

# Framing the Body and the Body of Frame: Item songs in popular Hindi cinema

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**Abstract.** The basic framework of this paper is to deliberate upon the emergence of item songs as a reinstatement of the dominance of the 'song and dance sequences' in popular Hindi cinema, and its inferences as a sub-text in contemporary cultural forms. While doing so, the paper argues that the transition in consumption and the circulation/distribution of Hindi film songs, and other visual/audio media has affectively facilitated the course. In the given context, the paper further attempts to address shifts in the filmic techniques that have consistently regulated the production of such songs, revealing a spectrum of negotiations between and among the 'body', 'performance', and 'frame', with which the spectator becomes familiarized over a series of visual/audio leaps that have taken place in the traditional media forms like that of television and in newer forms like the internet.

With more than a decade of history and dozens of box office hits to celebrate, academic research on the 'item songs' of Bollywood cinema is often in danger of being dismissed on various accounts. 'Kitsch', 'apolitical', 'vulgar', 'not so intellectual to be read', are the charges that cloud any deeper investigation into the phenomenal presence of these songs in contemporary Hindi cinema. This paper is an attempt to recognize the intricate process of experiences and events that have come to the fore in the multiple historical conjectures of Indian visual culture and Hindi cinema thereby generating norms in both form and content for these songs.

Arguably, these item songs will be investigated through the readings of the various 'frames'<sup>1</sup> they play in. In this connection, the idea of the body that transgresses the temporal and spatial grids of cinematic text and the lack of reference to it suffers in the narrative, which is achieved in other sub-texts, ingrained in social structures and mediated through the means of which the mass-media is read. To make the connections between the seismic titillations that occurred in the means of Indian spectatorship visible, the assimilation of 'item songs' into the visual culture may not necessarily be established in a teleological manner. However, the paper's objective is to locate the erotic economy rendered by the seamless signifiers of bodies in the

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the word 'frame' suggests assumptions that organize, promote or configure the structures of understanding or interpretation of a given text in familiar/obvious or in unknown/volatile realms. Conceptually, here, it would suggest deviation from any monolithic reading of a performative text.

cinematic frame as well as in the sieve of the tabloid, situated at the very core of capitalistic conventions.

It is this convergence of the very idea of the body in the 'frame' explicitly contained in the case of item songs that I find helpful for the reading of, and defence against or for the technological epistemology of contemporary Hindi popular cinema. What is most characteristic in this reading is that a tangible context of the cinematic frame is invoked to critique the visible sexual abundance and gluttony for filmic techniques relentlessly levied by a filmmaker, while at the same time observing item songs as a dramatic interjection in the passivity and ennui of the spectatorship. The scrambling of (and a) plethora of formal strategies that have eventually finessed the alchemy of cinematic space; the primal space of bodies and syntax of the camera are consistently referred to in this paper to address the construct of visual codes and language that define these songs categorically. It is in the locus of this dyad of frame that the paper tries to readdress the dynamics of visual pleasure that inevitably constructs the diegetic relationship between these songs and their spectators.

The various charges often made by critics on item songs for being not serious, arise from the similar indifference that film scholars conceived of in reading popular Hindi cinema at its initial stages. It is however, in the understanding of the celebration of fluidity, and eccentric framing that item songs are to be perceived as another filmic technique. With glossy costumes and bawdy lyrics these cinematic pieces cannot be simply dismissed without a meticulous investigation at various levels of comprehension. The discontinuities, rendered in the visual narratives, constitute the making of these songs, which is in a way an expression to represent a critique of Hindi popular cinema.

The readings of popular commercial forms have often been reviewed in the wake of changing paradigms in both the cultural and technological articulations. Songs, too, form an important part of reader's curiosity as a popular commercial form. Not very often, the 'song and dance sequence' in Hindi cinema is a subject to categorization. Any peculiar category is intrinsic to an appreciation of a style that is an amalgamation of similarities and the repetitions, available to a spectator, forms a discreet basis of this categorization within the industrial framework. The construction of what composed an 'item song' in terms of the cinematic practice in Hindi cinema and what functions, in response to a wider process of consumer consumption and quite crucially, in the dynamics of public opinion, is what the paper attempts to explore. The first section of the paper seeks to comprehend the conceptual meaning of item songs as a cinematic oeuvre that had evolved in parallel to and as an input to the idea of spectacle in popular Hindi cinema with a language that rigorously carries traces of collective memory of traditional popular songs in the Hindi cinema, and simultaneously cultivated 'tools of difference' in the visual experience. In the process of knowing what contains the

concept of an item song, I have construed the idea of body, i.e., the body of an item girl, which incessantly, creates the meaning of and for these categorized songs. In the second section of the paper I briefly elaborate on the deployment of cinematic techniques in the regime of the non-filmic domain as an essential link of studying transitions in the visual lexis in film songs. A few representative music videos that have taken a cultural leap in the popular realm of Indian television are analytically approached to substantiate the debate on the development of the stylistic frame.

### **Popular Indian cinema and item songs**

Song and dance sequences in popular Indian cinema have perpetually demonstrated affiliations with the use of lurid elements in costumes, music and lyrics that became rampant in the 1960s and 1970s with an increased sense of fashion, style, dance and thrill. The spectators of Indian cinema (in and outside India) are repeatedly exposed to these norms of cinematic tradition and continue to enjoy the presence of songs in Hindi films. Contemporary filmmakers continue to rely on this tradition and invariably experiment with songs for the entertainment. Even realist contemporary Hindi cinema could not resist the dependence on songs for their commercial success. But how ‘item songs’ offer its spectator a different expression from the earlier songs, and at the same time, maintain the logic of pleasure and commercial success is one of the key objectives of the paper.

A lacunae in the conceptual understanding of ‘item songs’ is that it remains largely identified as merely a reminiscence of the sexualized cabaret songs of the 1970s—an immediate link that happens to deduce the gravity of the scholarly engagement in this area. It is however interesting to note that the nuances registered in the collective memory of spectator vis-à-vis cabaret songs in popular Hindi cinema are consistently evoked while one watches ‘item songs’, yet with increasingly marked tools of difference. These tools of difference are grounded in the contemporary consumer realities that are to be clearly made visible through an inclusive study of the transitional phases in Indian visual culture from the post-liberalization period, i.e., 1990s. Also a comprehensive reading of the ‘function’ and ‘nature’ of the ‘song and dance sequences’ categorized as cabaret songs is to be complemented. In the readings of motifs, objects, and gestures that curtailed structure, nature and the form of cabaret songs, it can be seen that their presence was validated as an essential interlude to the logic of the narrative in the realm of film production (the making of the film) as well as reception (the experience of watching) for the spectator. Ranjani Mazumdar, the Indian film scholar says, in the context, ‘Films of the late 1960s and the 1970s had to have at least one cabaret dance; it was considered almost mandatory by distributors’ (Mazumdar 2007, 86).

Likewise the obviousness with which ‘item songs’, have acquired the status as a commercial ‘necessity’ in popular films for more than a decade suggests a typified function. Yet to comprehend them merely as a ‘pleasurable interjection’ in filmic text would be a limiting approach. While they provide a familiar junction for a spectator as a memory-linkage of images and motifs in cabaret songs; stage-space, close-ups of various parts of the body, deco, lighting effects, etc, in the interpolations that item songs seem to cling to and continue to regularize, they at the same time disrupt the conceptual and cinematic protocols of the 1970s. This paper deliberates on the ambiguous ways in which these protocols are disrupted and addresses the cinematic moments that have adequately contributed in the conception and formation of the form of item songs.

### **Body in spaces: Literal and/ or symbolic?**

In a reassessment of the Bollywood songs of the 1970s, Ranjani Mazumdar, in her book *Bombay Cinema*, devoted a chapter titled, ‘Desiring Women’, which speculated on the economic frivolity around cabaret songs and further extends her argument to explore the elements of cinematic space and gaze in the view of cultural context and the transitions in the consumer culture of Bombay in the 1990s, and relates it to the *mise-en-scène* of the songs.

[T]he prevalence of certain techniques have become important in the 1990s as the heroine began to occupy the space of the vamp ... the space of the nightclub has today lost its iconic status ... the dances were no longer located in a morally coded space, but moved into multiple locations. These fragments negotiate fashion, the female body, dance and music, to present a performance through which a ‘spatial relocation of the metropolis occurs’. (Mazumdar 2007, 90)

Although in her research, Mazumdar laments the loss of opulent dance spaces such as ‘the nightclub’ with respect to the role of the vamps, Helen and Bindu, who acquired a desirable status in the wake of the stylistic cinema of the 1960s but also divulges in the argument to the foreground idea of the multiplicity of spaces in contemporary cinema. Jerry Pinto, too, in his extensive book written on Helen, has argued about the limiting territories marked for Helen out of which ‘the hotel’ was a prominent one. The hotel, he says, ‘is full of transients ... it comes second only to the *Kotha*, the den of the dancing girls ... a brothel—as spaces in which heartbreak may be expressed’ (Pinto 2006, 57). A search for new sensibilities in aesthetics through which the ideas of freedom and revolt could be articulated, which were otherwise absent in the existing content of Hindi cinema, became visible in the cabarets. The films were not overtly political; yet, I would argue that the receptivity of the enduring cultural movements across the globe and in India, peculiarly the hippie movement and its corollaries in

music and fashion, were cinematically imbibed in the cabaret songs of Hindi cinema in this period. A brief appearance of lookalike Beatles groups, flamboyant hair-dos, tacky makeup, hipsters and several other iconic images of the movements were flirted with in a number of these cabaret songs. They collectively composed the space of the 'nightclub' and 'hotel' in the context, and served as a compendium to the elements of crime, romance/ eroticism, and psyche in the film narratives, reiterated for years, which quintessentially led to the artistic canon formation of cabaret songs in Hindi cinema. They facilitated narratives with the characteristic attributes of being dark, noir and sinful. An analysis of Helen's oeuvre in the films of the 1960s and 1970s suggests the strategic use of cabaret songs by the filmmakers that would authenticate the nature and role of the songs in terms of both content and form. Such a study would comprise of the understanding of stylistic cinema that constantly seeks to generate or develop certain filmic practices and later aligns them for selective genres and thereby invests in the spectator's perception of 'style'. Later in the paper I bring the similar argument on the development of 'item songs' via specific genres such as gangster films at the end of the 1990s. These filmic practices, I argue, conform to the ideological framework of narrative i.e., the storytelling and the suitable genre of the film. The songs and the vamp were essentially an intrinsic part of the narrative/ plot of the thrillers or suspense films, whereby both would be equally placed like any other episode in the film's unified dramatic structure. Except for the few, these songs' popularity was deeply connected to the films' success and vice versa. Apart from performing dance numbers, vamps occasionally played second lead to the love interest of the hero—bold, frivolous, and sexy. As opposed to the personality of the heroin—docile, ever so committed, simple—she is the one who symbolises the crime world that the hero enters into as a result of transgression: he crosses over the realm of innocence and meets her, where she could hold a gun if need be, either to kill or to save him. In turn, an inevitable death awaits her in most of the mafia tales. She is the 'drama queen' in her 'act'—maligned at one point of the narrative and a saviour in another. These plot-driven songs added commentary to the 'act' and other events that were to be unfolded later in the film. Helen's songs such as 'Piya tu ab to aa ja' (*Caravan*, 1971), 'Aaj ki raat, kaam nehi Sharaab se' (*Aag aur Daag*, 1970), 'Har raat chahtee he chupke se' (*Beenam*, 1974), 'Deewana, deewana yeh mera dil deewana' (*Don*, 1978), 'Mungda mungda' (*Inkaar*, 1978), 'Aa jaane jaan' (*Inteqam*, 1969) were songs in the thrillers that registered some of the above protocols. The space of the 'nightclub' and the 'vamp' vis-à-vis Hindi cinema, gradually disappeared with the fading of stylistic cinema, thrillers and suspense, and the later proliferation of domestic and family drama in the popular cinema of the late 1970s that was involved in the dialogue with subjectivity and engaged in authenticating itself through a social self. Consequently,

issues like the breakdown of big families, brain drain, conflicts in relationships set in the mood of angst and unrest—developed in the popular image of Amitabh Bacchan, a protestor for several social institutions. Thereafter a wave of realism seeped into Hindi cinema in the 1980s, often termed as the ‘Indian New Wave’ (Wood 2000, 60), a cinema that persuaded spectators for years to believe in the expression of truth: a cinema of representation that sought to achieve excellence in form. On the one hand, an array of alternative cinema was produced in this era that argued for the underprivileged section of society and pledged to narrate reality. On the contrary, it is the popular cinema of these times that was frequently discredited and rejected for being extremely oblivious to the social cause. From within the neatly divided cinema of high art and the popular, it is these popular films that have now begun to be politically critiqued in the understanding of the notion of ‘camp’ and ‘style’ (Thomas 2006, 280). Meanwhile, the camera oscillated between outdoor locations and/ or to domestic spaces. The only female roles with villainous intent were played by paranoid and hysteric mothers-in-laws or sisters-in-laws in the family dramas of the late 1970s and later occasionally by variable characters such as pimps, in the realist cinema of the 1980s while the ‘nightclubs’, ‘hotels’ and the ‘vamps’ became images of a bygone era. In the 1990s rigorous use of metropolitan spaces, in the performance of songs, sought the attention of scholars on the discussion of ‘spaces’. Ranjani Mazumdar illustrates her meticulous work on the design of the cinematic frame that includes multiple urban spaces in the performance of lead heroines like Raveena Tandon in the song, ‘Sheher ki ladki’ (*Rakshak*, 1995) or Karisma Kapoor in the song, ‘Sona kitna sona he’ (*Hero*, 1997) shot in India and abroad. Such instances in Hindi cinema have acquired responses from the academic circle, engaging in the discourse of voyeuristic pleasure, body and performance. However, the understanding of the various historical junctures of Hindi cinema require rigorous scholarship, and the brief commentary made here is merely intended to suggest to the reader the leaps that Hindi cinema had taken in the preceding decades. In the current scenario, popular Hindi cinema seems to have escaped the categories of melodrama and realism. Yet the emergence of a few genres such as the ‘gangster genre’ in the 1990s and post-2000 has predominantly acquired economic success in the Bollywood Industry (Vasudevan 2010, 219). The gangster genre provided context to the item songs as a category.

The idea of space, vis-à-vis the presence of item songs in contemporary Hindi cinema can be read as a part of the processes of the dissemination of the body—where the body of an ‘item girl’ performer opens from within the structured space of the film as a text, creating opportunities for itself to produce anti-texts i.e., plural spaces outside the text. I would argue that the spaces within the filmic text act like memorabilia—lavishly exhibited look-alike visual scrapes of the 1970s club spaces,

now reenergized into pubs and discotheques or a revisit to the stage/ public or dance situations of the 1950s and 1960s, fusing elements of folk and rural songs with a tang of lingo. The readability of these textual spaces is foregrounded in the memory of the spectator; whereas, it is in the dissipation of the item girl's body that spaces cease to be localized and seek territories outside the cinematic text. Jerry Pinto contrasts between the 'vamp'/ 'cabaret' and the 'item girl'/ 'item song':

There has been a tendency to reduce the figure of a bad girl to a caricature...this ignores the moral role the vamp had played in the films in which she appeared. She was not merely about eye candy, which makes the claim that the vamp has returned in the item-number sequences that began in the late nineties nonsensical. The item-number girl has no other function than to appease the male desire to be voyeur while a woman dances. (Pinto 2006, 86)

The above statement is precisely referring to the 'function' of the vamp and the singular act of an item girl in the cinematic text. Whereas, it is chiefly the dispersal of the spatial narrative—continually reframed for/ by the bodies of item girls in the cinematic text and conversely in other mediating structures—which constructs meaning for an item song.

### **Form of item songs and the body of item girl: Displaced?**

The discerning factor that differentiates item songs from other songs in contemporary Hindi films is the nature of its 'form'. The form of item songs is displaced in its nature. The comprehensibility of the differences in which the nature of these songs is inflicted obliterates any dependence on the earlier versions of the sexualized songs except for in 'nostalgia' and 'memory'. For it is only in the arising consumer practices that what is called an 'item song' has acquired its taxonomy and its form, and is further able to sustain it. Having been established as a constitutive element of contemporary Hindi popular cinema, it requires a reading into the feasibility of the potential form that questions its very own autonomous nature and transcendence of the grids of cinema as well as assimilation into cultural and economic imperatives, equally, assisting us in the understanding of the construction of the item girl's 'body'.

In the last few years, the classification of certain songs came to be known as 'item songs', gained currency when these songs would appear somewhere either in the middle of the narrative, and yet in more experimental way, at the end of the film, where it was also called a 'promotional song'. Etymologically, the word 'item' which means 'also' is quite congenial to the understanding of the usage of the word that eventually committed itself to the classification. In the most serious way, it is like the filmmaker telling the audience that we will show you an 'extra bit' other than the

film's narrative. Who would not want something *more* for what one is paying? An extremely lucid principle of a marketing strategy like this can vouch for the presence as well as the usage of the word. While I presented this paper at the conference on 'The Body in Cinemas of South Asia' (2011) held at Vilnius University, most of the audience was intrigued by the classification and the beginning of the usage of the word. I was asked 'why' and 'when' we began to use the word 'item song'.

Unlike cabaret songs and the vamps of the late 1960s and 1970s, the physical demographics of the female body, masochism and the desire of item songs are denied a character role in the grand narrative. The item girl invariably appears in the film, yet she does not contribute to the plot of the film, neither does she ever meet the 'hero' outside the realm of an item song. In an absence of any reference to the plot, the body of an item girl mimics the elusive frame of cinema, the intangible topography of an 'item song' in the filmic text. It re-arranges, re-configures and corrects the territories of spectacle in the infinite possibilities fuelled by the capitalist structures of the mass-media. Nevertheless it is the intrinsic space of the film, where the body begins to accessorize the nuances of performance, yet the rhetoric of materializing it takes place elsewhere. Surrounded by heterogeneous media practices, it seeks to plunge into the privileged situations of arbitrariness becoming the carrier of the dominant cultural iconography of contemporary society. It is outside of the filmic text, where the item girl exercises, validates and normalizes images of the expanding industry of consumer culture in a given time. She affirms the common man's fantasies of transforming bodies by indulging in the choice of sculpting, modifying, and correcting it through surgeries and tattooing—glorifying the body that is different, fashionable and fun. Rakhee Sawant's statement: 'What God doesn't give you, the doctor can' (Shreshtova 2011, 61). Media structures like television play a vital role in order to organize, perpetuate and sustain the pattern, releasing several narratives of campaigning, in the interests of creating markets for these bodies. In defeating that which is 'homogeneous', an item girl effectively competes to achieve look-alike prototypes of each other. Despite the fact that she is dictated by the norms of her own lobby, she freely claims the 'liberated space' she has earned by resisting not only the dominant forms of performance but also rejecting the idea of having the slender, 'zero-size body figure' of her fellow performers like the lead heroines of the film (much popularized by actress Kareena Kapoor) and glorified her curves, of which she robustly boasts in the interviews or press conferences, which remain accessible on internet websites such as YouTube. Cultural 'differences' continue to be celebrated while value judgment and opinion formation are contested by item girls such as Rakhi sawant, Mallika Sherawat and Mallaika Arora, through interviews on television and the internet, sensual dance performances at stage shows, high-end private parties & award functions, dance shows, and other reality shows such as



dating programmes on television. On the one hand, ‘bodies’ perform in the film; the elements of ‘desire’ and ‘spectacle’ are appropriated within these sub-cultural spaces. These scattered locations simulate the ‘absence’ of space in the text of the film and the character role is the same, where she is inertly restricted to perform. Here in the structures of media gallantry, she enacts various roles—‘villainous’, ‘funny’, ‘sexy’, ‘bold’—creating a number of characters for herself. On the other hand, these multiple roles are perpetually gesturing towards the form of the item song that is displaced in it is *a priori*, looking for meaning in the production and further reproduction of the positioning of bodies, challenging the generalizations about gender, class, performance and sexuality manifesting itself in the hierarchies of patriarchy in the Indian society. In viewing vamps of the 1960s as synonymous with ‘transgressive sexuality’, Sangita Shresthova asserts, ‘the sexually explicit dance movements were complemented by habits like smoking, drinking, and sexual promiscuity. Through her, an intensely objectifying *sringara*, or erotic meaning, claimed its space in Hindi films’ (Shresthova 2011, 27) A repertoire of orchestrated performances by item girls in the pluralistic regime of ‘viewing’, operates in a dialectic fashion, in comprehension of a singular visual piece, i.e., the item song.

The conception of the ‘item song’ is thus significantly rooted in the spontaneity that equip bodies to play with ‘what’ and ‘how’ they can be framed, boundless of textual meanings, and a tendency to divulge in other discursive narratives. The ‘voluptuous bodies’ celebrate the act of dance beyond the conventional experiences of a spectator with the sense of fantasy and realism, deeply grounded in the construction of images in the narratives of daily-watching. Conversely, they negotiate with the ambiguities of desire that are choreographed in other platforms of visual culture. Item songs thus reveal interplay between social relations, material forms and subjective position. In the wider process of achieving this subjective position in spatial reality at multiple levels, several constructions of image formation takes place, most importantly, that of the spectator’s perception. A flurry of these sexually rebellious bodies, displayed in various apparatuses of social reality, attempts to understand the meaning of this new form, thereby achieving a symbolic significance.

### **Spectatorship and performativity**

Research on item songs as a concept also indicates the practice of a market relationship between bodies that perform in films to other visual realms where new parameters of entertainment are set. In a projected performance on various television shows hosted by item girls, a constant validation is sought, constructing the idea of being ‘creative’. The body engages in a complex dialogue with the urban visual experience, precariously specific to leisure, which is highly accessible and collectively experienced by the

masses. Fiddling with her own image on several occasions, the item girl's body generously suspends the plethora of information and mimics each other. Several item girls have become regular interviewees, divulging in frenzies of various kinds, capturing the spectators' imagination in their fabricated stories of being betrayed or exploited. Many interviews contain accusations directed at male authorities, more so, concretely either at their boyfriends or the patriarchy at large. Numerous scandals are inflated, exaggerated and proposed as news items on prime time news channels and the print media. Where on the one hand, other film actors seem to suppress their personal affairs, item girls indulge in media coverage, further clinging to the scandals for an unthinkable stretch of visual pieces. One interview would lead to another and at times, to the creation of a new concept of TV show or else a new song in the domain of music. Rakhi Sawant's (a famous item girl) kiss scandal with the Punjabi pop singer Mikka Singh at a party was one such instance. The infamous scandal not only boosted the series of other interviews given by Rakhi on television news channels, where the clips of the kiss were repeatedly shown, and her conceited statements on the denial of being the singer's girlfriend were sensationalized for many days. Later, Mikka Singh recorded a song too titled, 'Kissa ek kiss ka', based on the event. These erratic media-hype events provided an axis for the performance of the item girls. Given the contemporary media realities, entertainment is removed from the binaries of the old self and practices a symbiotic relationship to carve a market for each other. In the due process, the spectator does not register, but consumes. The locus of conflict is thus transported from the production of images to its consumption in the daily dose of spectatorship. 'Popular texts must offer popular meanings and pleasure. Popular meanings are constructed out of the relevance between the text and everyday life' (Fiske 1989, 101). In this context, the Indian spectator is engaged with these bodies 'before' and 'after' he sees them in the film, while he watches them on television. The ever-present floating images of the performative bodies become nodes of endorsement for spectators to read in the item songs.

The general trend of the item girls' participation in the various media platforms that seem natural today can be seen as an appropriation of dancing bodies into the large canvas of revenue collecting opportunities that have been amplified by the technological advances in the media forms. Where the Hindi film industry was ushering into a new age of filmmaking, newer audio and video streams for film songs became available and the fluidity of music exploded the consumer's imagination. Anna Morcom remarks about the sales drop in the music market in her essay, 'Tapping the mass market'. She says, '[t]here has been a large drop in sales volumes, with the post-2000 market standing at around 30–40 percent of the pre-2000 market' (Morcom 2008, 80). A report published by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce, states:

Technological advances and increased access to these newer technologies have made the distribution function a critical success factor and thus an important tool for the business of entertainment. (FICCI 2004, 58)

The report reveals the extent to which the digitised format has revolutionized traditional media forms like FM radio. In fact FM radio was compelled to play Hindi popular music to compensate for the fixed license fee, which over-exposed the consumption of music. The digitised format also allowed music to be cheaply recorded, copied and distributed. Online music consumption downloads onto handheld devices such as iPods, cell phones, blogs, fan-sites and many such shifts eventually transformed the consumer experience: behaviour decentralized, music consumption became multifaceted and thus began to override the old school media and enable new creative energies to search for forms. 'Ringtones have also become an important income stream for music companies and film producers' (Morcom 2008, 80). The survival of radio is an industrial outcome of flexible and sophisticated sound recording. The report further reveals:

New technologies have brought in new revenue streams and value to the business. It has done so by bringing in new modes of delivery and therefore changed the content of consumption. New technologies warrant a change in consumer perception too. The consumer must realize that as new technologies bring in additional values and services, they will have to how the willingness to pay for them. (FICCI 2004, 58)

Amidst the new consumer realities, item songs soon negotiated the newly-revealed spaces of the contemporary entertainment industry in India and today practitioners procure revenue out of it by mostly accentuating the role of the 'item girls'. Like that of radio, Indian television too, witnessed an amplified consumption of music through the burgeoning of dance reality shows as an essential part of revenue streams; and item songs submerged into the glaring manifestations of hyper reality. One of its first kind: *Nach baliye* in 2005 featured tele-serial actors in a dancing competition. It was the beginning of reality shows. Thereafter, sequels followed and in 2008, *Dancing Queen*, a new concept of the dance show was telecast on the ZTV channel. The show presented competition between popular item girls such as Sanobar Kabir, Mink Brar, Sambhavna Seth (more popularly recognized as a participant of reality show *Big Boss*, the Indian-version of *Big Brother*), Shwetha Menon, Anita Hassanandani, Barkha Bisht, Ishita Arun, Meghna Naidu, etc. Publicized as a 'bootylicious war' in print media, it endorsed famous actors as the judges like Hema Malini and Jeetender. The video clips of these shows with the tags, 'behind the scene' and 'dance tips' were available on the internet. Such narratives conjure in and outside the film text, framing item songs with a bid to transpose the spectator to another realm of pleasure. The text, event, performer, role play and the spectator—all these constitute the act of performance that is extended beyond the grid.

### Bodies in perspective!

The spatial expanse of media images in articulation seems to offer a kind of vocal subjectivity for a characteristic body in question. In the act of performing in these spaces, whether in the film or outside, the sexual splendour of item songs' performers is disseminated in various ways—cleavage-exposing dresses, voluptuous bodies, sensuous remarks, inviting gestures, indecent scandals, and so on. These dissembling tools are like gizmos that carefully calibrate the body-image of the item girls. Yet, while this is the body-image into which the item girl invests her creative energy, to enunciate her performance, the questions becomes: what kind of body-image is this? Is it lewd, vulgar, bold or bawdy?

Popular pleasures must always be those of the oppressed, they must contain elements of the oppositional, the evasive, the scandalous, the offensive, the vulgar, and the resistant. Pleasures offered by ideological conformity are muted and hegemonic; they are not popular pleasures and work in opposition to them. (Fiske 1989, 101)

In this context, it is a matter of debate as to whether it is the bawdiness that empowers these inevitable performing bodies, resisting the more dominant performance forms (Nead 2010, 519). Excessive seepage into the media is a contradicted reality in their freedom of expression in opposition to the hierarchy of female leads, who have although successfully performed in the item songs on certain occasions, they have not achieved the cult status of item girls. Kareena Kapoor's 'Yeh mera dil, Fevicol Se' (*Dabangg2*, 2012),<sup>2</sup> Urmila Matondkar's 'Chamma Chamma' (*China Gate*, 1998) Amisha Patel's 'Lazy Lamhe' (*Thoda Pyar Thoda Magic*, 2008), Aishwarya Rai's 'Kajrare Kajrare' (*Bunty Aur Babli*, 2005), Katrina Kaif's 'Sheila ki Jawani' (*Tees Maar Khan*, 2010) are such examples. The actresses are contained in limited spaces of performance and do not invest in the precipitating media. A dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion, thus, offers the idea of playfulness in the construction of body-image, which is evident in other global techno-cultural forms.

### Vulgarity or a parody

It is interesting to observe how in its prolonged and continuous conformity of certain tropes over the years, within the overlapping media frameworks, the representation of the bodies of 'item girls' seems to have acquired a dimension of parody. Initially these bodies that have constantly refused to submit to the coded norms of film and the television screen, and frequently came into view as 'vulgar' and a threat to Indian culture soon became the pretext for other discourses, and in turn creating a niche. With a relentless energy to produce images of self-contradiction, item girls tended to

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<sup>2</sup> Sequel to the 2010 film *Dabangg*.

seize moments of 'androgyny' in the verbal discourses; while vaunting their swinging full busts and hips, they free themselves of gendered categories. The paradox of 'lewd' and 'pious' is staged within the parameters of TV shows. *Rakhi ka Insaaf* was one such reality TV show telecast on the channel *NDTV Imagine* where Rakhi Sawant, a very popular item dancer, hosts one of those so-called confrontational face-off shows between participants seeking justice. Precariously callous, cocky in her tone, she became known for her profanity while announcing her judicious statements. In fact, in one of the episodes, she accused a male participant of being 'unmanly' and 'impotent', which resulted in his suicide. The episode became a sensational rage in the Indian media. In December 2010, the TV serial was shut down by Information and Broadcasting Ministry of Indian government for Rakhi Sawant's use of obscene language. So she moved on, appropriating the image of the 'Indian bride' by role playing a docile, decent 'bahu' in the mega reality show *Rakhi ka syamvar* (June, 2009), although she still teasingly exhibits her silicon breasts implants, (still taboo in Indian society). The show was set as a sincere search for a groom by Rakhi Sawant, where she actually gets engaged to the contestant-winner Elesh Parujanwala, a businessman; however, the engagement ended immediately after the show. After nearly three years, she recently admitted, in a sloppy manner, in an interview on the show *All Famous* (telecast on TV channel *Zoom*) that the engagement was a professional deed required for the show so it had to end after the show finished.

These self-conflicting roles weave a labyrinth and put the self-consuming female-body on display. The contradictory attributes of deceit/ villainy and honesty/ naivety exhibited by the vamps in the films of the 1960s and 1970s, are playfully enacted by item girls in the narratives of television.

The traditional relationship between the spectator and the objectified bodies in the popular media is unsettling and disrupted constantly by rendering the dichotomy of eroticism and righteousness. Mallika Shehrawat, a highly paid item girl, not only initiated the debates on the ideas of eroticism and vulgarity in popular Hindi cinema after she acted in sensuous lead roles in many popular films like *Khwahish* in 2003 and *Murder* in 2004, but also engaged in a series of verbal discourses on television about the exposure of nudity. She became peculiarly famous for her use of phrases such as 'I have balls' in her interviews telecast in news channels. The lingo was a new proposition on Indian television to claim the right to free speech by a woman celebrity. In each of her interviews she swears by her integrity with which she pledges to survive the 'hypocrisy' of the film Industry. Many interviews included the story of her underprivileged status and class and the conservatism she faced in her own family and the rift with her father because of her decisions to join the film industry. The latest show of hers *Bachelorette* (2013) was telecast on TV channel *Life OK*, where she was

to select her husband and unlike Rakhi Sawant's show, she was projected in a new avatar of an elegant lady who is sophisticated about her relationships.

It is in the show of the 'private-self', playing through contradictions, which organizes the order of anxieties, attitudes, views and desires for the item girls' spectators. Uttering opinions over flesh display, dictating to anchors about being bold and comments on the conservative censor board is a routine endowment of the item girls' performance. These undulating contours of self-display are often readily available material for stand-up comedians on comedy shows like *Great Indian Laughter Challenge* and *Laughter Show* in the last few years, enunciating the verbal mocking of the item girls, mimicking their gestures. What is interesting to note is that they offered circulation and therefore normalcy to the body language and verbal discourse floating in a sieve of tabloids by item girls. These shows became an intense site of critique and perpetual discussion on the item girls. With such a plethora of continuous referential points, the item girls' bodies become carriers in the informational landscape, and yet remain visible in the cinematic experience for their audience. With their extended selves, a parodic exhibition in several scandals, the cinematic space—which is their primal space of performance, is rendered in a renewed perspective with contours of display, now and then.

The idea of vulgarity and item girls, along with the body exposure, has been further renewed recently through the likes of Sunny Leone, a famous porn star and Poonam Pandey, a popular model known for scandals and her semi-pornographic home videos on YouTube, both of whom have entered Hindi cinema as 'actresses'. On being asked about feeling threatened by these actresses, Rakhi Sawant has repeatedly maintained in the media that she cannot over expose herself like them and also confirms her role as a dancer who earns her way by maintaining dignity in its own right. Such confirmation further reiterates the role of an item girl who is not interested merely in exposing bare nudity but rather is being playful about it, which further reinstates the idea of travesty that I have tried to establish here.

The next section of the paper will argue about the patterns observed by item songs. These repetitive patterns rather necessitate the spectator to bear a psyche, a complex weaving together of anticipation and expectation/ culmination in frame on which the spectator's response is evoked. The expectations are nestled; it is hope and anxiety instead of the suspense element that propels pleasure in such a case. A domain of predictability is offered to the spectator both in conceptual and empirical view of the visual experience.

### **Bodies, space and camera: In performance**

The visual experience of what came to be known as ‘item songs’ as a peculiar form depends on it being seen through a lens of difference in which they are filmed, choreographed, edited and also written vis-à-vis other songs that existed in the films. The process of selection in the frame is governed by the negotiation between the film technicians’ know-how and the filmmakers perception, which is in itself historically contingent and drawn within the possibilities of generating a language for the filmic text and also is considerably regulated by the market dynamics. In this section of the paper, through analysis of a few commercially successful songs in the cinema and Indian pop music, I would argue that now as a clearly distinguishable form it has absorbed the visual nuances from the persistent changes in the framing of songs—both in the filmic and non filmic domain in the mid 1990s.

In this connection, bodies of dancers in the ‘item songs’ cannot be separated from the theatrical spaces in which they are framed; spaces that are limiting, edged, and staged. These spaces have replaced the lost spaces of nightclubs of the 1960s and 1970s that I had referred to earlier in my paper and contributed to the viewing of stylized songs. ‘Theatricality’ and the ‘tempo’ created in these songs are rooted in the way the filmmakers wanted to represent the urban visual experience to their spectators, renewing the norms of the cinematic frame. Through the performance of the camera, the dancers rebel against a static temporal-spatial frame that was normative in mainstream films, thus referring to the titillations in the wake of the digitized world.

In a closer study, it becomes evident that various stylistic conventions in mainstream Hindi film songs were a direct transport from the Tamil films out of which a few were later dubbed into Hindi. Tamil Films such as *Indian* (1993) dubbed as *Hindustani* and *Jeans* (1998), directed by Shankar popularised the use of expensive technology for filming songs and also of digital sound, bringing in creative possibilities in sound editing. Mani Ratnam, in his films has evidently been reenergized theatricality in the spaces-studio and outdoors, and equally in his songs. As an interjection to the narrative, many of his films’ songs can be reported as not only the faltering steps to highly stylised songs but also to the items songs that arrived on the scene much later. It is the song called ‘Hamma Hamma’ choreographed by Prabhu Deva in *Bombay* (1994), a dubbed version of the Tamil film *Bumbai*, which I feel is a notable example in this regard.

Being positioned as a central figure of the gaze, Sonali Bendre, a lesser-known actress dances in the song, instead of the female lead, Manisha Koirala (almost like in later item songs where the heroine would not perform). Interestingly, voice is lent to a male figure, who also performs. The song is actually posed as one of the

two visual narratives played against each other to construct a meaningful context to the story. Yet the song is a distant and exclusive visual piece that has no actual connection to the narrative, like contemporary item songs. The songs contain several recognisable camera strategies infused with spatial and temporal grids that have become essential to item songs. Here, Sonali Bendre performs the functional act of desire being transposed from the grand narrative, i.e., Manisha Koirala to an alternate 'body', which is consistently referred to, mimicking physical reality in the phantom space, which is a large open space, choreographed in the sections, designated with a camera technique suited to the geometrically-placed dancers in performance. Parallel editing allows the frame to generate perception. The nuptial bed is contrasted with the exterior space of the performers; an intricate multidimensional perspective is evoked with panning and the shifting use of low and high angle shots. Sonali Bendre, emerges from the white drapes, a common linkage of chastity from which she breaks free and enters the frame like a model walking on the ramp. The camera follows her at a low angle resulting in desire, awe and excitement. For a few moments she is isolated from the space altogether, bringing a dramatic perspective. This is also one of the earliest songs in the popular Hindi cinema of the 1990s to use several random cuts, masking an action, to build a peculiar pace in the narrative. Evidently, the song can be seen as a seminal one in terms of using a plethora of camera movements that help establish the protocols of stylized songs.

A similar reading of another cult song—to locate such a leap in the visual excess in the history of songs and dances in popular Hindi cinema where 'spectacle' was given prominence—is given by Madangopal Singh, who in his study of the song, 'Mehbooba Mehbooba' of the film *Sholay* released in 1975, suggests:

In this sequence the camera gropes the dancer's body and, by an extension, provides us with a point of view that was hitherto unavailable in popular Hindi cinema. (Nelmes 1996, 369)

In the film's narrative, (which was unconventional in many ways), the song was a sincere proposition to the excessive relayed performance in the stylistic logic of the film. Sung and composed by R.D. Burman, the visual narrative broke many conventions of filming songs. While we observe the visual of the song, it follows that it is the synchronization of the movement of the performer, Helen's body, in the frame and the movement of camera, which contributed to making the song 'cinematic'. Editing patterns too amplified the aestheticism. Unlike the cabaret songs of the era, such as 'Piya tu ab to aaja' (*Caravan*, 1971) and 'Aa jaane jaa' (*Inteqam*, 1969) where the camera mostly panned to chase the movements of Helen, here it is predominantly individual movements of body parts, like hips that respond to the rhythm in the music, and are well-coordinated with the camera and editing. The male performer, *Jalal Agha* is a lent voice, and focused while she dances. The coded convention of the



vamp is taken away. This bifurcation between the male and the female dancer, visibly noticeable, divulge the spectator into an intricate visual liaison between the two images. Her face expressions are seldom in focus, whereas her hips are. The camera follows her, shifts to close-ups of the male dancer with the use of the camera zoom. There are frequent zooms to get the face close-ups of the male while only the body of the dancer is focused and further dramatization is created by keeping the camera at a low level at the height of dancer's waist. Long and medium shots foreground the desiring body. Track shots suggest a sense of space and depth of action, i.e., by placing the performance in the context. To create contrast with the other high paced shots, there are few slow moments too. The immediate focus from one image to another is more at random than previous cabaret songs. An element of 'rapidity' is maintained by keeping the duration of shots short as well as accelerated cross-cutting, which provides the spectator with juxtapositions.

Selecting between 'pan' and 'cut' approximates perception in the visual narrative. With linked shots and sequences, including combinations of camera angles and montage as an editing pattern, the sense of high speed is maintained.

It is evident from these two cult songs in popular Hindi cinema how 'rapidity' is a desiring element and it renews itself with the changing cinematic techniques and conversely, with the variable perception-image drawn in the visual culture of a given society. The desire to bring pace in the frame had already begun in Indian cinema in 1990s; however, it was heavily sought in the dance moves themselves. The dance performed by Madhuri Dixit, (a famous actress and trained dancer) in the cult song 'Choli ke peeche' (*Khalnayak*, 1993) and Prabhu Deva (a choreographer famously known as India's Michael Jackson) in 'Urvasi urvasi, take it easy policy' (*Humse he Muqabla*, 1995) are notable examples. The latter song brought a different spatial context with the geometrics of space and tilted camera angles, increasing drama in the mise-en-scène. The song marked a difference with its oblique spatial planes constructed within various city architectures, providing plural perspectives on metro space vis-à-vis the earlier songs' picturisation, where flat geographical orientation was predominant. Many other dubbed versions of Tamil cinema, *Roja* (1992), *Kadhalan* (1994), *Indian* (1996) received huge commercial success and presented the spectacular song and dance sequences to the Hindi cinema audience. The urban spaces reintroduced in these songs, with oblique spatial planes, provided perspectival changes in the frame. With a quantitative increase in shots along with the performance provided stylistic codes in the visual narrative. Two songs, 'Sundra Sundra' and 'Shehar ki ladki' (*Rakshak*, 1996) exploited the geographies of the youth culture. Drawing from images of fashion photography, pillars and columns once again appeared, to renew perspectives in the frame. Ranjini Mazumdar, reads these two

songs in the context of the 'new temporal logic of globalisation'. She says that the 'camera uses several foregrounding techniques' along with 'barbed wires, gates and steps to add to the staging quality of the sequence'.

With a reading of these songs, it appears that they provided futuristic creative possibilities in the making of stylized songs. Interestingly, the flagpole and the pole that became a bystander of statement in these two songs, reappears at the turn of the millennium in the item song, 'Maahi ve' (*Kaante*, 2002) as a metaphor of sexual freedom. In the literal sense, the song relocates the night clubs of 1970s to the erotic space of pole dancing, a Eurocentric space of nudity and appropriates it to the context of Hindi cinema. The film 'Kaante' (Hindi version of Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*) shot in Los Angeles, with stylised cinematography in the digital format, introduced several other nominations in expression (Rai 2009, 61). Editing appeared here as a notable example of the shift in the frame. Audio and image editing changed the meaning of an image in Hindi cinema that could bring spectacle and performance in perspective. 'Repetition' and 'alteration' of images and the strategic filming of Malaika Aroras' performance, (the item girl in the song), regularly provide multiple perspectives along with the fade-ins and fade-outs and the superimposed images that define transition in time and space. What would be conventionally employed in the early cinema as a temporal marker reappears here with renewed purpose. 'Who' is looking and 'what' is being looked at is thoroughly established through multiple cameras. Low angles are preferred, maintaining the ramp-like walk. Diagonal settings are borrowed from plastic modelling. Angles thus cover the front and side and the top and bottom—where the performer stands poignant. A shift from high-key lighting to low-key is another element that reconfigures the planes of composition. A similar rendering was provided in another song, 'Ishq samander' in the same film. Soon several songs in Hindi cinema followed the similar pattern of elements in the filming of the songs, which were peculiarly-suited to the genre of the film.

The element of plastic space in the stage setting renewed the mise-en-scène of the film songs and gradually became a coded function of stylisation and later, that of the 'item songs'. An extremely popular song performed by Madhuri Dixit, called 'Ke sera sera' (*Pukaar*, 2000) is a considerable example. Shohini Ghosh in her famous article on Madhuri Dixit, 'The importance of being Madhuri', says that 'the choreography of the song 'Ke Sera Sera' ushers in an androgynous and plastic style that has so far not been performed by any woman in Bombay' (Ghosh 2000, 167).

The statement of Shohini Ghosh is true for Bollywood films, but it certainly doesn't apply to the Indian pop music that had already evolved new stylistic conventions. The visual ascendancy with the advent of cable television in India not only increased the spectatorship of western pop, but also accounted for the production of domestic pop

music and the increase in production of remix videos produced by various DJs in the late 1990s. At least four of the top 10 numbers on the music charts in 2003 were remixes' (FICCI 2004, 74). The music videos frivolously displayed the 'plastic setting' rendering a playful space to the female gaze and a voyeuristic space over experimental camera angles. The original songs of the popular Hindi cinema that contained merely connotations of sexual imagery in their lyrics were now given materiality via the global visual articulations. This transition in the content and the form of Indian pop music reveals the consumer realities observed in the post-liberalisation era in India. For instance a romantic duet song called 'Tu tu he wohee, dil ne jise apna kaha' (*Yeh Wada Raha*, 1982) is implicated in a whole new regime of sexual opulence by setting the female-body in suggestive paid phone sex in its remix video, done by DJ Aqeel. The song is picturised in the plastic Barbie-like, pink-collared space, which is supposedly a call centre where three different women pick their customers' calls and sell dreams of love. The rise in 'call centres' in the 1990s provided context to the song. Coquettish, the Barbie pinks to sexier dresses, the tales of seduction, begin to be part of such videos. MTV and other music channels of Indian television flooded the airwaves with such videos. Initially viewed as extremely provocative, these commercially successful videos introduced stage space and the performance of the female dancer in a new perspective for the Indian spectator. Another remix video of song 'Sajna he mujhe, sajna ke liye' (*Saudagar*, 1973), which was performed as a housewife dressing up while waiting for her husband is re-set in the 'green room' of a fashion show, corroborated the changing sensibilities of teen culture. The video of 'Kaliyon ka chaman' (*Jyoti*, 1983) used tools for the filming of the remix video that was international in character. The video, had a similar closed space with a central performer, with no dramatic situation like the earlier song, yet shot in professional zest. These videos flashed images of sexual freedom on the old media like television in a most popular and cinematic way. The remix video of song such as 'Kaanta laga' (*Samadhi*, 1972), celebrated verbal punning and extended it in the visual imagery. A nude male picture on the magazine cover that appears to be purposely focused by the camera, evoked a new sensibility of the female gaze vis-à-vis the male body, disrupting the conventional gaze for the female body. Most of these videos kept the lyrics of the songs intact and played with the visual potential to produce iconic, indexical and symbolic meanings, symptomatic of the emerging city cultures in India. Nilanjana Bhattacharjya explains the commercial and critical success of the song. Released in February, 2003 the album had sold more than two million units by December of that year. Although the video received awards such as Channel V, the Zee Music Awards, the Screen Videocon Awards, The MTV Awards and the Bollywood Music Awards, it angered many Indian institutions including members of Vishva Hindu Parishad and BJP (Bhattacharjya, Mehta 2008, 114).

On the one hand, the rise of music video remixes captured the mediating images of the evolving subcultures in urban reality for a few years: experimental in language, interacting with the media and fashion industries globally, and placing itself in the multimedia context undreamt of in Hindi songs otherwise. Yet it was realised soon enough by the music industry that these songs have very short shelf life. However, the innovative styles of filming the songs and breaking taboos of sexuality had already become popular among the Indian audience. The desire to reframe similar events of visual excess in the film easily seeped into the making of stylized songs in cinema. A series of departures from the conventional definition of songs appeared on the screen. The item song, ‘Dhoom macha le’ (*Dhoom*, 2004) featuring Tata Young, the Hong Kong singer was placed at the end of the film and was extensively used in the promotion of the film. This remix version of the film’s title song was a testimony to the historic development of ‘item songs’ where highly stylized filmic techniques amplified the commercial success of the film. This song also came to acquire another term—the ‘promotional song’ as a branch of the item song, which is designed especially to promote the film’s launch.

### Montage vs mise-en-scène

In the given choice of technological advancements in both production and post-production arenas where filming with handy cameras and digital editing exist at the same time, the visual lexis of the item songs seems to have made its choice in the montage.

Montage is above all an integral part of mise-en-scène. Only at peril can [one] be separated from the other ... what one seeks to foresee in space, the other seeks in time ... ‘cutting on a look is almost the definition of montage’. (Monaco 1977, 411)

In this connection, it is a ‘bricolage’ of post-production innovations, the rigorously constructed visual lexis of later item songs (post 2000). The endless choice of tools in the editing software has made it easy to play with the images. The random use of editing techniques with a revised intent, such as ‘wipes’ in its variables—flips, pushovers etc.—appeared in the editing of these item songs, almost like a nostalgic resonance to the black and white era in a renewed fashion. The recurrence of the use of editing tools superseded the basic and conventional syntax of cinematography and thus became a ‘statement’.

One such example is ‘Babuji zara dheere chalo’ (*Dum*, 2003). The sequence itself is bifurcated into two patterns—a *nautanki* and a retro-pub, both of which are separate, essential situations. The image distortion effect in the song, achieved by playing with the aspect ratio, was the credo of this song. Yana Gupta’s item girl dance was framed with low angles, using ‘tilts’ and ‘blurs’ and shifts in the camera axis to

create a retro effect along with the stage set up and the disco lights in the song. An element of the frequently changing camera axis was later reiterated and very popular in Rakhi Sawant's item song, 'Dekhta he too kya' (*Krazzy 4*, 2008). Although in this song, the post-production elements are kept lower and it is above all the swinging-effect's capturing of the dancer's body movement, achieved through the changing of the axis frequently from horizontal to vertical and vice versa along with the rhythm in music.

The conflict between the choice of a 'pan' from a 'cut' is clearly reflected in the filming of item songs vis-à-vis other experimental songs in the Hindi films that have opted to exploit light weight cameras in reinforcing 'long takes' to bring the notion of spectacle to another level. Whereas item songs continue to confirm to the style of filming by rejecting 'long takes' or 'panning' for a longer duration and to rely heavily on brief shots and editing to cut sequences into smaller units thus reiterating the 'style' of item song filming. Songs 'Chali hawaeyein' (*Mein hoon na*, 2004) and 'Ae chhori' (*Cash*, 2007), strikingly capture the space of performance, where the use of the 'long take' is clearly visible in the film's style. While integrity of space is maintained in the former song, the division of song into two episodes—to sustain the long take—is well-suited to the performance of dancers. The first sequence positions the female lead Amrita Rao in the frame, which is kept open for her to move around where she could shift off-screen and return back with ease. The camera follows her for a while until she goes off-screen and later focuses as she returns. The song experiments with the stage space providing a literal and extremely technical sense to the 'long take'. Throughout the song, the subject is shifted—a fine example of the displacement of the subject in the frame. Four performers, synchronise their body movements with the space available to them in the course of camera following them throughout the duration of the song. In the filming of these two songs, digital editing as the primal domain of creativity in the visual medium is reduced. It is clearly evident that the 'long take' is equally appealing to the choreographer if there is not any major technical impossibility to implement it, yet it is the 'cut' that constructs the discourse of popularity in the visual of item songs.

The ideological choice of the 'cut' continues to be implemented at present in the making of an item song. Numerous recent item songs would conform to the protocols. An extremely popular item song, 'Jalebi bai' (*Double Dhamaal*, 2011) performed by Mallika Shehrawat is a recent example. In addition, each item song attempts to use a new editing tool to provide titillation. For instance, this song contained a consistent flickering effect of lights in the video set in the stage space of a retro bar. The excessive use of 'cuts' has also raised scepticism at times at the dancing capabilities of the performers. Indeed, some item songs have extensive use of 'cuts;'

however, others maintain a shift between the completion of longer duration dance moves. I find ‘Munni badnaam hui’ (*Dabangg*, 2012), a hugely successful item song an exemplified instance. In the song, the performer, Malliaka Arora’s dance moves are given prominence, with a slighter longer duration to register the completion of a single move for the spectator before it cuts to another visible dance move. Several item songs extended their role in the comic genre in the subversive act of going overboard with their visual effects—‘Tinku jiya’ (*Yamala, Pagla, Deewana*, 2011), ‘Dil De do dil ka achar dalogi’ (*Bin Bulaye baraati*, 2011)—filmed for the comic genre, became extremely playful, synchronizing camera angles and editing tools, extending the comic flavour and the sexual overtones in the song. For instance, the former song’s lyrics and thereby, dance moves with erratic camera angles are more like an addition to the buffoonery in the film. The latter song consists of an electrifying effect in editing, strategically synchronized with dance moves, when in the lyrics in the song; the male performer compares her touch to be as vivacious as a sprig of electric wire.

The process of ordering and quantifying such stylistic conventions in item songs has reconfigured the traditional and dominant space of representation of the songs popular in Hindi cinema. The intrusive character of this form arises from the point of resistance, to intervene in the conventional discourse of representation, through a vocabulary, to contest from within the text and thus creating an autonomous space for itself.

### Conclusion

The paper argued that the varied possibilities of spectacle, which never existed in connection to Indian spectators through Hindi film songs, has been evoked in the practice of watching item songs. And the overwhelming presence of item songs is unquestionably accepted as an integral part of marketing in Bollywood and has gained credibility as a cinematic experience. I have attempted to indicate the emergence of a new form in these songs, which allude to the capitalistic trajectories in the growing consumerism in India. In the recent rise of debates on ethics and values, especially in Indian academic forums, the demonic aspect of the media is frequently contemplated upon and item songs have predominantly become an important part of all such discourses through the sexual sumptuousness in the lyrics and the videos. Nevertheless, one would argue that in understanding the evolution of these categorical songs, a conceptual and stylistic intervention of a distinct kind in the filmic world is perceived. In the politics of culture, it represents a potent ground for the exploration of contemporary sub-cultures—not only those of the metropolitan but also of small towns in India where smaller budget films and the regional versions of original film songs with bawdy lyrics have long existed in the parallel small music industries in India.

In the excessive accessibility to the mass media, it has evidently become more crucial to question the consumption of relayed images and investigate the extent to which they impact our beliefs, ideologies and aspirations. We are consistently disturbed by the question, if what appears to be more propelling and appealing as a visual piece, can it be perceived as 'cinema?' In the paper, I have tried to observe the impending categories of gender and filmic practices, which the form and nature of item songs recuperate in newer ways. The brief instances from film texts and media practices present a fair view of an analytical approach in the spatial-temporal frames, wherein item songs seek the production of meanings. Nevertheless, in my understanding, the discourse of 'item songs' suffers from the radical positioning it could have realised, more so, in its lyrics to achieve an act of subversion. The problems of experimenting with the use of newer motifs and themes in the lyrics enunciate the disbelief of the probability of form. Having established the structures of promoting and executing protocols of the body-image and style, there is a further scope of the opening avenues of radical thought and process that can easily seep into the very form. The reason to believe so comes from the pragmatic use of the songs by a few contemporary filmmakers in their films who are well-known for stretching experimentation in their films. I will end my argument with the instance from one of such filmmaker, Anurag Kashyap's film *Gulal* (2009), where the song 'Rana ji' was technically an intrinsic part of the plot but captured the essence of the 'item songs' by following few elements of the existing norms of the 'item song'. It is the lyrics of the song that captures the spectator's attention with the visual. The song is filled with sexual innuendos, yet carries motifs of contemporary socio-political reality: national as well as international: 9/11 terrorist attack on U.S. twin towers, American imperialism, consumerism, the rise of multinational companies in India, and finally the breakdown of democracy. Witty, colloquial and rhythmic—the song is a sheer poetry in writing, which truly exploits the cinematic space of an item song.

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