

WHAT'S A KISS: THE UNCHASTE CHASTITY OF BOLLYWOOD

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One reason Bollywood films have such universal appeal is because they're squeaky-clean. –Bob Simon, *60 Minutes*¹

The constant resort to subterfuge has turned into a game of getting the better of the Censor... The results are often obvious to the spectator, who is the recipient of their differences. All this makes our cinema the most truly erotic in the world. –Kobita Sarkar, *You can't please everyone! Film censorship: The inside story*²

Dashing heroes, epic love stories, powerful music, and grandiose sets—all nearly ubiquitous elements of the movies produced by the most prolific film industry in the world: Bollywood. Distributing more than 800 films annually, Bollywood fuels one of one of India's greatest national pastimes, drawing nearly 12 million viewers to the theater every day.³ Posters of Bollywood's most beloved actors sell on the street, alongside pictures of Krishna and Ganesh, two of India's most beloved and widely worshipped Hindu gods.⁴ Film songs are performed at weddings in place of more traditional music.⁵ Film is an indispensable and highly influential aspect of Indian culture.

Bollywood films feature multi-genre plots⁶, and romance almost always figures prominently in storylines. Unlike most western films, however, Bollywood films are devoid of sex scenes—one of the better-known facts to westerners who have scarcely heard of the world's most successful film industry. Kissing appears only rarely, though it is slowly becoming more prevalent. This lack of onscreen sexuality is not startling to Indians. As actress Aishwarya Rai points out, "... It's really a reflection of our culture."⁷ However, this lack of kissing and sex onscreen has led to an assumption in the West that Bollywood's films are unnaturally chaste. Yet, this is far from the truth of the matter. While censorship in India severely limits onscreen physical affection, sexuality is omnipresent and emphasized through innuendo at every opportunity.

It is true that India has strict censorship laws governing the certification and distribution of films within its borders, as well as the foreign films imported,⁸ but this does not preclude sexuality by any means. Filmmakers and censors are in a constant struggle, each testing the limits of the other. Since the first censorship laws were passed in 1918,⁹ producers and directors have made an art of integrating sexuality into scenes without actually including sex. Despite the lack of overt physical sexuality onscreen, Bollywood's films are brimming with sexuality. The sexuality within Bollywood's films is presented in a methodical manner tailored to fit each specific film. Filmmakers often

utilize such aspects as religion, setting, and the inevitably ubiquitous song and dance sequences as media through which sexuality can be displayed.¹⁰

The filmmakers of Bollywood ensure that hemlines are shortened, bodies pushed closer through dance, and the hindrances keeping characters from vocalizing their sexual desires are removed by providing songs. By these means, and the expert handling of relationships and characterization within each specific film, sexuality sits prominently at the forefront of a technically chaste Bollywood, with or without kissing.

Background

Bollywood is a far cry from the film industry from which its name derives, and in more ways than just its lack of sex scenes. Unlike Hollywood, which has a physical location in California in the United States, Bollywood is a categorical term for the commercial blockbusters of India. Most of Bollywood's films are often produced in urban centers such as Mumbai (formerly Bombay).¹¹ The films termed Bollywood all run in the vicinity of three hours in length.¹² Film is a nearly universal form of entertainment in India, being the most affordable pastime by far. However, despite the immense number of films produced every year, only a few succeed. As Bollywood's leading man, Shah Rukh Khan, notes, "Out of the 180 Hindi films that are made, only eight do well... So 172 films are rejected straight away."¹³ This fact may account for some of the over-the-top spectacle so indicative of Bollywood, as filmmakers know that capturing the audience is the key to success.

Sexuality is also a definitive aspect of a film's ultimate success or failure. Oddly enough, onscreen sexuality has not always been taboo in Bollywood's films. Before 1947, kissing was not at all unheard of.¹⁴ Today, however, very few films feature such overt physical affection onscreen. It has become an unspoken rule, although the censors are not above certifying films including kissing, as exhibited by a few Bollywood films as well as the growing number of Indian art films, also known as New Cinema. Art film is a very different form of movie in India, much more akin to the films that Hollywood produces. Art films do not always feature the song and dance sequences that are generally present only in films of the "musical" genre in the western tradition. The filmmakers are also more liberal with such aspects as kissing and violence.¹⁵ Producers of art films must still be cautious of their use of onscreen sexuality, as the same laws of censorship still apply. India's New Cinema is no more exempt from national regulations than Bollywood's commercial films are.

All Indian films are subject to the Cinematograph Code and the Central Board of Film Certification, which ensures that the code is upheld. Film censorship first appeared legally in India in 1918 under the Cinematograph Act, set in place by the ruling British Empire.¹⁶ Today, the 1952 Cinematograph Code serves as the law governing film regulation. It specifically prohibits "relations between the sexes" that "lower the sacredness of the institution of marriage," or "suggest that illicit sexual relations are ordinary incidents of life." "Excessively passionate love scenes" and "indelicate sexual situations" are not allowed either.¹⁷ With such a broad yet subjective realm of content to

which these laws apply, it is little wonder that filmmakers have relied on subtle ways of incorporating sexuality into Bollywood's films.

As a result of the strictures placed upon them by the government, India's filmmakers have found many loopholes to the laws they are bound to follow. Some filmmakers have even, over the years, developed such political connections and influence that they can get a film certified by the censors that would not ordinarily be distributed were it produced by another.¹⁸ However, most filmmakers must expertly work around the Cinematograph Code. Censors may demand anything from the editing of a single shot to the deletion of entire scenes, yet the differing interpretations of the Cinematograph Code by members of the Central Board of Film Certification can cause widespread imbalances in the representation of sexuality across Indian cinema.¹⁹ In the end, while the censors may be more lenient as time passes, basic regulations must be conformed to. Many of the top-grossing films in India are prime examples of the producers' meticulous maneuvering around the censors' scissors.

In each of these films, the filmmakers have carefully dovetailed sexuality with the plots, settings and musical sequences of the film. They appease the censors by keeping overt physical sexuality to a minimum, instead including veiled and coded sexuality in the forms of innuendo and suggestion as it is appropriate to each film. A closer examination of the presence and representation of sexuality in Bollywood's films reveals the integration of sexuality by means that are suitable for each individual film as well as conventional methods found almost universally.

Sexuality in *Rangeela*

Ram Gopal Varma's *Rangeela* (1995), which translates to "Colorful", is a film about a young dancer, Mili (Urmila Matondkar), who dreams of becoming a Bollywood star. She catches the eye of her favorite star, Raj Kamal (Jackie Shroff), and is cast as the heroine in his next film, which is titled *Rangeela* in a brazen demonstration of metatheatricality. This film is one of the few to break the taboo of no kissing, and expertly uses its plot, integrating the movie within the movie, to include sexuality. *Rangeela* is also an apt exhibition of the more traditional forms of cinematic censor subversion, such as the dance sequences and costuming.

As film is ultimately an escape from reality, the stories depicted on the silver screen are a deliberate means of suspending reality. This fact is especially apparent in Bollywood cinema, in which the majority of films have happy endings. Filmmakers have long been aware of the inherent fantasy of film and have learned to use that fact to its fullest advantage, particularly where it comes to the strategic integration of sexuality into that medium.

In *Rangeela*, the filmmakers expertly use the film's plot, which creates a movie within a movie, seamlessly weaving sexuality into *Rangeela*. This occurs most notably when Mili is showing Munna (Aamir Khan), her love interest, around the film studio at which she works. The two predictably break into song and dance. The sequence is filmed

as though the two were part of numerous films of various genres—from a jungle setting with Mili in stereotypically Tarzan-like clothing to a Broadway musical where they wear suspenders and fedora-esque hats, complete with a troupe of backup dancers.

Not only does the sequence allow them to transcend their egos in the film’s “real world” to admit their feelings for one another, it allows them to express their sexual attraction to one another, even breaking the kissing taboo. Yet in this breach of tradition, they still manage to be discreet, despite simultaneously adding a form of overt physical sexuality. Each of the two times Mili and Munna kiss, the camera cuts away only a moment after their lips meet, leaving the details to the imagination. Such is the nature of much sexuality in Bollywood—suggestive, but restrained. The censors have little to complain about, yet the audience is left with the initial image, which its members can contemplate as they wish.

The filmmakers of *Rangeela* also utilize the story’s plot and modern setting to allow the inclusion of particularly revealing costumes and an extended solo dance sequence for Mili, which is possibly the most overtly sexual sequence contained in any of the films discussed here. Costuming is a particularly important facet of the sexuality in *Rangeela*. Mili’s tops are always tight and fairly low-cut. Her wardrobe consists mainly of leotards, hot pants, and short skirts that twirl with the slightest movement. The scenes in which Mili wears her shortest skirts and dresses show a marked increase in the number of low-angle shots, though of course none of these shots is actually from an angle that compromises the actress’s modesty.

However much the filmmakers prove themselves artists in the handling of Mili’s costumes, they demonstrate the true limits of sexuality in *Rangeela* through Mili’s solo dance sequence: a beachside workout in red leotard pants, midriff-baring shirt, and hip scarf. This suggestive element of the movie is included on the basis of necessary characterization and plot development. These aspects of the scene legitimize its presence within the film, making the dance more than mere exhibition. As for characterization, the dance sequence, which lasts for nearly three full minutes, shows Mili’s dedication to her work as a dancer as well as her ability.

As a plot point, this sequence acts as a catalyst for the rest of the film. Raj Kamal, Mili’s favorite actor, happens to pass by and sees her workout, even stopping to sit down and watch her, while she remains oblivious to his presence. Even this aspect of plot augments the sexual nature of the scene. His voyeurism adds another aspect of sexuality to the already heated dance, but it also leads to Raj Kamal selecting Mili to play the heroine in his next movie. The dance, to which the setting of the beach adds its own special element of sensuality, involves a great many close-ups of Mili’s hips and a surprising amount of gyration, interspersed with much leaping and frolicking. Though the scene is sexually enticing, the fact that Mili dances by herself creates a distance between the sexuality of the dance and the act of sex itself, as the two implied members are physically distant. Mili is something to be observed, not a person to interact with. This remoteness of proximity helps to maintain a small pretense of innocence, though one that is quite arguably contrived.

Through two of Bollywood's most dependable means—dance sequences and costuming—*Rangeela* effectively displays a great deal of sexuality. With its own personal twists on sexual content, specifically Mili's extensive solo dance (complete with voyeur) and the filmmakers' audacity to include kissing, *Rangeela* exhibits not just sexuality, but a sexuality that keeps the audience at a distance. From its implications of voyeurism to its use of movies within the film, the characters themselves cannot truly reach one another on a physically sexual level, creating an even greater barrier to the audience. The film is sensual and tantalizing without actually revealing much of anything, which is a quality common to many Bollywood films.

Sexuality in kabhi khushi kabhie gham

Kara Johar's *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), which translates to "Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Tears", is a film concerning the importance of family. The main character, Rahul (Shah Rukh Khan), chooses to marry Anjali (Kajol), whom he loves, instead of the girl his father (Amitabh Bachchan) has chosen for him. This leads to a ten-year estrangement from his family, which Rahul's younger brother, Rohan (Hrithik Roshan), sets out to fix, tracking his elder brother down in London. The setting of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* provides ample room for the filmmakers to take liberties with the film's sexuality. Great Britain's vastly different culture serves as an excuse to add increased sexuality through the exaggeration of western sexuality, particularly in the form of clothing.²⁰

While a modern setting, in and of itself, provides a great deal of freedom for filmmakers wishing to use a liberal amount of sexuality in their films, a foreign setting provides even greater artistic leeway. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, the setting of the film's second half (London) allowed Johar to exercise such freedom, using the cultural differences in order to enhance sexuality. Filmmakers can argue that any sexuality portrayed in films set in foreign countries is only used as a way to promote the greatness of India. This justification is specifically illustrated by the transformation of Anjali's younger sister, Pooja (Kareena Kapoor), who goes from wearing very little in the way of clothing while in London—mimicking the British girls in the film—to dressing in traditional Indian clothing.²¹ The point is not the transformation itself, but rather the use of foreign setting as an excuse for Pooja to dress scantily in the first place.

The conduct and dress of the British girls, who are scarcely shown in much more than mini-skirts and midriff-baring tops, serve as a more-than-convenient tool for the conveyance of sexuality. *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* emphasizes the difference between a true Indian woman and the scantily clad British women, whose number includes those Indian women who have become subsumed by British society like Pooja. When Rohan first arrives in London, he runs into a group of Indian women in the middle of a traditional dance in customary garb. Only a few shots later in the montage, Rohan finds

himself on a college campus. It is difficult to spot a single girl on the campus with her abdomen covered by her shirt. In fact, in the following dance sequence, a whole troupe of cheerleaders, in their predictably barely-there outfits, join the throng, adding to the sexual overtone of the setting.

The film later exhibits a similar case when Rohan follows Pooja to a nightclub. The women are even more impractically dressed than in Rohan's introduction to London, and it is difficult to spot even one person not wearing at least one article of clothing made of vinyl. This use of foreign clothing trends to convey sexuality is not limited to women, however. Rohan's outfit seems to be made entirely of vinyl as well. His shirt is tight and his arms are bare. This costuming choice can perhaps be justified as a way to integrate his character into the London setting, but it also functions as a nod to the expectations of the women in the audience.²²

Pooja's first appearance in the movie's second half is a rather sexy montage, which makes it quite clear that she is no longer the little girl she was ten years previously. The montage is used to clearly show her conversion to a British way of life. The camera focuses on her exposed abdomen, her hands hooking her bra behind her back, and her application of vast quantities of makeup while she shakes her hips to "It's Raining Men" by the Weather Girls. This sequence not only establishes Pooja's new adult character traits, but creates an extremely opportune scene in which to include defensible "character building" dancing by the attractive young actress. So, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, in its turn, explores another aspect of sexuality, as portrayed through its temporal and foreign geographic setting, an aspect unique to this film.

Sexuality in Devdas

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* (2002) recounts a classic tragedy rooted in caste difference.²³ The title character, played by Shah Rukh Khan, is in love with Paro (Aishwarya Rai), his neighbor and childhood sweetheart. The story begins with Devdas's return from a ten-year stay as a student in London. The love between him and Paro is apparent from the film's outset. However, Paro is of a lower caste, and Devdas's family refuses to accept the match. Paro marries a rich widower, and Devdas drowns his sorrows in alcohol, taking up residence with a courtesan, Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit). The presence of a courtesan provides plenty of opportunity to slip sex-related dialogue into the film. However, sexuality of the type most prominent in *Devdas* is found mostly through visual metaphor and religious iconography.

Sometimes, depending upon context, sexuality in Bollywood films comes through in very unique packages, often ones that a western audience would need some knowledge of Indian culture to understand. One very specific method for introducing sexuality to a pointedly chaste situation is religion.²⁴ Allusions to or implementation of the stories of Krishna and Radha often work as vehicles for such sexuality.²⁵ Though the love of Krishna, one of the most important gods in the Hindu religion, and Radha, his consort, and their trysts on the banks of the Yamuna River are an example of complete spiritual

devotion to Lord Krishna, the sexual nature of the tales cannot be denied. Filmmakers use these to introduce a respectable, culturally acceptable form of sexuality.

In *Devdas*, Paro's mother, Sumitra (Kiron Kher), begins a song and dance detailing the first tryst of Krishna and Radha by the Yamuna. This sensual song overlays a scene of Paro and Devdas by a river of their own. Paro's voice takes on the part of Radha in the song. So, this direct comparison of the relationship of Devdas and Paro and the relationship of Krishna and Radha, down to the setting, adds an undeniably sexual overtone to the situation.

Devdas, in its traditional storyline and setting in the early 20th century, employs a great deal of symbolism in conveying sexuality. At the beginning of the previously mentioned dance sequence, Paro steps on a thorn, which she spends a portion of the ensuing song sequence trying unsuccessfully to remove. Devdas continually prevents her from doing so, and he himself removes the thorn from her foot, kissing the bleeding puncture wound: a rather straightforward metaphor for sexual penetration.

In this scene, the setting adds sensuality on its own, a separate element from the overlying song about Krishna and Radha. Earlier in the film, as Devdas and Paro's initial reunion, Devdas says that Paro is "a big girl", and her reply is that "The stream becomes a river in its wish to reach the sea." The comment is a reference to her longing to be with him during his ten years of absence, and this yearning of Paro's turns the rushing river beside them into an extended visual metaphor for the passion Paro and Devdas feel for one another. This is especially apparent in one far shot where the two lie in each other's arms. The two remain motionless, but the camera views them from over the edge of the roaring waterfall, belying the tranquility of their physical forms with the constant torrent of the waterfall, an allusion to the flood of emotion they feel inside.

During the same scene, one of Bollywood's fairly common visual metaphors is employed: the veil.²⁶ In Bollywood cinema, a veil worn by a woman is often a symbol of virginity, and the removing of such a veil by a man suggests the loss of virginity.²⁷ When Paro is first attempting to discourage Devdas's advances, she pulls her translucent veil about her face and shoulders. Devdas proceeds to pull the veil from her and throws it to the ground. Despite the pointed chastity inherent in their relationship, this is a strong metaphor for the sexual desire the two share.

Ultimately, in keeping with the plot-dictated chastity between Paro and Devdas, the sexuality conveyed is often evoked symbolically, even through religion. This use of religion places their love on a higher, purer level and also keeps the film in line with the more traditional values of the film's setting. Again, the individual film's necessities dictate the ways in which sexuality is included.

Common sexuality: lyrics

While filmmakers use the plots, characters, and settings of their films to the best of their abilities in expressing sexuality, there are aspects of Bollywood that change very

little from film to film that are just as easily employed as vehicles for the incorporation of sensuality. Song and dance sequences are found almost ubiquitously in Bollywood, and filmmakers use these built-in suspensions of reality in a variety of ways.²⁸ These pauses in the film's immediate action not only allow the characters more physical contact than they would be allowed within their existences in their films' worlds, but they also provide an opportunity for the characters to say things that they would not normally have the opportunity to within general societal strictures. These two usages greatly complement one another and enhance the level of sexuality in a film.

In *Rangeela*, the first dance sequence between Raj Kamal and Mili is not a mere suspension of reality, nor does it function only within plot as a shoot for their film together. The scene is also a means to include sexuality, containing mildly suggestive lyrics. Raj sings to Mili such lines as, "Distances won't do... Come closer," while pulling Mili physically to him. However, this does not convey the full extent of the film's sexuality. As the film continues, particularly in the sequences between Raj Kamal and Mili, the lyrical suggestiveness becomes unabashed raciness. During their last song together, the two take on an almost animalistic physical stance, circling one another. Raj Kamal sings, "Your fair arms, your body/ They make me so restless/ Your wet lips and your intoxicating eyes/ awaken the desires in me..." These sexual lyrics come as Raj Kamal dips Mili, running his lips over her neck.

In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, the songs follow a similar trend, becoming increasingly overt in their sexual content as the film progresses. During the early song sequence in which Rahul and Anjali proclaim their love for each other—in front of the pyramids at Giza, no less—the lyrics imply a fairly tame, metaphor-based version of sexuality. Rahul sings, "The colors of our souls have melted into one." Anjali replies, "I can't say which of me is you and which of you is me." The song continues, "The hearts of flame have been set afire." The two dance together in the desert throughout the song.

Later, when the younger lovers, Pooja and Rohan, proclaim their love for one another in a London nightclub, the sexuality in their song's lyrics is less subtle. Rohan sings, "This moment of bliss intoxicates me." As Pooja wraps her arms around him, he adds, "I want to hold you tight." The physical contact blatantly stated in his words, while paired with her mirroring actions makes the sexual tension between the two more all the more obvious, and thus the sexuality itself is very pronounced. In both cases, the lyrical connotations are far from prudish.

All of the lyrics in *Devdas* contain a more veiled sexuality than in either *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* or *Rangeela*, due to the nature of the film. During Paro's first song (the title of which translates to "The Longing I Never Let Die") Paro reveals the extent of her love, describing the flame she has kept lit for the ten years of Devdas's absence. She sings, "As this lamp burns, I'm burning in my every pore and my heart." Paro's mother expresses a similar emotion during her song about Radha and Krishna, singing indirectly of Paro and Devdas's desire. She sings, "Thirsting in every breath, searing passion in their hearts." Such overwhelming emotion is an obvious reference to the intensity of the act of sex and belies a sexual attraction which is expressed nowhere else in the film.

Toward the end of the movie, Paro and Chandramukhi sing together in a celebration of their mutual love for Devdas. The title of the song is “Dola Re,” which translates to “The Throb.” Paro sings, “I will give in to the ecstasy of the throb that sways my heart, my soul.” The love of which the women sing obviously transcends the spiritual or emotional. Both long to hold Devdas in their own arms, even though neither can.

Bollywood’s ever-present songs allow for the expression of unspoken desire and easily relate the sexuality implied therein to an audience. However, there are still other common methods by which Bollywood filmmakers express sensual aspects of their films; some that are far more blatant and far less poetic than song lyrics.

Thematic sexuality and dialogue

Sexuality contained within plot or subject matter often appears rather blatantly in Bollywood’s films. In *Rangela*, as little sexuality is inherent in the main storyline, most of the sexuality is displayed in the song and dance sequences. However, there are a few rather suggestive lines included. An unruly crowd member delivers one such line while Mili and Raj Kamal are shooting a scene for their movie. He calls out, “Will you tango with me?” The line is truly made provocative by the shaking of the man’s hips in Mili’s direction. The inappropriate nature of the line is cemented even further by Raj Kamal’s reaction. He physically attacks the man for his rudeness. The point, however, is the presence of such a comment in the film. The connotation of “tango” is overtly sexual, and its use is deliberately highlighted.

In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, naturally present sexuality pertaining to specific couples is marked. When Rohan first moves in with Rahul in London—pretending to be a cousin of one of Pooja’s friends—Rahul protests mightily, because he does not want anyone “looking at” Pooja. Pooja also makes no attempt to hide from Rohan that she finds him attractive. The sexual attraction between Rahul and his wife, Anjali, manifests itself briefly through dialogue. Although the most physical affection outside of dance sequences that makes it onscreen between the two is a kiss on the cheek, Rahul makes the comment at one point that, “[Anjali’s] affection is quite overwhelming.” To which, Anjali replies, “Yes... That’s because you are looking extremely... what do they call it? ‘Sexy.’”²⁹ There is an obvious attempt to bring the physical aspect of these relationships between the characters to the forefront of the film, despite the inability to express it visually through the characters’ real-time physical actions.

While the sexual quality of the relationships is relayed well, the filmmakers of *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* also used specific characters as focal points of sexuality. In addition, the implications of the sexualized setting are integral to the expression of such characters’ inherent sexuality. Pooja is undoubtedly the most overtly sexual character in the film, which stems from the fact that she is the character most infatuated with British culture. Because of this connection, other characters’ reactions to Pooja’s often-outrageous behavior highlight her sexuality all the more. When she descends from her room after her introductory number, her state of attire (a pink, sequined half-shirt and

beige mini-skirt) shocks her brother-in-law. Rahul nearly jumps at the sight of her. Pooja replies to his reaction, saying, “You scared me.” Rahul returns the sentiment and asks where the back of her shirt is. As she leaves, he proceeds to ask Anjali how she could let Pooja out of the house like that. The sexuality is brushed off as a normal state of affairs when Anjali and the maid, Sayeeda (Farida Jalal), tell Rahul to “take a chill pill”. It is obvious, however, that Pooja’s attire is meant to draw as much attention as the exaggerated British accent she employs while speaking English.

Pooja’s overall attitude in London exudes sexuality and changes the entire balance of the film. Only a few minutes later, as she meets her friends in front of the house, Pooja describes herself as P.H.A.T.: “pretty hot and tempting”. When she is attempting to make Rohan jealous by turning her attentions to another man, Robbie, she fiercely grabs him, holding him close to her right in front of Rohan, saying, “You look great.” She deliberately pushes aside the formality that Robbie’s gift of flowers symbolizes and purposefully accentuates her sexual interest in him.

In *Devdas*, attention being drawn to the sexuality of specific characters is unavoidable, and the characters speak with surprising freedom about the sexual activities of others. There is, of course, no explicit reference to the sex act, but the subject cannot be easily mistaken. The character whose sexuality is most openly discussed is Paro. Assumptions about her sexual conduct, though entirely chaste, are voiced many times. The first instance of this is after Paro sneaks to Devdas’s room in order to ask him if he intends to marry her. Devdas’s father (Tiku Talsania) discovers her and proceeds to tell Paro that she and her mother should go to a brothel.

Paro returns home dejected, and Sumitra brings up sexual conduct again, saying to her, “I would not have minded, even if you were a whore for a night.” She makes this comment with the note that Paro ought to have asked permission to go and could very well have disgraced the family with such action. Paro herself expresses her opinion of her sexuality later, long after she has married. She speaks with Devdas about his concerns of maligning her by meeting her alone, saying, “Had we given ourselves a bad name, we might’ve ended up together.” Though she speaks with poise and careful choice of words, she clearly insinuates a sexual aspect of their relationship together, hinting that such inadvisable and unchaste action might have made the two of them happy.

Another unavoidable source of sexuality in *Devdas* is Chandramukhi. Her presence adds a new and glaring form of sexual content. As a courtesan, her occupation alone makes sexuality an integral aspect of not only her character, but also any interaction she has with other characters. Her long relationship with Devdas, though devoid of any touching, demonstrates extremely sexual overtones. In one scene, Chandramukhi and Devdas discuss the fact that Devdas does not allow Chandramukhi to touch him. He says that she must not, because he is like a filled cup, and the reception of any more love would cause him to “overflow” and Chandramukhi to “fall to the ground” with the spilling. Devdas means that Chandramukhi’s love for him would lead her to ruin. Chandramukhi switches the connotation of his observation, replying that, “. . .in the spilling, the wine must’ve been caressed by the chalice.” This comment makes it

blatantly clear that she is indeed physically desirous of him and seeks more than a platonic relationship.

However, the most direct and forceful discussion of sexuality in *Devdas* does not pertain to Paro's or Chandramukhi's conduct. Paro, after befriending Chandramukhi, brings the courtesan to her home for a festival, hiding the knowledge of Chandramukhi's occupation from her family. However, Paro's son-in-law, Kali, unbeknownst to Paro, is a patron of Chandramukhi's and outs her. He proclaims that his revelation to everyone is "stripping without stripping," a suggestive line literally meaning that he has revealed the humiliating truth of Chandramukhi's background. However, Chandramukhi reverses the situation, openly condemning Kali's sexual conduct, speaking specifically about his visits to her abode. Angered by the prejudice against her due to her trade and the lack of chastisement for the men who purchase her company and that of women like her, she describes the homes of courtesans, noting that "the very dens are littered with trophies of the lust of [Kali's] forefathers." This one of the very few instances in which a term directly connected to sex, such as 'lust', is uttered in the film.

From plot-integrated circumstances to the dialogue of film characters, sexuality does cross into the real world of the characters within Bollywood's movies. While the film and dance sequences display the nearest physical equivalents to the act of sex that filmmakers can get past the censors—and one could argue that those scenes are more arousing than the most well shot sex scenes—the characters never truly ignore their sexuality. Characters discuss sex and relate to one another socially based on preconceived notions of the sexual activity of others, and the concepts of honor attached to those actions.

Conclusion

The films of Bollywood are widely known for the lack of kissing and sex scenes, but it is quite clear that Bollywood's films are packed from beginning to end with sexuality, a very real sexuality despite the often fantastical means by which it is conveyed. Those sensual aspects conveyed are enhanced by anticipation and imagination, something that western films could learn a thing or two about. The sexuality in Bollywood's films, veiled and restricted, is in some ways far more erotic than the sexuality in western films. This lack of kissing and sex scenes may be a reflection of Indian culture, but it is more important to note that the sexuality present in Bollywood precludes any amount of true prudishness. There is nothing squeaky-clean about the films of Bollywood; the sexuality just comes in a package unfamiliar to most western audiences.

While sexuality abounds in Bollywood's movies, as it does in those of most any culture, it is important to question why the lack of sex scenes and kissing automatically equals chastity in western minds. The understanding and interpretation of such misleading facts can tell us a great deal about the differing views on the expression of sexuality from culture to culture, because film ultimately reflects the society that creates it. Undoubtedly the use of innuendo over sex scenes speaks volumes about the place of sexuality in Indian society, but the opposing preference of Hollywood is just as revealing.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn is about ourselves. Instead of asking why Bollywood has so little kissing, perhaps we should ask why Hollywood's films have so many sex scenes.

Despite the traditions of Bollywood and its lack of kissing, the fact remains that there is no law prohibiting the use of kissing in film. As Bollywood's films slowly follow the trend of western film industries, it will be worth watching to see how the use of kissing and sex scenes evolves. Will Bollywood lose its mass appeal? How will Indian censorship be affected? The bigger picture is, of course, what does this mean for Indian society's perception of public displays of sexuality?

If Bollywood goes the route of Hollywood, it seems inevitable that it will lose the powerfully unique sexuality it exhibits now. The most sensual aspects of Bollywood's films have arisen from the censorship in place, and if that censorship is overcome, it is unlikely that such imaginative and suggestive sexuality will vanish completely. However, the danger of the appeal of sex scenes' immediate impact overtaking the slow and affecting sexuality of Bollywood's dance sequences seems very real. It is doubtful that dance scenes would ever disappear from Bollywood's films, but the sexuality contained therein would no longer serve the same purpose.

The question of the injustice of a censorship code is not the true issue in concerning sexuality in Bollywood's commercial cinema. Overall, the inclusion of kissing and sex scenes will not necessarily make Bollywood more liberated. In truth, the ability to freely place kissing and sex scenes into a film does not equal artistry at its best. Mass appeal is still an important consideration as well. Perhaps Bollywood's worldwide appeal has something to do with humankind yearning for more anticipation and less instant gratification. From the length of its films to the absence of sex scenes, Bollywood just has more patience than western film industries. Even as Bollywood changes, it continues to move at a snail's pace.

Beyond the world of film, there still lies the fact that society is reflected through its movies. As Indian society changes, Bollywood is slowly evolving, in much the same manner as many other film industries before it. The most important lessons we can learn, then, are indeed about our own societies. The shift in views of sexuality as a publicly displayable part of life in the western world has met a great deal of resistance in India. Instead of asking what is taking India so long to catch up, we could stop for a moment and think about the horrible hurry we are in. The inclusion of sex and kissing within film, or the lack thereof, is not about censorship, it is about cultural differences in the interpretation of sexuality.

¹ Rai, Aishwarya. Interview. *Sixty Minutes*. 2 January 2005.

Aishwarya Rai is one of the most famous actresses in Bollywood and is considered by many to be the most beautiful woman in world.

² Pendakur, Manjunath. *Indian Popular Cinema: Industry, Ideology, and Consciousness*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 2003. p.157

³ Kabir, Nasreen M. *Bollywood: The India Cinema Story*. London: Channel 4 Books, 2001. p.1.

⁴ *Larger than Life: India's Bollywood Film Culture*, DVD. Directed by Helle Ryslinge. 2003, Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2005.

⁵ Kabir, p.180.

⁶ While the Bollywood's plots cover many bases, there are four subdivisions of basic genre that apply to most films: mythologicals, devotionals, socials, and historicals.
Chapman, James. *Cinemas of the World*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2003. p.348.

⁷ Rai.

⁸ Chapman, p.337

⁹ Ramareddi, Padala. *Cinematograph Code*. Hyderabad: Cinematograph Laws Research Institute, 1969. p.17.

¹⁰ Dance in Bollywood is a conflation of many different types of dance, from classical Indian dance to hip-hop. It generally emphasizes pelvic movement and is termed 'filmi dance.'

Kabir, p.193.

¹¹ Chapman, p.336

¹² Kabir, p.23

¹³ Kabir, p.217

Here, "Hindi" refers to the language in which the films are produced. Full-length films are made in over 20 different languages in India. Pendakur, p. 24

¹⁴ Pendakur, p.163

¹⁵ Kabir, p.4

¹⁶ Chapman, p.330

¹⁷ Ramareddi, p.28

¹⁸ Bose, Derek. *Bollywood Uncensored: What You Don't See On Screen and Why*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2005. p.20

Raj Kapoor is one such filmmaker. In his film *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985), he was able to obtain certification despite a scene in which his lead actress's breasts were visible through her water-soaked sari.

¹⁹ Pendakur, p. 74

²⁰ The Cinematograph Code actually forbids the exhibition of the body "indecorously or suggestively clothed." It is also against the Code to show a film that "is likely to arouse disrespect of a foreign country or is liable to be looked upon by a foreign country as derogatory to itself."

Ramareddi, p.28-29

²¹ Character development in Bollywood films often follows traditional guidelines of conduct, and a female character that does not follow those guidelines generally conforms to them by a film's close, especially if she falls in love.

Kabir, p.74

²² Use of costuming to enhance male sexuality is used earlier in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* as well.

During a dance sequence in front of the pyramids at Giza, Rahul's shirts are all see-through, a fact that is later accentuated after he is drenched in water.

²³ *Devdas* is based on a novel by Bengali writer Saratchandra Chatterjee and was first made into a film in 1935. It has been told in the medium of film more than fourteen times, and Bhansali's version is one of the most expensive films to be produced in Bollywood, supposedly costing nearly 500 million rupees (approximately 4.5 million U.S. dollars.)

Chapman, p.329, 346

Geoffroy-Schneiter, Bérénice. *Indian Beauty: Bollywood Style*. Trans. Deke Dusinberre. New York: Assouline Publishing, 2004. p.14

²⁴ Bose, p.67

²⁵ Venkateswaran, T.K. "Radha-Krishna Bhajanas of South India: A Phenomenological, Theological, and Philosophical Study" in *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1966. p.139

²⁶ Bose, p. 70

²⁷ The same metaphor is used twice briefly in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*.

²⁸ The musical sequences in Bollywood films can take up a quarter to a third of a film's total running time.
Chapman, p.347

²⁹ This comment may, however, have another distancing effect. The line is spoken almost entirely in Hindi, but the word 'sexy' is pointedly in English. This covertly denotes the concept of sexiness as something foreign to the culture of the characters.