobs were being threatened by these immigrants, the axis of media discussion shifted to ‘Mexican

immigrants as a problem'. As a result, the media began to frame Mexican immigrants as diseased criminals – illiterate and morally corrupt people who could never meaningfully assimilate into the American way of life. Similarly, Lee (1999) uses a historical perspective to demonstrate how Asian Americans have been characterized in the media as coolies, pollutants, deviants, yellow peril, gooks, and recently, as the model minority depending on the larger political and racial background in the US in the past decades. Racial categorizations and characterizations undertaken by the media are thus ambivalent, malleable, and contingent upon social, political, and economic considerations. Most minority populations are either erased from mainstream media or re-presented in a distorted, obscure, and ambiguous manner. To explore the reasons behind this communicative and social phenomenon, this study approached media texts and their communicative conventions in a critical manner so that the manifestations of racism through unjust discourse (in today's so called post-racial American society) can be understood and interrogated.

Orientalism. Another foundation of the present investigation is Said's (1978) seminal theory of Orientalism that has often been used as the theoretical background for numerous post-colonial studies including those in the realm of literature (Brantlinger, 1992), communication (Bernstein & Studlar, 1997), sociology (Turner, 1989), anthropology (Richardson, 1990), religion (King, 1999), and history (Sardar, 1999). Said's primary thesis was that the West (or the 'Occident'), in its discourse (such as literature and art), deliberately misrepresents the people, cultures, and customs of the East (or the 'Oriental') in order to contrive a dichotomy between what the East *really is* and what the West *imagines* it to be. In the introduction to his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said defines

Orientalism as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experiences.” He goes on to argue that Orientalism as an imperialist tradition is essentially a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” by managing the Orient politically, imaginatively, and ideologically through discourse. Said uses Foucault’s concept of discourse to explicate how power and knowledge are intertwined by arguing that Western representations of the East were ideological tools used by Europe to further its colonial quest. Orientalism is therefore a *form of discourse* characterized by imperatives and essentializations that the West deems apposite for defining the East. Said’s (1978) theory of Orientalism can be seen by most scholars as a rejection of the Eurocentric practices of making stereotypical assumptions and generalizations about the part of the world known as the 'East'. Indeed, as he demonstrates through numerous examples, the East is imagined as the “repository of fantasy” (Bhaba, 2004) in the Western imagination. It is seen as a vast, monolithic, distant, and strange land – inscrutable, fearsome, and exotic. Its people have been characterized simultaneously as despotic, servile, primitive, sexually promiscuous, and unscrupulous.

Most of the examples that Said upholds in his rather comprehensive argument are somewhat dualistic. They dichotomize Orientals into simplistic binaries in a manner that renders them capable of mysticism and spirituality but incapable of action, practicality, or reason. The ‘Orient’ according to Said, signifies a conscious system of re-presentation and re-imagination premised upon the colonizing interests of the West. The East exists for and because of the West; it is constructed in relation to the West; and it is the significant ‘Other’ of the West. The ‘Oriental’ according to Said (1978) is the person signified by Orientalist discourse. The Oriental man is weak and effeminate and yet somehow embodies the threat

of contaminating White women. The Oriental woman, according to Said, is rendered so that she is male-glorifying, astonishingly exotic, and somewhat other-worldly. In Orientalist discourse, the Oriental man or woman is a prosaic image – an essentialization that cuts across cultural boundaries and seeks to reduce the East to an “imaginative geography” (Said, 1978) – static, backward, and eager to be conquered.

The social construction of reality by the media. Not surprisingly, many scholars have explored the relationship between what people witness in the media, the ways in which they process mediated information, and how media content impacts their worldview. For example, Gerbner and Gross (1976) asserted that over a period of time, one’s consumption of television content would ‘cultivate’ or shape one’s notions of reality to a large extent. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan (2002) similarly argue that information acquired by audiences from television may potentially lead them to believe that the world is a dangerous and mean place. Again, Bandura’s (1976) social learning theory posits that people, especially children learn aggressive behavior by observing others, the environment, as well as mass media content which seems to reward violent action. Hansen and Hansen (1988) posited the activation-recency hypothesis which claimed that when people are primed with media content, they utilize that content in subsequent information processing. Monahan, Shtruliss, and Brown Givens, (2005) tested the activation-recency hypothesis in a study about stereotypes pertaining to African American women and found that exposure to stereotypic portrayals of African American women eventually resulted in stereotype-consistent judgments of other African American women by research participants.

While media scholars may differ in their arguments about the nature of impact of media on people, one may conclude with some degree of certainty that many people today depend on the media to learn about things they have not personally experienced (Fujioka, 1999; Gandy, 2001; McLaren et al., 1995; Meyers, 1999; Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2003). Therefore, the media serve the crucial function of opinion-building – a function that seeks to create and institutionalize concrete, believable ‘realities’ in people’s minds about unfamiliar people, places, concepts, and issues. As a result of limited interpersonal contact with members from racial minorities as demonstrated by Halualani et al. (2004) in their study of college campuses, people are increasingly depending on mass media to observe minority group members and form opinions about them, as argued by Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht (1997). In fact, vanDijk (1987) posits that most of what White Americans know about ethnic minorities is based on what they learn from the mass media. This could be problematic because Western mainstream media are driven by a ‘melting pot’ ideology that seeks to exclude racialized minorities that were not able to assimilate successfully because they were distinguishable by physical differences, as argued by several scholars (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Park, 2009; Rhodes, 1993; Rogers, 2007; Taylor et al., 1995; Turner, 1999; Willis, 1997). Wilson et al. (2003) argue that these minorities were therefore never considered as target audiences by producers of mass media but became “targets of the media”. That is, whenever members of racial minorities were portrayed in mainstream media, they were represented in a heavily stereotypical manner – a practice that according to Wilson et al. (2003) has endured for decades. Because of this historical practice, critical media scholars continually criticize the mainstream portrayal of minority groups and hold it responsible for perpetuating negative stereotypes about racialized groups.

As a matter of fact, Hall (1997) contends, and this researcher agrees, that the mass media has historically depicted people of color in a manner that was deliberately in keeping with prejudices of the dominant class about racial minorities. The media, according to Hall (1997), intentionally re-presented the minority population in a manner that justified their weak social, economic, and political status in the minds of White audiences. Thus, the African American or Mexican man is often a lazy and irresponsible drug peddler, the African American woman is the mammy or the jezebel, the Latina/o is exotic and sexy but morally corrupt, the Native American is always primitive and in touch with nature, and the Asian men and women are hypersexual and servile respectively. Through these representations of ethnic minorities, mainstream media not only denies accurate portrayals to people of color but also precludes the dominant (White) section of society from becoming familiar with members of minority populations, which indicate that the practice of stereotyping is doubly damaging.

The limited nature of intercultural contact coupled with distorted (to say the least) media images of ethnic minorities raises several crucial problems about the role of mass media and the realities externalized by them. In the absence of any real intercultural contact, the only exposure to cultural and racial diversity that Whites have is from the media where representations of ethnic minorities are evidently deviant and warped. A fundamental assumption of the cultural studies approach to studying communicative phenomena is that the media constructs images and descriptions of the social world through representations that help people comprehend the world and the way it functions (Hall, 1977). In keeping with this, the ways in which people see themselves and their relationships with cultural 'Others' is impacted by mediated representations.

Because people tend to rely on stereotypes in order to create mental images of places and people outside their reach, scholars such as Gitlin (2000) argue that it is highly likely that the stereotypical representations would translate into realities about racial minorities for White audiences. Indeed, media effects scholars have repeatedly demonstrated how distorted representations of minority group members can reinforce racist ideologies among already prejudiced audiences (Brown-Givens & Monahan, 2005; Ford, 1997). Wilson et al. (2003) argue, for example, that mediated stereotypes about minorities affect members of that minority to a great extent. Mok (1998) investigated the effect of Asian American media stereotypes on the ways in which Asian Americans saw themselves, other Asian Americans, and Whites. The study revealed that research subjects were frustrated with the lack of true representation of them in mainstream US media and that Asian American women deemed themselves unattractive because they did not possess the manifestations of ideal beauty – blue eyes and blonde hair. Interestingly, it was also found that Asian Americans found it difficult to sustain a romantic relationship with *other* Asian Americans because of the stereotypes they held about one another. Lastly, Asian Americans saw the standards of success and attractiveness as being embodied by Whiteness which induced feelings of guilt and angst among them.

Asian Americans, according to Mok (1998) are not only consuming the media stereotypes pertaining to them but are also reifying the privileges of enjoyed by Whiteness. The effects of mediated stereotypes about racial minorities on White audiences are also well documented. Lee et al. (2009) found that among college students, heavy television viewers were more likely to hold ethnic stereotypes and prejudices against racial minorities. In the same vein, Punyanunt-Carter (2008) found that heavy users of television

thought that the occupational roles and personality characteristics of African Americans as shown on television were true to life.

Media effects scholars often posit that the nature and extent of media's impact on audiences is usually moderated by individual differences and demographic variances. While scholars may never be able to conclusively prove the effects of mediated stereotypes on racial minorities, it cannot be denied that the media does build opinions for a part of the population and that for these people, the media constructs very 'real' and believable images which are later recalled as references. Given the media's role of creating these realities (including realities about ethnic minorities), it is crucial to continually examine the images of people of color in different types of media to assess how the practice of narrowcasting them has transformed the obviously ideological into everyday commonsense.

Media and Culture as Instruments of Dominant Ideology

The concepts of culture and ideology are difficult to define conclusively. This study uses Hall's (1997) definition of culture – a foundational base that constitutes meaning, knowledge, and awareness of the world. It is thus an organized set of meaning-making procedures that constitute a society's way of life and are transmitted from one generation to another in implicit as well as explicit ways. Further, inherent in every culture, is a theory of knowing – a collective commonsense that aids people in making sense of the world around them as well as distant landscapes and people. It also helps them sort 'realities' into binaries such as good and bad, moral and immoral, normal and abnormal, and right and wrong. According to Turner (1999), for this theory to actually work as a governing principle, it needs to remain unspoken and invisible. This theory of knowing is what Turner (1999) defines as ideology – “the system of beliefs and practices that is produced” by such a

theory of knowledge. This definition of ideology is being used for the purposes of this study that explores how dominant ideology (such as Whiteness or masculinity) is produced and sustained by the media with the intention of transmitting these ideologies to the audience as a part of popular culture, as argued by (Storey, 1999; Shim, 1998; & Perry, 2003).

Further, it also through this nexus of culture and ideology that cultural minorities are silenced, misrepresented, and even appropriated by mainstream media as demonstrated by Rogers' (2007) analysis of how contemporary images of Kokopelli have been desexualized and fetishized by the media. Given these complex connections, a discussion about ideology, culture, and media representations is necessary for this study. This section therefore reviews the processes of cultural and ideological production and the instrumental roles played by the media in such production. This is followed by an analysis of how stereotypes play into the alliance between media and ideology. Lastly, this section offers an overview of the ways in which Western cinema has traditionally represented the East and its people, as revealed by prior post-colonial discourse studies.

The production of ideology and culture by the media. Media discourse (news, cinema, television, Internet, magazines etc.) is generated and organized in specific ways and imperceptibly serves as a foundation upon which consumers (audiences) base their cultural knowledge, form their ideas, and even see others vis-à-vis themselves. As we have discussed already, the media creates and institutionalizes realities for a majority of audiences that depend on the media for information. Just as these audiences accept such information without questioning, they also consume and internalize stereotypes about cultural minorities without determining for themselves the authenticity of the information source or interrogating the dominant ideologies that sponsor such representation. Because

these stereotypes remain unrelentingly constant, they eventually gain social currency, which in turn reifies the pigeonholing of cultural minorities into a limited set of characteristics that denies minority populations a full-bodied, complex, and intelligent representations in the media.

We know that media discourse is one of the manifestations of dominant ideology or the dominant way of thinking (Gitlin, 2000) and since stereotypes about ethnic minorities seek to highlight differences (thereby demonizing them), it may be argued that ideologically, stereotypes are meant to emphasize the incommensurability between the oppressed and the privileged – an emphasis that is executed by the media. This demonization of the cultural Other as undertaken by the media can be seen as a reaction whenever there is a threat to Whiteness or nationality – concepts defined by Harris (1995) as intangible but nonetheless ‘owned’ properties.

Since gender, sexuality, and race are intersecting concepts their representations on screen are also interconnected. This intersecting system of representation serves a crucial ideological function: it defines who has power and who does not. In order to do this, some groups are shown to be domineering while others are portrayed as weak and helpless so that the power dynamics are confirmed and culturally perpetuated. Understanding these strategies of representation is therefore a way of understanding how power manifests itself through the conduits of ideology such as media. Rosenblum & Travis, (2007) argue that in the United States, Whites are the definers of cultural ‘Others’ – “the unmarked marker of others’ differentness”, which means that Whiteness becomes the implicit social norm that derives power from defining others, while remaining undefined itself. In the context of mediations therefore, it may be argued that Whiteness derives its power and meaning in

relation to the representation of other races. Similarly, androcentrism and masculinity may be said to derive their power and meaning in relation to the representation of what it means to be female. Media representations indicate the guiding assumptions of a society's culture. They are hence telling commentaries that audiences use to gauge their social position vis-à-vis others and hence it is necessary to be cognizant of the media as one of the significant loci where culture and ideology are purposively constructed and assigned meaning.

Mediated communication, stereotypes, and ideology. Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney, & Wise (2005) contend that “the institutions and relationships that constitute a society always embody structures of power and inequality.” To ensure its own sustenance, therefore, every society needs to preserve these structures which in turn need to appear legitimate and also suppress all that is ‘abnormal’, or non-conformant. One way in which such legitimacy is attained is through ideology – a specific way of seeing the world that makes existing power imbalances seem normal and well-justified. The mainstream mass media, because of their commercial needs and political allegiances, act as primary conduits through which such ideologies are disseminated and eventually embedded into the cultural fabric of a society. Because the media constructs meanings that are often understood as reality by audiences (Gandy, 2001; Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2003), people tend to comprehend the world through these representations. As a result, audiences assume that they know where fact ends and fiction begins. This assumption, according to Grossberg et al. is a problematic one because people fail to recognize that “*representation* literally means ‘re-presentation’” – to mediate an original, stake a claim on it, and alter its reality.

The stereotypical representations of minority groups (such as ethnic minorities, women, and the LGBT community) are instantiations of such alterations of reality that communicate prejudice against disenfranchised sections of society. Gramsci (1971) argued that hegemonic groups must work in concert in order to stay dominant. Louw (2001) concurs and posits that much of this concerted effort “involves operating a discourse that keeps the ruling alliance together”, in order to ensure not only that power remains with the powerful but also that dominated sections of society accept and internalize this unjust distribution of power and agency. The more natural and tacit these communicative discourses are, the more entrenched prejudices about the subaltern become in the collective social consciousness. The stereotypical representations of the subaltern and its ideological underpinnings are therefore communicative phenomena that merit investigation.

Dominant ideologies pertaining to gender, sexuality, and race are therefore of particular relevance to this study because these ideologies perpetuate and reify the subordination of all that is ‘alternative’, ‘abnormal’, or non-conformant (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney, & Wise, 2005). Elements of normativity are codified by these ideologies and translated into cultural commonsense which is passed down from generation to generation as given knowledge. Ideologies of race, for instance, serve to reproduce the oppression of the subaltern by undertaking stereotypical representations of people of color even as whiteness remains dominant by virtue of its invisibility (Rosenblum & Travis, 2007). Similarly, ideologies of gender sponsor sexist representations of women by commodifying them as submissive, ever-smiling sexual objects being voyeuristically consumed by the male gaze (Kilbourne, 1999). The purpose of this study is therefore to

interrogate the portrayal of Indian femininity or womanhood in Western cinema to understand if such portrayal reproduces these ideologies.

Orientalism in film and the politics of visual culture. Said (1978) argued that the West's re-imagination of the East as an inscrutable and distant zone of the world was a result of the amalgamation of fascination and apprehension about a land inhabited by 'strange-looking' people and their rituals. Orientalist or post-colonial discourse, according to Bhaba (2004) is a mechanism or a rhetorical device that allows the West to appropriate the East as a bizarre place characterized all at once by barbarism, exotica, spirituality, sensuality, transcendentalism, and chaos. In keeping with this, the creation of the 'East' by Euro-American cinema is the focus of analysis here.

Western cinema has historically deployed a wide array of formulaic (and Orientalist) representations of the East as demonstrated by Studlar (1997) who argued that Hollywood has traditionally used the East for commercial and political purposes. According to Studlar (1997), most of the Hollywood films released between 1916 and 1926 that dealt with Orientalist settings or characters – such as *The Cheat* (1915) and *Broken Blossoms* (1919) – are said to be miscegenation dramas that suggested the erotic and ideological consequences of a White woman being contaminated by a dark-skinned man. The transgression of racial categories was also a predominant theme of films such as *The Sheik* (1921) which was extremely popular with Western audiences. In many of the movies of this period, Orientalism was evinced through the spectacle of female dance. According to Studlar (1997), this was a means for the West to showcase Eastern female as exotic, hypersexual, sensual, and mysterious – arguably a manifestation of the White male's colonialist imagination. Heung (1997) argues, however, that it was with Puccini's *Madame*

Butterfly (1904) that inspired the Western construction of the East as a “sexualized and sexually compliant space that is ripe for conquest and rule.” Heung posits that *Madame Butterfly* is a master-text for Orientalism because it confirmed the Asian woman’s perpetual availability for the White male.

The fact that Orientalism in cinema exists in contemporary times has been demonstrated by Nadel (1997) who argued that Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992) is replete with clichéd images about the Middle-East (the chaotic marketplace, the beautiful princess, the magic carpet) and that the movie seeks to camouflage this by appearing to be a standard Western romance. Nadel also argues that almost all characters in the movie are dualistic in nature and use the trope of ‘disguise’ at least once in the narrative. Such ambiguity, according to Nadel, is indicative of Orientalist discourse, which is also in keeping with Said’s (1978) original assertion that dichotomizing and obfuscating the Oriental people is one of the primary ways in which they are rendered fearsome, deceitful, as well as exotic. Shohat (1997) contends that films such as *The Jungle Book* (1942), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), and *A Passage to India* (1984) are also mediated discourses indicative of Orientalist practices. Orientalism in cinema has thus endured for almost a century. Its manifestations, however, have evolved from the overt and obvious to being implicit and harder to identify and hence more difficult to counter.

Stereotypes of the Subaltern in Mainstream Media

Critical scholars hold that racism and prejudice are intrinsic parts of Euro-American life because the dominant ideologies of these regions operate in a manner that seeks to subordinate those who are not a part of the White racial framework. Ono & Pham (2008) argue that in the so called post-racist or colorblind society we live in, people are continually

subjected to “offensive communication” because they are somehow different – by way of race, gender, age, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation just to name a few. Most of these offensive messages are disseminated through stereotypes – defined by Wilson et al. (2003) as over-simplified and generalized assertions about members of certain social categories.

Stereotypes are an extremely common communicative practice where several assumptions are made about a person by dint of his/her membership in a particular social category. The person being stereotyped is systematically robbed off all elements of individuality and a set of formulaic characteristics are ascribed to him/her because those attributes have ‘somehow’ come to be associated with the social category to which s/he belongs. The processes that constitute the ‘somehow’ are ideological and purposive in nature, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Several scholars have attempted to investigate why stereotypes, in spite of having tenuous links with reality, seem to persist over time and embed themselves within the popular imagination. The next section begins with a discussion of these reasons and the functions of mediated stereotypes. This is followed by the politics involved in representing minority group members. Finally, a detailed overview of the common stereotypes used to depict Asians, women, and women of color in mainstream Western media is offered.

The functions and impact of stereotypes. Stereotypes serve various functions for the media makers that produce these conventions as well as for audiences that consume them. Snyder & Miene (1993) posit that there are three approaches from which the functions of stereotypes can be understood – cognitive, psychodynamic, and socio-cultural. The cognitive approach assumes that human beings can only process *some* of information

that they are exposed to and therefore rely on stereotypes to reduce their cognitive burden. According to this approach, people consume and reproduce stereotypes because it affords them cognitive economy and allows them to 'predict' certain attributes of a person depending on his/her group membership in order to reduce uncertainty. According to the psychodynamic approach, however, human beings use stereotypes for ego protection and self-esteem through downward social comparison (Wills, 1981, cited by Snyder & Miene, 1993). That is, people use stereotypes to belittle the 'Others' so that they can feel better about themselves as well as less threatened. This is especially the case, as Snyder & Miene (1993) argue, when the 'Others' are "perceived to be competitors for limited sources." Lastly, the socio-cultural approach contends that people buy into stereotypes to be able to better fit in with their own cultural ingroups. According to this approach, stereotypes are socially and culturally ingrained and through socialization, people are *trained* to reiterate those stereotypes (about outgroup members) if they want to have productive social relationships with their cultural peers. From the audience's point of view, therefore, stereotypes seem to be a heuristic that reduces the complexity of information, boosts their egos, and makes them better fit in with their peers. These three approaches, individually and collectively, document why stereotypes endure over time and appear to be accurate depictions of particular groups of people.

Seen from the perspective of media producers, stereotypes seem to fulfill different types of functions. According to Wilson et al. (2003), most of the fixed or formulaic representations of certain people on screen were used as shortcuts by media producers in order to simplify complex personalities. This was done so that the first time an audience saw a character on screen, they would immediately be able to understand certain

things about him/her. From a critical perspective, however, it is crucial to consider why only the stereotypes about racial minorities (people who do not *look* like they are or could be a part of the White racial framework) have persisted over decades and are usually negative in nature. This brings us to a discussion about the politics of representing ethnic minorities in mainstream Western media.

The politics of representing the marginalized in mainstream media. Said (1978) argues that not only is the Orient the source of the civilization and languages of the West, but it is also “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.” More recently, Bhaba (2004) contends that one of the primary characteristics of colonial discourse is its reliance on the idea of “fixity” in the “ideological construction of otherness.” Indeed, mediated discourses have traditionally demonized the cultural ‘Other’ either through visual erasure or through static and arrested modes of representation. It is important to consider here that while these stereotypes may have contained *some* elements of truth, most of them are “ideologically stitched into the fabric of Western imperialism and patriarchy” (McLaren et al., 1995). Bhaba (2004) contends that stereotypes about ethnic minorities in popular media are over-simplifications because it denies these minorities the realities of their lives on screen, thereby rendering their portrayals formulaic and immutable. Feng (2002) argues, however, that it is by virtue of this immutability – the fact that these stereotypes remain constant – that they gradually acquire the “aura of truth”. Therefore, it is through the convention of repetition and fixity that the mass media condition their audiences and maintain stereotypes about racialized populations to the extent that their believability is no longer questioned.

Because stereotypes assume the quality of realism over a period of time and are inducted into the domain of commonsense of popular culture, critical scholars recommend that the meaning-making processes (heuristics) we apply to make sense of the cultural 'Other' need to be reformulated. Any mediation is politically-laden but the representation of racial minorities is especially so because they are rendered disenfranchised and powerless to resist or challenge their representations in the media.

The use of stereotypes to depict ethnic minorities is one of the several ways in which colonial discourses seek to themselves survive and also appropriate the cultural Other. Xing & Hirabayashi (2003) argue that visual media, especially popular film, are responsible for contributing to the stereotyping of different ethnic groups. Bhaba (2004) argues that colonial discourse is "an apparatus of power" that intends to highlight cultural, historical, and racial differences so that the Other is distanced and detached from the mainstream White society which itself continues to remain the 'norm' by dint of being unlabelled and undefined. The representation of minorities in the media is also done to construct the marginalized as a population incapable of self-improvement or productivity and therefore in need of being 'rescued' or otherwise controlled. What is interesting about the politics of representation within colonial discourse is what Bhaba (2004) terms as the "shifting positionalities" of the oppressed communities. That is to say, the subaltern's identities are constructed so as to be constituted of several positive and negative attributes. Then, depending on the contemporary political cross currents within society, either the positive or the negative attributes are enhanced by mediated representations of the subaltern in order to attain specific predetermined political goals.

Nowhere is this practice more evident than in the way Asian Americans have been characterized differently at different points in time depending on America's racial policies and labor needs, as demonstrated by Lee (1999). He argues that while Asian populations in the US were traditionally thought of as a Yellow Peril that would take over America, they were also thought of as subservient sources of cheap labor – willing to do work considered too menial for Whites, at a fraction of the cost. Because of this, even until the 1950s, Asian community in the US were framed in the media as a necessary evil – useful, convenient, but one that needed to be monitored, lest they take over the American way of life.

In the 1960s, however, in what seemed like the media trading one stereotype for another, Asian Americans began to be framed as the model minority in the US – educated, successful, familial, and non-militant. Lee (1999) argues, however, that the promotion of Asian Americans as successful, educated, socially productive members of society is a part of a larger political strategy that seeks to uphold the Asian American example to *other* minorities so that they can strive to assimilate into American society in a non-aggressive and non-political manner and yet seemingly live the quintessential American dream. Simultaneously, of course, Asian Americans still remain stereotyped on-screen and repressed off it as they continue to face instances of racism in their day to day lives as argued by Chou & Feagin (2008).

Representation is therefore a politically fraught practice where the marginalized is re-imagined in ways that seem realistic but are simplistic exaggerations bearing little or no relationships to the complexity of their lives or the real issues they face. It is the objective of colonial discourse and representation then, to recreate an image of the minority

populations that is at once familiar and distant, desirable and despicable – in Bhaba’s (2004) words, “a reformed and recognizable totality”.

I now turn to a more specific discussion about the ways in which some particular minorities – the Asian community and women of color – have been depicted in mainstream Western media. The representation of these groups in mainstream mass media is of especially relevant to this study. A discussion about these representations as investigated by past scholarship is expected to reveal useful trends that will inform this study as well as identify gaps that have not been addressed in prior literature.

Representation of Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream media. The representation of Asians is of central importance to this study. Feng (2002) contends that Asian Americans in the US are “perceived as eternally foreign”, a perception that is fuelled by mass media. Ono & Pham (2008) argue that the Yellow Peril discourse that has been historically used by the media to discuss Asians in the US is far from being a thing of the past. While Asians are seen as a model minority in the US today (also a problematic stereotype), the media still construct the Asian community as powerful and threatening while juxtaposing Whites as vulnerable. The Yellow Peril discourse is therefore structurally embedded in the cultural fabric of the US and is hence difficult to remedy. Ono & Pham (2008) provide a historical account of how the Chinese were seen as human oddities – immoral, diseased, and animalistic – during the Chinese exclusion era, and how these frames carried over to contemporary cinema such as *The Chinese Rubbernecks* (1903), *The Cheat* (1915), and *Broken Blossoms* (1919). While the imagery associated with Asians has evolved over time, they are still projected on screen in a manner that is parochial and largely negative, such as in the movie *The Fast and the Furious* (2001) in which the Asian

American characters are shown to be fearsome and dangerous gangsters or *The Hangover* (2009) where the evildoer is an effeminate and offensive Asian extortionist. Dominant media discourses have therefore evolved over time to reproduce the subordination of Asians through stereotypes in the present.

An interesting aspect of Asian American representation in mainstream media is the difference in the portrayal of Asian men and women. While most scholars (Ono & Pham, 2008; Lee et al., 2009; Pham, 2004; and Park, 2009) concur that representations of both Asian men and women are problematic, it is worthy to be noted that they are problematic in different ways. In what is indicative of Orientalist discourse, Asian women have historically been depicted in the Western media in two ways – the beautiful, submissive, sexually experimentative, mysterious, and exotic woman; or the aggressive Dragon Lady bereft of feminine emotions. Asian men have been portrayed in a dichotomous manner. They are either sexual predators – lascivious, brutal, and hypersexual – with a predilection toward crime and corruption, or they are desexualized – feminine, grotesque, under-endowed, and/or impotent – and hence rendered undesirable. Asians or Asian Americans have thus been gendered and polarized in mainstream media – a practice that Ono & Pham (2008) argue, works in tandem in order to suppress the Asian population within the United States.

Representation of women of color in mainstream media. Several scholars such as McClintock (1995), Said (1978), and Shohat (1997) have argued that race and gender are imbricated concepts especially within post-colonial or Orientalist discourse where sexual and racial domination is a common occurrence. It may therefore be argued that women of color, by virtue of being ‘women’ and ‘of color’ occupy a doubly disadvantaged position within the Western White patriarchal social system. Because of their problematic

nature, the representations of these women in mainstream Western media therefore deserve a focused analysis.

The most conspicuous stereotype about women of color has traditionally been that of absence. Indeed, scholars have documented the relative rarity of having a woman of color in a leading role in mass media such as television and film. In the event of a woman of color playing a leading character, she is invariably depicted in a stereotypical manner such as Halle Berry's 'welfare-queen' character of Leticia Musgrove in *Monster's Ball* (2001) where she is shown to be struggling financially to the extent of being evicted, eventually seeking solace in a relationship based on sex and desperation.

Scholars such as Bogle (2001), Collins (2004), and Lee et al. (2009) have argued that African American women have traditionally been depicted on screen in three ways. First, as the desexualized mammy – the nurturing nanny with a heart of gold who is often the maternal figure in the life of her White charge. She 'belongs' to her White family in a manner reminiscent of slavery and is faithful to them at all costs. Films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Made for Each Other* (1939), and more recently, *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008), are examples of this stereotype. Second, is the stereotype of the Jezebel/prostitute – 'the-black-girl-gone-bad' who does not hesitate to use her sexuality to get what she wants. She is brazenly seductive and hypersexual, as demonstrated by films such as *Harlem Nights* (1989), *Taxi Driver* (1976), and *Deconstructing Harry* (1997). The last and most recent stereotype of African American women is that of the sassy, overbearing character who is mean, dominating, and sarcastic. Films such as *Sister Act* (1992), *Sister Act: Back in the Habit* (1993), and *Dreamgirls* (2006) are examples of films that perpetuate this stereotype.

List (1996) argues that Mexican women have been traditionally depicted in Euro-American cinema in one of three stereotypical ways: the 'dark lady' who possesses great sexual prowess; the lower class "half-breed harlot" who cannot survive without a man; and the clown who induced comedy through her buffoonery and lack of sophistication. The 2006 film *Babel* is a good illustration of the Mexican female stereotype where Amelia (played by Adriana Barraza) is the loving nanny who has been taking care of two White children since their infancy. Eventually, however, she is rendered as the illegal immigrant who endangers the lives of the children and is eventually deported back to Mexico.

McGrath (2007) found that in comic books, Latinas are depicted as brash and out of control women who use vulgar language and need the men in their lives to guide them. Merskin, (2007) argued that Latina women have been externalized on screen as voluptuous, colorfully clothed, erotically dangerous or sexually naïve, self-sacrificing, childlike, and obedient. Merskin demonstrated, through an analysis of the hit television series, *Desperate Housewives*, that the dominant Latina stereotypes (sexual object, self-sacrificing *senorita*, and promiscuous vamp) are still being deployed through the character of Gabrielle Solis (played by Eva Longoria Parker). Calafell & Delgado (2004) have further posited that media representations today tend to obfuscate Latina identity by ignoring the distinct nationalities of women of Latin American descent. List (1996) argues that this practice is indicative of Euro-American cinema's premeditated indifference toward ethnic accuracy.

Asian women, as we have already discussed, are most often positioned in mainstream media as China Dolls. They are passive recipients of the male gaze – attractive, sexually experimentative, submissive, and obsequious towards her man, and their worth is

determined by their exotic appearance, as documented by scholars such as Ono & Pham (2008) and Xing & Hirabayashi (2003). On the one hand, Asian women are shown submissive to the extent of being male-glorifying, 'essential' women who fulfill every male desire and pacify male anxieties (for examples, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, 2005). On the other, they have also been portrayed as vicious virago-like man-eaters/dominatrices (Lucy Liu's character Ling Woo in *Ally McBeal*, 1997-2002; or her character of Pearl in *Payback*, 1999) or fierce female warriors (such as Michelle Yeoh's character of Yu Shu Lien in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000), or as beautiful superwomen that can do it all, from neurosurgery and engineering to archery and kung-fu (such as Lucy Liu's character of Alex Munday in *Charlie's Angels*, 2000 and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, 2003).

Native American women have also been represented on screen in a stereotypical manner as demonstrated by Marubbio (2009) who argued through an analysis of 34 Hollywood films that Native American women are most often represented in American cinema as the 'Celluloid Princess' or the 'Sexualized Maiden'. The Celluloid Princess often plays a sacrificial role – she teams up with the White male hero but dies as a result of her allegiance, as seen in films such as *Broken Arrow* (1950). The Sexualized Maiden, however, is the femme fatale – erotic, attractive, and sometimes elusive. Marubbio (2009) argues that in the last few decades, these polarized representations have been amalgamated by Hollywood to form a Native American 'female' who is self-sacrificial, attractive, as well as conquerable. This synthesis suggests, according to Marubbio, that the Native American woman embodies a threat to the idea of a pure, White America. By extension, this thesis argues that the way in which Indian women are portrayed in Euro-American commercial cinema can be seen as a response to the perception that Whiteness is being threatened.

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that women of color have either been stereotyped by omission in Euro-American media or they have been represented through the binaries or dichotomized extremes such as that of the prostitute-virgin. Stereotyping women of color by polarizing their representations is therefore likely to be one of the ways in which these minority populations are subjugated and limited by the media. The overall media trend pertaining to the representation of women of color can be summed up in the words of Cynthia Enloe (1990) who argues that “there exists an American sexual gaze towards the exotic, malleable third-world female – specifically, the colonial gaze displaced upon the female “other” as hyper-sexualized, embodying female masochism, and a one-dimensional willingness to seduce and please.” This gaze and its corresponding media representations, Enloe contends, afford credibility to the lingering perception that the exotic female lacks the “purity intrinsic to the imperial Christian female.”

The above discussion suggests that a significant amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the ways in which Western media represents and appropriates cultural others. Specifically, the discussion reviewed the ways in which ethnic minorities, women, and women of color have been delineated in Western mainstream media. One of the primary gaps that this review of literature indicates, however, is that no study has so far looked at the ways in which East Indians are depicted in Western media. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Indian population in the United States grew by 53% between 2000 and 2007. This is the highest growth rate among Asian American populations in the US. Indian Americans are not only the third largest ethnic group in the US (after Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans) but also among the most rapidly growing ethnic groups in the US.

As one of the largest ethnic communities in the United States therefore, issues of media representation of Indians need to be analyzed and investigated.

As a part of the far-east, India forms a part of what Said (1978) terms as “imaginative geographies”. He argued that popular discourse constructs the manner in which unfamiliar places and people are perceived by the West that has a predominantly colonial view of the East – a view where eastern cultures (and the people) are rendered monolithic and are re-imagined within the dominant paradigm of Otherness. Prashad (2000) argues that India first entered the popular Western imagination through Barnum’s circuses where ‘midgets’ from India were exhibited as strange, mythical creatures. These spectacles depicted India simultaneously as a land of romance, beauty, and barbarism. India was thus rendered a faraway land replete with mysteries that were at once fearsome and alluring. In recent times, however, ‘India’ as a concept, pervades a substantial part of the Western world. Its cuisine, cinema, clothing, and cultural artifacts such as the *bindi* and *mehndi* have been adopted not only by the Indian diaspora worldwide but also by Westerners. From state fairs with Indian themes and the celebration of Indian festivals to celebrities wearing Indian costumes and jewelry, India seems to be everywhere.

Indians are the most highly educated among national origin groups in the United States and have the highest full-time annual earnings (Reeves & Bennett, 2000), indicating that Indians contribute significantly to the economy of the US. With Indian actors (or actors of Indian origin) frequently appearing in Western media, Hollywood stars such as Sylvester Stallone acting in Hindi commercial films, and many collaborative productions in recent times, the cultural exchange between India and the West is also difficult to ignore. In spite of this, very little attention has been paid to the ways in which Indians appear in mass

media such as television and cinema. Based on Said's pronouncements, this study argues that the Oriental woman is re-presented simultaneously as an object of loathing, desire, admiration, and fear and that such re-presentation is politically fraught. While Said's theory of Orientalism can be seen as an effort to dispel some typical essentializations about the East, his primary endeavor was to qualify and illustrate Orientalism as a structurally entrenched *discourse* ("latent" as well as "manifest", in Said's words) representing nationality, race, and the 'Other'. This study upholds this argument in that it analyzes contemporary cinematic images of East Indian women to gain an understanding of how colonial ambitions of the West operate even today under the garb of representing the *essence* of cultural minorities.

Though Said (1978) investigated 19th century Orientalist artifacts about the Middle East, it is likely that the same ordering of reality and representation holds true even for contemporary images of East Indian women being circulated in the West. To substantiate this argument, this thesis investigated the ways in which Indian women and womanhood have been re-presented and re-imagined in Euro-American cinema.

Research Questions

In view of the above discussion about representational politics and the gaps in prior literature pertaining to the depiction of ethnic minorities in mainstream Western cinema, two research questions were explored in this study:

RQ1: What cinematic stereotypes or conventions are used to represent Indian women in Western cinema?

RQ2: How has the 'ideal' Indian woman been constructed by Western cinema?

Summary

This chapter was organized in three sections. In the first section, the theoretical framework (comprised of Critical Race Theory, Orientalism, and the social construction of reality) being deployed in this study was discussed. This was followed (in the second section) by an in-depth assessment about the nexus among media, ideology, and culture and the ways in which they connect in order to produce normative meanings for audiences. In the third section, through a detailed analysis of the problematic ways in which women of color and ethnic minorities have been historically delineated in mainstream media, it was concluded that such media consciously seek to marginalize, disempower, and subordinate minority group members in order to preserve the status quo and to prevent the loss of the White Male privilege. Finally, this chapter was concluded by stating the research questions that were addressed through this study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

In this section, I will first briefly explain the general methodological approach used for this study to explore ways in which Indian womanhood is re-imagined, constructed, and 're-presented' in recent Western cinema. Second, will be a discussion about the appropriateness and rationale behind choosing this method. Third, the strengths and weaknesses associated with this research method will be outlined. Fourth, the research dataset for this study and selection criteria will be discussed before engaging in a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the dataset and selection process. Finally, the specific data collection method used in this study will be discussed in detail. The process of data analysis, implications of using this method to collect data, and issues of trustworthiness will also be included in this section.

General Methodological Approach

This study is concerned with exploring the manner in which Indian womanhood is portrayed in mainstream Western Cinema within the past decade. It aims at answering two primary research questions: a) "What cinematic stereotypes or conventions are used to represent Indian women in Western cinema?" and b) "How has the 'ideal' Indian woman been constructed by Western cinema?" Past researchers have identified four critical issues in this area of research. They are power, mediation or representation, ideology, and culture. Lee (1999) contends that ethnic minorities have been historically delineated in mainstream Western media in a manner that indicates subordination and suppression, if not complete erasure by the dominant class. Gandy (1998) concurs by saying that

representations of ethnic groups or cultural minorities in the media are erroneous and reflective of “individual, institutional, and cultural biases...” that result in a production system “that oversupplies negative images of minority group members.” Evidently then, the media is complicit in the encouragement of a culture that simultaneously reproduces dominant ideologies and is molded by them. Scholars have argued that the racialized privileges that Whiteness enjoys and the predominance of masculinity in society are largely contingent upon media treatment of issues pertaining to race and gender.

While the terms ‘culture’ and ‘ideology’ continue to elude incontestable definitions, it is undeniable that they are inextricably enmeshed with each other and that the relationships between them heavily inform mass media conventions. As Turner (1999) argues, for the theories of reality to work as a system within a culture, “it needs to be unspoken, invisible, a property of the natural world rather than human interests.” Ideology, then, is the set of beliefs, values, and practices produced from these theories of reality. It also includes the mechanisms of representation and language within a culture that communicate that these beliefs, values, and practices are ‘natural’ and ‘true’. Harris (1995) posits that the ownership of White identity as property affirms the self-identity of Whites and simultaneously denies self-identity to people of color. In the same vein, it may be argued that inherent in the concept of being male is the right to ‘own’ masculinity at the expense of the subordination and disempowerment of women. Issues of power, ownership, and privilege are of paramount importance to critical scholars who recommend that popular culture should be studied vis-à-vis “collective interpretations of power and resistance” (Collier, 2000). Because ideology is contingent upon the management of discourse (Gramsci, 1971) and because of the implicit privileges afforded by Whiteness and

masculinity, McClintock (1995) rightly recommends that communication scholars must make a conscious effort to study “a more diverse politics of agency, involving the dense web of relations between coercion, negotiation, complicity, refusal...compromise...and revolt.”

Qualitative Textual Analysis. Based on the above, this investigation deployed two methodological approaches – qualitative textual analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis – to interrogate the manner in which this dense web of relations operate in tandem to portray Indian femininity on celluloid. According to Gans-Boriskin & Wardle (2005), qualitative textual analysis is especially suited to this type of study because it enables researchers to attain a nuanced and complex understanding of the ideologies that are perpetuated through discourse such as cinema. They further posit that qualitative textual analysis is aimed at a careful consideration of the dataset to “identify the most important themes, issues, and examples of dialogue, combined with more systematic analysis of selected passages that represent the identified themes”. For example, Merskin (2001) undertook a textual analysis of American advertising brands and concluded that several brands portray Native Americans in their advertisements in a manner that and dehumanizes them by stereotyping them as primitive and monolithic.

Similarly, through qualitative textual analysis, Rogers (2007) demonstrated that contemporary commercial images of Kokopelli are indicative of Euro-American masculinist fantasies. Qualitative textual (discursive) analysis is therefore effective and useful in determining the implicit and explicit ways in which ideological hegemony is ensconced in “format and formula; genre; setting and character type; slant; and solution” (Gitlin, 2000).

As an institution and a discursive vehicle, cinema has often been understood to sustain and propagate inequalities of power in society. Since this study uses a critical lens to look at the representational conventions used to depict Indian women in Western cinema, it is essentially an ideological critique of how the cinematic medium is being used for playing out issues of race and gender pertaining to the cultural 'Other'. As stated already, this study used qualitative textual analysis to explore these issues.

Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a more specific type of qualitative textual analysis, was primarily used to study the dataset. Fairclough (1995), one of the architects of Critical Discourse Analysis writes that its aims are to “systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between, a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events, and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power.” Based on this, one may argue that Critical Discourse Analysis views the existing social order as historically situated, socially constructed, and hence in flux. As Locke (2004) argues, Critical Discourse Analysis views “social processes as constituted and sustained less by the will of individuals than by the pervasiveness of particular constructions or versions of reality – often referred to as discourses.”

van Dijk (1987) argues that media discourse is a “specific form of social interaction” that takes place within cultural frameworks and in which social members participate. All media are produced with a recipient in mind and therefore, it is through the interactional nature of discourse that stereotypes and cultural prejudices are perpetuated. It is therefore necessary to persistently interrogate the form and content of mediated discourses

pertaining to the cultural 'Other'. Fairclough & Wodak (1997) argue that Critical Discourse Analysis views language itself as a socially and historically contextualized practice. They posit that Critical Discourse Analysis is premised upon the fact that discursive practices and texts originate from and are shaped by the organized power dynamics of a society. Discourse is therefore influenced by and is productive of ideological superstructures. van Dijk (1987) contends that Critical Discourse Analysis allows us "to assess the way underlying attitudes are strategically expressed in...communicative texts", which provides clues about the strategies of cultural prejudices. Critical Discourse Analysis reveals the manner in which mediated discourse (such as cinema) originate from and are shaped by the organized power dynamics of a society. In so doing, it is "revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonize human subjects through often covert position calls." Critical Discourse Analysis is therefore an efficacious research method that explores the labyrinthine web of relationships between discourse (such as film, newspaper, and television) and the society – an exploration that affords the researcher with an understanding of the discursive configurations used by the media to privilege some people over others and, construct the dominant consensus, and sustain the *status quo*.

Wodak & Meyer (2001) contend that Critical Discourse Analysis is rooted in the socio-cultural tradition of studying communication and hence cannot detach a text (such as cinema) from its wider 'con-text'. Since this study is concerned with instantiations of power, language, ideology, and politics, Critical Discourse Analysis lends itself very malleably to its purposes. Because Critical Discourse Analysis can sustain a plethora of theoretical assumptions, it provides a robust and rich foundation that can support a variety of research approaches. For this reason, it has widely been used in empirical studies based

on the argument that discourse constructs social realities and sustains power relations. For example, Calafell & Delgado (2004) used Critical Discourse Analysis to read *Americanos* – “a published collection of photographic images of Latino/a life in the US” – and concluded that the magazine re-imagines the Latino/a community by highlighting difference and that it denounced the distortion of Latino/a identities by dominant discourses. Similarly, Patton (2001) undertook a Critical Discourse Analysis of the popular TV show *Ally McBeal* and concluded that representations of women and ethnic minorities on the show were derogatory and bordered on extremes. Again, Chidester (2008) undertook a Critical Discourse Analysis of the sitcom *Friends* (1994-2004) to explicate how the purity and privilege of Whiteness is maintained by actively excluding ethnic ‘Others’ without explicitly dealing with (or even mentioning) racial issues.

Vande Berg, Wenner, & Gronbeck (2004) suggest that while “critical methods can be defined in pure forms...critical studies should be guided by the questions you ask, not the methods you want to use.” We know that critical scholars aim at redressing disparities of power and control in society through a persistent focus on social action. However, critical scholars also focus on mediated discourse – media texts that “promote particular ideologies, establish and maintain power, and subvert the interests of certain groups and classes” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2007). This specific scope of Critical Discourse Analysis implies that it is a potent tool that can illuminate the ways in which the oppression of the marginalized is manifested in and facilitated through the media. Keeping this in mind, this study utilized the analytical and interrogatory focus offered by Critical Discourse Analysis to explore if Indian women are depicted in recent Western cinema in manner indicative of a patriarchal Orientalist ideologies (Said, 1978) that seek to exoticize and fetishize the

'Eastern Female' and essentialize her femininity by rendering her eligible for consumption by the Eurocentric gaze.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodological Approach

Critical Discourse Analysis is a useful apparatus that enables the researcher to reveal those inequities of power that are usually not easy to identify and is especially useful in investigating the communicative strategies that the powerful and privileged employ to transform their ideologies into 'commonsense' through institutions such as media and conventions such as media stereotypes. To be able to lay open the 'facts' that we take for granted on an everyday basis, Critical Discourse Analysis is therefore a very potent research method that encourages complexity of understanding and resists reductionism or over-simplification of the problem under consideration.

In the realm of mass media for instance, the insights offered by Critical Discourse Analysis allow researchers, practitioners, theorists, and audiences to step back for a while from the goings-on of everyday media and engage in an analytical process that allows them to see that media texts are deliberately organized in a manner that encourages a specific way of being read (Hall, 1977). Again, for critical media studies pertaining to race, gender or other criteria that define one's privileges (or lack thereof), Critical Discourse Analysis offers a rich and complex illustration of how discursive approaches to the study of such criteria can explicate the tacit ways in which identities are constructed, represented, and contested through language. It is ultimately up to the recipients of mass media to negotiate the meanings of media texts by accepting the encouraged reading, rejecting it, or attaining a balance between one's own critical engagement and the ideologies being propagated through such media. Thus, the advantages afforded by Critical Discourse Analysis make it

apposite as a method that can interrogate popular culture from a critical perspective and aid the researcher in making recommendations based on findings of the study.

However, certain weaknesses inherent to textual analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis need to be carefully and consciously guarded against. First is the need to avoid convenient and bipolar explanations for the communicative phenomenon under investigation. Since this study is concerned with cinematic stereotypes and cultural minorities, the researcher should instead explicate the cultural tensions, threats, and inequities of power indicated by the manner in which the subaltern under consideration is portrayed on film. The second note of caution when undertaking this kind research is to resist the impulse of giving into one's own perspective and values by not looking for patterns in the dataset according to preconceived (and often prejudiced) mental categories.

This brings me to the third (and final) concern related to this study – that of its validity, trustworthiness, and objectivity. Based on Burrell & Morgan's (1979) framework of scholarship, my worldview is that of a critical humanist (subjective-radical change). Therefore, this study is guided by the corresponding set of meta-theoretical assumptions, as outlined by Martin and Nakayama (1999). They argue that critical humanism, like interpretivism, assumes that reality is socially constructed and that human behavior is voluntaristic. However, unlike interpretive researchers, critical humanists posit that even the 'voluntary' nature of human behavior is dictated by ideological superstructures that preclude people from attaining "a more liberated consciousness." Martin and Nakayama (1999) further argue that the study of culture and cultural differences from the critical humanist paradigm is based on the belief that culture is not "benignly socially constructed";

instead it is an arena of continuous struggle where “various communication meanings are contested.”

As a critical-humanist researcher, therefore, one of my most fundamental epistemological assumptions is that the quest for true objectivity is strenuous, if not impossible. I acknowledge that the struggle for attaining the balance between objectivity and subjectivity is an ongoing (and elusive) one. I also understand that my research is self-reflexive – which means that I cannot *completely* abandon my personal evaluations, ideologies, and my own positionality as an Indian woman, during and after the process of analyzing the dataset. Vande Berg, Wenner, & Gronbeck (2004) argue that “cultural criticism ends in judgment” and because of this reason, the researcher is tempted to start with those judgments and work backwards during the process of analysis. Therefore, while I assume that true objectivity is nearly impossible to attain and that I cannot distance myself from my personal viewpoint (that Western mediated discourses *do* represent ethnic minorities in a stereotypical manner), I also am aware that I must resist the proclivity to ‘judge’ or interpret the dataset according to my own ideologies before the process of analysis has been completed.

Lastly, Critical Discourse Analysis is not a research method that seeks to predict, explain, or prove facts about communication phenomena. Rather, it aims at understanding and observing communication trends so that these trends are investigated and critiqued. Given this, an inherent limitation of using Critical Discourse Analysis for this study is that it does not provide any exhaustive or definite answers; instead, it offers insights and recommendations based on argumentation and continuous debate. In so doing, this study is

more representative than comprehensive in its investigation of how Indian women and womanhood is portrayed in recent commercial movies produced in the West.

Research Dataset and Selection Criteria

The research dataset for this study is comprised of five films – *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002, Canada), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004, United States), *The Mistress of Spices* (2005, United States), *Outsourced* (2006, United States), and *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008, United Kingdom). These five films were chosen for this study through case study logic, based on the following specific criteria.

First, all five films are fairly recent productions with release dates between 2002 and 2008. The recent nature of this dataset offers a good opportunity to examine whether *contemporary* Western cinema perpetuates stereotypes about Indian femininity in spite of what is increasingly becoming a culturally pluralistic world. Since this study examined whether contemporary *Western* cinema perpetuates stereotypes about Indian femininity, the research dataset needed to contain movies produced in the West. Having been produced in the US, UK, or Canada, the films included in the research dataset fulfill this second criterion. Third, all five movies contain one or more Indian female characters (either in a leading role or in supporting capacity) being played by a South Asian Indian actress or an actress of South Asian Indian origin. The final criterion for choosing these films is that all of them were fairly successful at the box office, with combined worldwide gross revenues of \$3,86,975,538². On an average, each film did business worth approximately \$77,395,107, not including DVD sales. It may be said with some certainty therefore, that these films resonated with the movie-going audience and earned their endorsement.

Strengths and weaknesses of the dataset and selection method. The films included in the research dataset for this study were chosen because they fulfilled several specific and significant criteria – they are successful, contemporary Western productions featuring one or more Indian female characters either in a leading or supporting role. The method of sampling is evidently purposive, which has its own set of benefits and drawbacks. Vogt (2005) argues that purposive sampling is used by researchers because the characteristic of the research subjects are thought to be more or less representative of the overall population in question. Vogt (2005) cautions that this procedure is usually an “unwise” one since it assumes that the researcher has prior knowledge of what the salient characteristics of the dataset are. Since the selection method is not random, Vogt argues that it might introduce “unknown bias”. Thus, while conclusions about the total population of movies made featuring Indian woman cannot be made with absolute certainty, this selection method does aid in increasing representativeness in cinematic research as is the case here. The selection criteria indicate that the films in the research dataset were *not* chosen through convenience sampling. Rather, they were selected based on predetermined criteria indicating case study logic. Given this, the research dataset is likely to be a reliable and robust indicator of the cinematic commonplaces being used to depict Indian women in Western cinema.

For a study to draw strong conclusions about cinematic conventions related to ethnic minorities, it needs to have a substantial research dataset. This study uses five films as its research dataset and therefore issues of validity and generalizability are crucial to address. While it is being acknowledged that five films are perhaps not enough to draw definite conclusions about Hollywood’s portrayal of Indian women and womanhood, it

does provide preliminary insights for researchers, theorists, practitioners, and audiences into the politicization and contradictions of representing Indian women (or for that matter women from other cultural minorities) on screen.

Data Collection and Analysis

Copies of all five films were obtained from www.amazon.com and www.netflix.com. Additionally, scripts of each film were accessed from websites such as www.imsdb.com, www.rushmoreacademy.com, www.script-o-rama.com, and www.simplyscripts.com, all of which allow users to read movie scripts online at no cost. The analysis was started by reading the movie scripts (or screenplays) and noting the manner in which the Indian female protagonists were described. Use of adjectives, epithets, and imagery were recorded in this initial analysis. Once the process of reading each screenplay and recording relevant data was completed, the researcher watched each film (without its corresponding script), making a note of the conventions in which Indian female characters were depicted on screen. Several other crucial aspects such as dialog, plot, costume, make up, and overall characterization were also observed in this initial stage. In order to integrate the nuances of the script and the screen, the movies were viewed a second time, this time *with* their corresponding transcripts to see how the depiction from the screenplay was played out on screen. At this stage, any incongruities between the script and the screen were noted. This stage was found to be particularly useful in confirming and consolidating the themes that were revealed by preliminary analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis requires, much like Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), that the researcher *not* have pre-determined coding categories at the time of reading or viewing the dataset (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In keeping with this, open coding

was used and recurrent themes, dialog, and characterization used for portraying Indian women were recorded without interpreting their political or representational significance. At this stage, research notes helped identify the most relevant and pronounced screening conventions used for depicting Indian characters on screen. These emergent categories are presented in Chapter 4 and illustrated with specific examples from the dataset.

Implications of collecting data through Critical Discourse Analysis. Like any other research method, Critical Discourse Analysis affords the researcher particular advantages but also has its own set of disadvantages. Since the data in this study was collected through Critical Discourse Analysis, it did not reveal what is termed as “hard data” because Critical Discourse Analysis is always contingent upon subjective interpretation. As a result, the trustworthiness (or reliability) of the findings revealed by this study is determined by the logic and rigor of the researcher’s arguments. Since even the most cogent of arguments are subject to criticism and counter-arguments, it is essential that the quality of exposition be nuanced. Studies that have used Critical Discourse Analysis in the past have not only been authoritative, but have also had practical applications in the realm of communication and media. This gives us enough reason to believe that the results of this study would reveal significant contemporary trends and lead to useful and practical recommendations pertaining to representation of minority characters on celluloid.

Summary

This chapter was presented in four parts. In part one, Critical Discourse Analysis and Qualitative Textual Analysis were identified as the overall methodological approaches that will be used to answer the research questions posed in this study. The rationale behind choosing these methods was discussed and their aptness for this study was also assessed.

Part two of this chapter detailed the general strengths and weaknesses associated with methodological approaches being used for this study. The third part of the chapter elaborated upon the research dataset, its merits and demerits, and the sampling criteria used for arriving at the research dataset. In part four, the specific procedure for collecting and analyzing data was outlined. The implications of collecting and analyzing data through Critical Discourse Analysis were also presented in this section and a projected timeline was offered.

Chapter Four

Analysis

Introduction

This chapter is organized in two sections. The first section offers production-related information as well as an overview of each film included in the dataset. This would help in familiarizing the reader with the films under investigation as well as in contextualizing the results of the analysis and the discussion that follows this chapter. In the second section, each film in the dataset is analyzed with the help of Critical Discourse Analysis and qualitative textual analysis in order to come up with the major themes and trends that were used to depict Indian women. To accomplish this, the overall plot or story development of each film, the characterization of the Indian female character(s), and the dialogs spoken by or to them were analyzed. These themes were then clustered and distilled into several macro-level categories which are to be seen as the screen conventions used in the dataset to construct the identity of Indian women on celluloid and to thereby construct dominant ideologies that seek to exoticize non-White women and their femininity. These themes are presented in the next chapter for a detailed discussion informed by the theories of Orientalism, Critical Race Theory, and the social construction of reality.

Brief Overview of the Films

This study analyzes five contemporary films in its attempt to investigate how Indian women and womanhood are portrayed in mainstream Western cinema. They are: *Bollywood/Hollywood*, *Bride and Prejudice*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *Outsourced*, and *Slumdog Millionaire*.

Bollywood/Hollywood. A Canadian venture by Different Tree Same Wood

Productions, *Bollywood/Hollywood* is a 2002 movie written and directed by Deepa Mehta (an Indian-born Canadian movie director) and distributed primarily by Magnolia Pictures. Most of Mehta's films revolve around serious social issues such as homosexuality (*Fire*, 1996), the partition of India (*1947: Earth*, 1998), child marriage/widow remarriage (*Water*, 2005), and domestic violence (*Heaven on Earth*, 2008). Publicized as light-hearted comedy dealing with Indian values, traditions, and the country's culture of song and dance, *Bollywood/Hollywood* was therefore a departure for Mehta as a director in many ways.

Bollywood/Hollywood is set in Toronto, Canada and centers around the character of Rahul Seth (played by Rahul Khanna) – a young and successful businessman of Indian origin who espouses 'Western' values. Early on in the film, Rahul's long-time (Caucasian) girlfriend, Kimberly (played by Jessica Paré), dies in an accident. At the same time, his traditional Indian family insists that he get married (or at least engaged) to a "good Hindu girl" before his pregnant sister's imminent wedding³. Still grieving from Kimberly's death and not wanting to upset his family by disobeying them, Rahul hires Sue, a local escort (played by Lisa Ray – a Canadian actress of Indian origin) whom he meets in a bar and believes to be Spanish. When she tells him that she loves Bollywood movies, songs, and melodrama, Rahul asks her to pretend to be his betrothed during his sister's wedding. In the run up to the wedding, Rahul and Sue become friends although their personalities as well as their socio-economic background are quite different. On the one hand, Sue is an impulsive, audacious girl who has a zest for life and believes in spontaneity. Rahul, on the other hand, is a strong and responsible man who does not believe in displaying his emotions. While Sue's candor and passion for life softens Rahul and reveals a sensitive

man, his strength of character and astuteness inspires her to reassess and renegotiate her strained relationship with her parents.

Amidst the revelry and merriment of the wedding and many complications due to Sue's make-believe role as Rahul's fiancée, the two become romantically involved. Rahul learns that Sue is an Indian woman (her name is short for Sunita) and that her relationship with her parents had soured because they wanted to 'arrange' her marriage to a man she found repulsive. Later, Rahul is told by an intoxicated guest at a bachelor party that Sue is not only an escort but also a prostitute. Rahul is angered by this and confronts Sue, who is hurt by Rahul's credulity and leaves him. Eventually, he confesses the truth about his relationship with Sue to his family. After days of indecision and emotional torment, he (with a little bit of encouragement from his Shakespeare-quoting grandmother) apologizes to Sue and also asks her to marry him. Sue turns him down initially but eventually relents.

Bride and Prejudice. Loosely based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) is written by Paul Mayeda Berges, produced by Pathé Pictures International, and distributed primarily by Miramax Films. The plot of the movie is based on the characters and events in Austen's classic. The matronly and aggressive Mrs. Bakshi is constantly on the lookout for suitable (wealthy and influential) husbands for her four young daughters – Jaya, Lalita, Maya, and Lakhi. She is therefore elated when the London-based Bingley family sends her a proposal for their son, Balraj (played by Naveen Andrews) to marry Jaya. Balraj arrives in Amritsar, India with his American friend William Darcy (played by Martin Henderson) and immediately takes a liking to Jaya. The main plot of the film revolves around the character of Jaya's sister, Lalita (played by Aishwarya Rai Bachchan) and Darcy, Balraj's American friend. Jaya and Balraj

travel to Goa to get to know each better and are accompanied by Lalita and Darcy. Lalita's first impression of Darcy is unfavorable as she thinks of him as condescending and arrogant when he speaks incredulously about the concept of arranged marriages. She also thinks he is a hypocrite when she learns that his mother was intent on making him marry the girl of her choice. When she becomes aware that Darcy plans to invest in a beach resort in Goa, Lalita calls him an "imperialist". She tells him that the real India exists outside of the resorts and that he is promoting a way for foreigners "to go to India without having to deal with Indians", to which Darcy says: "Remind me to put that in the brochures."

During her stay in Goa, Lalita meets a charming young man by the name of Johnny Wickham. She is drawn to Wickham who tells her that he is the son of Darcy's nanny and that Darcy had thrown him out of his house as soon as his (Darcy's) father passed away. Wickham's story intensifies Lalita's dislike of Darcy and she invites Wickham to her parents' house in Amritsar, India. Mrs. Bakshi, however, does not approve of Wickham and would much rather have Lalita marry a US-based businessman named Kohli. However, Kohli ends up getting engaged to Lalita's best friend Chandra (played by Sonali Kulkarni) after being turned down by Lalita on multiple occasions. Things get worse between Lalita and Darcy when Lalita learns that Darcy had persuaded Balraj not to marry her sister, Jaya. Meanwhile, Lalita's youngest sister Lakhi becomes infatuated with Wickham who takes advantage of this and encourages Lakhi to run away from home with him. Amidst this chaos, the Bakshi family travels to California for Kohli and Chandra's wedding. In the US, Lalita and Darcy meet once again, where Darcy expresses his love for Lalita after explaining everything to her – the truth about Wickham; why he told Balraj not to marry Jaya; and why his own mother was obsessed with 'fixing' his own marriage. Lalita is hesitant at first

but overcomes her misgivings about Darcy and realizes that she too is in love with him. The movie ends with Lalita and Darcy getting married along with Jaya and Balraj in a lavish double ceremony.

The Mistress of Spices. *The Mistress of Spices* is a 2005 movie, produced by the UK-based Balle Pictures and distributed by Entertainment Film Distributors. It is directed by Paul Mayeda Berges and written by Gurinder Chadha – the same team that produced the critically-acclaimed 2002 film, *Bend it Like Beckham*.

The Mistress of Spices tells the story of Tilo (played by Aishwarya Rai Bachchan), an Indian immigrant in the US who runs a store in San Francisco called Spice Bazaar. Customers throng her store not just to stock up on Indian spices but also to share their innermost fears, insecurities, and problems with her. Tilo gives her customers spices that seem ordinary but are actually imbued with magical powers that can cure her customers' problems – from a dysfunctional family and an uneventful love life to traumatic memories and loneliness. Through repeated flashbacks, we are told that Tilo was among several children who were trained as Mistresses of Spices by an expert 'First Mother' (played by Zohra Sehgal). The Mistresses of Spices had inherent supernatural abilities (such as Tilo's strong instincts and clairvoyance) and these abilities were honed by the First Mother so the Mistresses could help other people by solving their problems. However, the Mistresses must also follow certain rules or face dire consequences – they must never use the spices to solve their own problems; they must not touch men; and must never leave their spices unattended. One day, a man named Doug (played by Dylan McDermott) meets with an accident outside her store and when people bring him inside Tilo's store, she tends to his injuries. Over the course of the film, she falls in love with him but denies her feelings

keeping the First Mother's warnings in mind. Eventually, however, Tilo ends up breaking all the rules – she leaves her store to go out with Doug and also allows him to touch her. As a result, she is 'punished' by the spices in several ways – the herbs in her store begin to wilt, some spices develop worms, her customers' problems get worse, and Doug's mother dies.

Tilo is certain that her transgressions are causing these problems and ridden with guilt, she decides to go back to India. She announces a final closing sale for her store and asks the spices for permission to spend one night with Doug after which they she would belong to them forever. Tilo spends that night with Doug and leaves him a note telling him that she cannot be with him but would always love him. After coming back to the store, she sets herself and the store on fire. The next morning, Doug arrives at the store looking for Tilo and finds her unconscious in a pile of rubble. The audience then learns that it was not a fire but an earthquake that almost killed Tilo and destroyed her store. The audience then sees the First Mother explaining that since Tilo demonstrated her willingness to deny personal happiness and belong only to the spices, she was now a "true" Mistress of Spices – she could now have everything and the spices would never leave her. The movie ends with Doug offering to rebuild Tilo's store and reuniting with her.

Outsourced. Directed by John Jeffcoat, written by George Wing, and produced by Shadow Catcher Entertainment, *Outsourced* (2006) is an American film distributed by Truly Indie Films. The plot of the movie revolves around that character of Todd Anderson (played by Josh Hamilton) whose job and entire department in a Seattle-based customer service firm is outsourced to India. Initially resentful, Todd eventually agrees to go to India to meet and train his replacement – an Indian man named Puro (played by Asif Basra).

Todd's initial experiences in India leave him bewildered and even distressed. He then calls up his ex-girlfriend from a payphone only to find that she has moved on and is with another man. He becomes upset and (oddly enough) decides to go to a fast-food joint that sells cheeseburgers. At the fast-food restaurant, he meets another American call-center manager who jokes that India stands for "I'll never do it again" but advises him to stop resisting India and 'give in'.

This advice helps Todd negotiate his stay during which he changes his mind about India and Indians as he gets to know the people around him – particularly Puro and a charming and assertive call-center worker named Asha (played by Ayesha Dharker). Asha is initially troubled by Todd's instructions to employees to adopt an American persona when they sell products over the telephone. She often argues with him and on one occasion tells him to learn about India before teaching the employees about America. They are attracted to and intrigued by each other but do nothing to act upon it. Eventually, Todd is so impressed with Asha's work that he promotes her to the position of Assistant Manager and says "Asha can do anything".

Later in the movie, an important shipment from Seattle to the Indian office gets misplaced and Todd and Asha go to recover the package. In the process, they end up sharing a hotel room and become physically intimate. Asha warns him that no one at work must know about their affair. However, they continue to flirt and spend time with each other. One day, Asha tells Todd that she had been engaged to be married since she was four years old and that her parents wanted her to get married soon. When Todd asks Asha if she would tell her future husband about them she says that no one must know about their affair and that their relationship was a "holiday in Goa" – a metaphor for being able to make

one's own decisions and pursue personal happiness before submitting to one's family's expectations. Toward the end of the movie, Asha tells Todd that a girl of humble background such as her "has her whole life mapped out in front of her" and that she has had to fight for all that she has attained so far. She also tells him that she always wanted to believe in herself but it wasn't until she met him that she truly believed in her own abilities. Todd's stay in India finally comes to an end and the movie ends with him returning to Seattle and receiving a phone call from Asha.

Slumdog Millionaire. The winner of eight Academy Awards and extensive critical acclaim, Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) is written by Simon Beaufoy, produced by the UK based Celador Films, and distributed mainly by Fox Searchlight Pictures and Warner Brothers Pictures.

The plot of *Slumdog Millionaire* revolves around the character of Jamal Malik (played by Dev Patel) who is on the verge of winning Rs. 20,000,000 (\$400,000) on the Indian version of the American quiz show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. As he answers each question, the movie flashes back to Jamal's early years and his relationship with his childhood sweetheart, Latika (played by Frieda Pinto). While the film addresses several social issues such as poverty, communal riots, and gang-based crimes, the mainstay of the film is the relationship between Jamal, his elder brother Salim, and Latika. They first meet as children and are 'recruited' by a Mumbai gangster named Maman who lures slum-children with the promise of food and then trains them to become singing-beggars. Jamal and his brother escape Maman's camp but Latika, who Jamal cares for deeply, gets left behind. Years later, Jamal comes back to Mumbai looking for Latika and finds that she is being trained by Maman to be an entertainer/prostitute whose virginity is likely to fetch

him high prices. Eventually, Jamal's older brother Salim propositions Latika for sex even though he knows of his younger brothers' feelings towards her. This leads to a fight between the two brothers. Latika subsequently asks Jamal to leave and the audience is given the impression that she chose to sleep with Salim so that he would not harm Jamal.

Several years later, Jamal is shown to be earning a living serving tea in a call center. He renews contact with Salim who is now the right-hand man of a powerful gangster called Javed (played by Mahesh Manjrekar). Jamal eventually finds out that Latika lives in Javed's house and he sneaks in pretending to be a cook. The two have an emotional reunion but Jamal realizes that Latika is Javed's mistress and sees that Latika is routinely mistreated and abused by Javed. He begs Latika to leave with him but Latika sends him away telling him that his idea is impractical. Over time, they lose touch and Jamal attempts to find Latika by becoming a participant on the Indian version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* because he remembers that Latika is a fan of the show.

The audience then sees Latika, Javed, and Salim (along with many other members of Javed's gang) in a safe house where everyone is watching Jamal's 'miraculous' performance on the show. Salim is shown to be greatly disillusioned by his way of life and Latika seems resigned to her fate of constant abuse and submission. While, everyone else is engrossed in the show, Salim takes Latika aside, gives her his car keys and mobile phone and tells her to escape and go to his brother. He then shoots Javed and is killed by his associates. In the meanwhile, Jamal uses his 'Phone-a-Friend' lifeline to call Salim on his mobile phone (now with Latika). The duo thus reconnects; Salim wins the grand prize of Rs. 20,000,000 by guessing the right answer; and the movie ends with Jamal and Latika embracing each other at a train station.

Analysis

Based on the narrative of each film as outline above, this section presents the most dominant themes (clustered here into categories) that emerged from repeated viewings of the films, close observation of the female protagonists' characterization, and the way in which dialog or language is used to signify the characterizations. These themes were frequently used to construct Indian femininity in the films included in the dataset and each of them is now illustrated with specific examples and manifestations from the dataset.

Major Thematic Categories

Based on the dataset for this study, each of the following macro-level were identified as the most common screen conventions utilized by Western filmmakers to (re)present and communicate what it means to be an Indian woman. It is pertinent to mention here that these thematic categories are not to be understood as watertight compartments into which the representations of Indian women (and the ideologies that dictate such representations) can be seamlessly ordered. Instead, these categories are meant to serve as dominant motifs that emerged during the process of analysis. These screen conventions, far from being mutually exclusive, are conflated and work in tandem to essentialize what the Western world today understands about Indian women based on mediated representations. What follows now is a detailed description of each of the seven thematic categories, corroborated by illustrative examples from the dataset.

Marriage and domesticity. The most dominant and repetitive theme that arose from an analysis of each narrative was its emphasis on marriage, procreation, and the search for the elusive 'Mr. Right'. The themes of marriage and marital prospects were echoed continually throughout the dataset. All the female protagonists, with the exception

of Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire*, are under enormous pressure from their families to get married and “settle down”. Emphasis in these movies is not merely on marriage but on *arranged marriages* where the female protagonists are expected to marry the man their parents have chosen for them.

For instance, in *Outsourced*, Asha has been engaged since she was four years old to a man named Ashok because their families had “known each other for generations.” According to Asha, Ashok had a good job and was “very polite” – virtues that according to her are enough for her to fall in love with him *after* their wedding. The following dialog occurred when Asha revealed to Todd that her parents had chosen for her the man she was to marry:

Todd: I just can’t believe that someone as strong, smart, and opinionated as you would go for an arranged marriage.

Asha: I’ll learn to love him.

Todd: But what about your right to choose for yourself?

Asha (indignant): My parents met each other on their wedding day. They love each other.

Todd: To me that’s crazy.

Asha: Some people would say America’s 50% divorce rate is crazy.

It is interesting here that Asha, in spite of the fact that she is depicted as a confident and self-assertive woman, *justifies* her parents’ decision based on her own parents’ arranged marriage and by implying that the divorce rate in the US was alarming because Americans choose their own partners and fall in love *before* they decide to get married.

It would not be wrong to say that the entire premise of *Bride and Prejudice* is based on arranged marriages. Mrs. Bakshi is so preoccupied with getting her daughters married to rich men that she is insensitive to whether or not her daughters would be happy with the men she chooses for them. Dejected at the turn of events in her household (Lalita turning down Kohli, Balraj severing contact with Jaya, and Lakhi running away with Wickham), Mrs. Bakshi comments: "I will end up living in this rotten house, full of spinsters, with no grandchildren." Surprisingly, even her daughters, with the occasional exception of Lalita, echo her sentiments:

Lalita Bakshi: Mother thinks that any single man with big bucks is shopping for a wife.

Jaya Bakshi: I'm embarrassed to say, but I hope he is.

Lalita Bakshi: What? Shopping or loaded?

Jaya Bakshi: Well...both!

Mrs. Bakshi's youngest daughter, Lakhi is depicted as hungry for male attention and overtly sexual – she has no qualms about seducing Wickham although she knows that her sister, Lalita is drawn to him. Indian women in *Bride and Prejudice* were characterized as docile and 'homely' – a feature that rendered them attractive to suitors such as Kohli who claims that although the US has afforded him every material comfort, he came to India to look for a bride because Indian girls in the US are "too outspoken, career-oriented, and some have even turned into...lesbians."

The theme of arranged marriage is also evident in *Bollywood/Hollywood* where the reason for Sue's discordant relationship with her parents (particularly her conservative father) is that she refused to marry the man (a wrestler named Killer Khalsa who asks her

whether her favorite subject was cooking or home science) her parents chose for her. She even suggests to Rahul at one point in the movie that she chose to become an escort just to spite her traditional and easily-scandalized parents and to deny their expectations of her of getting married and having children. Sue's parents often try to convince her to marry men of their choice by saying things such as, "He can give you everything you've ever wanted. He even has a BMW!" and when she refuses to get married to men of her parents' choice, tensions within her family escalate.

Another variation of the attention paid to marriage is seen in *The Mistress of Spices*. In this film, Tilo loses her parents as a young girl and the First Mother acts as her guardian throughout the film. As such, she is under no pressure to get married but two of her customers (an elderly Indian gentleman and a young Indian cab-driver) insist every time they visit her store that she marry a "nice Indian man" lest she is harmed by the dangerous and unsafe world outside. The cab-driver, Haroun, is suspicious of Doug and his intentions because he is White and tells Tilo to stay away from him. He tells her: "You should be careful who you let in the store after dark, with all kinds of people roaming around this neighborhood...Ask this fellow (Doug) to leave while I am still here." The elderly gentleman (who Tilo refers to as *Dadaji*) comes to Tilo's store because he needs a 'cure' for his granddaughter Geeta (played by Padma Lakshmi) who is born and raised in the US and (according to him) is thoroughly westernized. He is upset with the kind of clothes she wears, her working in an office till late at night with men, and also with the fact that her male colleagues drop her home at night. He is further scandalized when Geeta decides to marry a Latino man and is certain that the sari-clad traditional Tilo would never fall prey to the 'wicked' ways of the West and that she would marry a traditional Indian man.

While Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire* is not under pressure to get married, even the rendering of her character is such that she is confined to Javed's house where she exists to fulfill his needs and obey his commands.

The theme of arranged marriages was therefore pervasive in the movies under consideration. Even when the female protagonist chooses her own partner, the approval of parents is shown as paramount in movies such as *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Bride and Prejudice*, failing which the future of the relationship is rendered questionable.

Self-sacrifice. The second dominant theme that arose from the process of analysis was that the Indian female protagonist sacrifices (or is *expected* to sacrifice) her personal happiness, fulfillment, or independence in order to protect her family's reputation, maintain her own dignity, or to simply make her family happy. Under this motif, the female protagonist was the one whose actions brought shame or pride to the family and was therefore emblematic of the family's social and relational standing with relatives and neighbors.

For instance, in *Bollywood/Hollywood*, Sue's father continually chides her for not getting married and fears 'losing face' to his friends and family back home even though he plans to never return to India. He does not know that Sue makes a living as an escort and expects her to return home early in the evening, to wear traditional Indian clothes, and even to act bashful in front of prospective grooms although she is a strong, independent girl. At one point he is so enraged with Sue's lifestyle that he even threatens to "beat the hell" out of her and asks her to toe his line lest she is harmed by "the corrupt West". When a prospective groom visits Sue's family to meet her, Sue is forced to cover her head, act demure, and avoid eye contact⁴ with the man. Thus, although Sue is raised in Canada, she is

expected to sacrifice her personal liberties and principles in order to maintain domestic harmony and her own sanity. Her mother later asks her to stop defying them and tells her: "Men rebel. Women don't".

In *Outsourced*, Asha tells Todd that her family has mapped out her entire life for her and that when she chose to go to college and then work in a call center, her parents were displeased and apprehensive about "what people will say" and they were worried that her education and job might hamper her marriage prospects. She willingly enters into an affair with Todd but suggests that their relationship has no future because she would marry Ashok in keeping with her parents' wishes. Although the movie ends with Todd returning to the US and receiving a phone call from Asha, the viewer does not really know whether they have decided to continue their relationship or just remain friends after Asha has (possibly) married Ashok in keeping with what her parents wanted.

The theme of sacrifice also makes itself apparent in *The Mistress of Spices* where Tilo is forbidden by the First Mother on multiple occasions from using her spices for her personal fulfillment or happiness. She is also not allowed touch men or step outside her spice store. Tilo is therefore meant to solve her customers' problems and satisfy their needs through her magical spices but must endure personal agony in silence and also sacrifice her relationship with Doug lest her spices abandon her or harm her customers. When Tilo begins to break the First Mother's rules and her spices worsen her customers' problems, the First Mother appears to Tilo in a vision and tells her: "In your dreams of love, you have roused the spices' hate...To all whom a mistress loves as she should not, chaos will come." When Tilo says: "I want the spices *and* him (Doug)", the First Mother warns her: "If a mistress fails her duty, fire is the end. The spices will decide." As a result, when Tilo

reconciles to her fate and decides to break up with Doug, she says: “Thank you spices, for reminding me of my duty to others...My customers need me; don’t punish them.” Again, before setting her store on fire toward the end of the film, Tilo tells her spices: “Love cannot be wrong, but I will leave him if it means losing you. I give my life to you.” It is Tilo’s sacrifice that ultimately ‘allows’ her to reunite with Doug in the end. *The First Mother* allows Tilo her relationship with Doug only because she has “shown her devotion to the spices” through her willingness to leave him and set fire to the store and herself.

In *Slumdog Millionaire* as well, we see Latika sacrifice her budding relationship with Jamal when she willingly offers herself to Salim in order to keep Jamal safe. Later, as Javed’s mistress, she is again shown in a violent and abusive situation with no signs of personal happiness or satisfaction. Even when Jamal asks her to run away with him, she sends him away, seemingly resigned to her fate.

In *Bride and Prejudice* too, after Lalita’s feelings for Darcy begin to change, she is prompt to sever all ties with him after she learns that he had told Balraj not to marry Jaya – an action that caused much heartbreak to Jaya and anguish to her parents. Thus, even as her opinion about Darcy was becoming favorable, Lalita’s actions are dictated by what would please her family.

The female protagonists in the five movies are therefore depicted with remarkable consistency to be willing to give up (or stop pursuing) personal gratification through romantic relationships if it meant bringing disrepute or anguish to loved ones and/or family members. Such characterization of the Indian female characters as extremely family-oriented and self-sacrificial indicated a similar sub-theme that was reiterated in the dataset – the fact that the Indian female characters had fairly low expectations from their

prospective partners. For instance, in *Outsourced*, Asha is content that Ashok (her future husband) has a good job and is “polite” to her. She also claims that although she does not love him, she will *learn* to do so once they get married. For Chandra, Lalita’s best friend in *Bride and Prejudice*, it is enough that Kohli is a “good” man. Apprehensive that Lalita will judge her for agreeing to marry the obnoxious Kohli, she says: “I know what you’re thinking, but he is a good man. I am not romantic like you Lalita. I didn’t want to take the chance in case my prince never came. I know he’s not for you, but he’s kind and adores me...” Similarly, Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire* never proactively attempts to escape her tormentors (Maman and Javed). Instead, she seems strangely reconciled to her fate of being mistreated and abused. Apart from being portrayed as family-oriented and self-sacrificing, Indian female characters seem very passive, content with the *status quo*, and willing to compromise with situations and people even if they are unhappy as a result. Further, Indian women were also shown as undemanding of their future partners and fairly docile. A good illustration of this is offered by the plot development of *Bollywood/Hollywood* where the educated, confident, and vivacious Sue chooses to be with Rahul despite repeated objectionable comments on his part. The following dialog takes place when Rahul attempts to coach Sue about how to behave in front of his family:

Rahul: We don’t shake hands; we greet by folding them like so and saying ‘*namaste*’.

And don’t look directly at anyone. Always lower your eyes.

Sue: Which century is this?

Rahul: We’re caught in a time-warp here. We’re trying to preserve what we can of the home country.

Sue: Retro, wouldn’t you say?

Rahul: I don't question tradition.

Sue: Only fools don't question tradition

Rahul: At least I am not for sale.

Sue: Go to hell. Get someone else to do your dirty work. I'm history.

Sue is understandably offended at Rahul's remark and threatens to leave but is easily pacified when Rahul apologizes to her in a rather perfunctory manner. She does not retaliate in any way except for saying "That insult will cost you another grand." At another point in the film, the following dialog occurs when Rahul and Sue are spending time getting to know each other:

Rahul: How did you get into this...line of work?

Sue: To become an escort was the quickest way of getting back at *Papaji*.

Rahul: An escort? Does that mean you're not a.....

Sue: Yeah, I'm not a whore. Does that make me more acceptable? Am I suddenly less offensive to you?

Rahul: Sue, I can't help having middle-class morals. It's an ingrained thing.

Convinced that Sue is not a prostitute as he initially thought he was, Rahul goes on to kiss her – a kiss that Sue reciprocates. Later, Rahul again believes a drunken guest at a party who says Sue is a prostitute although she denies it and when Sue leaves him, he attempts to pacify her by saying that it does not matter to him whether she is an "escort or a goddess". Since Sue and Rahul are reunited at the end of the movie, one may conclude that Sue falls in love with a man who repeatedly insults her and is suspicious of her because of her chosen profession in spite of the fact that he was the one who solicited her services and needed her help.

Family-oriented self-sacrifice, docility, and a remarkable ability to compromise with people and/or situations were therefore significant tropes used to depict Indian women in the movies under consideration in this study. It is with the help of these themes that the Indian female characters were rendered largely passive – they do not transgress their family’s ‘honor’ and if/when they do, they are careful to conceal it before eventually doing what is best for the family.

Entertainment and servility. Several scholars such as Ono & Pham (2008) and Lee (1999) have argued that traditionally, Asian women have been depicted in Hollywood films as geisha-girls who exist for the sole purpose of providing entertainment and pleasure to men (usually White). Vestiges of this practice seem to be prevalent in four movies within the dataset: *Bollywood/Hollywood*, *Bride and Prejudice*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, and *The Mistress of Spices*. Although it may be argued this practice was necessitated by requirements of plot, story development, or comic relief, it must be more than coincidence that the third theme – that of the exotic entertainer who provides visual-erotic pleasure, is prevalent even in contemporary Western films, albeit in mutated forms that are hard to detect or problematize.

In *Bollywood/Hollywood*, despite being a student of anthropology at the University of Toronto, Sue decides to become an escort to spite her parents (as she reveals to Rahul). Given that her parents never find out that she is an escort during the course of the movie, it is interesting that Sue is presented specifically as one. In other words, while the filmmaker could have shown Sue working *any* job that required late nights (because she wanted to defy her parents), their decision to portray her as someone who makes money by accompanying men to social events, is interesting. When Sue meets Rahul in a nightclub for

the first time, and he asks her what she does for a living, she tells him: “I can be whoever you want me to be.” She is light-skinned, speaks accented English as well as several other languages, and Rahul is somehow certain that she is Spanish. Thus, Sue is not merely an escort who is for hire – she is an escort whose fluid identity and ability to transfigure herself makes her intriguing to Rahul who hires her because he thinks she could “pass off as East Indian.” This is in spite of his certainty that Sue *cannot* be Indian – a conclusion that he draws in the following fashion:

Sue: Why can't I be East Indian?

Rahul: Indian girls don't do *this*.

Sue: And what's “this”?

Rahul: You know, (whispering) pick up guys.

Sue: Really?

Rahul: Really. It's just not in our culture.

When Sue meets Rahul's family, he repeatedly asks her to simply smile, greet his family members, and look traditional for his family to approve of his 'fiancée' and for his sister's wedding to take place as planned. When Sue makes a genuine effort to establish a relationship and rapport with Rahul's mother and grandmother, Rahul is strangely annoyed with Sue's behavior and with the fact that she seems genuinely fond of his family. At one point in the film, when Sue comments on how good Rahul looked in formalwear, the following dialog takes place:

Rahul: Save it for the other suckers. You don't fool me.

Sue: Hey! Listen, you're the one that paid me to act like the love of your life.

Rahul: Yes, but not to go overboard and certainly not to ingratiate yourself to my family...I don't want any fallout of your stay here, Sue. Just be pleasant and that's it...I care very deeply about my family and you are hired specifically to ensure that Twinkle's wedding goes smoothly and that's it.

In *Bride and Prejudice*, when Darcy, Kohli, Balraj, and his sister visit the Bakshi's for dinner, Maya (Lalita's sister) performs a 'Cobra dance' to entertain the guests. Maya dresses in harem pants and wears excessive, garish jewelry (including a golden snake headgear). Her face is heavily made up as she sways seductively to music associated with the practice of snake charming in India. As she performs her sexually-charged dance steps (she writhes on the floor like a snake and pretends to 'bite'), the looks on her audience's faces (with the exception of her mother, Mrs. Bakshi) range from apprehension and bemusement to ridicule and embarrassment. While some of the guests evidently try to suppress their laughter, Darcy appears simultaneously startled and mystified by the spectacle of Maya's dance.

Along similar lines, Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire* is also depicted as an exotic entertainer. After Jamal and Salim escape from Maman's begging racket, the audience learns that Maman has "other plans" for Latika. The audience learns later that these plans including grooming Latika to become a sex slave or an entertainer-prostitute. When we first see Latika being trained in an Indian dance form by her tutor, she is wearing an ornate, midriff-baring outfit and abundant jewelry on her head, waist, feet, and arms. She sways seductively to Indian music and we see her in what is suggested to be a red-light district in Mumbai where she is known as 'Cherry'. When Jamal and Salim find Cherry/Latika, Salim remarks: "She's sexy!" and Maman later refers to her as his "prize" and rhetorically asks:

“Have you *any* idea how much this little virgin is worth?” After Jamal and Salim rescue Latika from Maman, the audience then witnesses the obvious sexual intonations of the scene where Latika asks Jamal to leave and then goes back into a hotel room with Salim. As the movie proceeds, we see Latika as Javed’s mistress/captive where she is required to entertain Javed, cook for him, endure his abuse, and be submissive.

Lastly, in *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo ‘entertains’ her customers through her stories about India, the magical abilities of her spices, and the ways in which she has been able to cure her customers’ ailments or problems through her spices and foresight. Tilo’s position as an entertainer, albeit more covert than Maya’s, Latika’s, or Sue’s, is evident nonetheless in the manner that her customers seem enthralled by her stories – sometimes even visiting her store just to listen to her tales (as is the case with Haroun and the elderly customer she refers to as *Dadaji*).

Virginal purity. The theme of sexual purity or innocence underlying a covert sexuality is the fourth significant motif that recurred in the dataset. As per this treatment, the Indian women in these films (with the exception of *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Outsourced*) were depicted as immaculate, virtuous, and untouched by sexual desire.

The Indian female protagonist in *Bride and Prejudice* (Lalita) and *Mistress of Spices* (Tilo) exist in a state of prelapsarian innocence, uncontaminated by carnal knowledge. Tilo is not allowed to touch men or step outside of her own store. Her overall characterization, initial awkwardness with Doug, as well as camerawork that focuses on her wide-eyed wonderment suggest that she is sexually pure and that she has not transgressed any ‘moral’ boundaries (symbolized by her spice store). Tilo’s chastity is also suggested to the audience by using Geeta’s (outgoing, Westernized, and rebellious) character as a foil. It is only when

she is attracted to Doug that she is sexually awakened (albeit after much self-denial) and is made to eventually regret her decision.

Lalita's characterization in *Bride and Prejudice* also suggests that she, unlike her youngest sister, Lakhi, is sexually naïve. In fact, no incident in the film indicates that Lalita has been in a relationship or has experimented with sex. Even her meetings with Wickham, to whom she is attracted, are strangely asexual. Later, as she becomes romantically involved with Darcy, their intimacy is restricted to an occasional kiss amidst Bollywood-style song and dance.

Although Sue in *Bollywood/Hollywood* is an escort by profession, she is incredibly defensive about her chastity. Although she has no reason to explain herself to Rahul, she repeatedly clarifies to him that she is just an escort and not a prostitute. While overt references to a sexual relationship between Sue and Rahul are absent in the film, she is not depicted as sexually pristine or awkward as are Lalita and Tilo. It is noteworthy to mention here, however, that it is only when Rahul is certain that Sue is not a prostitute that he asks her marry him. Even when he initially hires Sue to pretend to be his fiancée, he strictly instructs her not to indulge in any public display of affection in front of his family. He says: "All you have to do is smile. And if anyone talks to you in Hindi, smile some more."

In *Outsourced*, the audience is privy to the sexual rendezvous between Todd and Asha. However, Asha is extremely wary of being seen in public with Todd and clearly tells him to interact with her in public "like a businessperson". At one point in the movie, when Todd and Asha are spending time alone, he reaches out to her but Asha tells him: "Don't touch me. Not in public. People might talk, no?" After they make love for the first time, she warns him: "No one must know about this. We stayed in different rooms in different hotels,

and nothing happened.” Eventually, when Todd asks Asha if she will divulge their affair to her future husband, she says: “No! No one must know!” Thus, while Asha engages in premarital sex, she feels the need to pretend to be virginal and demure to her future husband who must not know of her ‘indiscretions’.

Another dimension to the virginal portrayal of Indian women in the five movies is the theme of ‘un-solitariness’. In the five films, we rarely see the Indian female character venture out unaccompanied by a man. On the two occasions that Tilo leaves her store, she is escorted by Doug and Haroun. When Jaya and Balraj decide to travel to Goa to get to know each other, Lalita is sent along with them as Jaya’s chaperone. Lalita herself is seldom seen without her family; even in most of the scenes between her and Darcy, Lalita’s friends and/or family can always be seen or heard in the background. Sue in *Bollywood/Hollywood*, although an independent and fearless girl, is always accompanied by Rahul or his chauffeur after she agrees to pretend to be his girlfriend. Even Asha is never seen alone – she is either with Todd or her other male colleagues whenever she ventures out. Lastly, Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire* is not only ‘un-solitary’ but held captive, first by Maman and then by Javed. On the one occasion that she ‘dares’ to meet Jamal at the train station, she is forcibly taken away by Javed’s goons and is scarred by Salim – the man who eventually sets her free.

The fact that the Indian female characters are always accompanied by a male in these films indicates two disparate and antithetical possibilities. First, that their innocence and naïveté need to be protected from the world lest they are attacked, tainted or defiled; and second, that their sexual wantonness needs to be restrained and hence they are always in need of guarding or supervision. Passivity and dependence on men for protection from

harm were themes that were repeatedly found in these films. Tilo, Asha, Lalita, Latika, and Sue are supervised and chaperoned lest they were taken advantage of. Their families are happiest when they are at home or engaging in feminine activities. Indian female characters were also represented as helpless damsels, unable to defend or stand up for themselves and always in need of being rescued by a male on whose agency rests their fates.

The theme of sexual purity is therefore a significant trope along which Indian female characters in these films have been limned. Their prelapsarian existence, however, is ruptured with the arrival of a White or Westernized man who 'contaminates' them with sexual knowledge or by arousing their passions – an interesting response to the traditional cinematic practice of the West where White female characters were shown to be violated and contaminated by men of color (Lee, 1999) who thereby posed a threat to the institutions of marriage and family.

Hypersexuality. The fifth noteworthy phenomenon observed within the dataset is that every movie delineated the Indian female protagonist as an attractive and sexual being whom men find alluring, mysterious, and desirable. Lalita, Latika, Tilo, Asha, and Sue are all portrayed as sensual and voluptuous women whose physical movements, makeup, and costuming accentuate their erotic image. This is especially interesting when seen juxtaposed with the state of virginal innocence that these characters seem to simultaneously exist in. The contradiction here is thus presented by the practice of depicting Indian female characters simultaneously as pure or childlike and yet as sexually knowledgeable or intriguing, in keeping with the Orientalist practice of rendering the racial 'Other' as an ambiguous site that evokes desire as well as loathing.

The trope of sexuality is well established by the plot, dialogs, and characterization executed in each film. While Sue in *Bollywood/Hollywood* is an escort whose job is to look pretty and escort men to social events for a price, Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire* is a dancer turned prostitute turned mistress. Asha (in *Outsourced*) is also depicted as a hypersexual character as she repeatedly initiates sex with Todd, keeps arranging romantic rendezvous for themselves, and even claims to be able to perform complicated sex positions from the Kama Sutra. Tilo, in *The Mistress of Spices*, is also a sexually charged character. Her touch is suggested to be hypnotic and seductive – probably the reason why she is forbidden to touch men. She recoils whenever Doug attempts to touch her, which in turn renders her mysterious and desirable to him. When Tilo seeks permission from the spices to spend one night with Doug, she dresses up in a red see-through sari and a backless blouse, wears an unusual amount of make up, and appears like a vision when Doug sees her. After they make love, the audience sees Doug and Tilo (with henna art on her arm and bare back) wrapped in red satin sheets and lying on a seemingly vast bed of dried red chillies⁵. Tilo’s hypnotic powers are also suggested when Doug arrives at her store after learning that his mother had passed away. Despite the fact that they had just recently met, Doug reveals to Tilo very personal details about his estranged relationship with his mother. Moments later, he is himself amazed at his candor as he seems to emerge out of a spell, and says: “I don’t even know why I dumped all that stuff on you. I’m sorry.” Tilo’s preternatural powers and her ability to concoct cures for the human existence are thus closely knit with her portrayal as a sexualized yet untouchable (and hence elusive) woman who is as consumable as the wares in her store. Again, Lalita in *Bride and Prejudice* is repeatedly seen to be switching between Indian and Western avatars through costume, accent, and characterization, which

demonstrates the fact that she is a modern Indian woman but also allows the film's narrative to project her beauty and sexuality across different cultural modes.

The exotic-ethnic allure of all five protagonists was found to be an integral part of the narrative of each film, with each character operating in an economy of desirability. Overall, since every female protagonist was depicted as unmistakably Indian, their racial marking and the insertion of their Indianness (through henna art, *bindis*, saris, and jewelry) forged an undeniable relationship between their 'innate' sexuality and their race. By implication then, sexualizing the Indian female characters could be seen from a racial perspective where fetishizing the female racial 'Other' signifies her historical and biological placement within society as a colonized and gendered subject. The practice of sexualizing the Indian woman therefore indicates that Western popular culture is not quite ready to release women of color from their cultural iconography that renders them commodifiable and desirable.

Unambitiousness. The sixth thematic category that emerged from the Critical Discourse Analysis of the films is the way in which the Indian women in these movies have been depicted in terms of their careers or job prospects. Among the five films, Asha has a source of income from her job at the call center, while Tilo owns her own spice store. However, Asha suggests that once she marries Ashok, she would likely give up her job to be able to take care of her husband, home, and family. Even Tilo, despite the fact that her store is popular with customers, seems to run it more like a hobby or a service than as a business. We never see her accepting money for the spices she sells or engaging in any sort of 'money-talk' with her customers, suggesting that the store and its wares exist as services to people for which she does not expect payment because the First Mother has ordered her

to spend her life helping others. Sue, as an escort, however, seems to make a fair amount of money but she indicates that she chose to become an escort just to defy her parents and it is not something she takes seriously. The other protagonists such as Lalita and Latika have no 'job' to speak of. Although Lalita tells Kohli that she likes to work, the audience never sees her engaging in any actual work. In fact, every female character in *Bride and Prejudice* seems preoccupied with getting married, shopping, festivities, and song and dance. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, Latika is repeatedly abused and has obviously not had any formal education or training. However, when Jamal finds Latika at Javed's house, the following dialog ensues:

Jamal: Come away with me.

Latika: Away, where? And live on what?

Jamal: Love. Come away with me, now.

Latika refuses to leave with Jamal and asks him to forget about her. When Jamal responds by saying that he loves her, she asks, "So what?" The message that the reader takes away from this scene is that Latika would rather remain in an abusive 'relationship' with Javed than face an uncertain future by escaping with Jamal. While requirements of the plot and story development might have necessitated this maneuver, there could have been other ways to justify Latika's decision of not escaping rather than suggest that she remains with Javed in order to be financially secure at the expense of her happiness or self-respect.

Related to the trope of not 'allowing' the female Indian characters to work real jobs or have a steady source of self-earned income is the antithetical dimension of their partners' representations – the male protagonist in each film is wealthy, belongs to the upper echelons of society, and hence symbolizes the material comfort with which the West

is associated. Thus, Darcy is the scion of a family that owns a luxurious hotel chain in the US; Doug is a well-off architect who socializes with powerful people; Todd (in spite of losing his job) rejects a lucrative job offer, indicating financial security; Rahul is a jet setting dotcom millionaire in Canada who travels only in limousines and lives in a palatial house; and Jamal, despite his impoverished childhood and lack of education, wins Rs. 20,000,000 on the quiz show which would obviously change his life forever. Because most of the Indian female characters in the five films seem not to work jobs or have career-related ambitions, and because their partners are portrayed as affluent, one may argue that these women never seek to rise in class or social standing by themselves per se. Instead, by choosing wealthy men (or wealthy White men) as partners, they indicate that they desire the material wealth and comfort of the West – a comfort that can only be granted to them only through their partners.

The (White) male gaze. The seventh and final theme that emerged as a result of analyzing the dataset was the pairing of a White or Westernized man with the Indian female protagonist. In *Bollywood/Hollywood*, the male protagonist, Rahul Seth is an Indian man who is fairly westernized because his family migrated to Canada when he was a child. He is fair-complexioned, speaks English with an American accent (as does the actor in real life), and is individualistic in his beliefs and principles. In *Bride and Prejudice*, the male protagonist is played by Martin Henderson, a White actor from New Zealand. Similarly, Josh Hamilton who plays the role of Todd Anderson in *Outsourced* is a White American actor. The same is the case with *The Mistress of Spices* as well, where Dylan McDermott (a White American actor) is the protagonist. In each of these movies therefore, the Indian female character is the subject of a White male's desires and fantasies. Interestingly, in all five

films, a specific technique was found to be at work on several occasions where the female protagonist was presented – she was shown as entering the male character’s field of vision through using his point of view. Thus the camera was positioned alongside the male character as it were, thereby giving the audience its perspective.

On most of these occasions, the male protagonist is not shown, thereby implying that the audience is essentially gazing at the Indian female protagonist in these films through Eurocentric male eyes. By organizing the camerawork around the White (or Westernized) male’s point of view, the five movies were found to privilege the male gaze where the audience was invited to share the male protagonist’s gaze *on* the female.

The gaze is also coded so as to structure the spectators’ pleasure of looking in specific ways and to evoke the audience’s visual, emotional, and erotic identification with the male character.

On several occasions in each of these films, the main female characters (Latika, Sue, Lalita, Asha, and Tilo) see themselves not as they are but as a woman being looked at, possessed, and desired. The camera pans the face and/or body of the female actresses as though the lens of the camera was synchronous with the gaze of the male protagonist.

Thus, in *Bollywood/Hollywood*, when Rahul makes Sue try on saris in an attempt to make her look more ‘authentically’ Indian, the camera (and hence Rahul’s eyes) zooms in on Sue at her feet and gradually zooms out to picture her whole body each time she tries on a new sari or wears Indian jewelry. Again, when Rahul takes Sue to meet his family for the first time, he looks at her from head to toe in a scrutinizing manner to ensure that she appears Indian and hence presentable enough. Later, when Rahul’s younger brother sees Sue for the first time, he peers at her from behind a screen and remarks: “She’s hot!” Again,

in *The Mistress of Spices*, each time Doug looks at the sari-clad Tilo, the camera focuses on the bare skin on her neck, back, and mid-riff. He gazes at her longingly and yearns for her every time they share screen space, and when Tilo gets dressed to go out on a date with Doug, the camera (and hence Doug) focuses on Tilo's feet and gradually makes its way up to her face. Again, in *Bride and Prejudice* there are four occasions (Balraj's friend's wedding, the Goa beach scene, Lalita's meeting with Darcy's mother, and her meeting with Darcy's sister) where Darcy is surreptitiously gazing at Lalita from a distance, not wanting to make her aware of his presence or gaze. Effectively then, the viewer too, sees Lalita as Darcy does – as an exotic and alluring spectacle to voyeuristically gaze at and visually consume. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, Latika is repeatedly rendered as a focus of male gaze – first as Cherry when she is trained as a dancer-prostitute and later as Javed's mistress where her role in his palatial mansion is purely decorative. Latika is often viewed from an oblique stance where she is unaware of being gazed at (for example, the scene with Jamal at the railway station and when Salim and Jamal see her dancing for the first time).

Tolson (1996) argues that “the principal forms of erotic looking offered by Hollywood cinema are voyeurism and fetishism.” Within this dataset, we witness a combination of both practices – voyeurism, where the spectator is tantalized by a partial but alluring view of the female, and fetishism, where the female is fully revealed or exhibited. As a result of such discursive construction, the body of the Indian woman in these films is transformed into an object of erotic fascination and curiosity. This media practice is as rampant in films as it is in most other forms of media where women find themselves *looked at*. As Tolson (1996) puts it, “...as this discourse has been

institutionalized, so its genres have proliferated, ranging from fine art, through glamour photography and film, to some ('soft') forms of pornography."

The repeated pairing of a White man with the Indian female characters is significant in various ways. On the surface, this practice seems to hail the acceptability of interracial relationships in mainstream Western cinema. While interracial relationships have been dealt with before in numerous mainstream movies such as *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), *8 Mile* (2002), *The Namesake* (2006), *Guess Who* (2005), *Hairspray* (2007), *Monster's Ball* (2001), *Body of Lies* (2008), and *Hitch* (2005), not many instances come to mind where Indian women have been paired with White actors in commercial Western cinema. Seeing as how the five movies under analysis here have been produced within the past six years, the opening up of the possibility of Indian female characters having productive, functional relationships with men who are culturally different, holds promise in terms of the portrayal and normalization of interracial relationships on screen.

However, this practice is also problematic as is indicated by the 'treatment' meted out to the female protagonist in most of the five movies being analyzed here. The characters of Tilo, Lalita, and Asha ally themselves willingly with the White male hero but they also have to endure hardships and emotional turmoil because of their choice. Tilo regrets her relationship with Doug when her spices go bad and her herbs yield bad results for her customers. Similarly, when Asha and Todd spend time with one another, they risk social exclusion and humiliation. Again, although Lalita is a confident and self-assertive woman, she pays for her relationship with Darcy by becoming somewhat of an outsider in her family. A recurrent theme, which arises here therefore, is that the Indian female

character is consistently chastised for transgressing her boundaries by daring to ally herself with a White or Westernized man.

Summary

This chapter was organized in two parts. In the first part, a brief overview of each film included in the dataset was presented along with production-related information in order to contextualize the findings of this study. In the second part, the plot, dialogs, and characterization of the Indian female character(s) in each film were analyzed in keeping with the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis and qualitative textual analysis. This analysis led to the clustering of seven major thematic categories pertaining to the depiction of Indian women within the dataset. In the next chapter, these seven thematic categories are discussed and recommendations about the representation of ethnic minorities are made.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter is organized in four sections. In the first section, the findings of this study are briefly revisited. This is followed in the second section by an in-depth discussion about the significance and implications of these findings as informed by Orientalism and Critical Race Theory. Based on these implications, recommendations about media production, consumption, and literacy are presented in the third part of this chapter. The fourth and last section outlines the limitations of this study and offers directions for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study was investigated the representation of Indian women in recent mainstream Western cinema and determining whether or not such representations were stereotypical as is the case with most mediated representations of minority populations. The study was based on three premises – a) Orientalist ideologies seek to dominate and define the East through discourse (Said, 1978); b) the media are ideological devices that constructs believable realities for audiences (Gandy, 2001; Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2003); and c) racism is structurally embedded in the *status quo* in order to normalize White (male) privilege (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001) at the expense of minorities. In keeping with these theoretical assumptions and principles, two research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What cinematic stereotypes or conventions are used to represent Indian women in Western cinema?

RQ2: How has the 'ideal' Indian woman been constructed by Western cinema?

Based on a Critical Discourse Analysis and qualitative textual analysis of five recent films produced in the US, UK, and Canada (*Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008; *Outsourced*, 2006; *Bollywood/Hollywood*, 2002; *Bride and Prejudice*, 2004; and *The Mistress of Spices*, 2005), this study found seven thematic categories or tropes upon which the depictions of Indian characters were based. These categories were: a) arranged marriages, b) family and self-sacrifice, c) exotic entertainer, d) virginal purity, e) hypersexuality, f) lack of career prospects or ambition, and g) the (White) male gaze.

These seven cinematic conventions were thus identified as the main stereotypes used to depict Indian women within the five movies that were analyzed. The 'ideal' Indian woman, then, was constructed by these films as extremely obedient, family-oriented, selfless, and unambitious. At the same time, these films indicated that the ideal Indian woman is also *necessarily* exotic (serving to entertain the male gaze) and hypersexual but that they also exist in a state of virginal purity – uncontaminated by sexual knowledge or experience until they are initiated into the realm of sexuality by White masculine agency.

Significance and Implications of the Findings

Through his systematic critique of Western representations of Oriental (presumably Middle Eastern) cultures, Said (1978) presented a well-grounded explanation of the consequences when a dominant culture represents what it does not (or cannot) truly understand. Said (1978) demonstrated how the West re-imagined the East within a dominant paradigm of Otherness, and in doing so, he argued that “it is Europe that articulates the Orient...” Along similar lines, Bhaba (2004) posits that imperialism collates images of racial or ethnic 'Others' in a manner that is not necessarily negative but usually ambivalent or ambiguous. One may infer from Said's and Bhaba's arguments that the

colonial representation of the 'Other' functions in a manner comparable to fetishization – the commodification and appropriation of racial fragments that have “tenuous connections to traditional images and stories...” (Rogers, 2007). When the 'Other' in question is a woman of color, the fetishized fragments of race become overlaid with connotations of sexuality. According to Tolson (1996), mediated images of women are “symbolically transformed, in voyeuristic imagery which excites, and fetishistic imagery in which the threat (to White masculinity), while in view, is contained.” Scholars such as Marubbio (2007) and Spencer (2006) go a step further to argue that this threat to White masculinity increases manifold from non-White femininity, because then sexuality becomes conflated with race (and the concomitant fear of desiring what is taboo or unfamiliar), as indicated by this study.

Bhaba (1983) posits that colonial stereotyping “gives access to an “identity” which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of (racial) difference and disavowal of it.” This leads to the conclusion that the discursive construction of women of color in Western media has been traditionally ambivalent and polymorphous, relying on different stereotypes and formulae depending on larger socio-political contexts in different points of time. This study illustrates such a conclusion in that it found that contemporary Western cinema re-imagines and essentializes Indian women by polarizing their representations and emptying them of psychological complexity. By representing Indian women simultaneously as sexually naïve yet experimentative, hypersexual yet virginal, the films under analysis rendered Indian female characters as ambiguous (neither completely fixed nor continuous) – a familiar strategy that has routinely been used to dominate populations

(illegal immigrants, homosexuals, career women, people of color etc.) perceived to be threatening or dangerous (Ono & Pham, 2008).

As with all stereotypes, the representation of Indian women as preoccupied with marriage, domesticated, hypersexual, virginal, and sacrificial blurs the real lives of these women and the actual issues they face in India as well as abroad. Even if these mediated representations are seen *prima facie* as lighthearted entertainers that are not supposed to be seen as serious cinema, they go a long way in valorizing the 'nature' of Indian women in the popular imagination. Not only is such representation harmful in terms of external perceptions *about* Indian women, it also has the potential of affecting the self-image of Indian women by ignoring the fact that they are increasingly emancipated, well-educated, well-earning, and productive members of society who no longer depend on male agency.

Discursive racialization. Discourse as an inherent constituent of society and social dynamics is complicit in the perpetuation of social inequality against the subaltern (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). One of the ways in which this oppression of the subaltern manifests itself in the media is through a consistent reliance on stereotypes that assume an aura of truth over a period of time and essentialize minorities depending on their group affiliations. The process of subordinating and circumscribing cultural aliens is therefore largely carried out through social (mediated) discourse. The process of discursive racialization can be easily witnessed in the media where racial sentiments are expressed without overt references to racial issues or descriptors, as is the case in the films analyzed in this study. Indeed, as Downing and Husband (2005) argue, visual images and iconography (such as cinema) can "provide the means of cosmetically erasing explicit racist imagery, whilst still effectively transmitting racist messages." Indeed, while the cinematic treatment of Indian women in

these five films was not overtly offensive or objectionable, it does raise several issues pertaining to the contiguity of gendering on the basis of nationality, race, and ethnicity.

Traditional discourse has rendered the East as passive and submissive – to be controlled and civilized by the masculine rationality of the dominant West (Lee, 1999). In the same manner, within these five films, Indian women were characterized as submissive and obedient, only to be gazed at or rescued by (in most cases) a White or Westernized male figure. Thus, the traits that have traditionally been associated with the East (primitive, impractical, emotional, romantic, and spiritual) in Orientalist discourse are also reflected in the characterization of Indian female protagonists (passivity, inscrutability, mystery, and eroticism) as indicated by the movies that study analyzed. Further, just as the East is rendered in Orientalist discourse as simultaneously desirable and ghastly, so are Indian women situated in a terrain where they are exotic, oversexed, pure, content, and consumable at the same time. Being *Asian* and being *female* are therefore positionalities that were found to be difficult to separate within the realm of mediated representations in the Western world.

A stereotype is a form of social control where persistently repetitive images seeks to limit, confine, and oppress a group of people depending on certain defining attributes such as race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. In this study, the portrayal of Indian women was found to be greatly limited, dualistic, and formulaic. Indian women were delineated in these five films in a manner that affiliated them with domesticity and passivity. While their partners were rich, ambitious, and successful, Indian women remained within the confines of the home, bereft of agency (best symbolized by Tilo's spice store) and were seen as additions to their respective partners' repertoire of success and achievement. In spite of

being presented as educated and self-confident, characters such as Sue, Asha, and Lalita seemed largely to serve ornamental purposes within the plot of each film, as summarized by Lalita's observation: "You should be stirring your husband's dinner. Not trouble." Juxtaposed with the trope of domesticity was the practice of representing all five characters as sexually charged and exotic. The deployment of dualisms was thus evident in the films that this study analyzed.

The binaries of Whiteness and masculinity on the one hand, and of non-Whiteness and femininity on the other, hold interesting implications for the representation of women of color in mainstream Western media. The results of this study indicate that polarization and ambiguity were used as instruments in order to stereotype Indian women through Orientalist ideologies. In so doing, this study provides support for Rothenberg's (2007) argument that Whiteness and masculinity occupy positions of privilege and power in dominant discourse through their 'normalcy' and label-free existence (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Any kind of deviance from this normative position (such as non-White femininity) is exoticized and othered in order to dominate and manipulate it. In this study, the process of such othering is largely contingent upon the static essentializing of difference – achieved through the creation of dichotomous stereotypes that render the 'subject' as ambiguous, obscure, and strange, instead of highlighting universality/similarity through complexity or depth.

Racial passing. The films included in the dataset raise several pertinent issues about racial identity, primary among which is the concept of racial passing, as indicated by the casting of the female lead in each of these films. Shohat & Stam (1994) posit that focusing on issues of racial casting in Hollywood is a critical and useful way to interrogate the

politics of representation in mainstream media. With the exception of Asha (played by Ayesha Dharker) in *Outsourced*, all the actresses cast as Indian women in the films under analysis (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Lisa Ray, and Frieda Pinto) are very light-skinned. All three of these actresses also have long, straight hair, aquiline features, and light-colored eyes. Since these features are generally associated with White beauty and femininity, the concept of racial passing merits some attention here. Although these actresses are cast as Indian women, they do not look typically Indian. In fact, to less knowledgeable audiences, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Lisa Ray, and Frieda Pinto could easily 'pass' as White or Western women because their appeal largely lies in being able to portray cosmopolitan subjects able to glide effortlessly from one ethnicity to another, while regularly maintaining an ethnic-exotic appeal.

One may therefore argue that these actresses were cast in these roles as they could be simultaneously be represented as being racially distinctive and yet possessing universal commercial/visual appeal, that potentially allows them to "pass" into the mythic and powerful realm of White femininity. Within the narrative of the films being explored in this study, however, these evidences of Whiteness never indicates these women's (or their characters') acceptance into the Western world. Instead, their features underscore their hybridity, the unusual and exotic combination of racial difference, and highlight their precarious positionality as immigrants in the Western part of the world. Nonetheless, the practice of casting actresses that do not look typically Indian in roles that are steeped in Indian cultural artifacts (such as arranged marriages, virginal purity, and family-oriented sacrifice) indicates a deliberate commercial and cultural investment in the aesthetics of White femininity which orders dominant notions of beauty the world over (Kaw, 2007).

The casting of these actresses also speaks to the problematic privileging of light skin in India and also indicates that the Western media seek to (re)invent an Indian cosmopolitan femininity, as represented by actresses such as Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and then circulate or transfigure such femininity in a transnational context.

The cinematic representation of Indian women as hypersexual beings with preternatural or seductive powers threatens male sexuality and dominance. This threat doubles from characters such as Tilo and Sue because their light-skinned and light-eyed features render them racially ambiguous. Casting Indian actresses whose ethnicities appear ambiguous allow them to be simultaneously racialized and non-racialized. This ambivalence of their racial status is crucial for projecting their Indian screen avatars as the exotic 'Other' who is fascinating but also threatening and must therefore be distanced through binaries. Race, ethnicity, and sexuality are therefore transfused and construed as proof of sexual power, all the while constructing an exoticized object that evokes both *desire for* and *fear of* the racial 'Other', in this case, the Indian woman.

The depiction of Indian women in these five films gauges the levels of sexism and racism embedded within each narrative, regardless of whether or not such embedding was intentional. Indeed, the intent of this study was not to accuse the producers or directors of these films of being sexist or racist. Instead, the fact that the representation of Indian women in the five films was stereotypical indicates that these stereotypes have been inducted into what is 'essentially known' about Indian women – that they are attractive, sexually intriguing and yet virginal, passive, and exotic.

The fact that even filmmakers of Indian descent such as Gurinder Chadha (*Bride and Prejudice*) and Deepa Mehta (*Bollywood/Hollywood*) have bought into these parochial

depictions of Indian women goes to show the insidious nature of ideology and how it is embedded by media such as cinema into the cultural commonsense of a society. Grossberg et al. (2005) argue that ideology “is not a characteristic of texts themselves but of the ways they are located and deployed in society. Insofar as a text, through whatever means, makes a claim about the world that its audience live in – about what is real and possible – then a text is ideological”, as is the case with the films that this study investigated. The implication here therefore, is not that the makers of these films are racist, but that they (along with the audiences who demand and popularize these movies) display an unwillingness to understand the cultural ‘Other’ (perhaps due to low intercultural contact in real life). In turn, this unwillingness leads to essentialized portrayals of ethnic identities that annihilate real lives and real cultures under the facade of authenticity.

Recommendations based on Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the representation of Indian women in recent Western cinema is as problematic as that of any cultural or ethnic minority as has been continually demonstrated by scholars such as Ono & Pham (2008), Willis (1997), and Marubbio (2007). While socially empowered groups need not be unduly concerned about mediated distortions (because they are seen as naturally diverse), derogatory representations of minority populations, in this case, Indian women, become “within the hermeneutics of domination, sorely overcharged with allegorical meaning...” (Shohat & Stam, 1994). This study demonstrated how ideologies, attitudes, and values pertaining to women of color are structurally embedded in Western cinematic discourse in a manner that makes it seem humorous and even satirical. Since there seems to be a demand for films that distance cultural Others and given the ideologically imbued nature of media such as

cinema, it is necessary to consider the ways in which audiences (as media consumers) can learn to interpret and critique the messages disseminated by the media. In keeping with this, this study recommends education in media literacy as a potent tool that can enable audiences to question the media that they consume.

The consumption of everyday culture. In the hyper-informative world we inhabit, the media provide us with so much information to process in such little time that audiences are tricked into believing that they possess all the information they could ever possibly need (Ono & Pham, 2008). Since we depend on the media to tell us about all that is unfamiliar (Wilson et al., 2003), we *think* that we know a great deal about people that we have no direct contact with. This, of course, is a perilous assumption because what the media make available to audiences is often only a part of the complete reality if not an entirely distorted and/or subjective version of it. Equally crucial is the consideration of what the media deliberately excludes or chooses *not* to make available to audiences and why. Unknowingly, audiences of mass media become recipients of ideological propaganda that tells them not what to think, but what to think about. Mass media also tell people that they can acquire what they truly need by buying certain things or behaving in a certain manner. Importantly for this study, ideologically driven mass media also tell people how cultural 'Others' are: what they usually look like, how they behave, and even how to interact with them. We have already seen how mass media's warped images about minority group members constitute very believable realities about these minorities for people who have little or no personal contact with them.

Given this, one may argue that the everyday culture we consume is purposively created by media makers and presented in a certain way so that such a value-laden culture

can be unwittingly consumed by audiences who often fail to realize that most mediated messages are constructed for social, political, and economic purposes. The overload that people receive from the mass media is therefore not always of information, but often of misinformation – a realization that can only come with media literacy. As Trend (2007) argues, “critically minded viewers (must)...continually question and contest what they see.” Without this critical focus, audiences are more likely to consume what passes for cultural commonsense in the media and buy into the ideologies that sponsor the manufacture of such an improvised culture.

Hall (2006) argues that audiences can interpret media texts in a number of ways. They can read a media text and take away, a) the dominant meaning (in keeping with mainstream ideologies; this is the meaning that the producers of the text *intended* for the audience to take away); b) the resistant meaning (dismissive of dominant ideologies; these meanings are understood within oppositional frames); or c) the negotiated meaning where the dominant message is accepted, albeit with some caveats that are indicative of resistance. Since people have the option of choosing what to see and believe, this thesis agrees with Hall’s (2006) contention and recommendation of media literacy. In other words, before audiences decide which reading of a media text they will adopt, they must engage critically with the text in question and attempt to understand the intentions of the media makers in producing that text and presenting it in the manner in which it was presented.

Critical pedagogy. Media literacy is contingent upon the practice of critical pedagogy, defined by Kellner (1995) as the “importance of developing critical and reflexive approaches to the study of mass-mediated culture and communication...” Critical media

literacy falls under the larger framework of critical pedagogy which according to Kellner (1995) informs individuals how society, culture, and media (a form of pedagogy) work in tandem to produce dominant ideologies. The objective of critical media literacy is therefore to counter the pedagogy disseminated by mass media and to equip audiences to resist the manipulations of the media. Critical media literacy is also a vital resource that accommodates new spaces where traditionally oppressed members of society can explore possibilities of empowerment and articulate voices of resistance, as argued by Sholle & Denski (1995). As Allport (1979) has argued, prejudice is an inherent part of the human character and it is only a restructuring of our meaning-making processes and education that can counter our predilection toward being prejudiced. Critical pedagogy is a step in that direction.

Theory and practice of media literacy. The primary challenge in the field of media literacy is the daunting gap between theorizing and practicing. Scholars such as Rhonda Hammer (1995) and Susan Reilly (1995) have argued that while most people don't hesitate to criticize media texts and accuse them of racism or sexism, they often fail to consider their own complicity in the production and consumption of these ideologies. McLaren, Hammer, & Reilly (1995) for instance, argue that people must reflect on their own historical formation and come up with a "new language of analysis" that would expose the ideological nature of mediated content. Essentially then, while the critical analysis of media texts is an intrinsic part of media literacy, its scope must go beyond just that.

An example of such 'going beyond' and attaining a new language of analysis could be understood and validated within the aegis of McPhail's (1991) Complicity Theory that makes three major arguments. First, is the concept of 'complicity' which, according to

McPhail (1996), arises out of the “failure to acknowledge and call into question the essentialist presuppositions of critical discourse grounded in either foundationist or conventionalist justificatory strategies.” Thus, audiences of mass media need to consider their pre-existing conceptions of ‘reality’ and realize their “complicitousness” and collusion in legitimizing their own positions of privilege at the expense of subordinating and oppressing others by means of mediated discourse.

Therefore, the oppression of one community through mediated stereotypes entails the privileging of another. However, stereotypical representations do not only harm the community being stereotyped – they also affect the (privileged) audiences that consume and enjoy those stereotypes. While privilege derived at another’s expense may not seem *harmful* to those enjoying the privilege, it does preclude them, to a certain extent, from having meaningful and functional relationships in the real world with minority group members. The uncritical consumption of mediated stereotypes is perilous also because such a practice encourages audiences to see only how they are different from marginalized group members, instead of focusing on their similarities.

The focus on similarity forms the crux of ‘coherence’ which according to McPhail highlights interconnectedness and commonality in language so that harmonic relationships can be attained (McPhail, 2002). Unlike complicity (which McPhail defines as language that *deemphasizes* commonality), coherence is a discursive attempt at transcending negative difference and critiquing frameworks or meaning-making processes that seek to divide people on the basis of race. Therefore, while ‘complicity’ sees differences as negative and oppositional, ‘coherence’ considers differences as complementary and correlative.

The third primary dimension of Complicity Theory is the concept of implicature which entails empathy for others as well as an intrinsic recognition of the belief that all human beings are connected in some way or the other, that all of us are ‘implicated’ in each others’ lives, and that what impacts one person eventually impacts everyone with or without our knowledge of it (McPhail, 2002). Keeping this in mind, an essential part of critical media literacy or critical pedagogy is for audiences to understand others’ experiences (even as seen in the media) empathically so that they stop seeing the Other as dangerous, unpredictable, exotic, and consumable, and begin to see them as entities similar to ourselves – vulnerable, complex, and emotional. Meaningful race relations within a society can never be realized as long as complicity is the norm.

Since mediated (mis)representations of cultural minorities are predominant conduits of complicity, they can be combated by truer representations – complex, full-bodied, and well-balanced. In the case of this study, for instance, a *true* representation of Indian womanhood or femininity in cinema would be one that was more coherent, humanizing, and one that deployed a wide range of human emotions and experiences to the character, instead of using exaggerations, dualisms, or half-truths. In so doing, race-related discourse can gradually move away from complicity toward coherence through an acknowledgement of one’s own implicature in the Other’s lived realities.

Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Further Research

The present study identifies some instances of the discourses (both visual and linguistic) being used to depict Indian women in Western cinema today, and would hopefully problematize issues pertaining to the representation of non-White femininity in Western media. Therefore, this study can be seen as part of the broader and crucial

(critical) tradition of looking into race relations within commercial mainstream cinema and how these relationships impact White audiences' understanding of an 'Other' that can be both non-White and female. This study is expected to contribute to existing literature on critical-cultural critiques of media as mechanism and media texts as ideological apparatuses that insidiously seek to maintain the hegemonic *status quo*. This study addresses the continual necessity for interrogating the ways in which ideological messages and principles are woven into popular media that are often consumed at 'face-value'.

However, there are certain limitations inherent to this study which can possibly be addressed in future research along similar lines. First, an analysis of a more elaborate and longitudinal sample of films would have probably led to more robust conclusions about the representation of Indian women in Western cinema. Second, while the present analysis offers some insights into how visual images and discursive practices perpetuate stereotypes about Indian women, it neither looks at what challenges and barriers might need to be overcome in realizing a coherent and yet complex Indian female identity, nor did it explore that cultural, social, and political aftermath of such a realization. Future research may consider these rich areas of investigation which will further contribute to the substantial body of literature related to representations of minority populations and the implications of racialized discourse in a 'post-racial' society.

Summary and conclusions

The results of this study indicated that Indian women were depicted in keeping with Orientalist imageries and stereotypes within the five movies chosen for consideration. Specifically, a constellation of seven thematic categories (discursive strategies) – arranged marriages, family and sacrifice, exotic entertainer, hypersexuality, lack of career prospects

or ambition, virginal purity, and the (White) male gaze – were identified as predominant tropes based on which Indian women were characterized. Illustrations were offered in the form of extensive dialogs and plot maneuvers in order to substantiate the cinematic commonplaces and stereotypes used to portray Indian women. The implications of these findings *vis-à-vis* the impact of media on the perceptions about real Indian women were discussed within the framework of Orientalism, Critical Race Theory, and the social construction of reality. Subsequently, media literacy was recommended as a potent tool that could enable audiences to question mediated messages and images before consuming them. Finally, based on the findings of this study, it was argued that the problematic conflation of nationality, race, and sexuality is embodied in the depiction of Indian women in Western cinema in that the connotations (passive, sexual, submissive) of being female, Asian, and of color were found to be transfused, overlapping, and contiguous. With this study, it is hoped that Indian women’s grounding within the discourse of Western media *vis-à-vis* colonial, sexual, and racial ideologies can be better understood, problematized, and redressed.

Notes

1. United States: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2007. Retrieved, September 25, 2009 from http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_DP5&-ds_name=ACS_2007_1YR_G00_&-lang=en&-redoLog=false
2. As reported by www.the-numbers.com and www.imdb.com, individual revenue breakdown for the movies are as follows: *Bollywood/Hollywood* (\$1,491,083), *Bride and Prejudice* (\$22,064,531), *The Mistress of Spices* (\$400,656), *Outsourced* (\$161,593), and *Slumdog Millionaire* (\$362,857,675).
3. In traditional or conservative Indian families, it is often expected one's elder siblings be married before one gets married. Failure to do so usually reflects badly on the family and can hamper one's matrimonial prospects.
4. Traditional behaviors expected from women when meeting prospective suitors, especially in the presence of family elders.
5. In India, some religious groups believe that red chillies (peppers) and garlic have aphrodisiac powers and therefore discourage their consumption. The sexual connotation of Doug and Tilo lying on a bed of dried red chillies is therefore hard to miss.

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