

**Strictly Bollywood? Story, Camera, and Movement in Hindi Film Dance**

by

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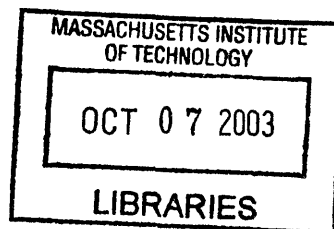
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## **ABSTRACT:**

Film dances, or filmed dance sequences accompanying film songs, are an important part of popular Indian cinema. Over the years, Hindi film dance has evolved from a cinematically simplistic, filmed documentation of performance traditions, to a recognized and increasingly respected dance category emulated in staged performances in India and abroad. Despite their significance, dances in Indian popular films have not been systematically analyzed, and their movement, history, cultural influence and migration remain largely unexplored. The ubiquitous presence and under-theorization of film dances raises many questions about why these dances emerged as key ingredients of film, how their production, dance and cinematic content has evolved over time and, finally, how these dances are received and reinterpreted by audiences outside India. The objective of my investigation here is to set the foundation for an analytical framework for understanding dances in popular Hindi films. Using the relationship between dance sequences in films and their re-staging as Bollywood dances at South Asian cultural shows as a point of departure, I explore the analytical challenges of exploring dances in Hindi films as a first step towards a larger study of the cyclical migration of these dances to be conducted at a later date. My rather formalist approach to Hindi film dances provides a foundation for investigating these dances in way that will allow me to expand on this research in the future. Most importantly, however, I believe my approach to Hindi film dances enables me to explore “Bollywood dance” as a site of reception of Hindi film dances as they move from films to stage.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

“Wiggle your hips, loosen your pelvis and be seductive!” commanded the instructor as “Sharara”, a popular Hindi song, blared out of the speakers. Several students complied, their bodies betraying their hesitation. Most smiled tentatively as they glanced at other students. I was a visitor in a crowded Bollywood dance class at the Body-Works in London in May 2003. While several of the mostly female students were of South Asian origin, most were clearly not. Their interest was clearly apparent in the students’ faces as they bravely attempted gestures, steps and expressions foreign to their movement vocabulary. Though I had been studying Hindi film dances for quite some time and had encountered dance classes in other geographic locations, I was once again struck by how contagious and apparently accessible the Bollywood dancing seemed to be. The movements being taught at this established London dance school were very similar to what I had experienced and seen in Boston, New York or Bombay<sup>1</sup> over the last three years.

My visits to these classes were based on my desire for understanding dances as they exist in popular Hindi films. Early in my exploration I was struck by the apparent ambiguity that surrounds the term “Bollywood dance”. Classes tend to focus on dance content featured in recent or well-known Hindi blockbusters. Instructors generally make sure they

maintain a mix of what they perceive as feminine and masculine movements to suit the interests of students in their classes, so that seductive hip swings may be followed by directed kicks. Through selective choreography, instructors build on perceived conventions of the ways in which characters in Bollywood films should move. Choreographed movements for men tend to be more direct and angular; women's movements are more contained, flirtatious and use gestures that openly reference Indian dance techniques like Bharat Natyam and Kathak. In a Bollywood dance class run by Honey Kalaria in the United Kingdom, men were even told that they did not have to swing their hips as much if they did not feel comfortable doing so.

Bollywood classes have sprung up in cities like London, Boston, Sydney and New York in response to enthusiasm expressed by Indian and non-Indian audiences to learn movements they may have seen in films. This popularity of Hindi film dance is further evidenced in talent competitions that promise fame to successful contestants. Andrew Lloyd Webber's West End musical *Bombay Dreams* has brought Indian film dance firmly into the spotlight in London<sup>2</sup>. In the United States, staged versions of Hindi (and to a lesser extent other Indian) film dances dominate South Asian and Indian cultural shows where these dances become opportunities for the performance of diasporic cultural identities. (Mukhi 2001, Marr Maira 2002) In India, cultural activists like Rustom Bharucha have lamented the inability of indigenous performance traditions to resist domination by popular Hindi film. (Bharucha 2001) The proliferation of Indian film

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<sup>1</sup> In New York City, Arya Entertainment runs Bollywood dance classes with great success. Honey Kalaria's dance school in London. In Bombay (Mumbai), Shiamak Davar's Dance school conducts regular classes and workshops to meet the dancing aspirations of the young and old.

dance through classes, informal performances and professional productions provides a powerful testimony to the current popularity of Hindi film dance while simultaneously suggesting that Hindi film dance represents a rather novel site of 'reception'.

Despite their significance, dances in Indian popular films have not been systematically analyzed, and their content, history, cultural influence and migration remain largely unexplored. The ubiquitous presence and under-theorization of film dances raise questions about why these dances emerged as key ingredients of film, how their production, choreography and cinematic content relate to film narratives and, finally, how these dances are received and reinterpreted by audiences outside India. Specifically, the cyclical migration of film dance from a medium influenced by existing performance traditions to a medium which influences performed expressions of "Indianness" that raises questions about the relationship between the film dances as song visualizations, their reception by audiences and reinterpretation in performed venues.

These and other questions ran through my head while I tried to keep up with Srijana, my Bollywood dance instructor in London, as she demonstrated a new movement with stretched arms at the sides of the body and hands in "alapadma" (a codified hand gesture). "This is a classical Bharat Natyam step", she explained. My seventy-two year old Brahmin Bharat Natyam teacher in Chennai would have cringed at that comment. In the next four beats we were onto a "folk turn" with a beat accented through the right hip and arms to the sides, wrists whirling, the phrase finished off with a hip-hop head jerk to

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<sup>2</sup> Based on its successful London debut, plans are currently underway to stage *Bombay Dreams* on Broadway in New York City in April 2004.

the right. So this was “Bollywood dance”? As I left the class and remnants of the movements we learned in the class still vibrated through my body, I could not resist the question: What is “Bollywood dance”? Over the last few years, “Bollywood dance” has become a term used by film professionals, amateur performers, and audiences to describe dances choreographed to film songs. Though 70 years of film production in India, Bollywood dance evolved into a recognizable, increasingly respected dance category. Bollywood dance classes and tours are a frequent occurrence in the urban centers in India, where these classes coexist with classical dance classes, underscoring the status of Bollywood dance as a distinct style. It is important to recognize, however, that the proliferation of Bollywood dance as a respected category is most prominent outside India where its study and performance has become a means of expression of Indian identity. This function of “Bollywood dance” is inseparably linked to what Vijay Mishra identifies as a nostalgic relationship between Hindi films and nostalgia for geographically dislocated Indians. (Mishra 2001)

The question of what Bollywood dance is, however, remains debated in both movement and text. In classes, Bollywood dance varies in terms of quality and style of dance movement from song to song, from instructor to instructor and choreographer to choreographer. “Silsila Yeh Chaahat Ka” (*Devdas* 2002) may be taught through an explicit connection to “classical” dance while “Sharara” (*Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai* 2002) mixes references to several Indian and “western” dance styles. While costume choices, deployment of facial expressions, gestures (as interpretations of a song’s lyrics), and movements like the “jhatkas and matkas” (that “emphasi[ze]...pelvic movement”)

(Kabir 2001, 189), wrist whirls, hand gestures and turns all set to film music could be identified as essential ingredients of “Bollywood dance”, this definition only begins to skim the surface of what constitutes film dance. Generally speaking “Bollywood Dance” refers to dances choreographed to Hindi films songs which make up approximately one third out of the more than 800 films produced in India every year. (Nandy 1995) Popular films produced by language-specific regional cinemas include song and dances that often retain a degree of regional specificity. For example, Tamil cinema draws on local Bharat Natyam Traditions. Malayalam language films from Kerala based films may draw on Mohiniattam choreography and Kalaripayat for inspiration. While it is important to recognize the similarities shared by these dance traditions, it is also necessary to acknowledge the definitional slippage underlying the colloquial usage of the term “Bollywood Dance”. For the sake of clarity, I limit the term “Bollywood dance” to a description of choreography inspired by Hindi films. This includes combinations taught in dance classes and performed on stages. I use “Hindi film dance” to refer to song and dance sequences contained in the films themselves.

While the existence of classes and stage performance points to the popularity of “Bollywood dance”, it is also important to recognize that many of these performances draw on dances in films for inspiration. Implicitly the adaptation of Hindi film dances from film to stage involves historical referencing of dance movements from other, sometimes older, films combined with other traditions. This referencing of past dances creates a legacy of inter-textual referencing, with the dance class referencing the stage, which in turn references the film, and thereby references underlying performance



traditions. In this way, “Bollywood dance” represents a form of reception of Hindi film dances as they exist in films. As a consequence, part of the search for a definition of “Bollywood dance” and its enduring popularity, lies within the dance sequences contained within the films themselves.

I believe an investigation of “Bollywood dance” should involve a comparative analysis between dances as they exist in films and their reincarnation into performed dances. For example, staged performances of “Bollywood dances” at cultural shows usually focus on group movements and, unlike dances in Hindi films, are rarely fronted by a lead dancer. The consequence is a shift of focus from protagonists to communities. While an exploration of the film dances themselves will not answer all questions regarding staged versions of the dances, it does provide a useful point of departure for exploring how dance content and meaning is altered as film dance moves from film to become a performance of cultural identity.

Speaking about the process of choreographing film dances, Hindi film choreographer Farah Khan<sup>3</sup> explains: “Usually the first step... the situation is given to me: why the song is coming in the movie, where it’s coming and who is doing it.” (Farah Khan 2003) Her comments raise many questions regarding my investigation of Hindi film dance. How did the intricacies, mechanics and narrative considerations, in short the craft of film choreography, as Farah Khan described them, relate to the Bollywood dance as a taught dance technique? For Farah Khan, film dances were to a degree integrated into the

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<sup>3</sup> Farah Khan is a choreographer who has choreographed dances in many films including: Dil Se (1993), Kaho Na Pyaar Hai (2000).

structure, character development, plot progression and general conceptions of narrative flow in Hindi film dance. For example, the film *Ram Laxan* (1989) used a song and dance sequence to establish a loving relationship between two brothers. In the film *Dil* (1990) song and dance sequences provide an opportunity for the realization and expression of love between the protagonists. As Farah Khan's description of her work process indicates, exploring the dance as it functions within the film itself is critical to understanding its significance.

Song and dance sequences constitute a part of accepted narrative conventions of popular Hindi cinema also known as "masala" films. This term has been used to describe a "formula of variety entertainment: charming stars, songs, dances, fights, ...spectacle, lavish sets, and big locations, melodrama, humour..." (Bahadur 1995, 110) Selective adaptation or mixing of movement, editing techniques and cinematography in the early years of Hindi film dance demonstrates an ongoing practice that established film dances as ingredients in the "masala" mix "pattern of popular Indian film". (Bahadur 1995, 110)<sup>4</sup>

Nasreen Munni Kabir elaborates on the content of Hindi "masala" films when she states:

Any Bollywood film juggles several genres and themes at the same time. Audiences are used to the sometimes extreme shifts in tone and mood. A violent action scene can quite seamlessly be followed by a dialogue in which a mother tells her son never to be dishonest, and this exchange can

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<sup>4</sup> Content choices respond to shifting expectations and change over time. As Javed Akhtar states: "the song used to be like a scene in a film; now it has turned into some kind of mischievous child sitting on the shoulder of the script." (Talking Films, in Kabir 2001) Pressures for using the songs as a marketing strategy discussed earlier have also influenced the degree to which the songs are integrated into the film narrative.

then be followed by a comic scene led by one of the film's secondary characters.... The multi-genre film was known in the 1970s and 80s as the 'masala film' ....(Kabir 2001, 7)

The pastiche of themes and genre contained in a "masala" film allows the film to appeal to a broad spectrum of emotions and therefore, hopefully, appeal to a large audience.<sup>5</sup> While of the elements of "masala" films could be labeled as "melodrama"<sup>6</sup> (Singer 2001), what's distinctive about "masala" films is often the hyperbolization of the mixing of these elements. As integral elements of the "masala" film, song and dance sequences are crucial ingredients in this narrative pastiche.

For spectators "used to a linear narrative style", the dances may initially "look as if they have no connection to the substance of the film." (Thoraval 2001) Even a preliminary perusal, however, reveals varied, yet distinct, deployment conventions of dance as song visualization in film narratives.

The objective of my investigation here is to set the foundation for an analytical framework for understanding dances in popular Hindi films. Using the relationship between dance sequences in films and their re-staging as Bollywood dances as a point of departure, I explore the analytical challenges of exploring dances in Hindi films as a first step towards a larger study of the cyclical migration of these dances to be conducted at a later date. My investigation begins with a brief historical contextualization of film dance

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<sup>5</sup> Rampant box office failures over the last few years caused a renewed questioning of the "masala" film as a guarantee for success.

<sup>6</sup> For a definition of "melodrama" please see Singer 2001.

in which I highlight political, ideological and socio-personal specificities contained under this term. I establish these considerations as critical for situating film dances. I then shift my attention to an examination of the analytical challenges of analyzing dances in specific films. Using the narrative function of the dance as a point of entry, I break down the content of the dances by attending to gesture; word-movement relations; historically encrusted meanings for various dance movements and the role of the cinematic possibilities accorded by the medium of film. Chapter II situates Hindi film dances in a broader context. Chapter III introduces analytical considerations of analyzing the dances within the films themselves. In Chapter IV, I pursue a close analysis of the “Dola Re Dola” dance that recently received *Filmfare*’s Best Choreography award for the year 2002 to demonstrate how an a close “reading” of a dance can reveal useful insights into their function in the films in which they exist. My focus on this recent film prepares me for a future investigation of song and dance sequences in staged performance.

This investigation is not an exhaustive evaluation but rather an initial exploration of Hindi film dance. My reason for this interpretive, and admittedly subjective, focus for my analyses is based on my interest in the ways in which movement functions within the films themselves. My approach draws extensively on work on popular Hindi film narratives explored by Ravi Vasudevan and Lalitha Gopalan. My focus on a detailed exploration of the narrative function of dances differs from a more historical approach taken by prominent film historians, including VAK Ranga Rao. I believe that a detailed understanding of how dances function in a broader film narrative allows for a more complicated definition of Hindi film dance. My rather formalist approach to Hindi film

dances provides a foundation for investigating these dances in way that will allow me to expand on this research in the future. Most importantly, however, I believe my approach to Hindi film dances enables me to explore “Bollywood dance” as a site of reception of Hindi film dances as they move from films to stage.

## **Chapter II: Hindi Film Dance in Context**

*“We dance at any pretext. We dance at weddings, we dance at Diwali and at Holi. All emotional expressions are shown in the songs. If songs and dances were missing from our movies, I doubt if the audience would enter the cinema hall.” (Saroj Khan in Kabir 2001, 192)*

The above statement, made by choreographer Saroj Khan in an interview with documentary filmmaker Nasreen Munni Kabir, summarizes a common, albeit problematic, perception that dance in Indian films stems from a perceived centrality of dance in Indian expressive culture. While Khan’s indigenizing claim echoes an often-cited justification for the continued popularity of dance in Hindi films, it is important to recognize that though commercial films did absorb and draw on Indian performance traditions, these processes were, and arguably continue to be, subject to regional and national ideological biases and agendas (Chakravorty 1993, Nandy 1995, Prasad 1998). In fact it would be possible to argue that Hindi films, through their conscious adaptation of movement content, exude a homogenizing trend. (Dwyer and Patel 2002) Integral to popular films, song and dance sequences play an important role in these processes and contribute to a construction of a pan-Indian ethos in Hindi films.

While I can neither satisfactorily refute nor substantiate this claim in this chapter, I attempt to complicate the simplified view of dances in Indian films (expressed by Saroj

Khan) by situating them in broader context. I begin with a brief historical overview of early films in which I stress the inherent hybrid content of these film dances. I then locate film dances in the discourse that surrounded the re-construction of “folk” and “classical” dance forms in post-independence India and build on this distinction to argue dance in Hindi films must be read in a broader context that recognizes the roles of history, and ideology in defining choreographic choices.

### *history*

Dance in films, for purposes of this discussion defined as choreographed movement set to musical accompaniment, appeared in India soon after introduction of film technology to India in 1896. The few silent films<sup>7</sup> that have survived of the approximately “1313 silent films produced in India” between 1912 and 1934 (Thoraval 2001, 5) suggest that rhythmically choreographed sequences existed even in those early experiments. It was, however, the introduction of sound to cinema heralded by *Alam Ara* in 1931 and the emergent importance of songs that introduced dance as a means of expression through song visualizations and helped songs become “one of the most pervasive features of Indian culture as a whole.” (Manuel 1993, 40) The advent of playback singing in the 1940s further augmented the development of movement and cinematic arrangements. (Manuel 1993, 48) The gradual evolution of sound recording technologies increased the economic significance of film songs that were often released months before the film. As Peter Manuel explains: “...songs have always been marketed independently as records,

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<sup>7</sup> VAK Ranga Rao estimates that: “in the 13 or so films that exist at the NFIA (only two or three are complete; others are truncated to various degrees), there must be a few [dances]. ...There is one silent example extant in the NFAI from Lankadahan (1917) of Dadasaheb Phalke, which clearly shows that a trick sequence must have employed the technique of music dictated movement...” (Rao1995, 301)

acquiring their own commodity status". (Manuel 1993, 42) Dance played an increasingly important role in marketing the songs<sup>8</sup>.

While the discussion in this chapter focuses mostly on indigenous influences on the historical evolution of Hindi film dance, it is important to acknowledge the influence of Hollywood musicals on Hindi film dance this influence on Hollywood musicals worked on several levels including method of narrative integration and interruption; at times literal adaptation of Hollywood techniques, music, choreography, camera. Several early films further exemplify the myriad of influences and functions that have helped define Indian film dance. Indian dance critic Sunil Kothari elaborates on Uday Shankar's choreographic choices in the film *Kalpana* (1948) With "30 Kathakali dancers and 20 female dancers, Uday Shankar weaved [sic] folk, tribal, classical and other group dances" (Kothari 2001, 3) with film montage, frame superimpositions. Film historian VAK Ranga Rao makes a similar observation about the non Indian influence in the case of Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* when and states that the "Man-Machine sequence from Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) depicting the assembly line" and "Uday Shankar's

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<sup>8</sup> With the advent of television and later cable and satellite, song and dance sequences have played an increasing role in film profit calculations. Film previews aired on channels like ZeeTV, Channel V, MTV and B4U lure potential viewers with selected song visualizations. This proliferation of film song and dances through television is further supported through Hits charts like: Doordarshan's "Superhit Muqabla", Zee's Philips Top Ten, Star Plus's Bakeman's Ooh La La (premiered in 1997), and Santoor Top Ten on Gemini (Juluri 1999). Juluri explains: "...[F]ilm music countdowns...remain a very attractive and safe proposition on the one hand, advertisers feel more confident about these shows, an on the other, production costs are often lower than those for soaps or sitcoms. Film clips are often provided at no cost by the film producers as this provides publicity for the film. Similarly, music videos may also be provided for free by music companies." (Juluri 1999, 75) In short, audio sales and television airtime can make or break a film's financials and film dance has emerged as an increasingly important system of song visualization and with it the increased prestige of dance directors, choreographers, responsible for the movement content.



Labour and Machinery number in Kalpana” are “too close for comfort”. (Rao 1995, 305)

Clearly, the Hollywood musical extended the reach of American popular culture in India.

SS Vasan’s *Chandralekha* (1948) impressed audiences with its spectacular dances. As VAK Ranga Rao observes, the dances in the film, however, were not “faithful” representations of “classical” dance forms. (Rao 1995) Rather they drew on several dance traditions, including: “gypsy numbers”, “[a] Strauss waltz, “Balan Karunai” a “traditional abhinaya [expressive] piece”, “the poikal kudirai folk dance” from Tamilnadu, and movements inspired by Betty Grable’s performance in “Coney Island” (1943) (Rao 1995, 305). This selective deployment of movement techniques and styles even in early films clearly demonstrates the broad spectrum of influences that influenced early film<sup>9</sup>. As VAK Ranga Rao points out, films like “Modhu Bose’s *Ali Baba* (Bengali, 1937), *Court Dancer* (Bengali, Hindi, English, 1941), and B. V. Ramanandam’s *Kacha Devayani* (Telugu 1938) were at least in part inspired by Hollywood musicals of that time”. VAK Ranga Rao further stresses that “even a film like *Shakuntala* (Tamil 1940) directed by an American Ellis R. Dungan deployed Anglo-Indian chorines scantily dressed in the dance of the wood nymphs....” (VAK Rao, 302) From its inception, therefore, Hindi films and the dances contained in them drew on a range of external sources for inspiration.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore these historical non-Indian influences, it is an area that merits further investigation.

<sup>10</sup> More recently “musical television” has had a “profound impact on the growth of Indian cinema”. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998, 17)

Simultaneously, Indian film dance drew on variety of Indian sources and performance traditions. In their discussion of the early influences of Indian popular cinema, Gokulsing and Dissanayake identify several of these influences, that include: “two celebrated epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata”, “Classical Indian Theater”, “Folk Theater” (including the “*Yatra* of Bengal, *Ram Lila* and *Krishna Leela* of Uttar Pradesh” and “*Tamasha* of Maharashtra”), and “Parsi theater of the nineteenth century.” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998, 17) Similarly In their discussion of traditions that influenced Indian film, Gokulsing and Dissanayake observe that the first film Indian film *Raja Harischandra* (1913) was “based on the Ramayana and since then scores of filmmakers have mined this and the Mahabharata for plots and themes” and “films such as *Mother India* (1957), *Awaara* (1951), and *Zanjeer* (1947) are directly traceable to these epics” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998, 17). They further postulate that a close of analysis of Parsi theater with its “lilting songs, bawdy humour... sensationalism and dazzling stagecraft...designed to appeal to a broad mass of people” and Indian popular films would reveal “remarkable similarities in terms of “themes, narratives, ... and styles of presentation.” (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998, 17) These forces influenced Indian film dances and helped establish enduring thematic and structural patterns for popular Hindi films.

Other elements of Indian theater adopted by popular films include extensive use of frontal address (soliloquy), recurring characters based on Hindu mythology, prominence of gesture and exaggeration of facial expression and perhaps most significantly the “idea

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<sup>14</sup> The number of films produced in India between 1930 and 1948 increased steadily as approximately 4,000 full length features were produced during this period.

of drama” as “inseparably linked with song, dance and music” (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1963, 71). The integration of Indian performance traditions into early films was supported by the documented migration of performers and other artists from Indian performance traditions that had fallen into disrepute during British colonial rule.<sup>11</sup>The involvement of acclaimed dancers including Gopi Krishna, Sitara Devi, Lacchu Maharaj, Roshan Kumari, and Uday Shankar’s student Madame Simkie (Rao 1995) in the film industry<sup>12</sup> further linked Hindi film dance to debates and processes surrounding Indian performance in pre and post independence India.

### *Ideological implications*

Songs and dances functioned as non-verbal visualizations that transcended Indian geographic and linguistic divisions and, arguably, helped film evolve into an influential mediator of Indian identity. (Gokulsing and Dissanayake 1998) If we recognize film dances as an integral part of Hindi film as it emerged as a problematic but crucial component in a constructing a pan- Indian identity, then situating their content in a broader political and cultural context becomes crucial. Film dances selectively borrowed from Indian performance traditions as these traditions went through a period of significant reconstruction. The patterns of what got adapted and what did not are, therefore, significant.

Historicizing Hindi film dance in a broader Indian performance context provides a useful reference for meanings associated with specific movements, practitioners, costumes and

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<sup>11</sup> In their historical analyses Anne Marie Gaston (Gaston 1996) and Pallabi Chakarvorty (Chakarvorty 1999) explore the relationship between colonial rule and specific Indian performance traditions.

performance contexts and how these associations changed over time. For example, stances associated with Bharat Natyam could be used to connote artistic achievement and conservative values. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), chorus line dancers dressed in Bharat Natyam costumes execute *adavus* (set abstract movement sequences) as they accompany Raj (Hrithik Roshan) upon his arrival in London to help reaffirm his connection to Indian family values. In the same sequence non-Indian dancers dressed in short dresses in the color of the Indian flag execute several stereotypical Indian dance gestures in unison with the lead male dancer. A full understanding of references of this sequence necessitates an exploration of the roles Bharat Natyam specifically, and dances in general, have played as a symbol of both Indian national and diasporic identity. Subsequently, an examination of the emergent distinction between “classical” and “folk” dance in post-independence India is applicable to understanding the movement content of Hindi film dances.

In her article “Dance in India”, Indian dance scholar Rajika Puri situates the Indian post-colonial focus on distinguishing between “folk” and “classical” dance traditions in the need “to create... a sense of national identity” as a key motivation for the “oversimplified notion of common heritage”. This agenda caused that “looked for similarities in the tremendous diversity of beliefs and practices” in an attempt to present India as “an integral whole”. (Puri 1983, 22) While “[s]trictly speaking, no expressive form is either *desi* [folk] or *margi* [classical] exclusively, each is a particular configuration of *desi* and

*margi* element, these categories have emerged as defining ideologically loaded categories.

*Classical Dance as Refined Art-form:* Reconstruction efforts surrounding Sadir dance (Bharat Natyam) historically practiced by the Devadasis<sup>13</sup>, or temple dancers, in South India greatly influenced the further evolution of other Indian dances striving to be recognized as “classical”. By forging a historically, scripturally substantiated connection between Bharat Natyam and spirituality, Rukmini Devi Arundale and several contemporaries sought to establish Bharat Natyam as a respectable, and therefore worthy of being a representative, practice distinct from other more secular dance forms. As dance historian and theorist Avanti Meduri explains, this “interpretation served cultural historians, art historians, and cultural practitioners such as the Devadasis as all were now able to hail the cultural practices of the ancient nation in the transcendental name of Shiva. Shiva’s name thus purged the artistic practices of the pre-colonial nation of its delegitimate history, and endowed the practices with a new mystique and luminosity.” (Meduri 1996, 185 in Chakravorty 1999)

The rehabilitative processes surrounding the dance form today known as Bharat Natyam, recognized as a “primary ‘classical’” dance by the “Central Sangeet Natak Akademi” soon after India gained its independence (Shah 2000, 19), initiated a process that other dance styles including Kuchipudi, Odissi and, for Hindi film perhaps most significantly, Kathak used to gain institutional status. The process of codification initiated by Bharat

Natyam “set particular standards for incorporating Sanskrit and vernacular works of high literary value, traditional music associated with piety and devotion, introduction of a movement technique and *mudras* (hand gestures) and body positions codified in the *Natyashastra*.” (Shah 2000, 20) Compliance with high standards prescribed in the traditional texts became a prerequisite for a dance form to be accepted and recognized as a “classical” (Shah 2000, 20), and therefore refined, art-form.

This process involved positioning the body not as expressing “sringara” (erotic content) but rather “bhakti” (“devotion to the divine form”). (Coorlawala 1994, 73). In Bharat Natyam terms this meant that “all remotely titillating stuff” was “purified out” of the dances’ content. Dance scholar Uttara Coorlawala explains: “Hip deflections in Bharata Natyam were taboo. Triangles dominated the shapes of the body in movement, punctuated with occasional semicircles... or spirals of the torso...” (Coorlawala 1994, 74) Even Odissi, a dance from indigenous to the state of Orissa, whose basic tribhangi posture “where the head and hip are deflected opposite the hips” stressed that “the movement does not originate in the hip.” (Coorlawala 1994,74) The reinvention of Bharat Natyam set the standards necessary for a dance form to “qualify” as a classical dance form and codified key attributes of what Indian classical dance means. These included: costuming, use of facial expressions, gestural vocabularies, stress on the eyes, rhythmic composition, notions of bhakti (devotion), Hindu themes of compositions, reconceived performance venues, performed desired audiences educated in the expressive and gestural nuances of the dances.

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<sup>13</sup> Anne Marie Gaston defines *devadasis* of South India as “dancers who belonged to the *isai vellala* community...[of] hereditary performing artists... The *devadasi*” and her dance were important adjuncts to

*Folk as Vernacular Testimony:* As members of the Indian intelligentsia rallied to define “classical” dance in the Indian context, “folk” was being similarly defined. Government sponsored folk dance troupes exposed Indians (and foreigners) to the “richness and range” of Indian performance traditions. Indian “folk traditions” were presented as vernacular diverse “testimonies” of communal (social) solidarity. Shah explains:

With the establishment of the National and State Academies, “culture” in India became formally ‘institutionalized’ in the Euro- American sense of the term; unlike the traditional past, the interrelated major disciplines of artistic practice such as dance, drama and music became recognized as separate categories; this division was also furthered by the sub-categories of the ‘classical’, ‘folk’, ‘tribal’ etc. (Shah 2000, 25)

This process of institutionalization established “India’s classical arts” as “a distillation of their highest and best cultured self” and the “folk arts... correspondingly ...as imbued with ‘vitality’, ‘variety’ and ‘indigenous color’”. (Coorlawala 1994, 5) As a later discussion will show, It is this separation of the “folk” from “classical” that has a key influence on the development of Hindi film dance as identifiable dance movements, themes and costumes are adapted strategies for character development. Coorlawala claims, definitions of “classical as opposed to folk, great traditions, and little traditions, and marga and deshi” are helpful in understanding this distinction”. She further explains:

In post-Independent India, dance forms designated as “classical” received private patronage and the support of state cultural institutions. ... This

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both religious and secular occasions.” (Gaston 1996, 15)

perception of a dance form as 'high art' is brought about through repeated performances in theaters in cities, in cultural programs, scholarly research, and re-representation and re-organization of the living tradition.

(Coorlawala 1994, 30)

Complementary to definitions of classical dance, folk dance forms became associated with colorful costumes, group formations, gestures and movements. The signifiers of classical and folk have been selectively adopted in Hindi film dances and helped better position them as a new sort of vernacular part of whose power is precisely its ability to evade and even transgress upon these older classification systems.

### *communicating values in dance*

In the previous section, I demonstrated how movements in popular Indian films exist in a broader historical context. The inherent hybrid movement content in films needs to be recognized as being directly related to culturally and historically specific associations between movement and character and plot development. For example, collaged "classical" and "folk" dance sequences in Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* (1948) become climactic symbols of cultural identity. Similarly, in the film *Guide* (1965), a the performances that establish the success of Rosie, the heroine of the film played by Waheeda Rehman, as a professional dancer reference several Indian dance forms including Kathak, Bharat Natyam, and Manipuri. This choice to cut between several styles rather than focus her mastery in a particular regionally specific dance form attempts to infuse Rosie with a pan Indian identity. The almost obsessive dances performed by Sridevi as Anju the heroine of the film *Chaalbaaz* (1989), a woman



violently abused by her relatives, draws heavily on Bharat Natyam gestures and movements to draw attention to her honorable character and tragic situation. The heroine of *Chaalbaaz* communicates her respectability through her classically inflected dance.

In *Madhumati* (1958), the simplicity and innocence of the heroine of the film, Madhumati (played by the South Indian actress/dancer Vyjayanthimala) are underlined through dancing a folk dance with the other villagers. In *Umrao Jaan* (1981), the heroine's tragedy is communicated through her dancing associated explicitly with Kathak, a dance tradition historically influenced by Islam. Umrao Jaan's artistic achievement as a performer, demonstrated through dance performances showcasing intricate footwork and expressive sequences, is contrasted with her inability to achieve happiness in her private life.

Similarly, the deployment of explicitly non Indian dance movements has reflected shifting gender specific meanings. Sumita Chakravarty points to *Junglee* (1960), starring and featuring dances by Shammi Kapoor, as a film that "signaled the change from the deglamorized heroism of Raj Kapoor's Indianized Chaplin to the more cosmopolitan, rambunctious personality of the sixties hero." (Chakravarty 1993, 205) Dances performed by prototypical vamp characters during the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated the characters' "uncontrolled female lust and wantonness" (Kasbekar 1998, 298) confirmed through "titillating" dances accentuated by revealing costumes, hip rotations, pelvic thrusts, chest undulations and frontal directed seductive expressions. The sexually explicit movements were complemented by habits like smoking, drinking and sexual promiscuity. The

eventual demise of the vamp character paralleled an increased acceptance of sexually explicit dancing for morally respected heroines.

The historical distinction between “classical” as refined, devotional and religious and “folk” as earthly, naïve and secular provides useful guidelines for thinking about movement content of Hindi film dances. Though inherently hybrid, movement choices in Hindi film dances are not arbitrary. Rather they are grounded in historically specific perceptions of dance content. Over the last seventy years, these perceptions have changed significantly. For example, the sexually explicit movements reserved for vamp characters of the 1970s are now acceptable content for heroines. Classical dance gestures once associated with admirable tragedy are today perceived as emblems of Indian cultural identity in the Indian diaspora.

The objective of this chapter was to provide a foundation for thinking about film dance content as a historically specific craft, which is influenced by, and in turn influences, perceived norms of dance practice in India. My brief overview of the historical and ideological background on dance introduced film dance as an inherently hybrid adaptable form. While I recognized the continued influence of Indian performance traditions on film dance, I acknowledged the lasting legacy of Hollywood musicals on film dance content and editing aesthetics. I then drew attention to the several ways in which movement in films is influenced by history, ideology, and perceived social values. The objective of this chapter was to stress of the need recognizing Hindi film dances as context specific, historically grounded movement traditions. In the next chapter, build on

**this contextually based approach to Hindi film dance as I shift my focus an exploration of analytical considerations for analyzing film dances.**

### Chapter III: Analytical Considerations

The previous chapter briefly situated song and dance sequences in popular Hindi films as inherently hybrid forms. While considerations introduced in Chapter II provide a useful contextualization for approaching Hindi film dances, they only begin the process of understanding Hindi film dance. The objective of this chapter is to explore several analytical guidelines for close readings of dances in Hindi films through a case study of the song and dance sequence “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” (What is Behind the Blouse?) (*Khalnayak* 1993).

Analyzing Hindi film dances presents theoretical and methodological challenges that need to be addressed. Film dances need to be explored both in narrative and aesthetic contexts. Though Indian performance traditions influence Hindi film dances, choreographers (historically referred to as dance directors)<sup>14</sup> also engage in ongoing adaptation of non-Indian traditions, including Hollywood musicals and, more recently, MTV production aesthetics. Efforts to trace movement sources in Hindi film dances without considering how movements are adapted and changed risk methodological reductionism. For example, movements reminiscent of those coined by Madonna in “Like a Virgin” video can take on a range of new meanings when executed in an urban Indian

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this discussion I will use the term choreographer to refer to individuals responsible for generating film dance movement content. I do, however, recognize that the people responsible for the dances have historically been “called many things (“dance directors,” “choreographers,” “musical sequence stagers” (Billman 1997, 1). While Larry Billman’s assertion that even under different titles the “work has been basically the same” (Billman 1997, 1), it is important to recognize a different meanings connoted by the terms choreographer and dance directors. Generally speaking in the case of Hollywood musicals, dance directors arranged movements and participated actively in camera choices and postproduction editing. Choreographers were responsible for movement creation. In the Indian popular film context., these terms have been used more or less interchangeably.

nightclub. Depending on the editing and choreographic arrangement they could communicate a heroine's emancipation from constraining norms, or they could be used to raise doubts about her moral status. Similarly, a deflection of the hip added to a Bharat Natyam step can make a character appear more playful rather than conservative.

As film and dance scholars and practitioners like Sherril Dodds (Dodds 2001), Larry Billman (Billman 2002), Evann E. Siebens (Siebens 2002) and Angela McRobbie (McRobbie 1997) have asserted, dances created for the medium of cinema make active use of the techniques associated with this medium to enhance the dance. The grammar of editing can transform the intention of the dance — a close up will compliment subtle expressions of the eyes particularly in a dance of seduction, while a wide shot will highlight the spectacular and perhaps situate a dance number in a lush location. Lighting and costumes are also used to bring to life different aspects of the dance and accentuate the gifts of a particular performer. Building on the hybrid nature of Hindi film dance, my approach to analyzing the selected dances draws on several disciplines. The narrative context of dance remains critical in understanding the motivation for the dance.

I take a two-tiered approach to analyzing the dances selected for this study. First, I situate the dances within the film narrative. I ask, *why* the dance happens, what motivates specific characters to dance and what does the dance achieve in terms of the broader narrative context. My approach to how song and dance sequences function in Hindi film narratives builds on Lalitha Gopalan's proposed system of narrative interruptions.

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Recognizing the insertion of songs and dances as ranging from active narrative integration to spectacular “item numbers” which may feature guest performers who never make a second appearance in the film, I build on Madhava Prasad’s proposed concept of temporary permission to establish the overall function of the dance in Hindi film narrative.

I then shift my focus to understanding the content of the dances by first identifying the role of the star personality in determining the meaning communicated through a dance. I explore music and lyrics, setting and costuming as explicit connectors to the narrative. Once these considerations are addressed, I conduct an interpretive reading of the dance’s movement content. Throughout this chapter, I use a case study of “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” (*Khalnayak* 1993) to build my analytical approach and conclude by linking the filmed version of the dance to its staged performance at the 47<sup>th</sup> Independence Day Parade in New York City to demonstrate how a close textual reading of the Hindi film dance can contribute to investigations of Bollywood dance in staged performance.

*Khalnayak* (1993), a film about a seemingly incorrigible terrorist whose erroneous ways are finally tamed by a brave and morally righteous policewoman, was a “runaway hit” from the day it was released. Crowds flocked to the cinema halls in unprecedented numbers and the music industry “still whispers about the frenzy” created by the song “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” (What is Behind the Blouse?), which went on to win the 1993 *Filmfare* Best Choreography award. In fact, it was this song that was, at least in part, responsible for the film’s momentous success.

The Indian Central Bureau for Film Certification, appalled by the “sexual innuendo and explicit... dance gestures” threatened to block the release of *Khalnayak* until this song was edited out. (Mukhi 2001, 119) The press coverage of the controversy guaranteed attendance when the film was finally released unedited. Significantly, the decision to not censor the film was based on the narrative context in which the song appeared, indicating that why women dance in Hindi popular films is just as important as how they dance. The song was a huge hit and cinema halls were often forced to show the song twice in one film screening.

The song almost immediately became a film song and dance sequence “classic” which continues to be danced and performed by communities in India and abroad. The continued influence of “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” is evidenced by its performance at the 47th Independence Day Parade in New York City in 1995. In this re-staging, the song was performed by a seven-year-old girl who claimed she re-choreographed the song herself. Though Preeti took over many of the original steps, including the “gyrations of her hips”, and “her flirtatious facial expression” contained in the original dance, the potential vulgarity of her performance was consciously constrained by her as yet “sexually ambiguous” body clothed in a more “modest” costume. (Mukhi 2001, 121) In her discussion of the dance, Sunita Mukhi argues that by inserting Bharat Natyam-like movements into the instrumental sequences, Preeti simultaneously identified herself a respectable child of middle class parents living in the United States and distanced herself from possible morally questionable interpretation. I use this migration of “Choli Ke

Peeche Kya Hai?” from a controversial song and dance sequence to a staged testimony of Indian national identity, a particularly compelling case study in support of my approach to close textual reading of dances as integral to an understanding the complex relationship between Hindi film dances and Bollywood dance as performed identity.

Through my analysis, I will demonstrate that Preeti’s performance of “Choli Ke Peeche” is effective precisely *because* knowing spectators use her dance as an inter-textual reference point to the original film song. Their acceptance of such cross-referencing is particularly interesting when we recall that the film version of this song was so controversial that it was almost banned by the authorities. Preeti’s young age and choreographic changes provide only a partial explanation for the song’s continued popularity. In other words, Preeti’s dancing body should be examined in tandem with the original film and its screen bodies. My interpretive analysis of the filmed song and dance sequence further contextualizes Sunita Mukhi’s analysis of Preeti’s performance to argue that explorations of Bollywood dances on stages need to explicitly recognize complex referencing of filmed versions as integral to the migratory processes of dances from Hindi films to stages.

My examination of the “Choli Ke Peeche” film will simultaneously illuminate my approach to analyzing dances and argue that Preeti was able to ‘re-present’ “Choli Ke Peeche” as a respectable performance because the filmed dance in *Khalnayak* allows for this interpretation. The dance sets up the tensions and constraints that allowed Preeti to perform it without compromising her reputation.



Before I move on to examine the specifics of the actual “Choli Ke Peeche” dance sequence, it is important to dissect more closely the changes implemented by Preeti in her re-staging of the song. Her young body allowed her to move in way that may have been questioned on an adult woman. Her conservative costume helped divert attention from the sexually charged lyrics. The insertion of recognizable classical dance movements performed the publicly sanctioned venue helped identify her “as a miniature of Indian culture”. (Mukhi 2001, 122) While these changes may have allowed Preeti to “reposition” her performance to an unknowing audience, she was performing for an audience that was familiar with the original film song sequence. As Mukhi explains: “They [the audience] recall Madhuri’s performance in the fantasy that is the Hindi film as they watch the child... In dancing Choli Ke Peeche, audience and performer acquire glamour and talent of the Hindi film, its star, its multi- layered narratives, and a vernacular Indianness.” (Mukhi 2001, 122)

### ***Hindi film dance and narrative***

My investigation of song and dance sequences begins with exploration of popular Hindi film narratives and the degree to which the sequences are integrated into narrative. For the purposes of this discussion it is important to recognize the variation that exists in the degree to which song and dance sequences are integrated into popular Hindi film narratives. On one end of the narrative integration ‘spectrum’, spectacular “item

numbers” featuring guest performers, provide extra-diegetic narrative release of narrative tension with only a “loosely metaphoric” relationship to the narrative (Niranjana and Dhareshwar 1996, 5). On the other end of this spectrum, dances can be associated with specific characters as integrated narrative expression with an explicit relationship to the main plot<sup>15</sup>. For the purposes of this discussion, I recognize this range of integrative possibilities but focus on exploring dances as “permissive” mechanisms (Prasad 1998). integral narrative and character development My focus on dances as narrative mechanisms provides a useful starting point for a more comprehensive comparative analysis of the dance sequences relationship between dance content, narrative development and flow to be carried out in the future. In addition, tracing how these permissive functions are maintained or altered as the dances migrate from films to provides a useful guideline for understanding the relationship between dances on films and stages.

Rick Altman’s formalist analytical framework for understanding narrative structures in Hollywood musicals provides a useful entry point into understanding Hindi popular film narratives as alternative systems rather than haphazard deviations from a more linear progression of narrative. While specific to his analysis of Hollywood musical narrative structures, Rick Altman<sup>16</sup> problematizes the “traditional approach to narrative” that

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<sup>15</sup> As Tejaswini Niranjana and Vivek Dhareshwar point out in their discussion of Tamil dance sequence “Mukkala Muqabla” (*Kaadalan* 1994) starring South Indian dancer/choreographer Prabhudeva, the “competition of television and MTV as well as the market opened up by them” have intensified the narrative “autonomy” of song and dance sequences vis a vis the rest of the film. (Niranjana and Dhareshwar 1996, 5)

<sup>16</sup> While Rick Altman’s focus on the “dual-focus narrative” is particularly useful for my discussion of Hindi film narratives, it is also important to acknowledge Ben Singer’s work on “melodrama” (Singer 2001), Tom Gunning’s work on the role of spectacle in early films and Jane Feuer’s discussion of “self-reflexivity” in Hollywood narratives (Feuer 2002) in defining this discussion of narrative.

“[identifies] psychological motivation as a necessary and sufficient connector” to move propel the plot, as an analytical entry point into “attempts to analyze the musical”. (Altman 2002, 42) Through his proposal of a distinctive Hollywood musical narrative structure, Altman’s analysis provides a useful starting point for understanding Hindi film narratives. Speaking about the Hollywood musical, Altman argues that, though the musical may “[look] as if it can be properly defined by a linear, psychological model, this impression is created by no more than a veneer,...instead the radically different principles of organization... lie just below the surface.” (Altman 2002, 42) Altman proposes an alternative system, one that recognizes musical narratives as possessing “two centers of power, two sexes, two attitudes two classes, two protagonists” and concludes that “instead of focusing all its interest on a single central character, following the trajectory of her progress, the American film musical has a dual focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values.” (Altman 2002, 42) While Altman’s dual focus narrative applies specifically to Hollywood musicals, his repositioning of Hollywood musicals as following an alternative narrative system raises useful considerations for exploring Hindi film narrative structures.

Like Hollywood musicals, popular Hindi films with elements like song, dance, and comedy, cannot be defined simply as haphazard digressions from an otherwise linear narrative flow. In his investigation of masala films, Ravi Vasudevan (Vasudevan 1995) identifies popular Hindi films as systems that include attractions such as song and dance sequences and comedic subplots. Rather than faulting an apparent disconnect between

dance and the rest of the film, Lalitha Gopalan builds on Vasudevan's hypothesis to argue that songs and dances need to be recognized as parts of an alternative system: a system of interruptions. Gopalan explains:

In contrast to the internally coherent narrative form generated by Hollywood genre films, genres in Indian popular cinema display a set of features that are akin to pre-classical cinema, especially several extra-diegetic sequences or sequences of attractions. Instead of concluding that these films stage the underdeveloped aspects of capitalism in the Indian economy, a different set of concerns nurtures this narrative form, including a desire to domesticate cinematic technology and develop and national cinematic style. (Gopalan 2002, 17)

Gopalan argues "these moments" that "disrupt the linear trajectory" allow us to recognize that "the most persistent narrative form found in Indian popular cinema includes several interruptions bearing a more or less systematic relationship to the narrative. (Gopalan 2002, 18). Gopalan and Vasudevan expand on their narrative theories and propose specific kinds of interruption: the comedy, the interval, and song and dance sequences (Gopalan 2002).

This proposed relationship between "interruptions", film flow and narrative provides useful considerations for interpreting song and dance sequences. Namely it allows us to ask, how do dances interrupt popular Hindi film narrative flow. In her discussion of Mani Ratnam's<sup>17</sup> films, Gopalan proposes five possible applications of song and dance as

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<sup>17</sup> Nasreen Munni Kabir describes Mani Ratnam, who "works principally in Tamil cinema", as "one of the most interesting directors working in Indian popular cinema today." (Kabir 2001, 149)

interruption. The first two applications involve the use of song and dance sequences as mechanisms for overcoming “geographical” and “temporal discontinuities” in the narrative. Characters move from one location to another without being subject to temporal and spatial continuity considerations. Gopalan cites the song and dance sequence in Mani Ratnam’s film *Roja* (1992) that “captures several moments of a couple frolicking through the landscape in different clothes and making love in their hotel room” so that “by the end of the song the film suggests that the once estranged couple are now happily reunited.” (Gopalan 2002, 130) Gopalan’s third application for song and dance sequences provides a “delaying device” for narrative flow and can be used to build tension. (Gopalan 2002, 131) Related to the third applications, the fourth and fifth categories are narratively integrated and provide an opportunity for extra-diegetic spectacle.

Gopalan’s director specific categorization of song and dance provides useful insights for thinking about their functions in films. She, however, fails to acknowledge that significant overlap may exist between the applications she presents as disparate categories. While Gopalan investigates the overall functions of song and dance sequences in narratives, she stops short of a detailed exploration of the what is expressed in song and dance sequences and how this contributes to the film narrative and character development. Her reading of songs and dances as interruptions is consistent with other formalist readings and focuses on the typology of functions rather than on an interpretive approach to particular film narratives. Nonetheless, her discussion provides useful guidelines for the ways in which song and dance sequences can be deployed as

mechanisms for controlling temporal and narrative flow. Gopalan's exploration of Mani Ratnam's films points to specific questions that need to be asked to understand Hindi film dance and narrative. Namely we need to ask: How does the song and dance sequence contribute to the overall narrative of the story? What does the song and dance sequence reveal? What in the plot motivates the dances? Do the dance sequences reveal new details about characters or the plot? Are they used to release tension in the plot? What is the narrative or aesthetic objective of the dance? Answering these questions about the narrative functions of the dances allows for a comparative study of how the dance content achieves or complicates these objectives.

### ***Hindi film dances as permissive realms***

I believe Richard Dyer's discussion of "utopianism" in Hollywood musicals as a function of "escape" and "wish-fulfillment" provides a useful entry point into thinking about ways in which dance sequences are used and what is revealed by dances in popular Hindi films. Arguing that "entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into", Dyer identifies "alternatives, hopes, [and] wishes the stuff of utopia" that can be "imagined and maybe realised [sic]." (Dyer 1981, 177) Dyer argues that the role of Hollywood musicals "work through ...contradictions at all levels in such a way as to 'manage' them, to make them seem to disappear." (Dyer 1981, 185) In this way musicals work to create a utopian realm. In his discussion of utopianism in Hollywood musicals, Dyer observes that in films "...utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies". (Dyer 1981, 177) He goes on to explain that "the sensibility of utopianism works through a code] and "[t]his code

uses both representational and... non-representational signs.” (Dyer 1981, 177) Recognizing “representational” signs like star personalities as acknowledged categories, Dyer goes on to discuss “non-representational” signs as the “colour, texture movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork” which are just as important though much less discussed. (Dyer 1981, 178) The utopianism described by Dyer in the context of Hollywood musicals finds culturally specific applications in a specific function of popular Hindi song and dance sequences as mechanisms for revealing inner, at times subconscious, emotional struggles and desires or intentions.

These revelations, expressed through song and dance, may take place in real or imagined realms that offer temporary respite from social, cultural and structural constraints that inhibit the fulfillment of these emotions or desires. Arguably, the realm of the dance provides sites of permission for the expression of these emotions.

Madhava Prasad’s analysis provides a compelling interpretation of song and dance sequences as sites of temporary permissiveness. He proposes a distinction between the private and public sphere in Hindi films and begins to decipher the significance of dance sequences. Distinguishing between the private and the public and what is acceptable in Hindi films, he proposes ways in which dance sequences provide glimpses of the otherwise hidden private sphere. Focusing on the sexual permissiveness in the context of strict censorship, Prasad cites so-called ‘cabaret dance’ and other song and dance sequences as “evidence of a sexual permissiveness that is at odds with the image of Indian

“censorship...” (Prasad 1998, 73) Prasad’s discussion of the film *Beta* (1992) demonstrates this temporary permissiveness:

This public confirmation of a private act has cultural associations with a certain feudal practice of communal eroticism that consists of the display of the marks of sexual initiation on the female body. In the 1992 film *Beta*, the heroine’s sahelis singing in the chorus, ask her to explain a series of marks on her body – the smudged bindi, the crumpled clothes etc. (Prasad 1998, 74)

While it is not acceptable to show in a film the sexual act, it is possible to allude to the evidence of its occurrence through a song and dance sequence. In this way the song and dance sequence becomes critical in making public what would otherwise be confined to the private sphere. Prasad’s proposed function of song and dance sequences as mediators between the private and the public particularly in the area of “sexuality” is useful in understanding the narrative context of the song and dance sequences analyzed.

Gopalan’s proposed strategy of “coitus interruptus”, or a “cinematic technique that is most visible when the camera withdraws just before we see a sexually explicit scene”, similarly suggests that one of the primary functions of song and dance sequences is their deployment as visual metaphor through which the private can be made public. Public and private constraints in Hindi popular films are in many ways functions of culturally based expectations of gender, class and caste, as well conceptions of acceptable behavior related to sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Budding romance or sexual desire may



find their expression through song and dance sequences in ways that could not have been expressed otherwise. Male-led performances can serve as assertions of skill and control. Consequently, understanding the dances a permissive realms calls a contextualization of what defines socially and culturally acceptable behavior for the characters and narratives.

Though fairly little analytical work has been done on Hindi films and masculinities, Sumita Chakravarty's historically based exploration of heroes in popular Hindi films "...through [their]... play with the signifiers of dress, accent and gesture." (Chakravarty 1993, 200) This can be manifested through "forms of disguise, impersonation, and masquerade" like Amitabh Bachchan cross-dressing in *Lawaaris* (1981) provides a useful insight to analyzing masculinity and temporary permissiveness. The dance can allow a man express characteristics, emotions or beliefs which deviate from the expected behavioral norms in terms of masculinity.

Feminist critiques of women in Hindi films often critique "the woman as an erotic object" or "spectacle in song and dance numbers" (Kasbekar 2001, 294) in a way that simultaneously "upholds the patriarchally determined feminine idealization through inflated rhetoric on chastity." (Kasbekar 2001, 294). This objectification finds its manifestation through the historical polarization of female characters as either "morally upright" or "vamp". While these polarizations do not apply directly to recent films in which the roles played heroines begin to complicate the lines between respectability and moral corruption, modernity and tradition, the theoretical underpinnings of these feminist critiques remain applicable when looking at Hindi film dances. The dance may become a

realm that affords temporary permission for allowing a character to perform in a way that would otherwise not be socially acceptable. Particularly relevant in this context is the concept of power that lies at the heart of much feminist analysis of Hindi films. Understanding the dualism that historically defined female roles in popular Hindi films provides clues to understanding the content and motivations for dances and who has the power to control the portrayal of the dancing body.<sup>18</sup>

Recognizing song and dances as integral elements of the Hindi popular film narrative system, I began to explore possible approaches to understanding *why* dances occur.

In narrative terms, *Khalnayak* provides one of the most widely known examples of what Kasbekar calls “noble sacrifice”. (Kasbekar 2001) When the police woman Ganga, played by Madhuri Dixit, dresses up as a dancing girl to save her husband’s honor, she successfully walks a fine line between “respectability” and “vulgarity”. This fine line is further accentuated through her performance of the song “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” In her disguise, she performs in a situation that would have normally compromised her respectability as a married woman.

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<sup>18</sup> Bindu Nair’s feminist analysis, informed by Laura Mulvey’s seminal article, begins to explore the mechanics so-called item (feature) dance numbers and women as spectacle and provides useful insights into a detailed analysis of how dances are constructed and achieve their objectives. Nair’s critical analysis positions the dancing woman as a powerless object, her body fragmented by the camera. She draws on the “the styling in terms of make up and costumes”, “the cinematic elements of lighting and shot taking, i.e. the way the body is arranged with respect to the camera and hence the eye of the audience, the movements of the body” (Nair 2002, 54) as evidence of this objectification. She argues that these components invite “the gaze...to certain parts of the body selectively considered sexual – the eyes, the lips, the breasts, the navel, the buttocks and the legs....[and] emphasize these unnaturally distended body proportions, the women are frequently shot either from a low angle, or from a high angle to show the cleavage. The actions of the women in the dance often mimic sexual movements with numerous shots of just body parts, like that of heaving breasts, of pelvic thrusts.” (Nair 2002, 54) Nair’s dissection of the cinematography in dances she believes present women as spectacle begins to address some of the questions regarding dance context and

As a song and dance, the spectacle of “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” plays a pivotal role in the *Khalnayak* film narrative as Ganga, wife of Ram who is a high-ranking police officer, tries to rescue her husband from public disgrace. A policewoman herself, she goes under cover as a dancing girl in an entertainment troupe to capture the terrorist Ballu Balram who escaped from her husband’s police custody. In the song, “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” she dances for, lures and charms Ballu Balram who asks her to accompany his on his journey. This offer ultimately results in his voluntary arrest and his renunciation of the world of crime. This distinction between virtuous praiseworthy sacrifice and despicable moral decay set up in the film narrative, stressed by a decision not to censor the film, is further evidenced through techniques employed in the “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” filmed dance sequence.

This masterful use of the film dance craft forces Partha Chatterjee, usually very skeptical about the dances in popular Hindi films, to grudgingly admit that “...the song, for all its implied vulgarity, is depicted with a fair degree of craftsmanship, and is remarkably tame.” (Chatterjee 1995, 216) Chatterjee’s recognition of the choreographic nuance introduced in the dance sequence raises questions about *how* the achieves its narrative objectives while subverting and simultaneously reaffirming perceived cultural values and norms in the context of the film. To answer this question, I explore how the camera, editing, and choreography are employed to empower or undermine the intentions of the lead to show how dances can be used to subvert and/or simultaneously reaffirm the perceived motivations for the dance. In the next section, I outline my approach to

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content as she stresses the function of the camera’s gaze as a means of fragmenting the female body in film dance.

understanding movement content in the selected Hindi film dances and demonstrate how this mastery of the craft of creating film dances contributed to allowing Preeti to perform this dance at an Indian national event in New York in 1995.

### *Analyzing Content of Hindi Song and Dance Sequences*

In the previous section, I outlined my approach to song and dance sequences and film narratives. Though relevant, narrative contextualization leaves the question of how the song and dance sequences work towards achieving their narrative objective partly unanswered. The meanings of the dances lie largely in their content. Analyzing the movement content from within the dance calls for an understanding of where specific movements come from, how they are used, and perhaps most importantly what they could mean. In Chapter I, I briefly introduced the processes that surrounded the categorization of dances as “classical” or “folk” and subsequent movement codification that accompanied these processes. Hindi films’ selective appropriation of “classical” and “folk” dance elements fused with non Indian movements calls for a more detailed exploration of the specific elements of these dance forms and how they are selectively integrated into films. Given the dances’ hybrid content, discussed in Chapter I, my analytical tools draw on both Indian and non-Indian critical work in both dance and film studies. In this section I briefly elaborate on several of these key critical considerations for exploring film dance content.

While I do not dictate a prescriptive procedure to investigating film dance content, I do propose specific categories for approaching the dances. My approach to content is divided into three distinct categories: significance of popular reputation of stars, defining factors, and movement content. I open my investigation by acknowledging the contribution of public associations with stars in determining the connotation of specific sequences. I follow this with an exploration of the external defining factors for the dance, namely the diegetic and extra diegetic deployment of song, lyrics, costumes and settings. I then shift my attention to the movement content of the dance. Drawing on both formalist and cultural studies approaches to dance analysis and Indian performance theory, I explore expression, and construction of meaning through focus and spatial arrangement in the selected dances to demonstrate the complex interaction between movement and narrative objectives. I then relate my observations to camera work and post-production editing to explore how these choices influence song and dance sequence. Having established these analytical considerations, I conclude with a return to the “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” to demonstrate how these elements functioned in this dance sequence.

### *Stars and Public Associations*

Chapter II introduced the development of prototypical characters like the courtesan, the vamp, the heroine, the villain, and even the hero who were then associated with specific dance styles. Historically, it was not unusual for an actor or actress to become associated with and ultimately get slotted into a particular role and consequently a particular style of dancing. At the peak of her career audience association of Helen with the vamp character

on screen made it impossible for her to walk on the streets for fear of being mobbed based largely on the kinds of roles she played in Hindi films. (Helen in interview with Nasreen Munni Kabir 2001). The character Helen embodied in films became associated with her off-set persona as well. Her performances build in audiences' memories of her previous films. On the other hand, Madhuri Dixit's public image as a "modern woman with an Indian heart" allowed her to perform in what could have been labeled sexually explicit ways without compromising her reputation on or off screen. The star's reputation, and what he or she brings to the role, can play an important role in determining how a dance will be interpreted and must therefore be considered in my analysis.

#### *External Determining Factors in Hindi Film Dances*

The movement content of Hindi film dances exists within the defining parameters of musical accompaniment, costume and setting which help define the relationship of the dance to the overarching narrative.

*music/lyrics:* Music in Hindi song and dance sequences provide a critical 'bridge' between the narrative function of a song and dance sequence and specific dance sequences. There are very few dance numbers in Hindi films that are performed to music alone. The majority of screen dances visualizes songs with lyrics and combine choreography with melody, rhythm and lyrics combined to be performed by the hero or heroine in the film. There are so few non-lyric based dance numbers that they stand out. Famous examples include Waheeda Rehman's snake dance in *Guide* (1965), Sridevi's

trance-like dances in *Nagina* (1986), and Madhuri Dixit and Karishma Kapoor's Dance of Envy in *Dil to Pagal Hai* (1997) in which both women compete for the attention of the hero through their dancing skills.

Music and lyrics often dictate movement quality and denoted meanings of the dances as choreographers set their dances to prerecorded soundtracks which are usually composed and at times even recorded before the dance is choreographed. These soundtracks work in tandem with the film's narrative context and help "impose" or alter meanings of dances. While skilled choreographers may interpret the lyrics of the song through nuanced, multi-layered choreography, the centrality of music and literal interpretation of lyrics to Hindi film dance is undeniable. <sup>19</sup>This close relationship between dance and music makes understanding the basic Hindi film song structure crucial for any investigation of film dance.

In her dissertation on the "Hindi Film Git", Alison Arnold identifies several defining features of Hindi film songs. She explains:

Among the constant and identifying factors of Hindi film song is the accompanying orchestra: prominent use of violins, the adoption of particular Indian instruments to evoke specific moods or cultural references (sitar for classical music/dance or sadness/yearning, rabab for folk or Muslim gatherings, shehnai for marriage ceremonies, etc.) and the inclusion of Western Instruments. (Arnold 1991, 232)

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<sup>19</sup> Choreographer Farah Khan explains: "I first get the music and listen to it.... I get ideas of possible movements that will fit the music and the character in the film." (Khan 2003)

Though Hindi film songs, which seem to have an average length of six to seven minutes, borrow liberally from several different musical styles and have quickly absorbed innovations in recording technology, they tend to “use the same string-dominated, Western-Indian orchestral ensemble, the same Indian vocal style, the same scale patterns ...that has dominated the Hindi film song for over four decades”. (Arnold 1991, 230)

Arnold further explains the songs “tend to... [use] a layout of”:

vocal/intr. intro → refrain → instr. interlude → verse 1 → refrain → instr. interlude  
→verse 2 → refrain → instr. ending

(source: Arnold 1991, 230)

For a larger or smaller number of verses, the “verse pattern is simply increased or decreased.” (Arnold 1991, 230). Choreographic arrangements in Hindi film dances often follow the song structure (outlined above) and may even repeat movements during refrains. In addition the tonality of the song, its melody and rhythm are all considered in the choreographic process and choreographed sequences often echo the verse and refrain patterns in Hindi film music as movements are repeated during refrains.

*costumes/setting:* In films, costume choices can become tools for furthering character development. In their discussion of clothing in Indian films, Divya Patel and Rachel Dwyer argue that “the codes of [Indian popular] cinema fill particular semiotic functions.” (Dwyer and Patel 2002, 85) Using the sari as an example they argue that its conscious deployment in Hindi films engenders ideological associations as both the



“national dress of Indian women and ... recent fashion” and function as “important sociological markers as regards age, marital status and class”.(Dwyer and Patel 2002, 86)

In a film, dressing a character in a sari can help establish or undermine her social status.

Similarly, costumes in song and dance sequences often function as mechanisms for furthering the narrative function of the dance. The Hindi film *Chaalbaaz* (1993), starring Sridevi in a double role of twins Anju and Manju separated at birth who grow up with a love of dance, exemplifies the deployment of costume as character development strategy and helps communicate their personalities and values through dance. For Anju, who lives in an oppressive household, dance is an obsession. When she hears music she has to dance. Dance is a manifestation of her inner turmoil. Her dance sequences show her in sari or other traditional clothing and are filled with Nataraj<sup>20</sup> iconography. Unlike her sister, Manju makes her living as a professional dancing girl. Her “westernized” attire of jeans, T-shirts, short dresses and high heeled boots complements her dances. Her costume works together with her dance movements to communicate her confidence and assurance. Costumes play an important role communicating the narrative function of a dance.

Like costumes, dance settings help locate a dance as they “create a fictional space for characters and narratives and thus fulfill a number of functions within a film”. (Dwyer and Patel 2002, 51) In Hindi films, settings adhere to certain theme related conventions. Frequent location changes of romantic duets exaggerate the dreamlike quality of the sequences. Wedding dance sequences often take place in large open spaces in houses

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<sup>20</sup> Nataraj is a form of Lord Shiva.

stressing at once the public and private nature of the event. College dances take place in school auditoriums or even in urban nightclubs as they work to communicate the relevance of the urban lifestyles to the film narrative. As settings help define the geographical boundaries of the dance sequence they simultaneously contribute to the content of song and dance sequences themselves.

### *Hindi Film Dance and Movement Content*

As demonstrated in previous section, Hindi film dances draw on a broad range of movement techniques and traditions. Consequently my approach to analyzing the dances builds on both Indian and non-Indian approaches to dance including the distinctions between masculine and feminine movement, use of expression, construction of meaning through focus, significance of bodies in motion and the role of camera and editing techniques in shaping film dances.

*Tandava/Lasya*: The *Natyashastra*, ascribed to Bharata-muni and written sometime between 200 BC and 200 AD, is considered to be the foundation for Sanskrit Drama and a “most comprehensive ‘how-to’ manual of dance, acting, music and theater.” (Coorlawala 1994, 13) While topics covered by the *Natyashastra* include theater architecture, costumes, make-up, audience, and dance, and music, the distinctions between masculine and feminine movements, central to many Hindi film dances, are critical for this discussion. Indian performance traditions that trace their roots to the

Natyashastra<sup>21</sup> the distinction between tandava (masculine) and lasya (feminine) is an important one. Tandava, which “denotes the rigorous dance style and is associated with the boisterous dance of Lord Shiva” (Chakravorty 1999, 217) is associated with direct, strong and decisive movements. Lasya, associated with “feminine sensuality and grace associated with eroticism and sringara” (Chakarvorty 1999, 217). Feminine movements may be seductive while they retain elements of indirect, hesitation or even playfulness. Distinguishing between lasya and tandava movements and the implied meanings communicated through these choreographic choices provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the underlying assumptions about gender, masculinity and femininity in the film’s content. Controlled swaying may be used to communicate a heroine’s submissiveness in a romantic duet. Conversely, selective cross-gendering of movements may be used to communicate determination or hesitation in ways that begins to undermine conventions relating to masculinity and femininity.

*Expression:* Expression, or “abhinaya”, is central to many Indian performance traditions. On a superficial level abhinaya refers to “gestural dance” that “involves symbolic or narrative expression as opposed to abstract, non narrative dance Though instrumental interludes in songs do sometimes become opportunities for more abstract forms of dance, overall Hindi films tend to use dance to accompany and express songs with lyrics, and the choreography incorporates/builds on expressive elements. Written between 200 BC and 200 AD, the Natyashastra, a Sanskrit text on dramatic arts written by the Sage Bharata, defines abhinaya as a interweaving of “movement, costume, and décor, audible

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<sup>21</sup> define natyashastra

accompaniment, and inner attitude in its inclusive statement.” (Coorlawala 1994, 140)

Through its broad definition of “abhinaya” the Natyashastra acknowledges the connections between all of these elements of the dance and how they contribute to the overall expressiveness of the dance. “[H]ands and facial expression supported by the body” are critical in expressing a composition’s emotional content. (Coorlawala 1994, 139) According to the Natyashastra, abhinaya makes use of nine bhavas (or moods). They are: vira (heroic), krodha (fury), veebhatsa (odious), shanti (peace), bhaya (fear), karuna (compassion), shoka (sorrow), and sringara (erotic). While sringara is indisputably a prevalent emotion in Hindi dances, it only begins to describe the nuances that choices in expression can bring to a dance. For example, sringara mixed with bhaya can be used to portray a heroine’s struggle to come to terms with her affection for a hero. Alternately sringara can be combined with elements of veebhatsa (disgusting) to portray the moral despicability of a dancing girl forced into her profession. The interpretation of the emotions expressed through lyrics is “not always literal.” (Coorlawala 1994 145) but can also be metaphorical or subtle rather than explicit. In film dances, heroes and heroines “enact” the lyrics of the words. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of expression in communicating the narrative meaning for song and dance sequences in Hindi films. Nuance in expression may be used to communicate a transition from hesitation to arousal through seductive dances. Expressions communicated through dances are often crucial in anticipating further narrative development in the films.

*Constructing Meaning Through Focus:*

*Whither the hand goes, the glance follows,*

*Whither the glances lead, the mind follows,  
Whither the mind goes, there the mood follows  
Whither the mood goes, there is "rasa" born.*

*-Abhinaya Darpana.*

These instructions, cited from the *Abhinaya Darpana*, which detail how *Rasa* (the real sentiment and flavor of a dance) can be appreciated, stress the importance of the eyes. Eyes and their intention are considered critical for communicating. In most Indian forms, dancers communicate their intentions through choreographed use of eyes and focus. A look can be interpreted as vulgar or shy depending on how long it is held and in what way it is ultimately broken. In an interview in a documentary *Bollywood Dancing* (Kabir 2002), Saroj Khan explains the details of her use of focus by demonstrating two possibilities for executing a look. One look belongs to a shy girl who lowers her eyelids at the last moment. The other look, held longer and broken at the last minute, conveys sexual daring. The skill lies in the performer's "ability to direct the audience's sensibilities towards a particular understanding through use of eye movements". (Coorlawala 1994, 160).

*Bodies in motion:* Though her analysis concentrates on "Western concert [dance] tradition [and] not dances of other cultures" (Foster 1986, 59), Susan Leigh Foster's framework for analyzing Western modern dance provides some useful categories for understanding movement in Indian film dance. These include: "the style" ("the way the dancer achieves an individual identity in the world and its genre"), "the vocabulary" ("the basic units or "moves" from which the dance is made") and "the syntax" ("the rules

governing the selection and combination of moves” (Foster 1986, 59) For the purposes of my analysis I focus on Foster’s categories of style, vocabulary and syntax, which I use to explore the background, appropriation and execution of selected movements. For example, the symmetry of Bharat Natyam’s basic Sambhanga stance, with both legs turned out and both knees bent, may be broken through a conscious deflection of the hip to soften the impact of the movement or introduce playfulness. Conversely, hip rotations and swings may be minimized to preserve a dancing heroine’s respectability.

*Camera/Editing Strategies in Hindi film dance:* The movement content in Hindi films works in tandem with, and therefore needs to be analyzed in conjunction with, camera movements and post-production editing decisions. When choreographer Farah Khan creates a film dance sequence, she immediately plans how it should be shot as well. (Farah Khan 2003) While not all choreographers get to work this way as they cannot control how their dances will be cut in post-production (Citaristi2003), editing choices do contribute to analyzing the three dances. Song and dance sequences in Hindi films make active use of close-ups, fast cuts, overhead shots and other techniques to complement and enhance the effect and meaning communicated through the dance. In his discussion of the music video, Larry Billman describes this intermingling. He states: “in music videos, dance is not captured by the camera. The film itself dances and leaps, twirls and pops. Similar to what Busby Berkeley did, music video filming takes dance as one of the moving components and then morphs and uses it.” (Billman 2002, 17)

Conceptually, the often-cited polarization between the strategies deployed by Busby Berkeley and Fred Astaire in filming dances for Hollywood musicals provide a useful spectrum for thinking about approaches to filming dance. With little dance training of his own, Busby Berkeley's choreographic arrangements privileged the film medium over the unity of the dance. This was evidenced in his frequent use of "abstract dance movement forming patterns of circles, flowers, snowflakes, and kaleidoscopic abstractions, of self-contained diegetic worlds unrelated to the external diegesis of the rest of the film – all achieved through mechanical devices and stage sets supplemented by a camera which seemed to allow "movement in any plan, at any angle, or at any speed". (Delameter 1981, 46)

At the opposite end of the Hollywood musical dance spectrum, Fred Astaire focused on making dances "that were interesting principally for their use of dance." (Delameter 1981, 49) Astaire, a trained dancer, was "interested in the attraction of dance.... Combining elements of ballroom, exotic tap, jazz and, to a certain extent ballet...[he] 'emphasized the intimacy the camera could bring to dance, rather than the grandeur of wide open spaces.'" (Delameter 1981, 49) Busby Berkeley's privileging of the film medium on one extreme and Astaire's passion for preserving the unity of dance on the other provide a useful analytical framework for analyzing the interaction between dance and film in Hindi film dances and raises questions about whether the sequence privileges dance over the technical capabilities of film.

In movement terms, the camera frame does not limit a dancer's entrances and exits. Simply put, as dancers approach the camera, their image size will increase as the amount of their body visible through the viewfinder decreases. (Lockyer 1993) In addition, the camera has the possibility to move in continuous shot or through the use of a cut. The camera can be positioned above, below, behind, or at an angle, thus providing a view of the performance not accessible to a 'live audience'. In the Hindi film dance context, the "reaction shot", or cutting to the characters or audience members who witness the performance, is a critical component in defining the intention and perceived effect of the dance sequence and often provides an explicit connection between the dance sequence and its narrative function.

As was already discussed in Gopalan's study of Mani Ratnam's song and dance sequence, the technological properties of film allow a transformation of temporal factors ways that break up a temporal continuity of a dance. On film, the body can move slower or faster than it would in real time. Dodds explains: "a live body cannot leap through the air in slow motion in the way that a screen body can." (Dodds 2001, 31) Lovers running towards each other in slow motion is an effect that can exaggerate the dramatic effect of a movement. Bodies in film can move in reverse, playing with the negation of time. The most significant factor in considering temporality of dance on film, however, is editing. (Dodds 2001, 32) Like in many filmed "attraction" sequences like fights, car accidents, and explosions, editing can alter the temporal flow. A cut allows dancers to disappear and reappear without exiting or moving. In Hindi films, frequent location changes can be used to enhance the dreamy quality of a sequence. Temporal discontinuity is a technique



often employed in Indian film dances and can be used to propel the plot forward (Gopalan 2002) or transport the protagonists to temporary fantasy or dream space. In fact, many dance sequences stress their discontinuity through frequent camera cuts or location changes. Slow motion can exaggerate emotional longing as two lovers run towards each other. The use of still frames or slow motion can have the effect of “freezing time” and can be used to build anticipation. Making dance partners “disappear” can exaggerate the dream like quality of the dance sequence. The key consideration becomes the representational norms of the dance sequences compare with the narrative objectives in the specific films.

A close-up can reveal choreographic details that could not be seen during a stage performance. The technological properties of the camera can, and have been, used to explore uncharted areas of dance. For Hindi film dance, close-up shots of the eyes, feet or hands have been used to increase dramatic effect of expressions and gestures. By echoing the movements of the lead dancers, chorus dancers can reinforce and strengthen the execution of the dance. In other words, editing choices for song and dance sequences can contribute significantly to determining the meaning communicated through the dance.

To conclude my exploration Hindi film dance content, I will apply my approach to Madhuri Dixit’s performance in the song “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” to demonstrate how these elements are combined in ways that facilitates the justification of what is perceived to be a morally questionable activity. In addition, this examination will begin

to demonstrate the importance of forging a connection between dances in films and their performance on stages.

***Return to “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?”***

In the previous section I explored the film’s narrative demonstrated how “[Ganga] ... as Madhuri, the actress, and as law enforcer in the film’s narrative, she is separate from the role of the prostitute – she is not the prostitute.” (Mukhi 2001, 121) For Sunita Mukhi this separation in large part due to Madhuri’s expert performance. She states: “In her other dances she [Madhuri] is able to look luscious without being vulgar, in love and refined, expressive....In this dance...she expertly exaggerates the stereotypical earthiness associated with a prostitute”. (Mukhi 2001, 121) While Madhuri Dixit’s performance skills and star personality deserve attention in identifying the cause of the dance’s success, I believe nuanced choreography and camera use are critical elements that allowed the dance to remain respectable.

The “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” (“) sequence opens with a shot of two female figures facing each other. They heave their chests in time with the music. Their veiled faces, in costumes that audiences are meant to believe are Rajasthani, mirror one another’s to communicate a shared ethnic identity. As the dancers’ chests move to touch each other, the camera cuts to seated Rajasthani folk musicians who play the apparently Rajasthani tune. The music and traditional costumes of the musicians and dancers establish the performance as based on Rajasthani folk traditions.

Significantly, Ganga (Madhuri Dixit) breaks this ethnic specificity when she enters the performance space. Face veiled and dressed in bright orange backless blouse and knee length full skirt, she presents herself as a variation on the Rajasthani theme established in the first shots. This costume differs from attire worn by the other dancers and establishes her as distinct from the other dancers. In a full body shot she balances pots on her head and walks towards the camera. Every four beats she accentuates her swinging hips. Before we see her face, the camera proceeds to linger on her bared midriff, which exaggerate her hip movements. Immediately, a shot of a Rajasthani flute player with a stylized painting of a courtesan behind him historicizes her activity, further contextualizing her performance.

The explicit bantering lyrics of the song are presented as a dialogue between Ganga and Devi, a Rajasthani woman who is assisting her in her undercover mission. Staring into the camera brazenly, standing behind other dancers, Devi asks “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” (What is behind your blouse?). Facing away from the audience, head still veiled, Ganga answers, “Choli me dil hai mera” (In my blouse is my heart). The camera cuts to her dance partner who smirks at her answer. This sequence in the dance establishes a crucial dialogue between the two women that communicates Ganga’s respectability. She continues to “rebuff” Devi’s sexually specific questions and directions with playful innocence. The camera and choreography work in complicity in establishing Ganga’s relative innocence.

When she first lifts her veil, Ganga looks into the camera playfully, but breaks her gaze at the last minute to look away. Ganga's continued use of the indirect gaze with her body slightly averted from the camera contrasts with Devi's unapologetic stare and hardened expression. After Ganga lifts up her veil to reveal her face, the camera ceases to linger on any specific body part. Once we have an expressive face, we no longer see a fragmented body.

This "respect" for Ganga's dancing body diminishes the audience's ability to interpret her only as a sexualized object. The choice to focus on Ganga's often shy and playful facial expression works to offset the potentially sexually explicit connotations of her movement. This privileging of her face contrasts with recurring midriff shots of the chorus dancers.

Most of Ganga's potentially erotic movements are shot from waist up. Fast turns and intricate rhythm-based combinations undermine the effect of her sexually suggestive gyrations and demonstrate her dancing ability. Playfulness, communicated through skips and innocent coyness, mitigates the sexual innuendo of the lyrics. An overhead shot of Ganga shows her sitting in a traditional Kathak pose fronting a group of chorus dancers in a playful gestural sequence. The same camera angle shows Devi and chorus sitting heavily on the ground facing forward in frontal address.

The reaction shot or an audience watching the "staged" film dance is a common technique used in Indian film dance. Significantly, the camera does not cut to a reaction

shot from Babu Balram until Ganga reveals her face. This delay suggests that it was not her bared midriff that caught his attention. Rather, he was attracted to her innocently playful expression. In other words we only encounter Babu Balram's spectator gaze when Ganga is able to meet it in return. This matched playfulness continues throughout the dance as Ganga teases Ballu Balram about the money that he offers her. Initially she throws it back at him.

The audience is left to wonder whether this was done in play or out of genuine disgust at his behavior. When Ganga approaches him again, the focus is once again on her eyes "ogling" the money he is offering her. She snatches it away before his able to count it out, and with a suggestive gesture places the rupee bills in her blouse. This gesture proves that she has achieved her task and she leaves the dance floor soon thereafter. Close ups of her face turning back mouthing the word "dil" (heart) with cuts to an entranced Ballu Ram, and dancing chorus dancers (fronted by Devi) mark her successful exit.

Ganga's exit from the staged performance effectively ends her "flirtation" with the morally questionable dancing girls. *Khalnayak's* narrative context, choreography and camera use allow her to retain her to complete (or rather begin) her task without compromising her "noble standing".

When Preeti performed "Choli Ke Peeche" as a celebration of India's Independence Day celebration in New York, she executed her interpretation of the dance. She received a standing ovation. Though her choreography and youth provide a partial explanation for

her success, they fail to explain how she was able to overcome the stigma of performing what was once a controversial song at a government sanctioned occasion. Though an exploration actual film dance I have endeavored to begin to demonstrate that it was the nuances introduced to the filmed version of the dance that may have enabled seven-year-old Preeti to dance the dance of the Indian seductress.

My analytical framework introduced in this chapter focuses simultaneously in *why* dances occur in Hindi film narratives and *how* they are executed. My application of this analysis to the “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” film dance demonstrated how analysis of a film song can further our understanding of film dances as they migrate from films to stages. In the next chapter, I will apply the analytical considerations introduced in this chapter to explore the “Dola Re Dola” song and dance sequence selected for *Filmfare’s* Best Choreography Award in 2002.

#### **Chapter IV: “Dola Re Dola” and Temporary Equality in Dance**

In the last chapter I explored the challenges of investigating Hindi film dances. Using Lalitha Gopalan’s proposed system of interruptions, I identified narrative context as useful for exploring the relationship between film dance and narrative. Once recognized, narrative context serves as a point of departure for exploring the content and the realm created by the dance sequence. I specifically introduced public associations with specific stars that exist prior to the film, external factors including setting lyrics and costume and close reading of movement content as analytical considerations for analyzing dances. The “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” case study demonstrated how a close reading of Hindi film sequences can be used to reveal choreographic and stylistic nuance that may not be immediately apparent but which influence the ways in which a dance is re-mediated. In this chapter, I apply my approach to a recent song and dance sequence that won the *Filmfare*’s Best Choreography Award. My analyses will demonstrate how a detailed understanding of the dance as an expressive realm can reveal a layering of content that contributes and complicates what is communicated through the sequence.

Colloquially referred to as the “Oscars of India”, the *Filmfare* Awards are generally recognized as one of the most prestigious honors in popular Hindi cinema. The awards are distributed based on a poll by the readers of *Filmfare* magazine and were constituted in 1953. A testimony to the growing influence of choreographers in popular Hindi cinema, the Best Choreography Award was first awarded in 1988 and that year Saroj Khan took home the prize for her choreography of “Ek Do Teen” (*Tezaab*). Ever since,

choreographers Saroj Khan, Farah Khan and Chinni Prakash have been recipients of this award on a regular basis. A rare exception to this rule was in 1995 when Ahmed Khan received the *Filmfare* award for his choreography in the film *Rangeela* (1994). While the scale of a film's budget and consequently visibility achieved through star casting and extensive publicity contribute indirectly to the selection of dances for the Best Choreography award, the fact remains that the *Filmfare* awards provide the only public recognition for film choreography in popular Hindi films.

Given the large number of films produced by the film industries based in Mumbai and the limited scope of my research, my choice of the film sequence is somewhat subjective. I focused on stylistic range and popularity of the song and dance sequences as an important consideration in my final selection of the dance sequence for my analysis. Specifically, I was interested in analyzing contemporary Hindi film dances whose popularity increased the likelihood that they existed as performances on stages and in Bollywood classes. This was important to permit a more reception-oriented analysis of the current relationship between Hindi film dances and Bollywood dances in a future research project. For the purposes of my research I will investigate the "Dola Re Dola" dance sequence (*Devdas* 2002) that received *Filmfare*'s Best Choreography award for the year 2002. As with the "Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai" case study, the analyses will explore how the selected song and dance sequences function within the narrative structure of films.

Adapted from Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's novel Devdas, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* (2002) has deviated in several instances from the original story. An important change



from the original story is a meeting between Devdas' first love Parvati or Paro (Aishwarya Rai) and Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit), the courtesan with whom he develops a relationship. The meeting culminates with the "Dola Re Dola" (The Sway...[of my heart]) song and dance sequence choreographed by Saroj Khan. Chandramukhi and Paro dance to the accompaniment of a group of chorus dancers. Paro's in-laws and other guests at the Durga Pooja celebration witness their performance. Significantly, this meeting between Chandramukhi and Paro did not take place in previous filmed versions of Devdas (including Bimal Roy's Hindi version released in 1955 and Dilip Roy's 1979 Bengali language version) which generally maintained clear distinctions between the two female protagonists.

The "Dola Re Dola" sequence, which brings the two female protagonists together in a shared performance, figured prominently in the publicity efforts and press reviews of *Devdas*. A majority of the promotional theatrical trailers included on the "Collectors Edition" DVD included excerpts from this dance. The star status of Aishwarya Rai and Madhuri Dixit cannot be underestimated approaching this analysis. Selected as Miss World in 1994, Aishwarya Rai is publicly recognized as an unofficial ambassador for India. Somewhat older than Aishwarya, Madhuri Dixit is respected for her refined acting abilities. Both female stars have been recognized for their dancing skills, with their "classical" dance training often cited as testimony of their virtuosity.

The dance cannot be dismissed simply as spectacular publicity material and marketing. Rather, the narrative function of the dance demands careful attention. The dance, which

takes place in the home of Paro's in-laws, is a public demonstration of affinity between the two women and contributes to the flow of the film. This sequence allows a temporary equality to emerge between the two women who are otherwise from completely different social backgrounds. Paro is the wife of a respectable landlord while Chandramukhi is the courtesan equivalent of a prostitute. This dance facilitates the meeting of the two women on the pretext of a dual performance during a religious festival in a credible context, despite their class differences. My analysis will demonstrate that this temporary equality helps validate Chandramukhi's love for Devdas, even as Paro symbolically relinquishes her hold over him. While the climax of the dance shatters the expressive permission created by the dance and establishes this temporary realm as an unachievable ideal, it leaves a lasting effect on the plot. In other words, the song and dance sequence becomes an integral element in the film's narrative flow.

The dance delays the flow of the plot by temporarily postponing the inevitability of tragic events to come. The dance sequence follows a scene in which Devdas, the object of affection for both women, submerges his head in water in a portentous gesture anticipating his eventual demise. In the scene that follows "Dola Re Dola", Paro is sentenced to lifelong confinement on her husband's premises as punishment for her persistent love for Devdas as well as her friendship with Chandramukhi. The dance interrupts the narrative flow of the film, echoing Gopalan's fourth "dance as spectacle" category discussed in Chapter III. Thus the dance, masked as a spectacle, engenders an explicitly alternate narrative space at once connected to, yet distinct from, the dominant narrative.

The setting for the dance is introduced with a shot of Goddess Durga enveloped in a red powdery haze of sindoor associated with both celebration and marriage. This resembles shot earlier in the film when Paro dances with her friends in anticipation of Devdas' return from England. Similarly, the imagery associated with the dance performed by Paro's mother on her behalf and the speech she makes following her public humiliation by Devdas' family invoke the visual associations of Shakti, or female strength. Though association with Durga could also be interpreted as a referencing of her alternate role as "Uma", the mother of Shiva's children, the fact remains that Durga represents an exclusively female power who needs to be understood in the context of broader Hindu values and perceptions of women in *Devdas*.

The women's status in Hindu society remains controversial. Michael Allen cites some of these apparent controversies in his essay "The Hindu View of Women". He identifies the different roles and ideals of women in Hindu societies as: "[the] pure virgin, voluptuous temptress, obedient wife, honored mother, dead widow, impure menstruating woman, powerful sexual partner...." (Allen 1990, 1) These contradicting ideas present women as sacred and polluted, sexualized and ascetic and potentially powerful. While orthodox Hindus may look to Sita as a female role model, they are also constantly confronted (and threatened) by women's reproductive, sexual power (Shakti). The recurring associations with Durga in the film reference this power in specific ways for the several female characters. For Paro this reference includes her dedication to Devdas and perseverance despite her marriage. Arguably Shakti helps Chandramukhi find the strength to

eventually confront Paro's brother-in-law. This recurring visual connection between the female protagonists and female strength in Hindu mythology is evoked throughout the film, and further stressed through the fact that Parvati is another name for Durga.

The costumes worn by the two characters work to establish a connection between the two women. Following the introductory shots, the camera immediately cuts to Paro urging a hesitant Chandramukhi into a space already occupied by dancers. Paro and Chandramukhi, both adorned with gold jewelry, are dressed in identical white saris with red borders and each wears gold jewelry. Their costumes suggest no difference in status and background. This similarity is significant when read in the context of the performance itself. In this section I explore the key characteristics of this performance: the beginning of the dance, the unity of movement and dialogue set up between Chandramukhi and Paro, their relationship to the chorus dancers, the role of reaction shots, and finally the climax of the dance.

The content of the dance, which includes use of expression, gesture and relationships between dancers as they move, establishes the relationship between the two women as Paro leads a hesitant Chandramukhi onto the dance space. The camera then cuts to Paro entering from the right, leading a group of dancers. The camera follows, as she moves left, touching her forehead in a greeting gesture, and finally allows her to exit the frame on the left. The view cuts abruptly to Paro facing the camera as she fronts rows of dancers and executes a series of moves that intersperse sharp pose-like movements interspersed with quick turns and level changes. On the down beats, Paro faces the

camera directly. This unapologetic frontal address establishes Paro's dominating presence in the space. The camera slowly zooms in from a pan and then seamlessly cuts to a three-fourths shot of Paro. Paro rotates a slightly raised leg and leans forward, then snaps her fingers as if inviting the audience and Chandramukhi to join her. Paro's invitation alludes to the courage she demonstrated on other occasions in the film, including when she came to Devdas' home in the middle of the night to urge him to leave with her and when she initiated contact with Chandramukhi.

The camera cuts to Chandramukhi who also leads a group of dancers. This portion of the dance begins with a sharp pose with her left leg raised to the side with the knee bent, her arms straight and pointing her right diagonal. She then moves her arms in figure eight movements as she moves front without her eyes following the movement pattern of her arms. She repeats the initial pose which is reminiscent of Durga and Shiva Nataraj poses in Bharat Natyam which are used to communicate valor and courage. The camera cuts to a close up of her face filled with longing to the lyrics "Oh maahi" (Oh lover) as she looks off to the sides. The movements and expressions used to introduce Paro and Chandramukhi are qualitatively different. Paro's entrance is an indirect playful invitation; Chandramukhi's is direct and pierces the space. The camera cuts to Paro fronting a group of chorus dancers and follows them as they run towards the right to join Chandramukhi in the dance space. The two dancers claim and define ownership of the dance space by moving in the four directions. They mark their territory and enter the performance space to establish their camaraderie through unified movement.

To understand the significance of this temporary realm that allows Chandramukhi and Paro's rapport, it is important to contextualize the social differences between the two women. As a courtesan, Chandramukhi represents a recurring character in popular Hindi films. In an interview with Nasreen Munni Kabir, Archana Puran Singh explains the fate of the film courtesan and her role in Hindi films:

The courtesan is someone who had no choice in being a courtesan. She may have been kidnapped or forced to do what she is doing. There is always a sad story behind her...If the courtesan is performing a mujra dance, it is not out of her own choice.... What attracts the hero to her is that she still represents something that is forbidden, so that the male may watch her dance and she will fall in love with him, but he will never truly reciprocate her love. And this very often forms a triangle: the heroine who the hero loves and some reason cannot marry, and the dancer. (Archana Puran Singh in Kabir 2001)

Influenced by the focus on solo performance in the courtesan, Nautch, Devadasi and other Indian dance traditions, female lead performances have been an inseparable part of Indian film dance since the early days. Like courtesans in films like *Pakeezah* (1971), *Mughal-E-Azam* (1960) and *Umrao Jaan* (1981), Chandramukhi belongs to a long tradition of women trained in the dance as "refined" seduction. As such she commands a certain power in society. Like other traditional artists, she is respected for her mastery of the fine arts of singing and dancing. Simultaneously, her profession as an entertainer and association with prostitution places her on the outskirts of society. Her tragedy is usually

confirmed through her impossible longing for respectability and the unattainable love of a single man. A courtesan by profession, Chandramukhi demonstrates her performance skill on two separate occasions before “Dola Re Dola”. Choreographed by Kathak Guru Birju Maharaj and set in her opulent *haveli*, Chandramukhi’s previous dances demonstrate her skills as a performer as well as her affection for Devdas as she uses her focus to interact with him during her dances. Significantly, the opulence of the her dances and the minimized movements differ from Chandramukhi’s dances in previous filmed versions of *Devdas* (1955, 1979) which tended to stress the seductive elements of the courtesan’s dance. In this way Dixit’s performances as Chandramukhi present her as a culturally refined and even somewhat respected artist.

Like other courtesan performances in Hindi films, Chandramukhi’s earlier dances are often consciously reminiscent of “classical” dance (in this case Kathak) performed for male audiences who respond to her achievements as a performer. Technical mastery of complex rhythmic compositions, accented through rhythmically coordinated camera cuts, and ability to emote through facial expression and gesture, emphasized through close ups, constitute focal points of her dance performances. The camera usually works in service to her dance, moving with her, cutting to accentuate, rather than fragment, her movement. Public performance is Chandramukhi’s profession.

For Paro, the norms of respectability would not normally support a public performance and even less so in the company of a professional courtesan. Earlier in the film, Paro’s mother was publicly humiliated for performing on behalf of her daughter at Devdas’

house. Though Paro dances earlier in the film, the dance takes place in the exclusive company of her female companions. Even so her earlier performances which establish her as spontaneity and playfulness differentiate her from the Paro's in previous films. In Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955), Paro's playfulness and dancing ceased as soon as she grew up. Though the two women perform together to express their love for Devdas, their backgrounds dictate acceptability of such an exhibition. Chandramukhi's performance is socially acceptable; Paro's participation is not. By partaking in the same performance, Paro and Chandramukhi complicate a polarity of respectability and disrepute.

Though the Paro and Chandramukhi come from very different backgrounds and live in very different sections of society as courtesan and married woman, they execute movements clearly communicating their camaraderie and understanding. They are united in their love for the ill-fated Devdas. The shared body language of two women communicates empathy. Paro and Chandramukhi use the dance to create their own, shared realm despite the social constraints they face

The lyrics play an important role in determining the meaning of the dance. During the recurring refrain, the two women execute a series of movements in unison to the lyrics: "Hey dola re dola re dola re dola" (Hey, I swayed, I swayed, I swayed), " Haai dola dil dola mann dola re dola" (Oh, my heart swayed, my spirit swayed). The movements incorporating a gentle sway of the hips from side to side, with one arm behind the head and a look off to the diagonal, stress that the sway of the women's hearts, caused by their love for Devdas, is what is allowing and simultaneously forcing them to perform. Their



movements are echoed by female dancers in the foreground and male dancers in the background, suggesting that the “Dola” or “Sway” of the heart motivates their dance as well. This recurring movement establishes a sense of camaraderie and even temporary equality between the two women.

The chorus dancers, representing other visitors at the family celebration, underscore and fortify this temporary unity as they define and simultaneously protect the physical space in which the performance takes place. Comprised of women in the foreground and men in the background, the chorus dancers also underscore the performance as an expression of female longing. The female chorus dancers’ movements echo and react to the communication between Chandramukhi and Paro. The men, located at the infinity point, respond to different rhythmic combinations in the music and accent the unison movement during the refrain. Like the male dancers, the female dancers also execute rhythmic variations, thus adding to the rhythmic “sway” of the song.

The lyrics, which Paro and Chandramukhi lip-sync assert their determination to express their feelings, are “Lag jaane do najariya, gir jaane do bijuriya” (Let them glare, let lightning strike). The two women express their shared emotions through movements that reflect the lyrics in conversational sequences connected through cyclical, spatially consistent editing. Paro and Chandramukhi use this dialogue to validate each other’s affection for Devdas.

The “Dola Re Dola” lyrics set up a dialogue between Chandramukhi and Paro that is echoed in their dance movements, stylized gestures and relationship to each other. They compare the depth of their affection for Devdas. As Paro states: “Maathe ki bindiya mein voh hai” (In the bindi of my forehead is he), Chandramukhi responds: “Palkon ki nindiya mein voh hai” (In the sleep of my eyelashes is he). They then shift their attention to recognizing each other’s love. Paro remarks to Chandramukhi: “Tere to tan mann mein voh hai” (In your body and mind is he). Chandramukhi makes a similar observation about Paro when she states: “Teri bhi dhadkan mein voh hai” (Even in the beat of your heart is he). The most significant reciprocity, however, emerges when Chandramukhi, walking around Paro, communicates her gratitude: “Tumne mujhko duniya de di” (You have given me the world). The camera zooms into a close up of the two women’s upper torsos focusing on their facial expression. The chorus dancers in the background “sway” to the underlying beat. Coming up behind Chandramukhi, Paro responds by tracing her fingers through Chandramukhi’s hair line, continuing to her head in a gesture that validates Chandramukhi’s love for Devdas and asserts a sense of equality between the two women. As she sings: “Tumse kabhi na hona door” (May I never be far from you), Paro uses gestures to symbolically “give” Chandramukhi a right to Devdas. Through use of gesture and movements corresponding to the song’s lyrics, accented through movements of the chorus dancers, the two women establish a realm that allows them to validate their love for Devdas.

The reaction shot of the diegetic audience plays a critical role in “Dola Re Dola”. Initially, the camera cuts only briefly to Paro’s family as interested spectators. Chorus

dancers spin in and out of the frame from left, right and occasionally enter from behind the camera. These variations allow for glimpses of Paro's mother-in-law watching the performance in the background while creating an enclosed performance space. As the song progresses, increasing speed of cuts to reactions of Paro's mother-in-law enjoying the performance and her brother in law waiting to reveal Chandramukhi's real identity. This portending danger adds to the tension and imbues the entire performance with a temporal fragility.

The slow cyclical motions of the camera complement the dancers' movements. Close-ups are used to convey facial emotions that would have been lost in a long shot of the body. The camera cuts, moves, and rotates, thus creating an "illusion" of a consistent space and a linear progression of time. When the viewers do not see the dancers, it is because they are out of shot and not because they have left the performance space. The movement of the camera speeds up as the song builds towards its climax. In other words, the camera contributes to the mounting energy of the performer's movements, further heightening the climactic resolution.

The climax of the song escalates the energy created by the dance and ultimately shatters the temporary equality and ensuing dialogue between the two women. Leading up to the climax, Paro and Chandramukhi repeat a variation on Chandramukhi's entrance. With the right leg straight and raised slightly off the ground and their arms out to the sides, they both walk to side. They then repeat the step to the other side, this time keeping one arm bent at chest level with palms flexed and facing up, as if to stop someone from

advancing. They then execute faster, more playful, movements that resemble Paro's initial "invitation" to Chandramukhi. With their finger on their shoulder and their arms raised, they shift their weight between their hips pausing briefly on the fourth beat. In this way they summarize their shared experience and once again asserting their space. The chorus dancers run towards the camera as if to join them. As the music moves to its final crescendo, the dancers whirl into a circular configuration and execute a series of movements as the camera spins around them at a rhythmically synchronized pace.

The camera cuts to Paro's brother-in-law circling the performance space waiting to intrude. With the last beat of music, the dance ends with a full body shot of the dancers in a circle with Paro and Chandramukhi in the middle, trapped in their midst. The brother-in-law interrupts the applause to reveal Chandramukhi's identity. His revelation leads to a confrontation between the two women and ultimately shatters the temporary realm the two women shared as Chandramukhi leaves the space.

The "Dola Re Dola" dance sequence has implications for the rest of the film. It validates Chandramukhi's love for Devdas and sets up the loveless life of physical and emotional confinement that becomes Paro's punishment for the rest of the film. At the same time, the dance sequence imprints a lingering memory of the temporary equality between the two women. This memory leaves a lasting effect on the characterization of both Chandramukhi and Paro as equal in their love despite their disparate backgrounds.

In my analysis I explored the narrative context and choreography of the “Dola Re Dola”, dance sequence. My close reading of this dance sequence reveals that the song and dance sequence relates to the overall narrative on several levels. On a more abstract level, the dance provides a spectacular release of the tension in the film at a time when Devdas’ descent into alcoholism is already apparent. On another more directly narrative level, the dance provides an opportunity for the female protagonists to express their love for Devdas. The choreography executed by Paro and Chandramukhi’s alludes to a more abstract sense of temporal transience that provides temporary permission for the expression of subconscious, or hidden, emotions and desires in ways that influence plot and character development as choreographic choices complicate simple interpretations in terms of their narrative objectives. In “Dola Re Dola”, Chandramukhi and Paro express their shared love for Devdas as they establish an exclusively female realm through the symbolic association with Shakti. Their character-specific and shared movement, use of gesture and expression allow them to for individual expression as they simultaneously establishing a sense of unity and friendship between them. The identical costumes worn by Paro and Chandramukhi in “Dola Re Dola” strengthen their communicated relationship. The relationship between the two women is underscored by their use of space. Simultaneously, distinctive choreography and nuanced deployment of expression and focus help maintain a distinction between the two women in terms of character and social status. At the end of the dance, this temporary equality is shattered and the impossibility of this ideal is shattered but enables both women retain a degree of stoicism as they face the adverse consequences of their public display as the dance sets the stage

for events to come as the temporary realm that allowed a courtesan to partake in a performance with a married woman disintegrates.

The detailed focus of my approach allowed me to explore the nuances of how this particular dance sequence was constructed to reveal how different levels of meaning are constructed through the ways in which camera, post production editing and elements like lyrics and costume interact with the choreographic choices. This more complicated understanding of the dances prepares me for a comparative analysis as that traces narrative functions of Hindi film dances and their content including gestures, movements and group formations as they migrate from films to stages and classes.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion/ Future Directions**

The analytical guidelines provided in this study provide a first step towards a future research project focusing more closely on the relationship between Hindi film dances and Bollywood stage performances as sites of reception for films produced in Bombay outside India. While the limited scope of this research does not allow me to make generalizations regarding Hindi film dance, it takes an initial step towards a more long-term investigation of the dance in Hindi popular cinema.

My case study of “Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai?” clarified my approach to such analyses as I investigated the general narrative context of the dance without compromising the layered meanings achieved by nuanced choreography. I began by situating film dances in a broader historical and ideological context that stressed the inherent hybridity of the Hindi film dance and linked movement content and deployment of movement to a larger ideological agendas. Using the narrative context as a point of entry, I built on Lalitha Gopalan’s proposed system of narrative interruptions which treats song and dance sequences as integral elements of the Hindi popular film structures. I divided my proposed approach to interpreting dance content into three distinct categories of star reputation, external defining factors and movement content. The latter category draws on Indian performance theory, selected film studies and elements of dance analyses to construct an interdisciplinary approach to investigating the complex relationships between movement, gesture, focus and camera in Hindi films dance.

My analysis of the “Dola Re Dola” sequence explored dance as a temporary realm that allows the two female protagonists to express their shared love for Devdas. Situating the dance in a broader context, my analysis explored the connection between narrative and dance content to demonstrate that the realm created by the song and dance sequence “permits” the expression of private wishes, desires and beliefs for the characters involved in the sequences. This interpretive reading of a popular dance sequence prepared me for an investigation of how movements, meanings and spatiality are modified as Hindi film dance migrates to staged events at cultural shows to they become a manifestation of popular Hindi films as mediators of diasporic “Indian” culture.

As film scholar Vijay Mishra argues, Hindi films have become “crucial determinant[s] in globalizing the deterritorializing link[s] between the imagination and social life” (Mishra 2002, 237). In the diaspora films become mediators of “key translatable signs” that are “crucial in bringing the “homeland” into the diaspora as well as creating a culture of imaginary solidarity across the heterogenous linguistic and national groups that make up South Asian (Indian) diaspora.” (Mishra 2002, 237) Inspired by song and dance sequences in Hindi films, performed versions of Bollywood dances dominate in South Asian cultural shows on college campuses in the United States.

These performances “showcase definitions of what constitutes ‘Indian culture’...for second generation college students” through “theatrical displays of idealized ...versions of culture.” (Marr Maira 2002, 120-121) As Sunaina Marr Maira further points out, these cultural shows also “provide a medium for the performative aspects of symbolic ethnicity



in the second generation, creating a formally organized occasion for enacting ethnic identity at the event and during rehearsals.” Maira Maira points to the “mimetic” quality of many of the performances featured at cultural shows to demonstrate their roles as “site[s] for packaging and performing cultural nostalgia” that simultaneously “highlight some of the contradictions of the ideology of ethnic authenticity.” (Marr Maira 2002, 120-121). While Marr Maira focuses on the “mimetic” elements of Bollywood dance performances at cultural shows provides a useful entry point into an analysis, she fails to account for the ways in which film dances are altered and interpreted for the stage. As student choreographers and dancers prepare for the shows they interpret and adapt the original filmed versions of the dances. Through this process of adaptation, staged performances become manifestations of Hindi film reception. These, at times contradictory, adaptations that inform performances inspired by Hindi films raises many questions about 1. the ways in which dance movements are maintained, altered or adapted in their translation from Hindi films to stages and 2. the implications of these decisions.

A preliminary review of the ways in which film dance movements were staged at South Asian cultural events at MIT over the past two years indicates that a complex relationship exists between the filmed and staged versions of dances.

As my analysis demonstrated, the “Dola Re Dola” dance sequence in *Devdas* (2002) becomes a public display of rapport between Chandramukhi, a courtesan, and Paro, a married woman. Recurring unison movements underscored by chorus dancers establish

the women's shared love for Devdas, despite their different social backgrounds. The dialogue between the two women, set up through lyrics, choreography and editing choices, validates Chandramukhi's feelings for Devdas as Paro symbolically relinquishes her "rights" to him. The choreography, camera arrangement, lyrics, and cinematography establish a temporary dialogue between the two women that is shattered in the final moments of the dance. Throughout the performance, the audience is constantly reminded of Chandramukhi's problematic status as a courtesan and the impending revelation of her identity dominates the song's finale.

While staged performances of this song at MIT incorporated some of the elements contained in the original film dance, they also made significant changes to the movement, content and arrangement, including a "flattening" of the embodied social distinctions between the two women. The social distinctions between the two women disappeared in the staged version of the song performed at a Diwali celebration at MIT in Fall 2002 where the dance became an opportunity for the performance of a perceived cultural identity. In the staged version of the dance, the implied differences between the two performers were subsumed by a festive joviality. Though the performers were dressed in costumes reminiscent of the film and integrated sections of the original choreography, they did not adopt the movements or expressions relating to Chandramukhi's courtesan status. Similarly, a group performance to a techno remix of "Dola Re Dola" sequence at the South Asian cultural show at MIT in April 2003 by the Indian fusion dance troupe Chamak, the relationship between Chandramukhi and Parvati disappeared as the dialogue

set up through distinctive movements gave way to unison movement and complex group formations. This, selective inter-textual referencing allowed the dancers to adapt and “position” their performance of “Dola Re Dola” as a “respect-worthy” celebration of “Indianness” and “femininity” at a cultural event outside India.

The translation of dances from films to stage raise many questions regarding thematic, spatial and choreographed relationships as dances as dances travel between these media channels. What changes the temporary realm created through the dance in the film translates into a staged performance? In what ways do the performers allude to the narrative context of the original sequence? How are movements modified to make use of the stage? How are post-production editing choices and camera work addressed in a temporally continuous performance event?

I believe my proposed approach to analyzing Hindi film dances through an investigation of the broader cultural context, the narrative function and content sets up a general framework that will allow me to carry out an analysis of staged dance performances as sites of reception. Hindi films and Indian dance classes as mediators of diasporic “Indian” culture, demonstrated at South Asian cultural shows, provide a broader cultural context this analysis. As my brief discussion “Dola Re Dola” briefly demonstrated, “the ways in which the narrative functions of the original film dance are alluded to, or ignored in, staged versions of the dance reveal underlying ideological concerns or agendas. Setting and costume choices can significantly impact the suggested meaning of a dance. In

addition, a comparative analysis of content in filmed and staged version of the dances needs to address the temporal, spatial and technical differences of these two media.

By preserving or adapting movements, gestures and expressions, staged performances can either “trigger” direct associations with, or distance themselves from, the original filmed sequence. In short, my proposed approach to analyzing Hindi film dances provides initial guidelines for investigating the adaptive processes that surround Bollywood dances as sites of reception and “performance[s] of cultural identity” (Desmond 1997). It is my hope that the frameworks developed through my detailed exploration of dances as they exist in films begins to build an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the complex relationships between Hindi film and Bollywood dance.

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1. Alam Ara 1931. Dir: Ardeshir Irani.
2. Ali Baba 1937. Dir: Modhu Bose.
3. Awaara, 1951. Dir: Raj Kapoor.
4. Beta.1992. Dir: Indra Kumar.
5. Chaalbaaz .1989. Dir: Pankaj Parashar.
6. Chandralekha 1948. Dir: SS Vasan.
7. Court dancer 1941. Dir: Modhu Bose.
8. Devdas 1955. Dir: Bimal Roy.
9. Devdas 1979. Dir: Dilip Roy.
10. Devdas 2002. Dir: Sanjay Leela Bhansali.
11. Dil Chahta Hai 2001. Dir: Farhan Akhtar.
12. Dil To Pagal Hai (1997). Dir: Yash Chopra.
13. Guide 1965. Dir: Vijay Anand.
14. Junglee 1960. Dir: Subodh Mukherjee.
15. Kaadalan 1994. Dir: Shankar.
16. Kabhi Kushie Kabhie Gham. 2001.Dir: Karan Johar.
17. Kacha Devayani 1938. Dir: and B. V. Ramanandam.
18. Kaho Na Pyar Hai (2000). Dir: Rakesh Roshan.
19. Kalpana 1948. Dir: Uday Shankar.
20. Khalnayak 1993. Dir: Subhash Ghai.
21. Lawaris 1981. Dir: Prakash Mehra.
22. Madhumati 1958. Dir: Bimal Roy.
23. Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai 2002. Dir: Sanjay Gadhvi.

24. Modern Times 1936. Dir: Charlie Chaplin.
25. Mughal-E-Azam 1960. Dir: K Asif.
26. Nagina 1986. Dir: Harmesh Malhotra.
27. Pakeezah 1971. Dir: Kamal Amrohi.
28. Pyaasa 1957 Guru Dutt.
29. Raja Babu 1994. Dir: David Dhawan.
30. Ram Lakhan 1989. Dir: Subhash Ghai.
31. Rangeela 1995. Dir: Ram Gopal Varma.
32. Roja 1992. Dir: Mani Ratnam.
33. Shakuntala 1940. Dir: Ellis R. Dungan
34. Tezaab 1988. Dir: N. Chandra.
35. Umrao Jaan 1981. Dir: Muzaffar Ali.

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### **Interviews**

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