Filmi vs the Everyday:Hindi films in the lives of women in an Indian village

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Filmi vs the Everyday

HINDI FILMS IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN IN AN INDIAN VILLAGE

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Abstract

This study examines the purpose and significance of contemporary Hindi films for women living in Narwal, a north Indian village near Kanpur city. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out over four months, interacting with more than 80 women aged 18-80 years, this thesis highlights the complexities of audiencehood for women living in rural India, where 'rural' is defined as 'anything but urban' and officially houses 69% of Indian population (Census, 2011). Observations, conversations and interviews were carried out in a variety of locations, in residents' homes, local beauty parlours, schools and workplaces. Despite these women's negligible viewership of films in cinema theatres, their limited viewership within their homes, and moral issues around women's film consumption, films fulfil these women's desires in real and/or imaginative spaces, with the term "*filmi*" connoting anything that is 'other' to village life in these women's imaginations. The thesis argues that by engaging in creative cultural production, using multiple modes of filmic engagement, negotiating within their own households, and capitalising on 'men looking away', women are breaking the everyday rules that govern them. Their negotiations around their consumption of Hindi films indicate a slow but steady social transformation which is visible through, and enabled partly by, their dealings with Hindi cinema. Drawing on James Scott's concept of 'everyday resistance' (1985) that, he argues, lies in the realm of the mundane, this study reveals that social change is evolving through a growing cluster of 'hidden transcripts' (Scott:1990) that women deploy in the context of their love for Hindi films. Through these, the powerful position of the village males gradually begins to be questioned, thereby challenging the status quo.

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My first step into the world of academia, my doctoral thesis, is dedicated to my grandmother (*nani*), Sarojini Awasthi, my grandfather (*Dadaji*), Budhi Behari Pandey, and my uncle (*mama*), Nalin Awasthi, who left me for ever before they could witness me become an oak from a tender acorn.

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Statement of originality:

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own research, and extracts from other academic work have been duly acknowledged.

Charusmita

(New Delhi, September 2019)

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Introduction

In 1973, when the Hindi film audience was being charmed and scandalised by the controversial teenage love-story *Bobby*, a young woman of 19 decided to watch it in a theatre in Jaunpur town with her college friends.[1] Midway through the matinee show, the darkness of the cinema hall was disrupted by men in police uniform with flashlights. "She is here", shouted one of the two constables. They escorted her out of the cinema hall while her friends were still inside. That young woman was my aunt. Now 64 years old, she recalls how watching a film that was considered sensual, and therefore controversial, in a theatre with my friends evoked a strong reaction from her father. He was a reputable jail-superintendent, and a middle-class Indian father, who said he did not want his daughter's demeanour (*chaal-chalan*) to be influenced by a morally corrupt (*bhrasht*) film like *Bobby*. The film broke all records at the Indian box office that year and also became the second-highest grosser of that decade (BoxOfficeIndia, 2019). This sensual love-story also featured a kissing scene between the lead actor and actress which was highly unusual in mainstream Hindi cinema at the time. The more compelling reason for my grandfather to get his daughter out of the theatre was to teach her a lesson for life, that it was not just the one film but the glamour of cinema itself which was a 'bad influence' on young women. Not much has changed since then for women in small towns and rural areas wanting to watch the films they love.

[1] Jaunpur is a town in the state of Uttar Pradesh in northern India. An urban agglomeration, according to Census, Govt. of India (2011a), Jaunpur is not comparable to mega cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and so on

India has gone through paradigm shifts since the 1970s economically, socially and culturally. However, even in 2015 in a village in Uttar Pradesh (same state as Jaunpur) women were still actively discouraged from going to the theatres to watch films. There is no cinema theatre in this village, which is around 36 kilometres from the famous city of Kanpur and going to the city to watch it is said to pose safety, economic, and more importantly, moral and social challenges for the women here. I remember the reaction of the wife of one of my hosts in Narwal when I asked her if she would accompany me to Kanpur to watch a film. She looked at me, amazed and amused, and said, "Sheher? Film dekhne? Akele?" (meaning: City? To watch a film? Alone?). These three word-questions asked in succession were enough to give me an idea of how surprised she was by my proposition. This was similar to the reactions I got from other women, as well as men about the women in their homes. If watching Hindi films was so uncommon for these women, there was a strong possibility of women not engaging with them, I thought. However, two weeks into my field research, I noted that, despite (or possibly because of) the pleasure of consuming film often being a transgressive activity, I witnessed everyday acts by women of varying age groups that hinted at a complex and unexplored Hindi film culture thriving here, often away from the watchful eyes of those who disapproved. Watching films at a relative's place when the parents disapprove, listening to film songs on a mobile phone that one is not supposed to have, dreaming of a grand Bollywood-style wedding that is beyond the household budget, displaying affection through filmic images on a social media app which you are not supposed to share publicly, dressing up in film-inspired designs that deviate from rural sartorial tastes, and considering marrying a man from a different caste 'for love', were all acts that were happening in the same village. There were not only instances of transgressions but also rare moments when women challenged the status quo within the household and outside, in relation to constraints on their consumption of film. These women certainly did not fit the definition of 'fans' of films. What, then, was the nature of this relationship that my participants shared with Hindi films? Why were some of them willing to break the everyday rules of their society to engage with Hindi films in some way? What then did it mean to be a female Hindi film consumer in rural North India? This question is what drives this thesis.

A field visit for my dissertation for a master's degree took me to my ancestral paternal village, Bhaupur in Uttar Pradesh in 2011. This village was about 26 kilometres from Kanpur on the Agra-Kanpur rail route, closer to the city than Narwal, and therefore,

relatively ‘modernised’. The village did not have a cinema theatre. I was hoping to conduct group interviews of men and women together. All my research participants at that time turned out to be men in the village, despite repeated invitations for women to join the group. None of them came forward to join a discussion that was not just full of male participants but also male onlookers, because that would be considered audacious. Two young women in their early twenties, who were listening to my discussions from behind the doors, told me they did not think that the Hindi filmmakers understood how rural poverty works (Charusmita, 2015). They also pointed out the lack of authenticity in the dialect used in the film (the case study for that research) and how they wished someone would present a ‘real picture’ of rural life. A few other women too, who did not come forward to take part in the all-male group discussion, had engaging tales of their love for films once I spoke to them alone. There it was: women of different age groups, sharing the common background of a rural community, sharing their thoughts on how they see India’s villages being represented on the big screen. What did this mean? What more did they have to share about their relationship with Hindi films? Moreover, if this village was just 26 kms away from the city, what could be said about a rural space that was further away from it? It was then that I decided to pursue further research on women’s film consumption in a rural setting where the paradox was apparent – these women did not watch full-length films and yet engaged with them in the most complex ways. The village where my maternal grandparents resided at the time, Narwal, 36 kms on the other side from Kanpur, seemed like a perfect choice to explore this. The unique character and history of the village, its location, my familiarity with the dialect, and the fact that this village was almost in the centre of the Hindi Heartland region of India were further reasons to select Narwal.[2]

1.1 Background

With changing technology, the modality of consumption of films and their exhibition spaces have also been refashioned. In comparison to men, in a village setting like Narwal, the women as a community have less access to spaces of collective film viewing. However, their modes of film consumption are multifarious and varied according to their class and age groups. In Narwal, film products exist in various forms – on smartphones,

[2] For an overview of Narwal, see section 1.1.2

at weddings, on everyday grocery products, in magazines, on radio, via recitations of popular film dialogues, through poster advertisements on the back of public vehicles, at festivals and other celebrations.[3]

A prominent visual and material film culture is evident in Narwal through the presence and use of filmic posters, images on everyday objects, and display pictures on social media.[4] Smartphones enabled with 3G/4G internet have made their way to Narwal where film products are now widely accessed through mobile phones.[5] Tej K. Bhatia, writing in 2007, had described a bleak future for cinema in rural spaces and a much brighter one for television. He had predicted a downward trend in film viewership because it is primarily popular only with the young males, is expensive, and not easily accessible (Bhatia, 2007:66). His argument was not supported by any data or primary study and did not take into account the rising access to films through other media. He extolled television and went on to say that it is the only 'proper' mass-medium in rural areas (ibid.). My research suggests this has changed drastically with the proliferation of internet; in chapter five, I draw a comparison between television and Hindi film consumption in Narwal that shows that television is considered to be 'mundane', while films loom larger in the imaginations of Narwal women. I explore this somewhat surprising finding later in the thesis.

1.1.1 The 'rural' in rural film consumption

There is a surprisingly small body of scholarly work on rural Hindi film consumers in India. Within that, as demonstrated by my analysis of Beatrix Pfleiderer and Lothar Lutze's study (1985), as discussed in the next chapter, there existed an insensitivity towards understanding the local cultures, and men have dominated women as research subjects in the already existing studies (see Mishra, 1980). My study, conducted in 2016, provides a snapshot of women as film consumers in a rural space in India and describes their varied and 'textually disintegrated' (Allen, 2011) experiences of consuming Hindi

[3] See chapter four

[4] I discuss this in detail in section 4.4

[5] For studies on the use of mobile phones by women in Indian rural spaces, see Tenhunen (2014), Doron (2012), Jouhki (2013), and Tacchi, Kathi, and Crawford (2012). I engage with their arguments in the section on use of phones in section 3.4

film content.[6] A study of women's film consumption in rural spaces, which are not the primary sources of revenue for the filmmakers, is significant because more than 68.84 per cent (Census, 2011a) of Indians reside in non-urban areas, a sizeable proportion of the country's population. Poverty and economic limitations, lack of film theatres, and illegal film downloads online are primarily responsible for the rural people being at the margins of film distribution, as well as what they perceive as an inaccurate representation of them in mainstream Hindi cinema.

In mass media studies on India, the rural setting is already under-researched, but the question that is relevant to this study at this point is this: What do I mean by 'rural' and what makes it worth studying women's film consumption in such a space? Rural spaces in India offer a unique set of features which make it a significant location for studying the role of cinema in everyday life. There is undeniably more to a village than being caricatured, romanticised, or represented as a crime-infested hellhole with complete failure of the State machinery, as films and mainstream media tend to do. But how is a village defined in India?

A key challenge faced by scholars working on rural sociology in India is to define a village (see Srinivasan, 2004:81). A 'census village' is, more often than not, a social unit that bears little resemblance to on-ground rural organisation in real life. The census of India defines rural areas as 'all but urban' (Census of India, 2011a). It formally describes the urban regions as comprising 'statutory towns', 'census towns' and 'outgrowth' (ibid.). These definitions only define the administrative boundaries marked by the government for urban areas, and "one cannot say just where a village ends and a town begins" (Sharma 2004:48). Villages throughout India differ greatly in terms of economics, politics, Human Development Index levels, language, clothing, and more. However, the social structure in India is still such that "within the existing Indian society, class struggles have been often assuming the form of caste struggles" (Desai, 1969: 38) even now. Rajendra Kumar Sharma, an Indian sociologist who has extensively researched on rural and urban sociology in Uttar Pradesh explains the distinction between rural and urban society based on their social organisation:

[6] 'Textually disintegrated' (Allen, 2011) consumption refers to the practice of accessing texts through multiple platforms, elaborated in chapter two

> … ‘great importance given to family bonds’, ‘low educational level’ and ‘low social status of women’, ‘greater bonding with the neighbours’, ‘higher influence of the community on the individual’, ‘clear demarcations and inequality in classes’ characterise the sociology of a village in India.
>
> (Sharma 2004:49)

This still holds true in my experience, more than a decade since Rajendra Sharma’s aforementioned study (2004). The everyday culture of urban and rural settings also differs greatly. For example, according to Sharma, “Culture is more static in the villages than in the towns…Traditions have a very important place in the rural culture, while urban culture does not attach much importance to them” (ibid.). Here, Sharma refers to culture largely as a set of social norms (ibid.). Having said that, it also cannot be denied that cityscapes are also very complex and there are areas within cities or similar demographics where traditions are important, or more important than in other areas or demographics. The rural spaces in India are increasingly becoming “modern” yet there is a clear distinction between city and village spaces and the difference is immediately felt upon entering either of them. I witnessed in Narwal what Arvind Rajagopal had termed an ‘incomplete modernity’ (Rajagopal, 1996:442), where modernity ‘offers a contested and contradictory set of values’ (ibid.). Within the villages, the most basic unit in the social structure was not the individual, but the family. As A.R. Desai said, “...family and familism impress their stamp on the entire rural structure. Familism permeates it from top to bottom” (Desai, 1969:31). More recent ethnographies of rural North India confirmed this sociological characteristic of family as the most significant social unit (see Singh *et al.*, 2017:105; Madan and Madan, 1983:46). My observations in the field confirmed that within the family, the woman is expected to play the role of the glue that binds everyone together and this can be witnessed during festivals, rituals, and celebrations, where women are at the forefront, leading the traditional festivities with a sense of authority. This was also validated by my own experiences of visiting the villages in UP as a child as well as through conversations by my parents who grew up in two different villages there. The burden of honour, morality, and conserving traditions within a family set up lies on the shoulders of women, who seem to have little power to subvert these norms.[7] However, the power structures within the village still favour the men. The

[7] See Bhattacharya’s (no date) study on challenges faced by women in rural India in terms of health and employment.

caste system is still prevalent in this space, according to several scholars in the context of rural North India before (see Sharma, 2004; Desai, 1969). It is in this social space that I situate my study.

1.1.2 About Narwal: The legacy, landscape and current challenges

Narwal's historical significance looms large in the minds of the people in and around this village. By the end of the 19th century, when India was part of a struggle for independence from the British Raj, resistance movements, big and small, confrontational and mundane, had sprung across the country. Hundreds of thousands of villages and cities became centres of resistance as well as birthplaces of future freedom fighters. In the present-day Uttar Pradesh in northern India, Narwal still wears the legacy of being a hub for resistance movements proudly on its sleeve. The Indian flag song, *Jhanda uncha rahe hamara, vijayi vishwa Tiranga payara*, was written by the Padma Shri awardee Shri Shyamlal Gupta 'Parshad', who was born in Narwal village in 1896.[8] In 1918, when the Home Rule League work was operating in the city of Kanpur, he helped organise a Home Rule meet at Narwal along with Ganesh Shankar 'Vidyarthi', a leader of the Indian National Congress and an independence movement activist. As documented by Vidyarthi's biographer, Moti Lal Bhargava, it was due to the persistent efforts of Ganesh Shankar 'Vidyarthi' that Narwal became a live centre for social, cultural and political activities during the independence movement (Bhargava, 1988). With the help of about 1500 volunteers at the Narwal training camps he set up, Vidyarthi organised events that aimed to help people there rise above the caste prejudices and untouchability. In February 1929, he established the *Sewa Ashram* in Narwal and became its president. This was intended to promote the production of *Khadi* using the spinning-wheel (*Charkha*), which he regarded as the 'saviour of the peasants' (ibid.) and later became an iconic symbol of Indian independence. At the invitation of Shyamlal Gupta 'Parshad', Mahatma Gandhi too visited Narwal in 1934 to meet the *Khadi Ashram* workers. The people of this village still boast of this legacy of social movements and the village's contribution to the Indian independence struggle. It became an educational hub for adjacent smaller villages

[8] The song translates to: 'May our flag be at the zenith for ever; the conqueror of the world, our tri-colour'

following independence in 1947. Narwal was recently declared a *Tehsil* in 2018 by the Government of India, comprising 207 small villages of which Narwal village itself is a part. However, in the village that served as the locus for numerous freedom fighters, the battle for gender equity rages on, and it is not just Narwal that is grappling with this problem in this region.

Despite being hailed as the 'promised land' of change and revolution at one point in time, what I witnessed upon arriving there in 2015 was that negotiations between tradition and modernity were invariably seen as the struggle of men, while women continued to protect and uphold the *izzat* (meaning: respect, honour) and *sanskaar* (the moral and cultural values) of the family. Susan Wadley, in her work spanning almost three decades on village life in Uttar Pradesh, explained this as "the contradictory nature of femaleness—that a woman, although subordinate, holds the family's fate in her hands" (1994:40). Before leaving for fieldwork, my intention was to record film viewing experiences of women in this space as my experience with my fieldwork in U.P. in 2011 had aroused my curiosity. I had hoped to explore the thriving film culture in rural areas and what kind of films appealed to women in a place where there was no cinema theatre and yet a strong presence of Hindi films. I imagined my interactions to be excited chatters, lengthy conversations about favourite film stars, studying the social factors that governed their film choices. However, the gendered divisions of everyday life there seldom left room for dramatic enactments of happiness, pain, or disquiet by women. In the first week, there were hardly any women who were watching full-length Hindi feature films at a stretch on television or laptops or city-screens. I asked one of the women I was living with, "So women are not too fond of watching Hindi films here, right?" It took me two weeks to realise how strong Hindi film's influence was on women here and how they were consuming (and not merely watching) Hindi films in different ways.

Narwal is located 36 kms south-east of Kanpur city and falls under Kanpur Nagar district. A drive from New Delhi to Narwal takes about 7.5 hours. From the wide Delhi-Agra Expressway to the narrow alleys of Narwal, the changing scenery along the route is indicative of the shift from a metropolitan city like Delhi to a rural setup like Narwal. The drive starts with Buddh International Circuit at the beginning of the highway while the scenery gradually changes to beautiful sprawling agricultural farms.[9] About 10 kms

[9] Buddh International Circuit is an Indian motor racing circuit

before Narwal is a railway crossing at Sarsaul, where local commuters have to halt for up to half an hour sometimes before being able to cross over. News-stands and small tea shops have sprouted up in the last ten years, providing tea, snacks and newspapers to people waiting. In September, one can see people selling BTC forms at the crossing for entry to the teacher's training exam in Narwal, bolstering the image of the village as an educational hub.[10] The students who pass this coveted exam further receive professional government certification at the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), which is just at the border of the village. Below is a sketch map of the village (figure 1.1).

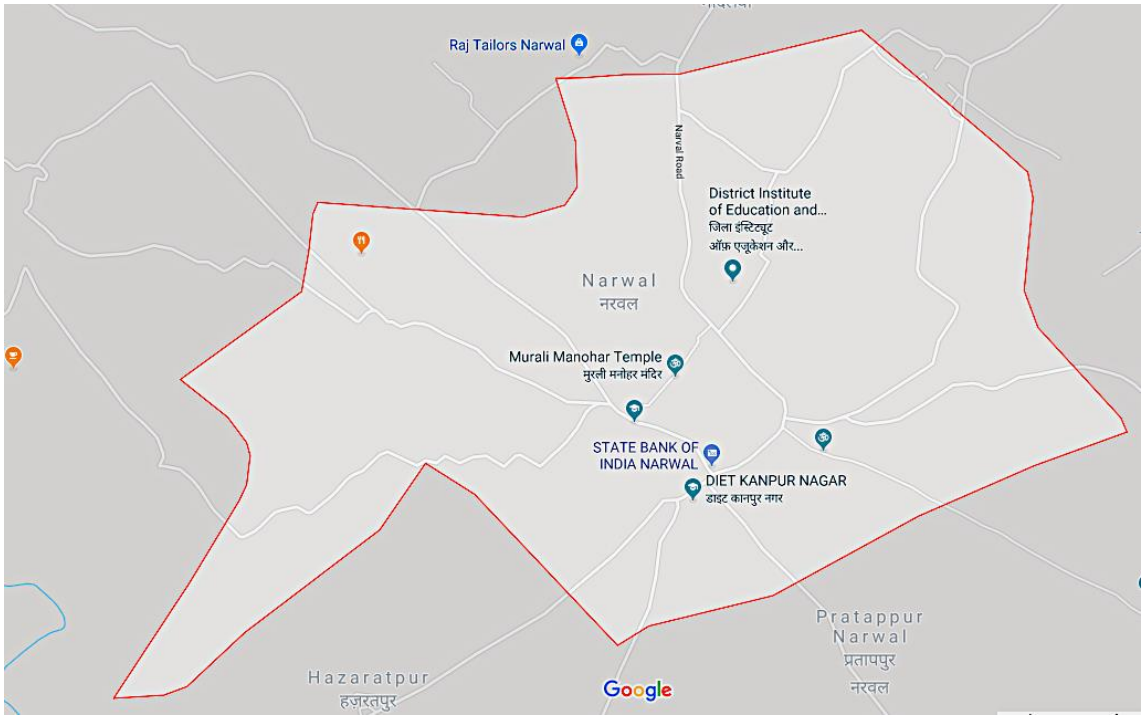

Figure 1.1 A map of Narwal (© Google Maps)

Upon entering Narwal, one first sees the Murli Manohar Temple, which is among the eight Hindu temples in the village. Moving ahead, there is the Bhaskara Nand Inter College, which is the oldest educational institution in Narwal. In the last decade, the housing arrangement of the village has undergone a substantial change, according to Jitendra Shukla ji (58), one of my interlocutors who is a distant family contact in Narwal. He told me that irrespective of class and caste, people living in the earlier era could build

[10] BTC stands for Basic Training Certificate (BTC). It is a Certificate level Educational course which is necessary certification for the appointment of primary teachers in government primary schools in India

their houses wherever they could buy, inherit or occupy land in the village. In the last ten years, there has been an unspoken but well understood segregation, with people of better means building *pucca* houses in the central locations in the village.[11] On the other hand, poor people or those belonging to the so-called lower castes found it more suitable, economically, to live in areas where land was relatively cheaper. Thus, the location of one's house is now indicative of one's class, and often also caste.

The total population of Narwal as a revenue village was 5578, according to Census (2011a).[12] Indian government's official sources recognise villages as follows:

> Village or Town is recognised as the basic area of habitation... […] ...In the rural areas the smallest area of habitation, viz., the village generally follows the limits of a revenue village that is recognised by the normal district administration. The revenue village need not necessarily be a single agglomeration of the habitations. But the revenue village has a definite surveyed boundary and each village is a separate administrative unit with separate village accounts. It may have one or more hamlets. The entire revenue village is one unit.
>
> (Census of India, 2011b)

C Ramachandraiah, a professor of geography at the Centre for Economic and Social Studies, India, highlighted a challenge in identifying the boundaries of small settlements within these revenue villages. He said:

> …even if there are hamlets [small settlements within the village], what appears in the Census is the name of the (revenue) village…[..]…The concept of revenue village was introduced by the British [in India during colonial rule] as the lowest administrative unit in the settlement hierarchy for revenue collection and not for any local level planning and development. If one has to examine various dimensions of development at village level, there is no way one can know about hamlets through the DCHBs [the District Census Handbook. Some of the hamlets are quite significant in size and are, sometimes, as big as the main village itself.
>
> (Ramachandraiah, 1995:2301)

Keeping this in mind, the population of Narwal alone, without its neighbouring villages, was ~3000 in 2015 when I started my fieldwork.[13] This inhabitation within the revenue

[11] *Pucca* housing refers to permanent and solid dwellings using substantial building materials such as stone, brick, cement, concrete, or timber

[12] A revenue village is a cluster of smaller villages, with one main village as its name

[13] Due to outdated Census data and lack of statistics of specific location, I had to rely on the accounts of residents of Narwal

village (also called Narwal, since this is the largest village among the group of nearby villages) is where I carried out my fieldwork. However, all government statistics pertaining to Narwal henceforth in this document are for the revenue village Narwal. However, the qualitative data of my participants is from my field site (can be thought of as 'core Narwal'), which is the largest among the cluster of villages as counted for the revenue village purposes, unless mentioned otherwise. The only the demographic data that were available was that of the revenue village in the Census of India documents. This estimate (2011a) stated that the total population of Narwal (revenue) village was 5578, out of the total population, 2949 (53%) were males and 2629 (47%) were females. There were a total of 1035 families residing in this (revenue) village. There were 842 residents belonging to the scheduled castes, out of which 436 were males and 406 were females. It is an area predominantly inhabited by Hindus (~90%), with less than 10 per cent Muslims and zero Christians. In terms of caste, the Scheduled Caste (SC) constitutes 15.10 % of total population in Narwal village and as of 2011 does not have any Schedule Tribe (ST) population. Narwal village has a higher literacy rate than neighbouring regions of Uttar Pradesh. The total literacy rate of Narwal village in 2011 was 81.51%, significantly higher than the 67.68 % of Uttar Pradesh state. In this village, the male literacy rate was 87.59 % while the female literacy rate was 74.56 %. The local language is a dialect of Hindi known as *Khari Boli*, which I can understand completely and can speak a little. However, my interactions with my participants mostly happened in a mix of Hindi and Urdu (Hindustani).

The ruling party of India, the *Bhartiya Janata Party* (BJP), had a stronghold in this village in the duration of my field work, the extent of which I witnessed during my stay. In November 2018, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the demonetization of all ₹500 and ₹1,000 banknotes of the Mahatma Gandhi series, I witnessed people standing in queues outside banks to deposit the old currency notes and chatting with each other about how this was in the interest of a 'greater good' of eradicating corruption [*ab hatega bhrashtachaar, toh kya hua agar kuch maah ki taqleef hai*]. The overwhelmingly large majority of upper caste Hindus in the village and the discussions at the homes of my hosts, all pointed to a large voter base of the BJP here. During my conversations, which was mostly with women, the political landscape of Narwal did not come up, and hence, I am unable to comment on how my participants voted.

Out of total population, 1654 were engaged in work activities, with 1430 males and 224 females. The table below summarises the information about their working population. This does not include the wage labourers or women's work at home.

Particulars	Total	Male	Female
Number of Families	1,035	-	-
Population	5,578	2,949 (53%)	2,629 (47%)
Child (0-6)	679	338 (50%)	341 (50%)
Schedule Caste	842	436 (52%)	406 (48%)
Schedule Tribe	0	0	0
Literacy Rate	81.51 %	87.59 %	74.56 %
Total Workers	1,654	1,430 (86%)	224 (14%)
Main Worker	1,276	-	-
Household Industry worker	71	65 (92%)	6 (8%)
Marginal Worker	378	274 (72%)	104 (28%)

Table 1.1 Summarised demographic information about Narwal

Out of these, 77.15% described their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 22.85% were marginal workers, engaged in their work for less than 6 months. Following is a table that gives a glimpse of the occupational data of the worker population of the residents of Narwal. The main worker population had 1156 males and merely 120 females.[14] There were different occupations within the main workers category. The main cultivators (owners or co-owners) constituted 247 workers, with 228 males and only 19 females. Out of the main agricultural labourer workforce of 274, 249 were males and only 25 were females. The household industry workers (people working with family at their shops, from their homes) were 71 in number with 65 males and an

[14] Main worker refers to either officially employed or earning for more than 6 months

almost negligible number of females, i.e., 6. The category of main other workers comprised 684 people with 614 males and 70 females.

The income distribution of the village could be not be found in any local administrative official records, and hence I had to rely on the residents, and records of one of the local *Aanganwadi* centres.[15] Within the village, between 10 and 15 per cent of the total population is below poverty line (BPL, as per the Government of India guidelines), i.e., their annual income is below Rupees 24,000 (~£273 per annum). The income of an average family in is close to 80,000 Rupees per annum (~£910 per annum). As for the families in which there are more members than 6, and thus, more earning members, the family income is 1,20,000 Rupees to 1,80,000 Rupees per annum (~£1365-2047 per annum). Families having the highest level of the income level earn 15-20 Lakh Rupees per annum (~£17,061-22,749 per annum). These 'high-income' families are either engaged in small but successful family-run businesses within the village or, as in some cases, part of their family income is earned by members who work and resides in cities. If the family income is above that level, they usually migrate to the cities to live or at least, send their sons to work or study in the cities or get their daughters married in the city. In rare cases, the families sent their daughters too to seek employment in cities.

There are three health centres in greater Narwal (including nearby villages) – a small dispensary, a primary health care centre, and an animal health centre. There are three nationalised banks operational in this area (Bank of India, Punjab National Bank and the State Bank of India), but none of the private banks operate here. Given its reputation as an educational hub, people from nearby villages send their children to Narwal for primary and secondary education. There are a total of 14 schools and colleges in the village- two primary schools, three high schools, seven inter-colleges, one industrial training institute, and one district institute of education and training. The numbers of pupils in these institutions is dependent on the size and level of degrees offered, ranging from 50 to 1000. This high number is inclusive of two institutes which are at the border of the main village. This is not a typical characteristic of villages in India and this makes Narwal unique.

[15] Literally, courtyard shelter, these centres were started across India by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services program to combat child hunger and malnutrition. These centres now are instrumental in improving maternal healthcare and childcare, and most effective in rural areas of the country.

During my fieldwork, I observed that women who themselves had never received college education, or even completed school, were instrumental in instilling discipline among their children regarding education. It was common for families with 15-year-old children preparing for their high-school exams, to withdraw the television connection on the insistence of the older family members, especially mothers. Taking advantage of living in a smaller community, parents often informally sought reports of their children's performance in school from their teachers, and, if poor, did not hesitate to resort to a light thrashing, accompanied by repeated reminders of their own lack of education that led to a lifestyle that was less than desirable. To me, this was not inexplicable or unfamiliar, but the scale of it was certainly unexpected from women who still do not 'permit' their daughters to step out of the village to get seek employment, even though numerous young women (aged 18-28) either teach in the village's primary schools or the industrial training institute, along with giving private teaching lessons. Teaching is considered to be 'the most respectable occupation' for women among my participants and their families. As Vineeta (29), one of my participants, put it, "It (teaching) inspires learning for these girls, and is convenient for the families". These young women prefer to teach alongside pursuing their graduation through distance-learning, as they can earn extra money from a 'respectable occupation' and are not required to go out of the village for the same. The BTC (Basic Training Certificate) is a sought-after, teaching-eligibility certification for the area around Narwal, and numerous young aspirant teachers come here to teach or complete this certification.

In December 2015 when I first visited Narwal for this research, women's role in local administration too seemed significant as almost every pillar and wall I came across in public spaces was covered with election campaign posters. All of these posters had the same template – an image of a saree-clad woman with the *pallu* (the loose end of a saree) over her head, hands folded in a deferential pose, above/below a box of text with her appeal for people to vote for her. In one of the corners of the poster, there was always a picture of a man, usually either the woman's husband or her father-in-law in the same pose with his hands folded, urging for support. However, in the following weeks, I observed that these were still largely proxies for men. In January 2016, a 43-year-old woman, Saroj (38), was elected as village head. In September 2016, I got the opportunity of interacting personally with her for about an hour about her responsibilities and the challenges of being a female leader in the village. She was the Sarpanch (head) of the

Gram Panchayat of Narwal. In addition to a female village head, almost half the members in the Gram Panchayat were women (6). This is the minimum number of seats reserved for women in this village-level body and the elected women are still mostly appointed due to such reservations. Saroj shared that she was elected because her seat was a reserved one (for women) in the 2016 Gram Panchayat elections and her own father-in-law, the previous Sarpanch, campaigned for her. Since the election, he oversees all day-to-day affairs of the village, while she, in her own words, has stayed away from Narwal because she is convinced that "he handles it better".

Understanding and examining the social status of women in Narwal, or most of the Indian villages for that matter, is a complex project in itself. The literacy rate, school drop-out rate, college-education and employment level, among other measures, are not precisely indicative of the routinised subjection that women face. Lack of equal agency in household decision-making and restricted access to public places and to cities are just a few examples of the limitations they face. Here it is important to mention that the idea of subjection, as I perceived it, did not completely fit this context, as the young women spoke of the relative freedom that they now enjoy in terms of education, access to entertainment and mobile phones, their desire to own trendy garments, among other matters. The older women I spoke to showed an increased sensitivity and understanding about their own positions in their households and the society, accompanied by a cynical acceptance of their future. Our interactions revealed their anxious expressions of how they felt about their daughters getting into the 'trap of modernisation' and 'forgetting their values' owing to exposure to media – especially films and television.

I noted that shifts in urban conceptualisations of traditional village structures are not only driven by political motivations, but also heavily dependent on the 'eye of the beholder'. By this, I mean that for anyone who has not spent time there, the process of transformation of a space from rural to urban seems linear and inevitable. The perception of ruralness, then, comes from various other sources such as literature, films, television, oral history, and so on. The complex microcosm of an Indian village has reconfigured itself in ways that cannot be understood simply as a forward march towards modernisation. I use this term, 'forward march towards modernisation' with some unease, as 'modernness' or 'being modern' itself is a multiple-narrative category (Sabry, 2010:95). In this context, I use this term to point to the social, cultural and economic process that brings people living in villages closer to the urbane and, further, a globalised

set of people in terms of lifestyle and aspirations. My study, therefore, attempts to explore the social forces that impinge upon the lives of my participants, and whether and how film entertainment culture is instrumental in social reconfiguration of any kind.

In December 2015, I started my fieldwork by looking for conventional film exhibition spaces such as film theatres and collective television family viewing. I aimed to record my participants' film-viewing experiences with them as other scholars have suggested that the location of film viewing is vested with so much meaning (Srinivas, 2010). I also planned the duration of my stay to coincide with the two major festivals, Diwali and Eid, so as to record any changes in film viewing patterns. As I mentioned earlier, upon commencement of the actual research, I observed that there was almost negligible viewership of feature films in public spaces. There is no film theatre in the village and the nearest single screen theatre is close to Kanpur. The nearest multiplex theatre is only inside the city of Kanpur. Women do not go to a theatre to watch films, unlike men, and there is a moral panic around women's film viewing. Susan Wadley, in her book on a north Indian village, also alluded to women's restricted movement from the village to neighbouring towns or cities, and more so for recreational purposes (1994). She noted that women only visited the nearest town "while passing through on trips to their natal or affinal homes or to take a sick child to a doctor" (1994:11) and that "many women, especially the poor, claimed to go no more than once or twice a year" (ibid.). She added:

> Certainly they did not go for recreation, as the majority of Karimpur women have never seen a film. Their primary recreation is a visit to the district fair held on the northern fringe of Mainpuri [the nearest district] every April.
>
> (ibid.)

Although her study was based on fieldwork of almost three decades, Wadley's observations still held true as of 2017. I also observed a complete absence of city-style internet (cyber) cafes for the purposes of emailing, scanning, printing, or downloading films. What I found were small shops with a single desktop computer system, operated by a small group of men. In these 'computer shops', ordinary people could not use the computer on their own but they were required to ask the 'computer-*wallah*' (the computer operator) to carry out the required task for them.

Film viewership on television and laptops within households was also limited. Although there was no local cable operator in Narwal who could provide precise data on how many

households have a television installed in their house, a 20-year-old young man who installs dish TV within Greater Narwal had a record of all the households that he had installed dish TV boxes in. According to his records as on October 2016, more than 800 households (in Narwal and neighbouring villages combined) had access to television programmes in their homes (out of an estimated total number of 1200 households, according to Census conducted in 2011). However, his records were not exhaustive, thus, distorting the statistics in my study. In the case of the main ethnographic data, I had to rely on local administrative statistics, data from health centres, oral accounts, my own knowledge of the region, and most importantly my own observations. All of these gave me a sense of how media technology, visual and material culture, and low-cost internet data were supporting a thriving film culture in Narwal.

1.2 Research Aims

Investigating the experience of filmgoing and other film-related activities, situated in a certain location and time-period, helps us examine the film culture of a society. The impact of Bollywood on everyday cultures has been studied in the context of various Indian audience groups such as urban youth, diaspora, children, and so on.[16] Each study emphasises the significance of such studies to understand the cultural shifts in the society, which are projected in Hindi films but adapted or negotiated by film consumers in their lives. My study has just one question at its core: What does it mean to be a female Hindi film consumer in rural North India?

The research aims were as follows:

1. To study the contemporary Hindi film culture existing in Narwal beyond viewership.

2. To examine the ways in which women in Narwal engage with mainstream Hindi films and establish the relationship between them.

[16] Contemporary Hindi film for the purpose of this research refers to the mainstream commercial Hindi cinema. I refer to 'Bollywood' and 'contemporary Hindi film' interchangeably for the purpose of this study. Bollywood as an industry and its reputation as popular Hindi cinema have been explained at length by many Indian film scholars before (see Ganti, 2004:3; Nandy, 1981; Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Vasudevan, 2010). For the purpose of this research, I describe the nature of Bollywood following Ashish Rajadhyaksha's comment, "Bollywood is *not* the Indian film industry, or not the film industry alone…It might be best seen as a more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music cassettes, from cable to radio." (2003:27)

3. To investigate the role of factors such as gender, age and class in women's Hindi film consumption in Narwal.

4. To assess the role of contemporary mainstream Hindi films in the everyday lives of my participants.

The questions with which I started my fieldwork were these: Does being a woman film consumer mean merely getting access to films? Does it mean living in an environment where everyone is surrounded by a strong film culture? In what ways are they consuming films in ways that are different to men in villages? Does film consumption mean more to women than just access? To understand the audience relationship in question, I chose to use Participant Observation method for data collection combined with an ethnographic analysis. The following section explains how I collected primary data and how I made sense of it to fulfil my research objectives.

1.3 Methodology

Understanding this subgroup of the Hindi film audience required me to live in Narwal and to be part of the women's daily routines, such as living within the households, accompanying my participants to public places and places of worship, identifying their friendships and occupational social networks, and so on. The focus of this section is not only on *what* information was collected, but more importantly on the question of *how* it was collected. My earlier study (2015), conducted in 2011, made me aware that focus group interviews were not only not conducive settings for women to talk about their everyday lives and disrupted their routine, but also attracted unwanted attention from men and senior community members, which would discourage the women from taking part in my study. Other quantitative methods such as surveys would also have defeated the purpose of studying film consumption in everyday life. The study had to be methodologically designed to attempt to make distinctions between what people said, what they did, what they did not say, and what they (probably) meant.

Ethnographic methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and recording my field notes could help me to record the 'act of their consumption, but also the context of their consumption' (McGuigan, 2010). Accordingly, I chose to use participant observation and in-depth interviews for collecting data. This study is not a

classic ethnography, i.e., it was conducted for a period of only 4 months as opposed to long-term work in the field. The analysis was based on recorded observations and interviews, informed in part by statistical data (the demographics of the village, occupational distribution, caste distribution, number of television sets, and so on).

In this section, I describe my experience of living and collecting data in Narwal village in Uttar Pradesh. I begin by giving an overview of the research procedure and how I gained access to my participants. I then provide brief descriptions of how I formed and expanded my network with help from my interlocutors. Throughout these sections, I reflect on my interactions with the women (and men) of Narwal and reflect on my own positionality as an unmarried, upper caste, middle-class, urban female. I also outline the challenges I faced in collecting as well as analysing the data. Lastly, I describe the field note-taking process and address ethical concerns of confidentiality and informed consent.

1.3.1 Overview of the research procedure

This study is based on data collected over almost four months of fieldwork in Narwal village.[17] I interacted with more than 80 women in Narwal of varying age groups and classes out of which 50 women were under the age of 40. For the purpose of this study, I classify women under the age of 40 as young, between 40 and 60 as middle-aged and 61 onwards as older women. The first few weeks went in familiarising myself with the village and the rest were utilised in interacting with people and obtaining demographic data. Below is a small table to give a general idea of my fieldwork schedule (table 1.2):

Week	Primary Tasks
Week 01-03	• Familiarising myself with the village streets, • Obtaining authorisation from authorities in schools and other institutions, • Identifying my hosts, • Identifying public places where I could interact with women,

[17] A stretch of three consecutive months from September 2016 to November 2016 and a recce field trip for 3 weeks in December 2015.

(1st Dec – 22nd Dec 2015)	• Visiting the Block Development Office for collecting data from government records, • Attending Ganesh Chaturthi festivities • Spending time at a tailoring boutique
Week 04-08 (1st September 2016 onwards)	• Making note of media devices in the households, • Screening the first film, • Meeting the village head, • Visiting *Aanganwadi* centres, • Meeting the female staff at various schools in Narwal, • Spending time with children at the pre-primary and primary schools to build networks with their mothers, sisters, grandmothers • Spending time at the public spaces such as temples and marketplace to interact with both men and women, • Visiting the primary health centre
Week 09-11	• Spending time with women at the ITI,[18] • Screening the second film, • Introduction to the computer-learning institute, • Visiting beauty parlours, • Interacting with weaver women of *Ganesh Sewa Ashram*, • Visiting the agricultural farms within Narwal
	• Interaction with the photo studio owner,

[18] The Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) (post-secondary school centres providing industrial/skill training), are an initiative of the Union Government of India, which provides certification for professional skills like plumbing, knitting, fitting, and electrician training.

Week 12-13	• Attending a local wedding • Assisting primary school staff with curriculum • Re-visiting women for more candid conversations • Interacting with my male hosts about rural film distribution • Collecting data about film distribution at the computer-shops
Week 14-16	• Semi-structured interviews with 20 women • Spending time with young women from the computer-learning centre • Preparation for analysis and groundwork for future follow-ups

Table 1.2 Overview of my field work

I will explain all of these in the following sections, but not before mentioning my own social position there which affected my data collection. I am a Hindu by birth and come from a *Brahmin* (so-called upper caste) family. I was also aware that my maternal grandfather being a well-respected teacher there up until 1990 put me in a position of social privilege in Narwal. None of my family members reside in that village now but it was impossible for me to completely dissociate their perception of me from my caste and class identity. Since it was not possible for me to 'go completely native' for the purpose of this research (Bryman, 2012:445), I sought help from a few people from Narwal who later became my interlocutors. They introduced me to their families, friends and communities and offered to host me in their homes. I ensured that no single household became my 'permanent place' for the duration of my fieldwork. This was because my hosts did not let me compensate in any way for my stay, and I did not want to be a financial burden on them, and hence, it was best to keep rotating between different households. Moreover, it was in the interests of my research that I optimised my time in Narwal. The first week just went into building my network with (male) heads of the families and the next step was getting access to women in their households.

The participant observation method of obtaining data was also inflected by that fact that I was a 26-year-old unmarried female who was an 'outsider' seeking interactions with the womenfolk about their lives. The first three weeks of my fieldwork went in familiarising myself with the roads and alleys within the village and I passed up no opportunity to introduce myself to any member of the village who was willing to interact with me. However, I had to put in further effort in order for people to view me as a researcher, a non-invasive person, who had come only to pursue her study. I bought new clothing locally and shopped for several notebooks and colouring books as gifts to be distributed to children studying in local primary schools. This activity allowed me to spend more time with the female staff members before the schools ended for the day. Four out of the twelve educational institutions in Narwal had an almost all-women teaching staff. These were young women in the age bracket of 18-28. In the final phase of my fieldwork (week 14-16), I conducted 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with women of various age groups, occupations, caste and religion, so as to validate my findings and cross-question.

The study is focused on the lives of women, and not men (or both). This was guided by social factors in the region. First, social segregation along gender lines was sharply defined in the village. My position as a 'young unmarried female researcher' would have made a study of men strenuous and inexpedient. Due to cultural and moral concerns, I would not be granted access to the men privately in their daily setting for the purpose of a study. Second, it would have been unfruitful for my research if I included men as my participants because I would not have been able to establish a relationship strong enough for them to converse with me candidly. Lastly, it would have been grossly uncomfortable for the women knowing that I was having conversations with the men in their house and they would not have welcomed me inside their homes.

As outlined above, my fieldwork involved a range of activities that were useful in collecting data and developing an analytical framework. Although a richer description of everyday village life could have benefitted my study, I elaborate only on the most relevant experiences in the following sections due to the limited scope of my thesis.

1.3.2 Networks and interlocutors

As most families' household heads were male, I approached them first to get introduced to the women. My age, marital status and gender meant that I could not simply walk around on my own in the village, I always had to be chaperoned. In the first two weeks, the people, generally young men, facilitated my interactions and data gathering by taking me around and introducing me to who they thought of as 'suitable' women for my research. Although I did benefit from their experiences, networks and knowledge, I was acutely aware that I needed to have interlocutors (informants) of different statuses within Narwal, i.e., of different classes, castes and age-groups. I mostly interacted with men within their houses, explained my intent and requested them to connect me with women of varying age groups in their neighbourhoods. After the first two weeks, I knew enough women to tag along with them to market spaces, beauty parlours and temples. Having women as interlocutors was advantageous as they ensured that when I went to a household, they could engage other household members by talking to them about various things, and I could observe and interact without all questioning eyes on myself. In exchange for helping me with the research, I photographed some of the women (prints of which I was required to hand over to them), helped their children with their school homework, and offered suggestions for pursuing higher education.

My local interlocutors also helped gather statistical information about the village. For instance, a 20-year-old son of a beautician works to install dish and cable television in households of Narwal and surrounding villages. He shared that until 2014 he used to maintain a hard-copy record of all installations, but since then he has been using an SMS service for the same and he had no recent registers. I had to examine the records from his phone to ascertain the number of TV installations since 2014. Another young man in his 30s, who runs a primary school, accompanied me to the Block Development Office to help me gather some demographic data. In this way, I expanded my network through this first set of residents who were my local interlocutors, and later my hosts.

1.3.3 Staying with the residents

I lived in four different households during my stay in Narwal. None of the families agreed to accept any monetary or non-monetary compensation for my stay in their homes and

insisted that it was ‘my own home’ and that ‘I could come and stay there whenever I please’.

The first family I lived with was a couple in their early 60s who I knew through my grandfather. The husband, who I addressed as uncle, was a well-respected Chemistry teacher who had taken voluntary retirement from a secondary school to pursue his interest in Indic and astrological studies. He introduced me to many of his male and female students in Narwal. Theirs was an old neighbourhood with mixed-income housing. Next to their house was a primary school where I could spend time with children and their female teaching staff. The next family consisted of a total of seven members – a woman, her husband, mother-in-law, brother-in-law and his wife, and two children. It was easier to understand the everyday decisions that women make when I spent three weeks here. Staying there, I also gained access to women who came from the adjacent village to work here, such as students, farmers, teachers, shopkeepers, gardeners, trinket-sellers and cleaners. The third family was also a joint family with different generations of family living together in an arrangement similar to the second one. The last household that I stayed in had two members – a woman and her daughter. I also lived briefly in the houses of two young women aged 22 and 24 who I met at the ITI (only for three and four days, respectively). All the families I lived with could financially afford to host me for the required number of days. This certainly did not give me a comprehensive picture of familial dynamics within households of lower class or caste, but I did so to avoid being a financial liability on them and to not make them uncomfortable with my presence. My hosts further introduced me to their friends and relatives in Narwal, thus helping me expand my network.

1.3.4 Watching films at home and at the Industrial Training Institute

In the absence of cinema halls and given the families’ reservations of about sending women to the city to watch films, I organised two film-screenings for all-women groups in Narwal. The first screening was on a hot afternoon inside the house where I stayed with seven people. This was a Brahman, middle-income household according to Narwal’s income levels.[19] I used my laptop for the screen and there were a total of five women in this group including me: a woman aged 65, her daughter (23) and two daughters-in-law

[19] Section 1.1.2

(27 and 35).[20] The film was a family drama, *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* (2015), that starred Salman Khan, one of the most popular film stars in the country and in this region. I chose afternoon as there would be no men present in the house, and therefore it would be appropriate timing for me to have conversations about the film while it was being screened.

The second screening was on a slightly larger scale at the Industrial Training Institute (ITI). My first host in Narwal had introduced me to a young woman aged 21, a former student of his, who taught a Stitching Technology course at the Narwal ITI. Some of the women who were trainees were married and wanted to be gainfully employed to support their families. A total of 204 students (males and females) were enrolled in one of the three courses offered – sewing technology, electrician-training and fitter-training. The sewing technology course had 25 young women in each of its two batches. These women hailed from middle- to lower-income families. This course only had one male enrolled under it who hardly attended the classes. Upon entering the campus, there was a courtyard with classrooms on all four sides. The classroom for sewing technology was located at the far end, beyond the rooms where young men could be seen gathered around the teacher's table for some sort of demonstration. Their chatter was interrupted when they directed their eyes at me, curious. There were two female teachers of the sewing technology course too, aged 21 and 42, with whom I had discussed a potential screening. They were happy to help and shared that the students will be happy to spare time after their classes as the syllabus was nearing its end. When I visited the ITI for the first time, I did not inform the female students about the screening. I just asked them if they could spend some time for a group activity after their class the next day, in response to which they just looked at each other and smiled at me politely. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30. I then distributed chits of paper to them and asked them to write the name of a film that they wanted to watch the next day. This led to a hushed chatter within the room that became increasingly louder when I got the chit 'ballot' papers back from them. The film was screened in two parts on two consecutive afternoons, as some of the women at the ITI were travelling from nearby villages for stitching classes to Narwal ITI and had to travel back before the sun started to set. Since the families of these women would not have encouraged watching films at the ITI, where they had gone to attend classes, I only had a small window of time to screen the film so as not to compromise on their class-

[20] A detailed account of our interaction is in section 4.2

time. On the day, the women were curious about my visit and the screening. One of them (20) asked, “Is this a new government scheme that has been launched? I had heard about the laptops being awarded to meritorious students but what purpose is the film screening going to serve?” After I answered the first round of questions by two enthusiastic girls aged 18 and 19, we all watched the film *Pink* (2016) together.[21] For the day, I had hired a small projector beforehand along with a screen and a pair of portable speakers. However, due to power failure and technological issues, at the last moment I could not use the apparatus. I had to use two laptops, kept at a distance from each other and, with the help of one of the teachers, I ensured that videos on both screens were synced. It was a tedious process and the screening was not devoid of interruptions, one of them by a man.[22]

The first screening was more telling of how the familial relationship affects film consumption and the second one gave me a better insight into what aspects of film-viewing women of varying age groups enjoyed. I discuss these findings more in the sixth chapter (section 6.2).

1.3.5 Spending time at beauty parlours and tailor boutiques

Upon entering Narwal, once you reach the central part of the village, you can see one of the oldest Hindu temples of the village: Raval Devi temple. It is said that, during the medieval age in India, the Mughal invaders (*Aakramankaari*) had destroyed some of the idols in the temple but it had stood the test of time and is still here today. If you walk from the temple towards to marketplace for half a kilometre, you will see small garment shops and a digital photography studio. In between the temple and the studio lies one of the oldest beauty parlours of Narwal, now known as ‘*Susheel Genral Store and Beauty Centre and Photo Copy Centre*’ , which is evidently multi-functional in the village. There are six operational beauty salons in Narwal, as well as several individual beauticians who operate from within their homes. Women who offered beauty services in Narwal were between the ages of 28 and 49.[23] Females running the parlours were often not the only ones involved in the business as they worked in shifts along with other women family

[21] The screening provoked mixed reactions and discussions and I discuss some of them in chapter four

[22] See chapter six, section two for a detailed account of the interaction

[23] As of December 2016

members. This was done so that they did not lose out on their designated household chores and were also able to spend time with their children once they were back from school. The older women in the beauty business would train the younger women in the family so that they could run it together. Most women prefer to invest in these services only on occasions like weddings, family functions, traditional ceremonies, and so on. The parlours, however, still exist in locations where the women can afford to spare money for grooming services. This means that in localities where the majority of the households are below the middle-income group, women either do not visit the parlour at all or use traditional in-house treatments as and when required. Beauty parlours were an important location for my study as the women coming here were away from their homes for a small period of time to do something for themselves. The act of going to a parlour in the village did not mean that women could relax or spend a longer time than needed, as that would come at the cost of delaying household chores. This activity was not considered an act of luxury or as spending time 'with oneself', but a task that was to be completed as swiftly and discreetly as possible, such as threading eyebrows, hair removal, simple haircuts, face-bleaching, henna-application, and make-up and hairstyling on special occasions. My frequent interactions with one of the salon owners on a weekly basis gave me an idea of these salons' immense popularity for small beauty treatments, such as ... I used to sit there for 1-2 hours whenever I visited, which was usually when the number of customers would be higher. The women customers, as young as 19 and as old as 55, were happy to talk to me about my marital status, my family, and my views on Narwal, but as soon as I tried to talk to them about films or television or even mobile phones, they hesitated and cited reasons to go back home. Taking notes on film-consumption in parlours was a long and low-yielding process in the first three weeks. Females under the age of 25 were the first to open up about their choice of devices to engage with films. In the presence of middle-aged women, my young participants and I often exchanged phone numbers. Eventually, my interactions with young and middle-aged women became more focused on the availability of media technology, sartorial tastes, family celebrations, and so on. Older women (55+) were few and I was unsuccessful in forging a stronger bond with them at the parlours. My interactions with them were more fruitful inside their homes or at celebrations in the village such as wedding rituals.

While the beauty parlour was a place where women avoided spending more time than absolutely necessary, there were other spaces which were considered acceptable and

completely normal for women to talk to each other at length. Public places including grocery stores, outside their children's school premises, outside the houses of neighbouring households, and tailoring boutiques were a few such spaces where women could be seen in groups talking to each other every day as part of their routine. Of these, clothing boutiques or tailors' homes provided a particularly useful, closed safe space where I could interact with women, who were happy to talk to me while working. The customers, also females, became accustomed to my presence after a few instances of seeing me enter the house of one of the tailors. In the first week of my stay in Narwal, I was introduced to an elderly female tailor, Durga Devi (69) who worked from home. She also provided training in stitching and knitting to young girls and women from in and around the village. This was a household with five women residing in it at all times and several others who visited as students or clientele. Durga Devi kindly offered to host me during the afternoons whenever I wanted to come back, which would be in the September of the following year. My interactions with the women of her house were helpful for me in understanding the importance of 'safe spaces' for women to discuss their everyday issues around household woes, their future plans for their children, their space for relaying news about upcoming weddings and childbirths, their insecurities about the increasingly unsafe environment for women in the country in general, and sometimes just to share their nostalgia for a pre-modernised era. Another female tailor's (40) shop, the front half of which functioned as a general store, was where I met a young bride-to-be who had come there to get her bridal blouse stitched.

Tailoring boutiques and beauty parlours were valuable not only to understand women's varying tastes and trends in clothing and beauty services, but also to observe the media technology and film forms they preferred. As long as the topic of their domestic and marital lives was avoided, women under the age of 50 were willing to share their experiences and, in return, advise me on ways to please my future husband and my in-laws. Women over 50 were wary of my presence at such places and always asked questions about my marital status, my connection with Narwal, my location there and my ancestral house in Narwal. Some women in this age-group who responded positively to my communication attempts, denied they themselves liked films and only spoke of other

women who liked films, saying that I should be going to them (*Unse baat karke dekho, shayad kuch mile*).[24]

1.3.6 Interactions in schools and computer learning centre

Narwal's educational institutions are attended not only by its residents but also those from neighbouring villages, as I mentioned earlier. The primary and secondary schools in Narwal had an almost all-female teaching staff aged between 18-30. A lot of these women were pursuing their own graduation/post-graduation degree through distance-learning, but they were encouraged by their families to teach children in these schools. The average income of these young teachers was between 1500-2500 Rupees (£17-28) per month. However, in one of the all-girls secondary schools, there were more experienced female teachers between 35-50 years who travelled all the way from Kanpur and nearby small towns to teach in Narwal. I visited five schools (two all-girls' and three co-educational) out of the six in the village. My motivation for visiting schools was not only to interact with the women teaching there but also with those whose children studied there. As the staff had an extremely hectic schedule at the school, I devised group activities for the children to keep them occupied while completing their learning targets. I offered my assistance in discussing teaching methodologies and curriculum and provided them with a few books standardised by the education-board that the school was affiliated to. I also carried gifts to be given as prizes for 'best behaviour', 'creativity', and 'punctuality', among others. This helped the teachers and they were able to spare a total of 2-3 hours every week to talk to me. I had obtained authorisation and guidance from the headmaster of the school, a young man in his early thirties, who kindly permitted me to carry on my interactions with the staff as a group or on a one-to-one basis. It was, however, not so easy to secure time with the mothers of children under the age of 12 who came to school to pick them up. Those women not only had to rush home early to feed their children, but also had to start preparing for dinner and finish pending household chores. The best I could do was to be there and introduce myself, and once they started seeing me frequently, some of them kindly invited me for a cup of tea to their houses. That is where my conversations with them took place.

[24] Translation: Try and talk to them, maybe you will find something

One of my interlocutors (Poonam, 50) informed me of the only computer learning centre in Narwal where both males and females attended classes. This institute had been operational since 2010, with 30 to 40 students at any given time in a single batch. For every three females, there were two boys. The proud head of the centre (29) told me:

> There have been several computer institutes before (*Bahut hue hain*), but they all got shut down due to various reasons…Maybe people trust my work-experience, given that I worked in various cities across India (*bade sheher la anubhav*), or maybe they just trust me to provide a safe learning environment for their daughters.

I spent six afternoons interacting with three female students who studied at Insight Computer Classes, two from Narwal, and one from a nearby village. As I gathered from our interactions, the primary reason for them to join these classes was a hope for gainful future employment. The interactions here were closely monitored by the owner of the institute who probably wanted to ensure the safety and well-being of his students, or just wanted to know what they were saying about the institute. My interactions were limited to ten minutes each with three young women. However, I later visited those young women in the last three weeks and had tea in their homes. This is where they probably felt at ease and shared what they liked to do with the computers beyond preparing for their course tests.[25]

1.3.7 Attending weddings, festivals and family celebrations

Weddings, festivals and family celebrations were invaluable opportunities to expand my network by meeting women in conducive environments. They were also particularly useful to understand what made an event at Narwal successful and whether the popularity of Hindi films had an influence on the way in which those events were celebrated.

The second family that I lived with was invited to the wedding of one of Narwal's residents. They politely insisted that I must go with them for the celebration as well as be involved in pre-wedding celebrations too. I was happy to attend the pre-wedding rituals and helped the bride's friends finalise their attires and music playlist for the wedding day. Participating in the preparations gave me an insight into the influence that Hindi films have on the music that is played at celebrations, as I discuss in chapter four. One of the

[25] See section 3.3 for a detailed description of my interactions with the owner and the students of the computer centre

two weddings I attended was of people who were village residents but whose parents decided to book the wedding venue outside the village in a small town on the way to Kanpur, to celebrate the alliance with 'great pomp and show' to satisfy the groom's family.[26] From music and dance to fashion, most aspects of the celebrations were evidence of filmic influences in some way, and chapter four specifically engages with empirical illustrations of this. The second wedding was more modest in comparison. The main holy wedding ritual was organised at a nearby temple, followed by a simple feast at the house of their neighbour who had a big courtyard. There was no loud music or dance on the day of this wedding. I draw comparisons between them in chapter four.

During my stay in Narwal, I witnessed five days' long festivities on the occasion of *Ganesh Mahotsav* (meaning: the Ganesh mega-fest), or as it is known more popularly in the country, *Ganesh Chaturthi*. I also observed and participated in celebrating *Karwa Chauth* and Diwali.[27] Celebration of Hindu festivals such as Holi, Diwali and *Karwa Chauth* too reflected filmic influences. Interactions with and interviews of my participants indicated that some of the rituals in these festivals were introduced or re-shaped by mainstream Hindi films, television serials, and big cities. I discuss these in detail in chapter four.

1.3.8 The semi-structured interviews

I conducted 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews during the last three weeks of my fieldwork. The purpose of this was threefold: (i) to validate the data from my field notes, (ii) to fill any gaps in my understanding of my participants' film use, and (iii) to enable me to pursue issues that I observed from my participants' individual stories. I designed the questionnaire in such a way that some of the questions were re-phrased and presented in a different wording at the end.[28] The rationale for this was that once the participants moved past their initial hesitation about being interviewees, they might be willing to

[26] As is the norm in several parts of India, the scale of the wedding was determined by the economic status of the bride's family. The expenditure was decided by the groom's family background, his qualifications, and his income level. The practice of dowry is widely prevalent here, under the garb of providing seed money for 'the kind of life he would be providing his new wife with'.

[27] *Karwa Chauth*, a Hindu festival in which women fast without food and water for a day to pray for their husband's longevity

[28] See Appendix (ii) for the points of discussion for the semi-structured interviews

answer the same questions in greater detail later. Each interview lasted from 30-60 minutes. The interviews started with information about their family background, their relationship with their friends and other family members, access to media technology, and ownership of technology. The later questions were about their film-use, such as their preferences in actors/actresses, types (genres), fashion, and their idea of an ideal film for them. Through the interviews, I was able to make notes on brief profiles of each of my participants including their monthly expenditure on themselves for the purposes of entertainment, clothing, mobile phone top-ups, and other personal expenses.

The responses revealed that the disposable income available to my participants for their personal use ranged from 0 to 500 Rupees (£0-6) a month. The women I interviewed travelled outside Narwal 4 to 5 times a year at the most for various purposes such as weddings or medical treatments. Most interviewees lived in joint families, with 4 to 10 members living together on any given day. On a typical day, my participants had a maximum of 1-2 hours of personal (leisure) time. I also asked my interviewees how they celebrated their birthdays, for which I got upsetting reactions from most of them. They spoke of celebrating birth anniversaries of their husbands, sons, brothers, and even fathers, but not their own. However, amongst younger women, there were a few instances of getting presents like clothing or jewellery and special feasts for the occasion. The number of hours of usable electricity each day for accessing television or other electronic devices during daytime is usually only 3 to 4, and most households do not have a power backup facility. Although it is not unheard of to have small household inverters or generators now, it is still a luxury for the majority and uncommon among my participants.[29]

Since my method of data collection was primarily participant observation, there were several other interactions that would qualify as unstructured in-depth interviews. However, the function of semi-structured encounters was to verify whether my previous observations and unstructured interactions yielded different results than personal interviews, where the questions about my participants and their film-use were more direct.[30]

[29] Class and age-specific data from the interviews are interspersed within my analysis.

[30] See Appendix (ii)

1.4 Methodological challenges

Ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews helped me meet my research goals. My field notes, once I was back in London for analysis, seemed erratic, unpredictable and chaotic, but writing my experiences in a descriptive ethnographic style helped me organise, analyse and signpost my data. The whole process of going to the field, collecting the data, organising and analysing it, was marked by methodological challenges that I reflect on in this section. These include gaining access to village women, unreliable statistics, ethical considerations, field note taking, the small scale of the study, and implications of me being an 'outsider' (urban, studying abroad, non-resident) as well as 'insider' (ancestral roots, middle-class north Indian family, familiar with dialect).

1.4.1 Gaining access to village women

Gaining access to women in a gendered and hierarchical class and caste society was challenging as "unlike experimental researchers, ethnographers typically have limited control over who enters the field of observation" (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 342). During the day, I only got limited time to interact with women as they had household work and I could only find small slots of time to talk to them. I could not go to the city to watch films in the theatre with any of my participants as their families did not allow that. The men were sceptical about what I was going to tell or ask the women in their families and whether I was extracting private information from them. I obtained verbal consent from men of varying age groups to be able to talk to their female family members and children. This reluctance on the part of the male fraternity also came from the patriarchal need of control over women's lives. As Susan Wadley remarked about the observed social order in a village in Uttar Pradesh more than two decades earlier, "a woman must be controlled. But whether that control should come from her husband (or father or brother), as normative statements claim, or from her own sense of right is debatable" (1994:38). She described the various ways in which this took place in the rural social setting, but the primary ways that I observed during my fieldwork were (i) control through containment (veiling, restricted movement and participation of women in public and private spaces) and (ii) control through silencing (referring to norms for conduct that mandated how and when a woman could speak freely) (1994:55).

Several men who did not know about me suspected I was a government official visiting the village for an inspection. Some of them thought I was working for an NGO in Delhi probably associated with '*Mahila Kalyan*' (women's empowerment), which made them suspicious of me. As one of my participants told me in a later week, "My husband thought you were an NGO worker who had come to our house to ask about my reproductive health (*zaccha-baccha adhikari*) or possible domestic violence (*maar-peet*)". As the weeks passed by, the word spread about my research and the kind of interactions I was having with the women in the village. By the fourth week I noted that a few men themselves ensured a separate seating place inside the house for me to talk to the women. In the first 3-4 weeks, our conversations were mostly about how grateful and satisfied my participants were with their lives and that their days were occupied by the household duties, children, husbands, and in some cases, cattle. As one of my participants (42) shared, "We have home, family and our neighbours, why would we go anywhere else? (*Kahin aur jaake kya karna hai*)". It was only after the fifth week that their discontent with various things started to show in our discussions. It was the younger women under the age of 30 who started sharing their dissatisfaction with me, long before the older ones did. It may have been because they were closer to my age and felt that I might empathise. By the end of my fieldwork, some of the elders had started calling me *bitti* or *beta*, both of which are words of endearment for addressing a young one. Ironically, although engaging with film was still an activity that was not encouraged for women, the men found it acceptable for me to talk to the women about it. As a male staff member (35) at one of the village schools said, "*Iske baare mein poochhke kya karengi aap* (what will you do with this information anyway)". Once the men and the village elders were convinced that I was 'researching on films', they were not too bothered to limit our interactions. This may have been because they thought there is 'nothing to be said about it' or that 'information about women's film consumption in a village' will not lead to any substantial knowledge-building.

Additionally, a major limitation of my study was lack of access to the women who were economically the weakest in the village. For instance, women working at the *Ganesh Seva Ashram* as weavers (daily wage earners) only earned about 50 Rupees (£0.57) a day. As mentioned earlier, the *Ganesh Seva Ashram* is a small *Khadi* cloth manufacturing unit located in Narwal.[31] The legacy of 'self-sufficiency' and the government's policy

[31] See section 1.1.2

encouraging *Khadi* has ensured the continuing existence of the *Ashram*. However, the women who worked here shared their aspiration for a self-reliant life where they could use their skills to make more money than they currently do. Most of these women either came from broken families, were widows, or had alcoholic husbands, often with little or no other means of support. They did not seem particularly happy with my presence in the *Ashram*. This was understandable, given that my presence meant incurring an opportunity cost for them. A woman, perhaps in her 50s, even politely suggested that it was my responsibility, as someone educated and well-off, to 'give back to my own people' in some way. She added, "If I sit and spend time conversing with you, from where will my food come?" I felt that my presence in the ashram was unwanted and maybe even exploitative. The proverbial dilemma of a social researcher became real for me as I came to terms with the harsh everyday realities of my participants. These women were self-reliant, hardworking, and often the sole breadwinners in their households. Carrying out fieldwork in this setting ideally called for more time and preparedness to compensate in a fruitful or sustainable way for the long-term benefits to participants. It would have also allowed for an analysis that gave a detailed and accurate account of women's film consumption based on their caste. Caste struggles often also coincide with class struggles in India (Desai, 1969:38) even now, especially in rural areas, and gaining access to the households of women from so-called lower castes proved to be extremely difficult. None of my interlocutors believed that those women would have anything to say on the topic of film consumption (*woh bechari kya kahengi*), and the other two who did not dismiss the idea expressed that I might offend those women by asking questions on films, internet and phones when their household was still struggling to get two square meals a day (*Khane ko paise nahi hain, film phone net pe kaise jawaab dengi*). Additionally, within two weeks of starting my fieldwork, I realised that some of my interlocutors only took me to places they wanted me to go to, and my agency was somewhat undermined. Therefore, I started going straight to the houses of the women with other women who I knew but made sure that the same person never accompanied me more than twice to any place.

When I approached women from extremely poor households or those belonging to the so-called lower castes, there was a discomfort between us. This may have been partly because some of them knew who I was staying with and approaching them with or without a chaperone yielded unfruitful interactions. If I went with someone, their social

position in the village affected these women's perception of me. If I went without anybody, that would be considered strange and intrusive by men and women. One of my interviewees for the in-depth interviews belonged to *Prajapati* caste (the pottery makers).[32] She taught at a local secondary school in Narwal and was in the third year of her BA degree. She told me during the interview that her older brother works in Kanpur and he wanted her to finish her BA degree. She shared that her household did not have a television or laptop and the only mobile phone in the house belonged to her father. The discomfort was tangible between us and I got the sense that I probably embarrassed her by asking about films, internet, and phones, when she did not have those resources yet. She shook her head 'no' to most of my questions on disposable income, her favourite actor, her ideal film, and so on. All she said after a few minutes of conversation was, "*Hamare ghar mein kisiko shauk nahi hai* (no one in my family is keen [on films])". Maybe the discomfort was less due to lack of resources and more because of our class and caste power imbalance. Maybe the power imbalance was created not only by my own background but also due to my other social associations in the village. Maybe she was just not interested. I could not say for sure the reason for her hesitation, so I wished her good luck and our interaction was cut short. More time in the village could have helped me to carry out a study specifically among the lower-caste low-income households in the village. This was not the only challenge that the rural power structures gave rise to.

1.4.2 Power relation between researcher and participants

George E. Marcus described some of the methodological challenges of ethnography in his book, 'Ethnography through thick and thin' (1998). In the context of ethical issues in ethnographic research, he said:

> "The inequality of power relations, weighted in favour of the anthropologist, can no longer be presumed in this world of multi-sited ethnography. The fieldworker often deals with subjects who share his own broadly middle-class identity and fears, in which case unspoken power issues in the relationship become far more ambiguous than they would have been in past anthropological research."
>
> (Marcus, 1998:121)

[32] Belonging to the Scheduled Caste category

I faced a similar issue in my research. Up until the 1990s in Narwal, the notion of a person from a metropolitan city or outside India evoked awe and people wanted to elevate their social standing in the village by associating themselves with the 'outsiders'. This observation held true in my experience as a child visiting this and other areas in UP. News of anyone coming from outside the village spread quickly across the community along with an intense curiosity about their motivations. My fieldwork visit indicated that although there was curiosity among some of my college-going participants, it was more to do with learning about my experiences in the UK than putting me on a higher social pedestal. They were cognizant of the similarities and differences between us during all our interactions and often expressed their desire to pursue work or higher education in cities. As such, it was difficult to ascertain the power equation that existed between my participants and myself, which changed with each interaction. On one hand, owing to my background (caste, class and education), I possessed higher social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in that space. On the other hand, I was in a weaker position due to my need for their time and resources, and my sudden and strange request for spending time in their homes. For instance, sometimes participants or their family members asked me how I managed living on my own in a foreign land and whether I was living in a hostel. Their curiosity did not reflect any awe, and they empathised with some of the issues I had faced, such as lack of safety, sexism, and familial responsibilities. The familiarity and empathy in this case proved to be a point of solidarity among us. However, my caste remained a privilege and the fact that I had immediate family who grew up in the countryside gave me advantages; had some higher middle-class urban researcher been to Narwal, I am not sure whether she/he would have been given such kind invitations to live in people's houses.

1.4.3 Unreliable statistics:

My research would have benefitted from quantitative data about Narwal and the lack of sources for these was a crippling obstacle. During my analysis, it proved extremely challenging for me to ground my arguments due to unreliable statistical data for the following:

- Total number of households

- Number of people in each household
- Income distribution
- Number of women involved in local administration
- Exact number of films distributed through 'computer shops' in Narwal
- Precise incomes and sources of the poorest of women (for e.g., women working at the *Seva Ashram* or women belonging to so-called lower castes)
- Media infrastructure (broadband/internet providers, telecom towers, number of mobile phones and connections, exact number of television sets in Narwal)

I visited the Block Development Office (BDO) for records of demographics, occupation, incomes, number of households, *pucca* houses, caste- and class-based occupational data, and so on. After waiting for half a day, the BDO's assistant dictated the figures from his records registers and I noted them down. The obtained data would have been sufficient, reliable and timely had I been carrying out my research across the whole revenue village. The information was incomplete as it was impossible to isolate Narwal's data from the cluster of neighbouring villages. Women's reproductive and health data from the *Aanganwadis* was reliable and detailed, but not relevant to answer my primary research question about film-use. My research additionally relied on informal and unofficial sources such as the cable installer, shopkeepers, computer-shop owner, principal of a local primary school, and so on.

1.4.4 Scale and generalisability of the study

Lack of credible data affected the generalisability of my study. Additionally, due to my difficulty in gaining access to the village women, the method of sampling became random (sampling) by default. Also, relying on interlocutors and my participants to introduce me to potential respondents meant a curb on my agency to choose a more representative sample. Despite interacting with more than 80 women in a village of 3000 people, I was unable to find women strategically based on sociological classifications such as age, class, and caste. Although I have drawn some conclusions on film-use by women of varying ages and classes, they are based on individual stories of my participants and my observations. In this sense it is perhaps best thought of as a pilot study.

Time constraints were also a huge disadvantage for this research. By the time I expanded my network and started having productive interactions, it was time to wrap up the fieldwork. Having more time to do this research would have meant not just more women as my participants but also having a more representative sample whose analysis would yield results that were more generalisable for different age and income groups.

1.4.5 Confidentiality and ethical concerns

During my research, I was privy to some intense and distressing recollections by women about their lives, wreaking irrevocable changes in my ways of seeing. The issue of safety in general and the risk of disturbing their family relations led me to make a choice of keeping their identities anonymous. My study takes into account the right to privacy and safety of the women I met. I changed the names of my participants in this thesis and have avoided describing any unpleasant experiences that can identify the person, so as to avoid threats to their psychological well-being. Since the subject matter of my research in general did not pose any grave danger to my participants, most of them agreed to let me divulge details such as their family structure, their profession, disposable income, and so on. I avoided private or intrusive questions on issues such as their relationships with their spouses and older family members. For instance, one of the women at one of the educational institutions (40) shared with me in the last week of my field visit, that she wanted to get away from the joint family to live only with her husband, as the other family members did not treat her well (*achha vyavhaar nahi karte*). She further confessed that she was subjected to emotional and sexual abuse [details omitted] by two of her family members, and she was afraid of telling her husband about it, fearing a rift between him and the abusers, or worse, abandonment. She was seeking teaching opportunities in the nearby cities without the knowledge of other family members so that she could convince her husband to move out. She asked for my help in drafting a letter for her job application. In any other circumstance, this would have been an uncomplicated decision for me. However, my assistance could harm her if anyone found out that I had been helping her, she would be in trouble. I drafted two application letters for her, printed them out, and gave her the hard copies discreetly. It was interactions like these that I found challenging because of the ethical dilemmas they posed. They did, however, provide me with glimpses of the power structures within which my participants lived.

Another ethical concern that may have inflected my participants' responses was their perception of my research motivation. Whenever I explained the objectives of my research, I was hardly taken seriously as a PhD student who was studying a waste (*faltu*) topic like films. I realised that my topic evoked a generally underwhelming response from men. For middle-aged and young women, my topic was *badhiya* (great, nice). However, there were a lot of questions from men and women following the introduction of my topic before the start of each new interaction. Everyone wanted to know 'which subject was my PhD in'. I tried to explain it as a mixture of media studies and anthropology, but that either led to more questions or sudden disinterest. It was easier for me to say, from the second week onwards, that I was writing a book on Narwal and its women. I introduced myself as a researcher based in London, studying media and its role in the society. This was acceptable for everyone after the initial scepticism for a few weeks, especially as my background information spread within the community, that my mother spent the first 19 years of life here. Hence, it became a matter of great pride that Narwal was about to be highlighted on the world map by someone.

My agency as a researcher in the field differed from one participant to another. There were various discursive categories within which I found myself to be positioned, in the eyes of my participants as well as interlocutors. It was not just those of the Self/Other, Rural/Urban, Insider/Outsider (Parmeswaran, 2001:69), but also of the so-called Upper/Lower caste and Researcher/Participant. Implications of carrying out research in a cultural setting that was partly familiar had its own challenges and I had to balance my position in alignment with my participant's perception of me during our interactions. For instance, while talking to a 65-year-old woman with an extremely critical view of her daughter-in-law, I felt uneasy about what she was saying and uncertain about the mixed messages I was receiving from her about me participating in that conversation. While talking to certain participants, I felt as if they were *prepared* for what I was going to talk to them about. This may have been a result of interpersonal networks of my participants in the village. After a month, I had to proceed slower and had to carefully tailor my conversations according to the person I was going to talk to. Patricia and Roger Jeffery's experience of their discussions with rural Indian women was precisely what I went through during my research too: "Aligning ourselves with one person's critique would almost inevitably put us out of alignment with other people's" (1996:21). If I heard what men had to say, the women appeared to be lazy and nagging. If I listened to the young

women, I would be inclined to become critical of the older family members. If I lent an ear to older women, all I would hear is how *filmi* habits are destroying the young women living in the village. In none of the cases was I openly defiant of my participants' views. Mostly, I listened to all, but had to rely more on my own observations than my interactions.

1.4.6 Field note taking and informed consent

The most tedious yet significant task was taking copious amounts of field notes. To optimise my time in collecting data, I used the feature of audio recording on my phone. This method proved to be particularly helpful as I recorded my observations in my own voice immediately after an interaction with a participant in their toilets or bathrooms. It seemed distracting for me and uncomfortable for my participants when I was taking notes on paper while speaking to them, and I was scared that I may forget the details in between my interactions and note-taking, as I did in the first three weeks. This method proved to be useful for field visits requiring extensive notetaking, and it ensured that I documented even the minutest of details. Hence, my focus could completely be on the dynamics of the interaction.[33] For the interviews, I used printed questionnaires that I filled out after each session. My field notes, audio-recordings and data from the in-depth interviews provided the data for this research.

I secured oral consent from my participants and interlocutors, as making them sign a written consent form would have unsettled them. My earlier research work in 2011 in another village in UP made me aware that a written consent form did not invite trust from participants. If I distributed consent forms, the information they revealed 'could be used for anything', and no one was ready for that. I explained the purpose of my research and told them their names would be changed or they could even choose to tell me false names. Whilst I could not conceal my interest in knowing about members of their family and everyday lives, films as a topic of discussion eased them into interacting with me. All my participants were aware that I was taking notes of what they were telling me and one of

[33] An excerpt of my field notes on an audio-note I made after my session with a participant can be referred to in appendix (i). It includes a vivid description of the relevant elements. The purpose of documenting this profile is to describe how I communicated and connected with the participants. Profiling and descriptions formed most of my field notes.

them (60) made me show her my field diary. They were not comfortable with a live recording, so I made the audio notes myself once the interactions were over. In my interactions, I kept mentioning casually at times that any insights from them will be valuable for my research. The purpose was to maintain an informed consent throughout our conversations and to encourage them to talk freely without thinking about how their responses were going to be relevant for my study.

Conclusion

I started this chapter with an introduction of how women in rural north India still find it difficult to share their relationship with Hindi films openly. In a country that is such a significant part of the global film industry, producing the world's largest number of films every year, women film-users in this north Indian village are still largely non-viewers of mainstream Hindi cinema, even though their lives are dominated by films in many ways. I provide a brief background of this paradox and highlight the reasons for film consumption being seen as a transgressive activity for women. I explain how the rural spaces in India offer a unique set of features which make it a significant location for studying the role of cinema in everyday life. I then moved on to contextualise this by outlining what I mean by 'rural' in this study and why Narwal is an appropriate case study. Next, I provided a historical background of Narwal and explained why it was considered to be the promised land of social, cultural and political change since the Indian independence struggle. Subsequently, I delineated my research aims and the questions that drove this thesis. My study provides a snapshot of women as film consumers in a rural space in India and describes their varied and 'textually disintegrated' (Allen, 2011) experiences of consuming Hindi film content.

In the second part of this chapter, I reflected on my methodology and its challenges. I described the research procedure and reflected on aspects of my fieldwork such as staying with the residents, gaining access to women, watching films with my participants, visiting beauty parlours, interacting with female staff in educational institutions, attending celebrations, and conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews. Next, I reflected on the challenges faced during and after my fieldwork such as unreliable statistics, difficulty of access to women, and power relations between researcher and participants. I also discussed the scale and generalisability of this study as I interacted with 80 women, but

the sample was not representative due to lack of comparable number of participants in each category of age and class. Further, I concluded the section by addressing ethical concerns such as confidentiality, informed verbal consent, and disclosure of my purpose of data collection in Narwal to my participants. Finally, I outlined the techniques used for taking field notes and recording interview data.

Chapter two is a survey of the literature which I begin by reviewing existing scholarship on ethnographic work on Indian media audiences. I highlight ethnographic studies carried out on the use of mass media in India and go on to critique how some of them used methodologies that were insensitive to local cultures, thus presenting a thin description of the context. I then critique audience studies on India that lack any kind of audience research or fieldwork (see Stadtler, 2005). Since my participants as audiences cannot be categorised as film viewers, I move on to define the scope of audiencehood for my study. Subsequently, I briefly examine various approaches to audience research and argue for an inclusive narrative of audiencehood that goes beyond filmgoing and viewership, specifically in a non-urban context. Next I discuss the contribution of anthropology to media studies, and more specifically, to my research, which I situate in the field of media anthropology. Finally, I introduce the theoretical paradigm of everyday resistance and how I use James C. Scott's theorisation of 'hidden transcripts' (1985) as a way of everyday resistance by my participants. I re-engage with this concept in chapter six after introducing it here.

In the third chapter, I discuss the ways in which women in Narwal seek the use of available media technology to engage with Hindi film content. The aim of this chapter is to describe the availability and usage of various devices by women of varying age groups and classes. Here, I also review the use of the same device by different women to access different kinds of preferred film content. I begin by focusing on television sets in households, and subsequently discuss the use of laptops and personal computers. The chapter also describes the popularity of 'computer shops' and a computer learning institute in Narwal, which are two places housing computers outside the households. Finally, I discuss the use of radio, newspaper, and mobile phones that various women use to relate to Hindi film. This chapter shows that women's use of media technology might be an appropriate example of acquiring social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). I argue that Hindi film is often used by them to distinguish themselves socially within the village.

The fourth chapter elaborates on the above argument and continues to establish the presence of a strong Hindi film culture in the village. Here, I discuss the various Hindi film forms that exist in the village. In third chapter, I had only introduced the devices which my participants use, but in the fourth one, I discuss the extratextual film forms that exist beyond the use of devices and newspapers, such as film-related images on everyday objects, film-branded merchandise, and filmic influences on festival and wedding rituals. Using examples, I elaborate on how films are not only present in textual fragments (videos, songs, trailers), but also have indirect influence on rural popular culture.

Chapter five takes the discussion forward by exploring the nature of the relationship between women in Narwal and Hindi cinema. The significance of this chapter lies in its analysis of the meanings of the word *filmi*. I explore the various connotations of this word that repeatedly came up in my interactions with my participants. Women of different age groups and classes used this word to refer to various aspects of their everyday lives. However, despite multiple connotations, I show that a common thread holds all these meanings together. This chapter looks at what women of various age groups think about their everyday lives in comparison to the world of Hindi cinema. I discuss what this relationship implies and how it compares with their use of television. I argue that everything *filmi* lies outside the realm of everyday experience for my participants, whereas television-related consumption is considered as mundane in comparison.

Having established the nature of the relationship between Hindi films and my participants, chapter six discusses the social implication of this relationship at village level. It starts by explaining the everyday norms that govern women's use of Hindi films and moves on to explain why and how this is changing. The primary question that drives this chapter is: Why are women breaking everyday social codes to engage with films? The chapter explores the role of Hindi films in a long moment of social change that the village is going through. It highlights the forms of everyday resistance through which my participants are challenging the status quo, thereby bringing into question the existing gender power structures. I argue that talking about something contentious (films), behind the backs of the people who clearly hold a higher social position than my participants – both within the household and at the village level – indicates an undercurrent of 'hidden transcripts' (Scott, 1985) among women within the village.

2

A review of literature

2.1 Introduction

Learning of my participants' individual stories, hearing brief episodes from their everyday lives, of their fears, burden of expectations, and negotiations, required me to be physically present at the sites of their everyday experiences. However, participant observation and ethnographic methods would mean nothing if the data could not be organised in relation to the existing scholarship. The need for this study stemmed from gaps that I identified among studies in different academic areas such as ethnographies of Indian audiences, audience studies, and studies on rural women in north India. This chapter highlights those gaps, identifies the main criticisms of existing studies and, thus, defines the scope, boundaries and workings of this thesis. The writing style I chose for this thesis aims to present women's individual agency in consuming film, locating this in their personal and family networks, and in the social structure of their time. Patricia Jefferey and Roger Jefferey, who studied the everyday lives of women in rural North India in the early 1990s, suggested that 'an individual's story or a brief episode can highlight some common features of village life in north India' (1996:12). They argued that this style of writing 'enables us to focus on the ambiguities that surrounded women's views of their situations' (ibid.).

This is the first study to focus on the consumption of films by women in rural north India. There is little recent scholarship on rural Hindi film consumers, and I had to draw on perspectives from related areas of research such as audience studies, anthropology,

sociology, gender studies, and studies on rural India, which are mentioned later in this chapter. My study can be categorised as belonging to a number of different (but sometimes overlapping) areas of research. These include: (i) audience reception, (ii) gender and communication, (iii) rural communication, and (iv) the anthropology of media. The literature that I review and use does not belong to a single research canon but to a mix of all of the above. However, there are two insights from this study that uniquely contribute to this interdisciplinary body of knowledge. First, my study establishes women in Narwal as Hindi film audiences despite their limited or negligible viewership of these films. Second, I show the way in which women's film use distinguishes them socially from other Hindi film audience groups. I argue that women in a rural setting such as Narwal are an audience group that have a unique set of features due to which they cannot be categorised as conventional filmgoers, and that this film consumption means more to them than being 'just' entertainment or enjoyable deviations from their everyday lives.

In the first section of this chapter, I explain the rationale behind categorising my participants as a Hindi film audience. Here I discuss various approaches used by audience researchers and argue for the need for an inclusive narrative of audiencehood that includes audience groups like my participants, who are audiences of Hindi film despite being part of a film culture that is essentially beyond film viewership. The next section of this chapter addresses questions such as: What has been the focus of the research efforts so far in the context of Indian media audiences, and more specifically non-urban audiences? What were their main shortcomings and how can I address those gaps in knowledge? Which methodology among the ones used was the most relevant for me, and why? This section introduces previous ethnographic research works on television or film audiences in India. I also examine, in this section, previous studies that investigated the role of factors such as gender, age and class in media consumption, which helped me to address my research objectives. In the third section, I situate this audience group in the field of media anthropology. Here, I highlight the anthropological turn in media studies and outline the contribution of ethnography and ethnographic methods in my study. I present a case in favour of audience ethnographies or media ethnographies, as they have come to be known. Finally, for a theoretical understanding of my participants' film use, I use the concept of 'everyday resistance' to explain all the moments of social change that I witnessed in the village. Here I introduce the main theoretical paradigm that ties together the diverse film-related experiences of women in Narwal – the notion of

everyday resistance and 'hidden transcripts' as theorised by James C. Scott (1985). I engage with this later in chapter six, using real-life episodes of my participants' lives, but I introduce it first in this chapter to lay the theoretical groundwork for analysis of my study's key findings.

2.2 The Audience Complex

During my fieldwork recce in December 2015, I observed that women in Narwal almost never watch films in cinema halls, and yet they avidly consume films through what Robert Allen has described as 'textually disintegrated' modes (Allen, 2011:43-44), as I discuss in the chapter three[34] Before describing them as a film audience, as opposed to involuntary and unintentional consumers of an existing Hindi film culture, I analyse and compare various narratives of audiencehood. In the following section I examine a few relevant perspectives in audience studies and define the scope of audiencehood for my research.

2.2.1 Audiencehood beyond filmgoing and viewership

Studies on film and TV reception in India have largely presumed the audience to be viewers and spectators (see Pfleiderer, 1985; Mankekar, 1993; Derné, 2000; Scrase, 2002; Rao, 2007; Srinivas, 2010). Lotte Hoek's ethnographic study was situated in the cinema halls of various provincial towns of Bangladesh, in which she noted, "It was difficult to build relationships with individual spectators or to see how they valued other films" (Hoek, 2010:50), and that there was more to cinema audiences than the "viewers' complex intersectional identity" (also see Derné, 2000; Dickey, 2001; Srinivas, 2002). She emphasised on how material conditions such as film distribution and projection play

[34] With media production going transmedial (Jenkins, 2006), media consumption is also expected to develop "radically heterogeneous ways in which meaning is constructed and contested in multiple everyday contexts of media use and consumption" (Ang, 1996:4). An important clarification here is the difference between the consumption being 'transmedial' (Jenkins, 2006) and extratextual or 'textually disintegrated' (Allen, 2011). Transmediality refers to a narrative being communicated through different media, such as a video game based on a film (in this case, the medium is the focal element), and textual disintegration means having to experience a media production in its various elements, such as watching a complete film, or just watching its music video (in this case, the 'text' or the 'content' is the centre of the experience). For the purpose of this research, transmediality, which might seem relevant to someone studying various media experiences, was not particularly useful.

an important role in audience studies (Hoek, 2010:51). Like the earlier ethnographic studies I discussed in the section above, most of these studies were based on film-going or film-viewing experiences in cinema halls. The dynamics of changing media technology and constraints of an everyday rural setting made me look beyond cinemagoing/filmgoing and look for a type of audience study that still could be termed that. For instance, if I needed to find out 'what my participants said' and 'what they did', the *cerebral* form of audience study seemed pertinent, i.e., an audience that *read* and derived meanings from the film. However, when I wanted to find out 'what they did not say', and 'what they (probably) meant', observing visceral aspects of film reception seemed more appropriate.

Studies of film exhibition practices require an update in what is now known as the post-cinema era, owing to changes in technology and the corresponding increased consumption of films as a textually disintegrated phenomenon. Robert C. Allen, examining his daughter's film consumption in a cosmopolitan context, wrote: "My daughter's generation understands cinema as a textually disintegrated phenomenon experienced through multiple and unpredictably proliferating sites and modalities. For her, the experience of cinema has always been decentred and fissiparous" (Allen, 2011:44). Although his observation was in a modern, urban context, the 'textually disintegrated' or rather, extratextual experience of film reception is what I have examined in a gendered rural context. Women's engagement with Hindi films in this village was not only through the internet (video clips, songs, trailers, full-length feature films), television (full-length features, soap operas having a high film content, as I describe in chapters three and five), smartphones, radio, and newspaper supplements (comprising entertainment sections and show-timings in the nearest city-theatre), but also through various sites having filmic influences, such as in the beauty parlours, mobile confectionary carts, in juice shops, among others. Even Allen's 'textually disintegrated' lens (2011) could not completely explain the existing film culture which my participants experience in their everyday lives. Participants who were seeking to use films actively to further their interests (for example, to learn choreography or to stay updated with trends), were going beyond film-viewership and using their film engagement for everyday purposes. In his study, Kirk Johnson (2001) noted that "rural Indians actively seek out and use television for a variety of both personal and social endeavours" (Johnson, 2001:166) but even in his study, the only form of consumption by the users of television

in the two villages was on-screen viewership. My study went further than earlier studies by focussing on participants who cannot be termed as a conventional audience group and yet have a strong and complex relationship with films.

In the context of my research, it was also crucial to find out whether my participants identified themselves as a Hindi film audience or not. The only words I heard during my interactions to describe an audience was *darshak*, which literally means a 'viewer' or 'spectator'.[35] Even the participants who were evidently engaging with films actively in their everyday lives, but not watching them, did not identify with the word, and thus, I realised that I needed to define the scope of their audiencehood in this study.

2.2.2 Audience as an unstructured abstraction

Contextualising the silent film genre in South India, Stephen Hughes (2011a) argued that "as an object of enquiry, film audiences will always be circumscribed by indeterminacy" (Hughes, 2011a:295) and when speaking of film audiences, "we can therefore only refer to abstract and constructed social categories, which should not be confused with the empirical reality of those who actually attend films" (ibid.). He drew on Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery (1985), who noted, "The 'audience' for movies in any sociological or historical sense are really only an abstraction generated by the researcher" (Allen and Gomery, 1985:156), and that "film audiences are never present as a totality, but only in geographically dispersed, unique and fleeting social events" (Hughes, 2011a:32). This conception of audience pulled together all the other definitions and was particularly useful in developing my ideas.

The negligible film viewership, the extra-textual film consumption, and a prominent rural film culture were examined to explore the boundaries of 'audiencehood' in my research, with a temporal focus. As James Clifford noted, "'Cultures' do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship" (Clifford, 1986:10). Ien Ang too, added to Clifford's argument, "The same thing happens to the social world of actual audiences, I argue, when 'television audience' is conceptualised as a taxonomic

[35] The Hindi translation for 'audience' is dependent on the form that is being consumed, i.e., the word is *shrota* is for listener, *darshak* is for viewer, and *prekshak* is for observer/onlooker/viewer/attendee

collective, holding still for its portrait" (Ang, 1991:41). I extend this to my study wherein I have presented the observed picture of women's film consumption in Narwal as a snapshot of a moment in time. In addition to a temporal focus, I took into account the contingent nature of my participants' day-to-day lives, which is what put into context their act of film consumption.

2.2.3 Need for an inclusive narrative of Audiencehood

Elizabeth Bird's book, 'The Audience in Everyday Life' (2003), dealt with discourses within media ethnography. It criticised the tradition of audience research relying too heavily on reception studies based on text. She saw these as "inadequate in capturing the kaleidoscopic quality of our media culture (Bird, 2003:4)". Further, she noted, "If we cannot define an audience, is it effectively impossible to study it?" (ibid.) Adding to this line of inquiry, Sonia Livingstone raised two pertinent questions: (i) "Is the audience a unified group or a collection of diverse, sometimes marginal subgroups?" (Livingstone, 1998b:10), and (ii) "Is the viewer a consumer or citizen?" (ibid.) These were key questions that led me to think about choosing my group of participants, based on their class, occupation, and age. However, due to constraints in gaining access to potential participants, I could not have perfectly representative sample sizes in all the above categories.

Examining the role of Hindi film in the lives of these women as a 'snapshot of a moment in time' was a challenge due to limited time for fieldwork. In compiling and analysing my ethnographic data, Livingstone's observation was a useful starting point, "Audience research could usefully conceive of audiences in terms of the relationship between media and people (rather than audience as a kind of social grouping), and that this relationship could usefully be analysed at both macro and micro levels" (Livingstone, 1998b:18). Considering the scope of my research, I only dealt with the micro-politics of women's film consumption in their day-to-day lives. Livingstone's line of questioning pacified my apprehension of not being able to make generalised claims about women in other rural areas in India, as she asked, "Why do qualitative researchers even wish to make claims, when supposedly the focus is on the identification of certain practices, within certain contexts, rather than on trends, differences or generalities?" (Livingstone, 1998b:15) This aligned well with Silverstone's argument that, "audiences are a social and cultural object

within the complex reality of everyday life... (which are) embedded both in the macro-environment of political economy and in the micro-world of domestic and daily existence" (Silverstone, 1990:174). This line of inquiry prompted the first round of analysis for my study where I studied how my participants use film references to talk about their everyday lives. In presenting my research, I started by explaining the 'context of consumption', followed by an analysis of the 'act of consumption', and then proceeded to understand the 'production of meaning' (McGuigan, 2010). Thus, audiencehood in this case solely relied on the 'act of consumption'. Reception studies have established that 'audiences are plural in their decodings, that their cultural context matters and that they do not always agree with textual analysis" (Livingstone, 1998b:4). In other words, "the audience has become *visible,* theoretically, empirically and politically, having been previously marginalised and devalued within media theory" (ibid.).

Bird suggested the need "both for studying 'the audience' as real people, and for looking 'beyond the audience' toward a richer ethnographic understanding of life in a mediated world" (Bird, 2003:20). This followed Livingstone's line of reasoning which also calls for an agenda that 'connects audience research with actual production/texts/contexts" (Livingstone, 1998b:5). To address this gap, it was crucial for my study "to contextualise and to draw connections between media/audience and the larger culture" (Bird, 2003:5).

Highlighting gaps in the scholarship on audience studies required engaging with different theoretical perspectives. Pertti Alasuutari, in his book 'Rethinking the media audience: The new agenda' (1999), explained that "the objective [of audience studies] is to get a grasp of our contemporary 'media culture', particularly as it can be seen in the role of the media in everyday life" (1999:6), but as Livingstone cautioned us, "a single narrative makes it difficult to attend to the intellectual relations" (Livingstone, 1998a:6) between various theoretical frameworks of audience research. I agree with Livingstone's cautionary observation that "audience research faces significant issues concerning the relations between marginal and dominant groups, between textual structures and audience understandings, between local knowledge and ideological processes, for all of which a diversity of theory is essential" (ibid.). However, due to the focus and scope of my study, I set myself a far more modest task of only engaging with narratives of audiencehood as non-viewers or as an abstraction. A more laborious task would have been to engage in a discussion about various narratives of audiencehood and how I can examine my data in the light of those. This realisation reaffirmed the need for an inclusive

narrative because as Ien Ang reminds us, “The identities of actual audiences are inherently unstable, they are dynamic and variable formations of people whose cultural and psychological boundaries are essentially uncertain” (Ang, 1991:40). Shaun Moores, too, in his book ‘Interpreting Audiences’ (1993) conformed to the idea that “The conditions and boundaries of audiencehood are inherently unstable” (Moores, 1993:2). He went on to propose a *plurality* of audiences – “consisting of disparate groups categorised according to their reception of various media and/or by their social and cultural positioning” (ibid.).

In reconceptualising this framework for my research, it was clear to me that “the audience no longer represents simply an ‘object of study’, a reality ‘out there’” (Ang, 1996:4). I drew on the concept of the “audience as a construct which addresses relations between people and media in context at a number of interlinked analytic levels” (Livingstone, 1998b:15). By doing this, as Livingstone suggested herself, several problems were resolved, such as studying their reception of film in the context of their everyday lives, employing a gendered approach to their film consumption, and examining the everyday negotiations they performed in order to consume more film.

Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers’s article on ‘revisiting research on audience’s filmic and cinematic experiences’ (2018) discussed important shifts in the paradigm of reception studies. They point out:

> It is probably not very productive to draw a hard line between studying filmic experiences, or audience’s reception of, and engagement with (particular types of) film(s), on the one hand, and research on cinematic experiences on the other hand. But it is precisely the latter type of audience’s engagements with the cultural institution of cinema that recently received much attention, more in particular in relation to the public’s encounter with the place where movies are/were consumed and with the overall social experience of cinema-going.
>
> (Biltereyst and Meers, 2018:22)

Since the 1980s, film reception studies have been increasingly influenced by “various theoretical paradigms, methodological strands and with input from different disciplines, such as cultural studies, cognitive psychology, film history, media studies and feminist film theory” (Biltereyst and Meers, 2018:36). Drawing from cultural studies and media studies helped me look at various film-related experiences of my participants by analysing not just their reception but also seemingly smaller details of film-accessing

strategies and the influence of community and my participants' interpersonal networks. As Biltereyst and Meers described, film consumption for my participants "was a significant social routine, strongly inspired by community identity formation, class and social distinction" (2018:36). This was only possible through a multidisciplinary approach. This was also helpful in identifying and studying power relations of my participants with the rest of the community, and I address this in chapter six. It will be useful at this point to situate my study in the context of earlier studies on Indian media audiences, as I do in the following section.

2.3 Previous ethnographic work on Indian audiences

Previously published research on Indian film and television audiences has discussed themes such as Indian-ness (Derné, 2000; a study of filmgoing of the working class men), womanhood (Mankekar, 1993; television watching by urban middle class women), masculinity (Derné, 2000), poverty (Rao, 2007; middle class men and women as Bollywood audiences in a semi-urban town), marginalisation, urban and rural identities (Pfleiderer, 1985; group-discussions of working class and peasants in ten Indian villages), notions of morality (Pfleiderer, 1985; Derné, 2000; Mankekar, 1993), 'habituees' (Srinivas, 2002; filmgoing culture of an urban middle class) among others. These works largely followed ethnographic research methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and long-term fieldwork, and focus-group discussions, which helped me think about the gaps and advantages of using these methods.

More than three decades on, Lothar Lutze and Beatrix Pfleiderer's book, *The Hindi Film: Agent and re-agent of cultural change* (1985), remains a seminal work on the Indian rural audience of Hindi films. In their fieldwork in ten Indian villages, they conducted group discussions with village residents after screening the film *Do Raaste* (1969). On analysing the behaviour and responses of their participants to this film, Pfleiderer noted that "films propagate manners of behaviour which are unknown in the village and which cannot be integrated into the village; i.e., they must remain dysfunctional" (Pfleiderer, 1985:77). She pointed out that in comparison to the West, there was no medium that could 'teach' audiences the empathy which people need in the modern age (1985:76). She wrote:

> In the West, films helped people to learn the kind of empathy which they need in the modern age. Films also projected the roles which they might have to play and, according to Lerner, clarified the opinions for which they might possibly have to use…[..]…For the villagers with whom we conducted the group discussions, it was obvious that this teacher was not yet available.

She explains her comment further:

> Up-till now, there has been no reason to integrate flexibility into village role behaviour. On the contrary, this is a luxury which cannot be afforded and for which there is no use. Furthermore, no other means of communication is available to present the villagers with empathic model behaviour. The ideologies that feed the daily consciousness are drawn from such traditional sources as the *Ramayana.* Behaviour is instilled and evaluated in the light of such sources. While in the West, all of the various categories of novels had presented and taught empathic behaviour long before films appeared, a literary genre of this type and for this purpose was not in use in the villages. For this reason, it can be assumed that *social empathy* cannot belong to the repertoire of the villagers we met.
>
> (Pfleiderer, 1985:75-76)

Her observations, or *assumptions*, drawing on Appadurai's argument (1988), informed that "by not looking to their (natives'/people's) histories, we have denied these people the same capacity for movement, travel and geographical interaction that Westerners take for granted" (Abu-Lughod, 1993:11). It was not only Pfleiderer's own lack of empathy but also her lack of knowledge about the region which informed her analysis. The range of popular Hindi literary works that span this region have frequently dealt with themes of social complexities and empathy for over a century now (for example, native novelists and storywriters like Premchand, Phanishwar Nath 'Renu', and Sri Lal Sukla among others), although of course these would not be read by Pfleiderer's illiterate villagers.[36] Pfleiderer also observed that "the villagers, because of insufficient empathetic competence, cannot place themselves into others' roles (in the sense of "If I were you"). For this reason, roles which are offered (sic) to them, e.g., in films, are greeted with reactions which run the range from rejection to aggressive denial" (Pfleiderer, 1985:77).

[36] Premchand (1880-1936), Phanishwar Nath 'Renu' (1921-1977), and Sri Lal Sukla (1925-2011) were noted novelists and authors from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Their works depicted the rural life in India from the point of view of a native. Their themes of socio-economic injustice and political failures in Indian villages dealt with the local customs, the colloquial terms, the sites of resistance, the household structures, power relations, and the problem of the caste system that is still prevalent. Their stories are still widely read by people in this region and although they are from another era, these stories still resonate with the local sentiment, especially when it comes to issues of representation of Indian 'rural-ness'.

Once again, these statements reflect a failed attempt of the scholar to create a representation of a group's lived experience. Further, it did not take into account the possible reasons for the rejection of the films' content by the participants. This had consequences on their findings, and I illustrate my point in the next section.

Recent films that depict small-town or rural spaces have lacked a representation of the lived reality of people like my participants. A few examples are *Dabangg* (2010), *Gangs of Wasseypur* (2012, Part 1 & 2), *Gulaab Gang* (2014), *Omkara* (2006), and *Matru ki Bijlee ka Mandola* (2013), among numerous others. For my master's dissertation in 2011 (an audience study of representation of rural poverty in Bollywood), my male participants from rural spaces discussed how they were perceived to be perpetually buried in the 'traditional lifestyle' by these films. They shared that, in reality, they often chose to ignore their own representation on-screen as they found it to be highly glamorised and stylised (Charusmita, 2015). My point here is that if a particular audience group (women of Narwal in my case) was unable to relate to the representation of themselves and their friends/family, it would have been inappropriate for me to interpret their reactions as 'orthodox' or 'requiring a teaching of modernisation' as suggested in Pfleiderer's work (1985). This is in tune with Derné's findings (2000) in which men were aware of and showed understanding towards the often-complex position of the characters (for example, in conjugal and familial relationships). Steve Derné's seminal work, *Movies, masculinity and modernity* (2000), studied working-class men's filmgoing in two North Indian cities, Dehradun and Banaras, and examined notions of masculinity among his filmgoing participants. He studied how men enjoy (or not) watching narratives dealing with family, sexual relationships, gender relations, and the problem of Westernisation. It is notable that the two studies, Pfleiderer and Lutze's, and Derné's, took place more than a decade apart – and more than twenty years ago now – but their significant findings paved the way for my present-day study of film reception by a non-urban audience.

When I talk of films in my analysis, I refer to mainstream Hindi films released after 2005 (ten years before I started fieldwork). The characters of villains/antagonists/adversaries that the mainstream Hindi cinema has been producing in recent films are starkly different from the films of the 1970s and 1980s, which were based on a more rigid contrast between the rural and the urban, dealing with rural to urban migrations (Ganti, 2004; Rao, 2007),

and with narratives where 'villains' were mostly urban and (therefore) evil.[37] The anti-heroes of today are full of nuances which invoke audience empathy for the characters. Fieldwork for my MA study revealed that, in comparison with the earlier studies, rural viewers then (in 2011) were more receptive to 'realistic' content than those described in Pfleiderer's (1985) or Derné's (2000) studies.[38] This observation may have been the result of a long gap between my study and theirs, or because my group discussions in 2011 were almost all male (Charusmita, 2015). This certainly required further study. However, drawing on my previous argument on the issue of representation, it is significant to note the difference between the participants rejecting representations of themselves and their acceptance of the more nuanced characterisation of the protagonists in these recent films. A present-day understanding of rural women's responses to Hindi films was necessary to contextualise women's preferences in relation to their current social position in the rural community.

Purnima Mankekar's ethnography of middle-class urban women's television-viewing in New Delhi (1993) highlighted various discourses on womanhood that emerged during her interactions. A consequent observation was the notion of 'Indian womanhood' that emerged from her discussions with a woman and her mother in their household while discussing *Sita* (from the *Ramayana*) and *Draupadi* (from the *Mahabharata*). Although she clarified that the "notions of Indian Womanhood are not static" (Mankekar, 1993:560), she observed, based on her fieldwork, that "Ideal Indian Womanhood is constructed in terms of values deemed fundamentally womanly, essentially Indian: modesty, patience, and, above all, a strong sense of duty toward the family, the community, and the nation" (1993:552). In her work, Mankekar discussed several seemingly simple interactions between middle- and lower-middle-class women who watched television at home. Her analytical approach and the presentation of her findings represented thorough ethnographic work and informed my own process of analysing my participant's interactions.

[37] There were still plenty of films of village life in these decades, as well as ongoing reruns of films like Mother India (1957), where the villain was clearly rural. However, I intend to point out that the protagonists in recent films have been multi-layered and not as decisive about 'morality' as in the films of the 1970s, 80s or the 90s.

[38] By realistic here, I refer to the dystopian, non-melodramatic content that has become a prominent part of realistic Hindi films post 2000, similar to the satire that my case study was (*Peepli Live*, 2010)

Before commencing fieldwork, I had hypothesised that viewing films in 2015 would be much easier for today's village women in comparison to those Pfleiderer had observed: "Women, especially, are rarely or never taken to the movies. Men might go once in a while, before coming home from the market" (1985:59). Although women in Narwal are accessing film through various media now, their participation at collective spaces of viewing, such as film theatres, is still negligible. In 1980, in a critical case study of Darauli Gram Panchayat, Siwan District, Bihar, Sachidanand Mishra had touched on the subject of rural 'cine-goers'. Darauli is a small village situated on the border of U.P. and Bihar and at the time of Mishra's study it was a small village with minimal infrastructure. He took a sample size of 600 respondents and found that 200 of these had never been to see any film in their entire lives (Mishra, 1980:54). These studies were helpful in sketching the film consumption patterns of villages in North India: both Pfleiderer (1985) and Mishra (1980) confirmed that women's film-viewing was negligible. More than two decades on, Shakuntala Rao's (2007) ethnography of film reception among non-elite working-and middle-class Indian audiences in a midsized city (in Punjab, North India) suggested that there was a paradigm shift in how people view films in India. Although Rao's study was carried out in a city, she defined her audience group as non-elite lower middle class. My study examines if things had changed in the rural settings too, i.e., to see if Pfleiderer's claim that watching a film is a part of urban/industrial culture, and that it has no roots or takers in the villages (1985:59), required updating.[39]

Derné's ethnography of men's filmgoing in two north Indian cities discussed 'alternative ways of Indian thinking' (Derné, 2000:166-167). The term referred to the ways in which viewership of popular Hindi cinema challenged the dominant hierarchy and male dominance among his participants, and yet did "not necessarily resolve them" (2000:167). Alternate ways of Indian thinking (ibid.) referred to an increased focus on the diversity of his participants' emotional experiences after watching films, and yet Derné argued that "they do not suggest that the emphasis on equality and individualism had gotten the upper hand" (2000:167). In comparison to Pfleiderer's study, Derné's study was more nuanced and he showed that his participants, although all men, seemed

39 Although Rao's study (2007) was carried out in a city, she defined her audience group as non-elite lower middle class.

much more appreciative of complex themes and issues of gender. From analysis of both the studies, it was inconclusive whether or not women were able to negotiate with patriarchal norms in the current times as a result of their experiences as a film consumer. Through my study I was able to address this gap by showing how women were being enabled by their film consumption to break everyday rules that govern them. Here I wish to clarify that it is not primarily the content of the film, but the act of consuming it that is transgressive in nature.

The need to investigate film consumption practices, and not only film-viewing, is more pressing now than ever before, owing to multifarious modalities. Graeme Turner, in his book *Film as Social Practice* (2006, fourth edition), discussed the socio-cultural aspect of the cinema and said, "the act of 'going out' is itself intrinsic to the event of cinema-going" (Turner, 2006:146). Lotte Hoek, in her article 'Film Projection and the Cinema Audience in Bangladesh', said, "The nature of the active audience was thus related to the possibilities offered by technology and circumstance of exhibition. To understand cinema audiences, in Bangladesh and elsewhere, practices of exhibition need to be investigated" (2010:61). Exhibition spaces, filmgoing companions, age, technology, among other factors, became important parameters for my study. In 1980, in his study of Darauli, Sachidanand Mishra revealed that the 3:1 ratio (of filmgoers vs. non-filmgoers) was skewed in favour of the younger generation which was much more in contact with the urban world, as verified by the studies carried out by Turner (2006) and Elizabeth Bird (2003). Shakuntala Banaji, in her book (2006) on young audiences of Hindi films in India and the UK, agreed with Derné's (2000) and Mankekar's (1999) studies:

> In their view, the immediate context of viewing – namely the companions with whom one attends a film showing or watches a programme, the location and type of theatre or the position of the television in the type of living room – is central to the experience of Hindi film or television texts and might influence, alter or even shape entirely an interpretation of a textual message or representation.
>
> (Banaji, 2006:32)

The effect of the modality of film consumption on my participants is explained in chapters three and five. In these chapters, I have gone beyond reading my participants' interpretation of film as a text and established that the *act* of their consumption *through* a particular mode has implications for and because of the *context* of their consumption.

As Lotte Hoek alerted the scholars of cinema in South Asia "to the possibilities that the blanket term "popular cinema" may hide a very diverse and theoretically challenging domain of cinematic practices" (Hoek, 2010:61), the meaning of rural women's love for films has far-reaching and transformative consequences, as I show in chapter six. The social churning that Narwal village is going through cannot be studied in a linear transition to 'modernity', which itself is a loaded concept. I have only been able to study the changes that reflect my participants' evolving film consumption, and the film practices that are, in turn, affecting their everyday life. Additionally, Derné's claim that "the extent of Indians' film-going is one indication of the appeal of modern lifestyles" (Derné, 2000:19) seemed vague but may have been accurate in terms of male participants at the time of his study. My findings have indicated that the degree of women's engagement with films was not an indication of how far urban or wealthy lifestyles appealed to them. Their desires, after a point, were limited by their everyday lives. In other words, it cannot be concluded based on my research alone whether their film use was indicative of a desire to have an urban/wealthy lifestyle, owing to their diverse experiences and realities.

I also found that it is not only the 'modern lifestyles' but also filmic images of the rural from which my participants often find themselves to be removed or misrepresented that alienated them, as was also the case in the context of my MA study (Charusmita, 2015). This finding was in line with Shakuntala Rao's central argument (2007) about her non-elite participants' growing resentment towards contemporary Hindi cinema for its ignorance of people like themselves (Rao, 2007). Her study showed how strongly non-elite audiences living in a North Indian small town reacted to urbanised and glamourised films. When films like *Dhoom 3* (2013) and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011), which depicted luxurious settings and exotic locations outside India, faced criticism from Rao's participants, it was hardly a revelation. However, her study showed that films like *Swades* (2004), that dealt with the nostalgia of a Non-Resident Indian for his native village, were also somewhat alienating for her participants who had relatives living abroad. As one of the respondents from her study put it, "Maybe some Indians like those from IIT [Indian Institute of Technology, an elite engineering school] are living like Shah Rukh Khan's [character] in *Swades,* driving that car, living in that house, or working for NASA. But my sister is not living like that. She works as a janitor at the New Jersey airport" (Rao, 2007:68). Such responses from Rao's participants highlight the divide that

exists between the representations of people on- and off-screen and how the non-urban audiences increasingly feel alienated from contemporary Hindi film images.

Sara Dickey's ethnographic monograph about cinema and the urban poor in South India (1993) argued that the filmgoers of Madurai were not passive recipients of a dominant ideology but were constantly negotiating their film viewing experience in the context of their 'everyday' lives, including family, relationships, among other aspects. Her 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of her extended ethnographic fieldwork in a foreign land was largely sympathetic towards her participants. Dickey's study provided an analytical standpoint for my own research as she emphasised the sociological meaning that the urban poor's filmgoing held. She contended that the films provided a pleasurable escape from the contradictions and conflicts of the lives of the Tamil urban poor that derived "from [their] roots in real-life social and psychological stresses and from the soothing of those stresses through melodramatic crisis resolution" (Dickey, 1993:175). Her analysis was partly informed by her textual analyses of the films that her participants were watching and discussing as viewers and filmgoers. My study aims to take this notion of audiences and expand it to incorporate my participants who are not conventional viewers but operate within and engage with a thriving film culture in rural north India.

Lakshmi Srinivas (2010) carried out yet another important piece of ethnographic work in Bangalore (a metropolitan city in Southern India) on how urban space and culture shape the cinema experience for both moviegoers and the film business. In 2016, she published *House Full* where she addressed the questions of reception and the connections filmgoing practices had with other local traditions (Srinivas, 2016). The significant finding from her studies was her central argument of an 'active' audience as opposed to a silent or an imagined abstraction, and that the filmgoing experience in India is starkly different from filmgoing in the West. Both of her studies, heavy on ethnographic detail, shaped my own understanding of how to deploy ethnographic fieldwork for a reception study. Additionally, the role of space and existing local culture in shaping cinema experience was a tenet that helped me think about how my participants' everyday lives influenced the ways in which they discussed Hindi film.

In the words of Tejaswini Ganti, who spent about two decades on her fieldwork on filmmakers and producers in Bollywood, "Ethnography, however, is not just about interviewing people, but is centrally about paying attention to what Malinowski (1922) referred to as the 'Imponderabilia of everyday life', which is best achieved through long

term sustained participant-observation" (Ganti, 2014:17). But even today ethnographic investigations initiate debates that 'tend to just limit themselves to an Anglo-American perspective' (Drotner, 2006:1). This call for de-westernizing audience reception (Drotner, 2006) was seconded by Hoek, following her fieldwork on cinema reception in Bangladesh. She argued that (in the context of South Asia) studying cinema audiences "requires a theoretical approach that can understand the collective without reducing it to a mass, and a methodology that does not only rely on presence and interviews but can also approach absence, silence and collective forms of affect" (Hoek, 2010:61). All of the above studies served as guides to how to achieve this objective of de-westernization and to capture the nuances of local context. These studies led me to observe more keenly and look out for acts and gestures, instead of only relying on my participants' responses in our conversations. Women of varying age groups and classes had different body languages, and some were more silent than others. Familiarising myself with my participants' everyday lives was instrumental in decoding their silences and in identifying people who could validate my observations about those participants.

In his study of television audiences carried out in two isolated hill villages in Western Maharashtra in 2001, Kirk Johnson pointed out that the "culture emerges from the myriad decisions made by intelligent individuals within the constraints of their social contexts" (2001:148). This argument was useful for analysing studies on rural vs urban media cultures. The contrast between the media preferences of the two groups should not only be attributed to the 'the intelligent individuals' who can exercise choice in everyday life, but also to the 'constraints of their social contexts' (ibid.). Johnson's argument was based on television-viewing, while my study is concerned with the film consumption preferences of a rural group and requires the contextualisation of the social, economic and/or political constraints that shape their choices.

Timothy J. Scrase, in his ethnography of middle-class television viewing in West Bengal between 1998 and 2000, argued that "although admittedly entertaining, television generally is perceived to have no cultural virtue except for the educational programmes and documentaries, current affairs and news which are broadcast" (Scrase, 2002:332). This was in disagreement with other ethnographic works on television (Mankekar, 1993 and Jain, 2010). Further, Johnson also observed that his participants in the villages "watch television to discover new lifestyles, validate ideas, beliefs and aspirations and find answers to questions that have ramifications both locally and regionally" (Johnson,

2001:166). He further claimed that "rural Indians actively seek out and use television for a variety of both personal and social endeavours" (ibid.). Both of these studies illustrate that India is a country with diverse rural audience cultures and there is scope for further work on media audiences in other rural cultures of India, and more significantly, on differences between television and film audiences. This is another gap that I address in chapter five, where I draw a comparison between television and film consumption by my participants.

These ethnographic works were certainly not exhaustive, but they were instrumental in guiding my study. My study required a certain level of immersion into my participants' everyday lives in order to understand their 'absence, silence and collective forms of affect' (Hoek, 2010:161). The following section focuses on the most prominent gap that I found in some of the existing reception studies and how I address it through my own work.

2.3.1 A Voice Silenced: A critique of audience reception studies of Hindi films

In several ethnographic studies that I examined, the participants' reactions were manipulated or taken for granted by the researchers, thereby making their conclusions problematic. Some of the others that claimed to be audience studies lacked any primary research at all. For example, amongst Pfleiderer's team of researchers was Anil Saari (1945-2005), a journalist, poet, dramatist, and one of the earliest film critics in India. In 'Critic's Notes', his chapter in Pfleiderer's book, he wrote about the three different levels of reactions of the village spectators to a song in the 1969 film, *Do Raste* (Raj Khosla). Through parallel cuts, the song juxtaposed a cabaret-dance with scenes of the serious illness of the matriarch of a joint family. The levels described by Saari were: (i) a strong and intense reaction to the bikini-clad cabaret dancers, (ii) sadness and mourning at the family tragedy and (iii) a reaction to the 'totality of the cinematic arrangement conceived by the filmmakers' (1985:48) and to the 'sophistication of the juxtaposition apart from their specifically independent reactions to the sexuality of the cabaret dance and sorrow about the dying mother' (ibid.). This last finding seemed methodologically problematic to me for two reasons. First, what was the act that made him perceive that, apart from the mournful reaction to the tragedy and intense reaction to the erotic images, there was an 'independent' reaction to the sophisticated juxtaposition and the totality of the song

sequence? There is evidence to prove the first two reactions, but there is no 'action by the viewers' to show how his participants felt about the totality of the cinematic arrangement. These kinds of extrapolations can pose problems for ethnographic analysis. The second problem was that during data collection by Saari, there were photographers with the researching team present at the site, and the viewers were completely aware of that. As I noticed during my fieldwork, the presence of cameras and filming personnel can inflect the ethnographic results, especially among participants who are not used to being filmed in their everyday lives. Consider this extract by Saari:

> However, since he became the focus of the team's photographers, he gradually quieted (sic) down out of self-consciousness (As soon as Beatrix came and sat near him, another villager shouted out to him, teasingly, about her photographic interest in him). This, plus the fact that the film's thematic surface changes so completely, made this villager around thirty-five years of age change his personality completely. The second half of the film he watched quietly and intently, only exchanging a comment with his neighbours now and then.
>
> (Saari, 1985:50)

The young man in question was one of the spectators described to be having a visibly active response since the start of the screening. Apart from the observation that the film's narrative turned serious in its second half, the reason for his change of reaction was also, as Saari informed us, due to the female researcher's (who also happened to be Caucasian) sudden proximity to the male participant. For anyone who has had any connection with the Indian rural context, this act could (must) have had an adverse effect on their primary data collection. It is not the act that distorted the data, but the lack of acknowledgement of its inflection on the fieldwork that posed a real problem. Further, such an act during a screening, which was already being recorded and photographed, might also have been unwelcomed by village elders and women.

Another of Saari's recorded observations was, "The money-lender in the film evoked the expected identification and mocking laughter, but they seemed to accept the money-lender's desire, and scheme, to rape the young girl of the joint family, Gita" (Saari, 1985:49). This observation did not take into account the fact that audience reactions to such incidents in the films might or might not be vocal or physical at that moment. Additionally, in the presence of cameras at the screening and lack of evidence of their actual reaction to those scenes, Saari's conclusions seem to be not only misrepresentative but also presumptuous. It is not only important to re-emphasise the 'recorded and

photographed' nature of this screening but also the researchers' ignoring of the silences and internal thought processes of the viewers. I argue here that not all reactions can be understood by only being physically present at the screening. There has to be a continued long-term presence of the researcher at the site and a knowledge of behaviours and attitudes of the participants.

In comparison to Pfleiderer's study, Mankekar's (1993) methodology of living in participants' households and interacting with them on a daily basis seemed more appropriate for my research. Mankekar illustrated her arguments by observations based on the conversations inside the households between the family members. Learning from this, during my field recce, I listed the various sites where I could observe and understand my participants, such as agricultural fields, schools, beauty parlours, tailoring shops, women's community healthcare centres (*Aanganwadis*), among others. Grave issues like the aforementioned audience reactions to the rape of a young girl need multiple opportunities of discussion in order to evoke any sort of response from participants. During my stay in Narwal, there were certain instances of reluctance and hesitation, and these kinds of reactions informed and shaped my analysis.

The behaviour of Saari's viewers/participants, as described by him, was quite 'indisciplined'. In his own words:

> From time to time the older men would tire of the movie and turn away from it...One of them kept walking around while another often turned his back to the screen... They would constantly distract themselves from the movie to talk with each other or exchange comments.
>
> (ibid.)

This description of an 'indisciplined audience' lacked knowledge of local film-viewing practices. The act of watching a three-hour film was not an act of commitment for this kind of audience and instead of noting down what film-viewing meant for his participants, the researcher chose to impose his own contempt for their behaviour, which I have demonstrated through a few excerpts from his chapter in Pfleiderer's book, in the next section. It is also likely that his participants in the village engaged with other forms of entertainment, including traditional forms, in the same way, which could have been a significant observation to document. My study addressed this by going beyond collective

screenings (without excluding them) to include the silences and the 'unsaid' reactions of my participants instead of alluding to misplaced notions about their psyche.

Pfleiderer's own account of the group discussions was, arguably, crude and rather simplistic. One of the interviewers in her study (Lutze or Saari; it was unclear in the text), followed up an earlier question, "Is what I am saying right because I am saying it, or because you really think that way?" (Pfleiderer, 1985:67) and the group answered, "We also feel that way" (ibid.). Questions like these not only could have distorted the responses of the participants, but also ultimately produced a banal reporting of the entire setting. In another example, when asked about 'the Muslim neighbour's friendship (in the film), we (researchers) were assured that there is no such thing as religious enmity' (Pfleiderer, 1985:66). For such questions the researchers ought to have dug deeper, perhaps by observing their unease, confidence, silences, or a delay in response time. For instance, in their work on gender and kinship in north India more than two decades ago, Raheja and Gold showed that village women sometimes challenged the 'cultural discourse encoding female subordination' by inculcating resistance found in folk songs and stories into their everyday lives (1994:29). Their in-depth research also discussed instances where women used 'submission and silence as conscious strategies of self-representation' when it was advantageous to do so (1994:11). My main critique of reception studies such as Pfleiderer's is the lack of understanding of their participants' context and circumstances when discussing concepts like empathy, which would have required them to carry out much more detailed research. In all of the above examples, the voice of the participants (including not only verbal responses but also body language, discomfort, silences, and internal murmurs, among others) seems to have been overlooked. A systematic silence over such ethnographic nuances is present throughout Pfleiderer's and Saari's analysis, along with a lack of sociological understanding of the local culture. This feels uncomfortable for the readers and does not fulfil the purpose of bringing the participants' culture to life. An understanding of the norms of gender segregation in the region was necessary, such as maintaining no close proximity between women and men during the screening, the flouting of which can create discomfort. To illustrate my point, here is another example (an extract from the interview):

> "Did you see the whole film?"
>
> "Yes, we saw it, but don't remember it, everything has been forgotten."

> "You forget things in villages?"
>
> "One forgets things after such a long time."
>
> "Did you like it?"
>
> "Everybody liked it."
>
> (A woman respondent as quoted in Pfleiderer, 1985:71)

Neither the interviewer, nor the participant, shows any signs of interest in the conversation. This disinterest is not acknowledged or analysed inside the findings section. I agree with Clifford Geertz, that "understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity. It renders them accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity" (1973:14), and Pfleiderer's approach towards her interviewees seems almost coercive. Consider the following extract:

> The interviewer was insistent because he felt that Masterji (a village elder) should see the reason for the cabaret dancer's presentation:
>
> (so, he asked) "But listen, it also had a moral".
>
> Masterji, however, was not interested in the moral which was behind the showing of the belly dancer and replied indignantly.
>
> (Pfleiderer, 1985:73)

In the above, there is not only an apparent disdain for the respondent's view, but also a complete disconnect between the two. Such patronizing remarks are likely to have antagonised the participants and defeated the objective of their research. There are repeated references to this elderly gentleman 'Masterji' in the text and none of them indicate any empathy with the local hierarchy and culture. It is evident that the researchers seemed acutely aware of their own elite cultural background and clearly imposed their beliefs, thus warping the production of meaning by the viewers. Despite drawbacks, the strength of the above study lies in its on-ground data collection covering ten villages in India, thereby presenting the readers with first-of-its-kind primary data.

Another fundamental gap in existing reception studies in India is due to a lack of audience investigation or fieldwork research. One such example is a paper by Florian Stadtler titled 'Cultural Connections: "Lagaan" and Its Audience Responses' (2005). Although it is rigorous in its treatment of the film's text and the global appeal of the Hindi film industry, it engaged inconsequentially with the subject of its title, 'The Audience Responses'. Stadtler said, "The success of *Lagaan* with a wide variety of audiences, be it the poor man in Bihar as much as the NRI yuppie in London, Singapore or New York, and non-Asian audiences all over the world is interesting" (Stadtler, 2005:519), and that there was a 'shift in the taste of Western audiences' (ibid.). These claims were presumably based on the box-office figures, but there was no supportive statistical evidence or audience response.

Interestingly, a call for new approaches to audience research was also seconded by the producer of the above-mentioned film *Lagaan* (2001) - Aamir Khan. He is one of the most prominent actors in the Hindi film industry and an immensely successful filmmaker. During my interview with him for a previous study (Charusmita, 2015), he criticised the box-office approach to suffice as a measurement for audience engagement, as it is a complex process heavily inflected by technicalities of distribution and media projections. He cited examples of the TRP (television ratings) and box-office ratings as being inadequate to paint a picture of audience reception. In other words, box-office statistics make for a 'necessary' condition, but not a 'sufficient' one, when studying audiences. Understandably, for industrial purposes, the viewers' responses cannot be studied for every film with in-depth interviews and fieldwork, but as a researcher it becomes crucial to look at the factors influencing people's film practices. Geertz' argument pertaining to cultural analysis will prove useful in addressing the criticisms mentioned above. He argued, "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape" (Geertz, 1973:20). This is an arduous exercise but was most effective in a place like Narwal where I could not expect extroverted or direct responses to my questions. Thus, the analysis of 'audience responses' in an audience reception study can only be achieved through primary data collection. In the case of my study, I drew from an ethnographic methodology, and in the next section, I discuss the approaches that helped me situate my study in the field of media anthropology.

2.3 From Geertz's 'Thick Description' to the Anthropology of Media

In his seminal book, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Clifford Geertz presented an anthropological analysis of culture:

> Culture, here, is not cults and customs, but the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience; and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold.
>
> (Geertz, 1973:312)

He defined 'cultural meaning' as the conceptual structures individuals use to construe experience (Geertz, 1973:313):

> We begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those – the line between (Moroccan) culture as a natural fact and (Moroccan) culture as a theoretical entity tends to get blurred.
>
> (Geertz, 1973:15)

Geertz's 'Thick Description' claimed to ensure a rigorous analysis simultaneously alongside 'ethnographic writing'. As Raymond Madden said much later on, "while we might identify ethnographic description and analysis and interpretation as separate events, they must never be divorced from each other in the writing of ethnography" (Madden, 2010:161). Madden saw critical potential in the strategy of describing the 'being there' experience. He saw it "not as a weakness in ethnographic representations but as a potential strength" (Madden, 2010:160). Geertz decried the tendency of most ethnographic works to be 'merely evocative' (Geertz, 1973:312). Traditional anthropological literature aimed to establish the importance of the 'thick description' approach, and I agree with this assessment. However, I wish to clarify that my study borrows its theoretical perspectives from various fields such as media studies, sociology, and the more recent one, media anthropology. Therefore, despite the fact that anthropology has been ignored by earlier media researchers (Dayan and Katz, 1992), 'armchair anthropology' (Pickering, 1984) seems quite old-fashioned now and needs to

be re-visited with a 'more (and more rigorous) examination of anthropological theory in media research, not less' (Couldry, 2005:60). Theoretical debates in media anthropology are becoming more complex as scholars now argue that mechanically applying the concepts of anthropology to media phenomena will not explain a cultural problem that needs to be understood (see Coman, 2005). The appropriation of old forms of anthropology gave rise to important questions in my mind: To what extent can my analysis be generalised in terms of geography, culture, history, and politics? Is long-duration fieldwork-based ethnography the only method to adapt when carrying out studies of anthropology of media? What is the difference between Ethnography and Ethnographic work? Consider the following suggestion by Coman (2005) that helped me address the above questions during my analysis:

> The re-invention of anthropology must take into account two essentially congruent processes: a) changing the object of study; anthropology is no longer the science of the exotic, but of multiple otherness built by the researcher through the intellectual techniques of de-familiarisation; anthropology investigates the various mechanisms through which meaning is created and negotiated in the nexus which links the local with the global, the present with the past; b) the disappearance of the traditional forms of scientific authority; the basic pillars of anthropological vision (Otherness, Sameness, Culture, etc.), subject to the process of self-reflection, no longer have a substantial character, are no longer objects per se, but processes.
>
> (Coman, 2005:18)

I discuss next the value of anthropological inputs in my study of rural women as film audiences in order to I justify my field of study and its significance in the current context.

2.3.1 The anthropological turn

Stephen Hughes, in his article 'Media Anthropology and the Problem of Audience Reception', noted that "in focusing on media audiences and reception, anthropologists have been a part of a larger critical interrogation of these issues within media and cultural studies over the last several decades" (Hughes, 2011b:288). Antonio La Pastina also made a strong case for situating media research within traditional anthropology. He argued that the ethnography of 'audiences' needs to be "repositioned as a fieldwork-based, long-term practice of data collection and analysis" (La Pastina, 2005:139). He added that "This practice allows researchers to attain a greater level of understanding of the community studies and maintain self-reflexivity and respect toward those they are

attempting to understand within the everyday life of the community" (ibid.). It is important here to note that although La Pastina called for a long-term practice of data collection, I was limited by scope, duration and resources during my research. I optimised my familiarity with the everyday culture in Narwal, which I had developed over a period of two decades, and this proved instrumental in offsetting the short duration of my fieldwork (see Bird, 2003 and Alasuutari, 1999). According to Coman and Rothenbuhler, "valuable interpretive accounts can be based on relatively small periods of observation, focusing on media texts as much as people and activities" (2005:3). They also noted that "if the ethnographic goals are achieved, the research activity is itself legitimately ethnographic - whether or not it fulfils all the requirements of the classical ethnographic field experience" (ibid.). For my research, I did not solely rely on 'thick description' as my methodological tool, and therefore, I do not claim this study to be 'an ethnography' but an ethnographic project.[40]

In an earlier section of this chapter I examined a few ethnographic case studies of Indian media. In support of the value that I assign to my familiarity with Narwal's culture, I emphasise that Mankekar's (1993) and Rao's (2007) studies differed from Derné's (2000), Pfleiderer's (1985), and Dickey's (1995), as the former two were much more familiar with the culture than the latter three. There was no strenuous travel to faraway lands, and the languages and rituals too, were familiar. This element of familiarity saved them from the anthropological challenge of cultural translation. I agree with Geertz here that, "understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity" (Geertz, 1973:14), and this by no means was achievable without an element of familiarity and, even better, an element of 'native-ness'.

Sara Dickey also built a case for using anthropological approaches in media studies, and she noted, "as anthropologists, we approach the field of mass media studies at a time when it raises issues we are very well prepared to take on using our methods and theoretical perspectives" (Dickey, 1997:454). Despite this, as Coman cautioned us:

> Several representatives of media studies have applied concepts such as myth, rite, religion, sacred, magic or liminality to interpret various texts and contexts of the production of significations in mass media. Their enterprises, exotic in rapport with the main trends in media studies, have been totally ignored by anthropologists

[40] See section 1.3 for a detailed description of the methodology

(2005:8)

The methodological concerns of my study were discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter, but it is important to discuss a methodological criticism that emerged from the literature in cultural studies (especially ethnographic work). This criticism was the tendency of the ethnographer to "stretch the definition of ethnography to cover almost any effort to collect extended accounts of people's beliefs, responses and experiences" (Murdock, 1997:184). Murdock denounced this practice and argued that characteristic ethnographic techniques like in-depth interviews, focus groups, diaries, among other methods, "can offer a solid basis for creative interpretation but…cannot provide thick descriptions" (ibid.). Elizabeth Bird went on to criticise this line of reasoning and said:

> As any anthropologist knows, ethnography has also long encompassed a range of methods that supplement or even replace classic fieldwork, and that may perfectly legitimately be used to study media reception – especially if combined with a broader analysis of cultural context.
>
> (Bird, 2003:7)

She argued that "many media ethnographers are studying cultural phenomena with which they are already familiar as participants, and there is a variety of techniques that build on this familiarity" (Bird, 2003:7). This was in agreement with Alasuutari's suggestion that in such studies, the "fieldwork has actually started years before" (Alasuutari, 1999:8), and this allows the "native researcher to focus attention on phenomena that are already quite familiar, whether the context is India (Parmeswaran, 1999; Mankekar, 1999) or the United States" (Bird, 2003:7). This was particularly useful for my study as my fieldwork could be supported by my earlier visits to Narwal as a child and a young adult, and my familiarity with the everyday culture helped me to validate and explain my findings better.

The above arguments of Alasuutari (1999) and Bird (2003) can be further analysed in light of what George E. Marcus (1998) observed. He said that despite the existence of well-established research techniques to account for history, change, and political economy, "ethnographers of an interpretive bent – more interested in problems of cultural meaning than in social action – have not generally represented the ways in which closely observed cultural worlds are embedded in larger, more impersonal systems" (Marcus,

1986:166). He further argued that these ethnographers had not portrayed "the role of these worlds in the sort of events and processes that make history, so to speak, perhaps because ethnography as description has never particularly been ambitious in this way" (ibid.). This debate was centred on the considerations of situating the fieldwork data in a context, and extrapolation of that context into 'something broader'. As Clifford Geertz noted, "each study struggles to draw broad generalizations out of special instances, to penetrate deeply enough into detail to discover something more than detail" (Geertz, 1973:313).

Michael Fischer called for a 'renewed beginning' in 1986, and his observation still holds relevance in the mapping of current challenges in ethnography: "Cultural criticism that operates dialectically among possible cultural and ethnic identifications is one important direction in which the current ferment about ethnography seems to lead" (Fischer, 1986:233). Furthermore, he suggested that if this was true, then "finding a context for ethnographic projects in the provocative literature on modern ethnicity can only enhance their critical potential" (ibid.). An analysis that was to fulfil this challenge posed by Fischer required a conscious choice of contextualising the 'emergent' rather than the 'pre-conceived', i.e. contextualisation was ideally required to be an objective act on the part of the ethnographer. Therefore, in the case of my participants, where studying the 'self-awareness' as women living in a rural area was crucial, the critical potential of the study was also contingent on the act of contextualisation. In the process of contextualising the everyday use of film by my participants, anthropological perspectives were instrumental in sketching the social structures of power within which they lived and negotiated their experiences, and I discuss them later in this chapter. However, I wish to narrow down the discussion to approaches that helped me in addressing the issue of 'optimistic celebration of audience' (Gibson, 2000:256) in ethnographic research.

Timothy A. Gibson, in his article 'Notes Towards the Critical Ethnography of Media Audiences', criticised the cultural populism of some audience researchers such as Fiske (1986 and 1990), and drew on Budd, Entman, and Steinman's argument (1990):

> The problem with this optimistic celebration of audience (as well as subcultural) power, opposition, and resistance is that Fiske seems to argue that "we don't need to worry about people watching several hours of TV a day, consuming its images, ads, and values. People are already critical, active viewers and listeners, not cultural dopes manipulated by the media" (1990:170).
>
> (Gibson, 2000:256)

I agree with Gibson that "active viewing is, by itself, not political resistance: (2000:256) and, in my study, I have been careful to theorise this emerging, yet weak, dissent by women in order to gain access to technology through which they can consume media, and more specifically, Hindi film. Finally, he argues:

> What such a singular focus on the freedoms of reception and consumption leaves out…is an understanding of the complex social, economic, and political determinants that shape both the moment of reception and the political efficacy of the meanings generated through text/audience interactions.
>
> (2000:257)

Thus, the ethnographic approach was useful in not only understanding the audience context in depth but also prepared me to be careful of exaggerating any deviations in the everyday as revolutionary acts. I was also mindful of not claiming my work to be 'an ethnography', as I mentioned earlier. The reason for this was lack of long-term fieldwork which would have helped me tease out the 'informal logic of everyday life' (Radway, 1986:100) from a dense, thick description of various groups living in the village. Keeping this cautionary difference in mind, Shaun Moores, who I mentioned earlier in the context of a narrative of audiencehood, still argued in favour of some reception studies being called proper ethnographies. He wrote about reception studies using ethnographic methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observations:

> It is true they are not based on extensive fieldwork in distant lands, but they do share some of the same general intentions as anthropological research. There may be a similar concern, for instance, with questions of meaning and social context – and with charting the 'situational embeddedness' of cultural practices (see Marcus and Fischer, 1986); Silverstone, 1990). If the means of investigation are not always identical, then the aims of inquiry can be. I ought to make it explicit, though, that I am advocating an ethnographic perspective of a certain kind – one which is committed to critically analysing culture as well as describing it.
>
> (Moores, 1993:4)

In the methodology I used, both data collection and analysis, I relied on the above concern to guide and prepare me. However, once I collated every observation and response, I started to see a few transgressions by my participants that seemed to be motivated by their fondness for Hindi films. There were some instances of questioning the status quo that were not direct consequences of their film use. I was not able to point my finger at

how these two were related and which theoretical paradigm could help me understand and explain this. Power relations were apparent and clear, in terms of gender, age and class, but the dissent did not seem strong enough to call it a powerful and organised women's resistive effort. This was until I 'read across various disciplines' till I identified a paradigm that I could adopt and use to explain the findings of my study. Before discussing that in the next section on my theoretical framework, I briefly outline my thought processes in analysing my ethnographic data.

2.3.2 The landscape of 'Meaning': Analysing ethnographic data

Of all the perspectives, if there was one that I would use to summarise my whole discussion, it would be Geertz's call for understanding the link and the balance between writing on 'culture' and 'politics'. He noted that, "What the attempt to link politics and culture needs is a less breathless view of the former and a less aesthetic view of the latter" (Geertz, 1973:311). In my study, forms of women's everyday resistance, therefore, cannot be seen as being driven by Hindi films, or being revolutionary in nature in their current form. What I learnt is that women's film consumption in this village is indeed political, but I have refrained from assigning it more power than it currently has. Writing about the film culture in Narwal was not as colourful an exercise such as describing an ongoing film festival. It was written about after months of finding small, seemingly unconnected bits of filmic influences and tying them together.

The main question when I began my analysis was this: How do I make sense of my observations and other ethnographic data? What kind of 'meanings' will emerge from this data? Will the analysis address the 'meanings' of films for my participants? Or will it examine the 'meanings' of what my participants tell me? What kind of 'meaning' was this going to be? Are they just guesses that are assessed and verified? Most importantly, does the virtue of being empirical in nature prematurely close our understanding of 'meaning'? Raymond Madden's reasoning lies at the heart of this line of questioning. He noted that "It is in the systematic and repetitious revisiting of ethnographic data that we find meaning" (Madden, 2010:155). In my research, the only definition of meaning I have considered is the one I explain below.

A major challenge in analysing my data can best be explained by Clifford and Marcus: "In essence and at the limit of anthropological accounts one can consider an ego-centric

and fictional staging of a subjective experience, dominated by ideological illusions" (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; also see Fischer, 2003; Marcus and Fischer, 1986). My research was focused on deriving meaning out of my observations by connecting the ideas about my participants' self-articulated relationships with the media, their micro-level resistances within social relationships, and conformity to community norms, as previously mentioned, thus strengthening the anthropological approach of my analysis. Their social networks, family organisation, income distributions, lived experiences of power relations (in terms of gender, caste and/ or religion), and age-based responses were sociological considerations that helped my analysis. Thus, for explaining the articulations of my participants, both sociological and anthropological factors needed to be examined. 'Articulation' as a notion (Slack, 1996) referred to bringing together ideas "related with the social and political practices through which they are mediated on specific occasions, placing attention firmly on the circumstances, purposes, and consequences of mediation" (Hobart, 2002:380). Geertz's 'articulation' was defined more as an end result and less as a starting point (as in Hobart, 2002). He said, "Behaviour must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behaviour – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation" (Geertz, 1973:17). In other words, articulation meant stringing together ideas on socio-political practices based on one's own multiple positions as a social being and voicing them. It depended on how a person used his/ her language, other people, speech, and social practices to develop an idea. My study rests on the assumption that this act of 'articulation' was a step which marked the point from where 'meaning' was derived. I must mention here that 'making meaning' is far from being a linear process. In all possibility, it is anything but linear.

Before moving on to explain the meaning-making using my data, I would like to draw upon two arguments. The first one is by Bronislaw Malinowski, arguably the most influential anthropologist of the 20th century, who propounded that the goal of the ethnography is to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world" (Malinowski, 1922:25). And for the second one, I quote a relatively recent study by Kirk Johnson. He suggested that the ethnographic objectives (in the context of his research) were achievable "by delving into the microcosm of village India and exploring real people's lives through their own words" (Johnson, 2001:148). Both these views are widely held by classical anthropologists across the world, but this process of studying people's lives through their own points of view is, according to me, impossible

to achieve in the absolute sense. However, owing to a framework informed by the above discussions I attempt to explain how I arrived at my conclusions (or 'meanings') from the data that I gathered. The first level was (a) making meaning (by the participants) and the second was (b) making meaning of making meaning (by the researcher). To explain further, the first lens accounted for (i) my participants' everyday life, (ii) their actions, articulations, and negotiations within households and in the village, (iii) their silences around older family members, (iv) their communication within their own interpersonal networks, and so on. The second lens then looked at aspects such as (i) the influence of the community on my participants, (ii) the structures of power that governed them, (iii) the family structures within which they lived, (iv) the efforts of the state to enable or discourage their media consumption, (v) the nature of film distribution in the village, and so on. The meanings thus derived completed my understanding of their responses and attitudes.

After conducting this primary-level analysis using various, sometimes unconventional methods, I used the notion of everyday resistance, as conceived by James C. Scott in 1985, to understand the implications of it theoretically.[41]

2.4 Theoretical framework: Examining 'everyday resistance'

There were multiple analytical frameworks working together to situate my fieldwork data in an appropriate context. However, I still needed a more accurate theoretical understanding of what could be said about my participants' film use, to try and explain all the moments of social change that I witnessed. I was able to explain almost all of my empirical findings with illustrations in the following chapters, with a few exceptions, through the concept of 'everyday resistance' as introduced by James C. Scott more than three decades ago. I engage with the concept of 'everyday resistance' and 'hidden transcripts' (Scott, 1985) using examples from my fieldwork in chapter six, but I signal it here briefly to explain what it stands for and how it helped in identifying the social structures of power in the village.

[41] See chapter five for my analysis ('unconventional method') of the word *filmi* whose significations I examined in order to understand what my participants think when they use the word in their everyday lives.

Substantiating the field of resistance studies helps us understand the multi-faceted nature of power better. The women I met during my fieldwork were not confrontational or revolutionary in their day-to-day lives, but I did observe numerous moments where they subtly undermined the powers that governed them. These moments were generally hidden from the gaze of the powerful and were personal and, most often, not openly accurately articulated. The empirical richness proved to be illustrating various forms of negotiation and forms of resistance by my participants, as I show in chapter six. This form of resistance was also "done in a *regular* way, occasionally politically intended but typically habitual or semi-conscious" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:37). Scott showed that certain types of behaviour by people constrained in the face of power amount to more than just deviations or difference from their everyday lives. His primary contribution to the theorisation of 'everyday resistance' (1985) was that he used the phrase interchangeably with 'infrapolitics', thus putting the subaltern at the forefront of political system by enhancing our understanding of the word 'politics'. However, when talking of women of Narwal as subaltern, we must take into account that women have long-term stakes in the patriarchal systems (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996).[42] This was also discussed in Raheja's and Gold's work on women in rural Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, where they explained at length the ways in which their participants sometimes adhered to patriarchal standards to advance their own interests (1994). Hence, there was a need to study each example, each act of 'deviation', carefully and examine if there is a power dynamic at play. One of the forms of everyday resistance - established ways of behaving and speaking by actors *away* from the face of power and, thus, undermining it - was what Scott called 'hidden transcripts' in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990). Although Scott had earlier used the concept of everyday resistance in the context of factory workers and peasants, he clarified that it was "not a peasant monopoly" (Scott, 1989:52), but something that existed among all types of subaltern groups (Scott, 1990). Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson questioned the existing research in resistance studies and cautioned us that "resistance runs the risk of being able to marginalize, exclude and silence different articulations of resistance; especially when only some intentions are counted as legitimate" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:38). Their criticism brought into question the studies that considered emotions and personal needs as irrelevant if they were for a 'non-political goal', irrespective of whether they undermined

[42] I discuss it in detail in chapter six

power relations (ibid.). They argued that certain political intentions and consciousness are privileged and "it is as if expecting all resistance to express "politics" in the same way as researchers, regimes, national and educated elites and intellectuals" (2013:38). I am in agreement with their assessment that how we include or exclude the resistance of others is key to studying this form of resistance. The guiding principle for identification of acts of everyday resistance in my study was this: "conceptualizing and analyzing everyday resistance begins with a double identification of something as being part of the everyday, and that part as being an expression of resistance to power" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:10).

Scott's own understanding of everyday resistance was neither unchallenged (see Gupta, 2001; Howe, 1998; Field, 1994; Gutmann, 1993; Kelly, 1992; Tilly, 1991), nor was it the only conception. He was criticised for overemphasising the role of this kind of resistance and for applying a strong division between dominants and subalterns (O'Hanlon, 1988). Vinthagen and Johansson's critique was that "Scott gives resistance and the agents too many independent abilities – a kind of autonomous or even isolated position" (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:15). My work addressed this by seeing resistance and its actors (my participants), '*in a relation to power* throughout the analysis', as also suggested by Vinthagen and Johansson (ibid.). Most other critiques of Scott's work were directed towards the way in which he had engaged with 'subordinates', rather than peasants or factory-owners, which were not of immediate relevance to my study.

I wish to close the discussion about the framework here, which I will re-engage with using my field experiences in chapter six. However, Scott's understanding was the closest to explaining and analysing my participants' uncommon, unexpected, and often not-so-impactful behaviour which was fuelled by their enthusiasm for Hindi films. I felt it needed to be born in mind as the next chapters are read.

Conclusion

The literature mapping discussed in this review is not exhaustive but is broadly the underpinning for my research. In this chapter, I not only wanted to restrict myself to discussing relevant debates in the field but also wanted to explain how and why I used the various theoretical paradigms to understand, analyse and present my data. In conclusion, I make three major points below.

First, there is a growing complexity in the notion of audiencehood that continues even three decades after Fischer's observation that, "Not much ethnography yet exists that fulfils the anthropological promise of a fully bifocal cultural criticism. Or rather, what exists was drafted with less sophisticated audiences in mind than exist today [1986] on all the continents of our common earth" (1986:233). Stephen Hughes noted this rise of scholarship which was devoted to "providing a comprehensive overview and scholarly review of the literature on the topic of audiences" (Hughes, 2011b:293).[43] Currently, there are countless books, articles, reviews on audience studies and we need a review of those reviews in order to make sense of this overcrowded field (ibid.). Hughes expressed "serious doubts as to whether the untidy history of audience studies will ever fit neatly into a seamless progressive and comprehensive narrative overview" and posed questions on the contribution of an anthropological approach to these issues (ibid.).

Second, media ethnography, as a field, makes several promises that can be fulfilled by keeping intact the primary goals of classic anthropological fieldwork. Mary Hancock, in her paper 'Festivity and Popular Memory in Southern India', illustrated some of the ways by which "localities are produced through the articulation of local and translocal objects, institutions and images" (2001:20). Studies that are undertaking fieldwork are increasingly adopting methods that are fulfilling ethnographic goals without strict adherence to the long-term fieldwork spanning years, and my prior familiarity with the setting helped to fulfil those goals to a large extent.

Finally, I presented a detailed account of the theoretical paradigms that informed my analysis such as the conception of cultural meanings, the process of meaning-making, and contextualisation using both sociological and anthropological elements. I then introduced the main theoretical framework that I used for understanding the on-ground politics of film consumption by my participants and its social significance. This framework was only signalled here in this chapter, and I will engage with it with much more rigour in my final analysis chapter.[44]

[43] Also see (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Alasuutari, 1999; Ang, 1996; McQuail, 1997a; McQuail, 1997b; Moores, 1993; Morley, 1992; Ross and Nightingale, 2003; Ruddock, 2001)

[44] See chapter six

The next chapter introduces the film culture in the village and more specifically discusses the available devices and technology that my participants choose to use to access Hindi film.

3

Accessing Film:
Devices in use by women in Narwal

3.1 Introduction

At the heart of this chapter lies the assumption that media practices are never universal, and neither are the ideas and values that accompany any specific form of media consumption by any specific set of people. Marshall McLuhan's catchphrase 'the medium is the message' (1964) is relevant in understanding how modes of film consumption by my participants contribute to the context of their use of film. As McLuhan put it, the medium is the message because "it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan, 1964:9). In other words, it is the character of the medium that determines its potency or effect – its message (Federman, 2004). Narwal is a space lacking a 'filmgoing' culture due to the absence of cinema theatres, and yet it enjoys a thriving film culture. Various technologies and media forms that women in Narwal use to access Hindi film are telling of their social relation with it. These social relations inform us of how one medium can potentially be more instrumental in popularising one kind of film content rather than another. Problematising McLuhan's phrase is not my intent here, as it is not able to explain the everyday film consumption without the use of technology/devices, thereby leaving out a significant aspect of my study.

The aim of this chapter is to assess how the media technologies available in Narwal are making Hindi film accessible to my participants. This chapter argues that the experience

of using different devices and media is instrumental in shaping women's preferences to access their favoured film content. It is an introduction to Narwal's film culture, but it certainly is not an exhaustive description of the ways in which the Hindi film manifests itself in the village. Hindi film is also present outside the technological realm in Narwal, in forms such as images on everyday objects, sites of celebrations and festivities, and sartorial sense, and I discuss those in the next chapter. I begin this one by providing an overview of television in the village and the film forms this offers to my participants. Next, I move on to describe how computers and the internet are used by my participants of varying age groups. Further, I discuss the use of mobile phones by women for personal communication and accessing a variety of content, including Hindi films. The final section sheds light on the use of other media such as radio, newspapers, and magazine supplements for film consumption.

3.2 Television

Television occupies a special place in any household in Narwal. It was the first thing that I noticed upon entering a home. One would know of its presence immediately as the television set is usually situated in the most decorated corner of the living room (drawing room). Other items of decoration, such as showpieces and flower vases, accompany the setting created for placing a television set. This was true for almost every household that I visited in Narwal, barring a few where the only proper room was a bedroom that also acted as the living room, and therefore, the only available space to place the device. Television was the most talked-about medium of entertainment in my interactions with my participants during the fieldwork.

Studies on television viewership in rural India have largely argued that the medium has had 'modernising' influences on people living in villages (Malik, 1989; Johnson, 2001; Jensen and Oster, 2009). Some studies go as far as to suggest that television's modernising impact (Johnson, 2001) has led to a significant decrease in domestic violence towards women and an increase in their autonomy (Jensen and Oster, 2009). Although my observations did find connections between public service broadcasting channels in India and the modernising agenda of the State, it is beyond the scope of my study to examine the relationship between television, in general, and ideas of modernity. I rest my study on the assumption that modernity, in the context of my research, is not

necessarily a forward march, but a rather erratic social movement of groups of people who are substantially influenced by media consumption, along with other socio-economic and political forces. Further, these studies linking television with modernity failed to explain the privilege of access to television and other forms of media, that my participants often did not have.

Early on in my fieldwork, I realised that television was an absolutely acceptable topic for discussion. Talking about it with my participants felt like talking about their routine life. I guessed from my interactions about television whether or not my participants had TV sets at home. The discussions on TV were so common that it felt appalling to ask if they had a set in their homes or were watching it elsewhere. However, I visited three houses where television had never been a part of the household. Two of these were because of financial constraints and one was because an 'earlier tv set was broken and the family did not want to buy a new one as it would be a distraction for school-going children in their house'. In the final three weeks of my fieldwork, I conducted 20 in-depth interviews with women of varying age groups and classes. I did not have any questions directly pertaining to their caste, except their real surnames, which could be verified later for this information.[45] Their responses did give me an idea of their disposable incomes and their family structures, along with the media devices that they owned and used. The frequency of their television viewing ranged from a few hours a day to a few times a month. Women of all age groups, who had access to a television set, enjoyed watching television whenever they could get a chance. Erratic electricity and joint family set-ups did not make for a conducive television viewing environment.[46] Among the 20 women, there were three who did not own a television or laptops at home. The younger women, between the ages of 18 and 30, preferred watching television with either minimal company or with other female family members, whereas interviewees above the age of 30 regarded television-viewing largely as a family activity. In terms of preferred content, soap operas (women aged 18-55), devotional shows (aged 50 and above), music-based programming (aged 18-22), news, and films (different forms popular across all age groups) were the most popular answers.[47] In my interviews, whenever I introduced questions on content, viewing with family, preference for timings, and more, there was

[45] However, that data was too little to carry out an analysis of media consumption by women of various castes.

[46] I illustrate and explain this issue in the later chapters

[47] I explain the various Hindi film influences in television later in this section as well as the next chapter

variation in the responses of the interviewees. However, there was one common response among them all. According to my interviewees, men and children in their families did not have a set timing for TV viewing, because it was understood that if men and children were at home, the control of the television set would remain with them, and not women. Hence, even in a household where women were equal or more in number than the men, television was never a personal medium for women unless men and children were away.

As a personalised experience, television served as a source of fashion trends, an association with Bollywood actors, a source of entertainment and hard news, a lifestyle model, and a luxurious experience in some cases. As a collective activity, television-viewing only referred to watching TV with family members, apart from rare instances of watching it with female neighbours, relatives, or friends. While staying with some of the families, I was part of both collective and individual viewings, where the individual viewing did not mean only one person but a personalised experience with one or two other like-minded family members. For instance, two sisters watching a television drama together would show very different reactions than when watching it with the entire family, and it is closer to the phenomenon of watching it alone due to the absence of hierarchical boundaries with each other. It was taken for granted that male family members are entitled to their 'own time to watch television'. For women, collective viewing would largely translate into giving company to their husbands, children, and in-laws while the latter watched television. During such sessions, women lacked the control or 'ownership' of the television that they enjoyed otherwise, when watching it individually or with their friends, sisters and mothers.

Conversations with my participants were also indicative of the relationship that they share with everyday television-viewing. Manju, a 25-year-old tailor who works part-time from her home, said:

> I do not go out to get the top-up (voucher) for Tata Sky at home, but I do know that it is very expensive – we pay 280 Rupees for 20 days for our TV package. I like to watch TV when I am at home working in the afternoon, but most of the times, there is no electricity then. It is frustrating because that money goes to waste, but I still manage to watch my favourite shows, owing to repeat telecasts, despite gaps. The 'company people' [dish tv companies] are looting us because they know we love films and television.

Without looking up from her sewing machine, she added:

> Of course! This is the only source of entertainment that I enjoy every day. Once my children come back from school, or my husband comes back in the evening, I do not get to spend time watching television. Even my mobile phone is mostly operated by my four-year-old son. What will I do the whole day without television?

I probed further, "So who is your favourite television actor/actress?", to which she responded, "No one in particular, I watch television shows and they mostly all seem similar. But I like Pragya from *Kumkum Bhagya* (a television series from 2014)...[..]...I can easily recognise film stars. They are different. I like Salman Khan". Her response was telling of the different perceptions which television and film actors have in the imagination of my participants. The middle-aged women aged 40-60 were also more interested in knowing about the film stars than television actors. This was revealed when I referred to soap opera actors by their names and none of them was recognised by their real-life identities by my participants. This was not the case with Hindi film actors. This gave me a hint of how Hindi films loom larger in the imaginative spaces of these women as compared to television, and I must discuss here the influence of Hindi film on television content, which my participants consume so regularly.[48]

Daily soap operas, the most popular form of television entertainment among women in Narwal, carry a considerable proportion of film-related content. The commercially successful and popular Hindi films frequently lend their titles to television soap operas which, in turn, aim to capitalise on the popularity of such films using either the same title, theme or even storyline. For instance, *Jodha Akbar* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2008), a period drama, was a film whose title and sub-plot was later on adopted by television producer Ekta Kapoor for Zee TV network in 2013. One could argue that, given it was a period drama, it should not be surprising to have the same characters and theme as real-life people on whom the film was based. However, given the various historical documents that were available for the television producers to draw their plot on, this TV drama's sub-plot was largely in line with that of the film. Moreover, as one of my participants, Vineeta (29), a homemaker, shared while watching an episode of the *Jodha Akbar* series:

[48] See chapter five for my illustration of this point and an overall argument on how films lie outside the quotidian while television remains mundane

> I had watched the film when it released, and when this television show came out, I knew I had to see it, because I had really liked the film. Hrithik Roshan was much better than this actor in the television show.[49]

There have been several other television series that followed suit, such as *Pardes mein hai mera dil* (2016, inspired by Subhash Ghai's 1997 film *Pardes*), *Peshwa Bajirao* (2017, cashing in on the popularity of the 2015 film *Bajirao Mastani*), *Jamai Raja* (2014, inspired by its 1990 namesake *Jamai Raja*), *Brahmarakhshas* (2016, inspired from the 2002 fantasy film *Jaani Dushman*), *Badho Bahu* (2016, loosely based on the 2015 film *Dum Laga ke Haisha*), and *Naagin* (2015, a fantasy show inspired from the 1986 cult film *Nagina*, starring Sridevi), to name a few. Furthermore, they emulate fashion and lifestyle trends from Hindi films and in some cases, like the ones mentioned above, they are instrumental in keeping those trends sustained in popular memory in urban as well as non-urban areas. From the drapes of *sarees* to styles of applying *sindoor*, the television often popularises film-fashion among my participants.[50] As Vineeta (29) said:

> I sometimes use my red lipstick instead of the *sindoor* powder when I go out to the city. Actresses in the television wear it like that and I find it easier to apply and trendier but cannot wear it that way when I am living here (in Narwal).

These are only a few examples to substantiate my point that a large number of Indian television soaps capitalise on cultural memories of Hindi film songs, fan-base, fashion, plots, and phrases, to gain audience.

There is not only a synergy but also collaborative interdependence between the Hindi film industry and television production in India. The trend of filmmakers, actors, and actresses being part of numerous notable television series, in a few or all of their episodes, represents a concerted marketing effort to combine the popularity of cinema with the widespread reach of television. Occasionally, directors, actors and actresses approach television producers asking to feature on their shows to promote their films. Conversely, television producers are keen on inviting them onto their sets in order to publicise their

[49] I shed more light on filmic presence in television with examples in chapter five. In section 5.3, I briefly draw comparisons between the actors in television series and Hindi films, in terms of shows having the same titles or themes, drawing on the interactions with my participants

[50] The Sindoor is a vermillion-coloured powder traditionally applied in the middle of the hair-partition of a woman who is married. This is a Hindu tradition.

shows as well as capitalise on the enormous fan bases of film stars to attract audiences. Widely watched television series such as *Comedy Nights with Kapil* (2013) and *Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chashma* (2008) are examples of the same phenomenon. As Sugandha (38), a staff member at a primary school, shared, "My husband loves *Comedy Nights with Kapil*, but I watch it with him only when someone I like is featured in an episode, like Ajay Devgn or Deepika Padukone".

Adding to the filmic influence on Indian television are music-based shows and dedicated television channels that broadcast popular Hindi film content (such as Zoom TV, B4U Music and 9XM). These include songs, trailers, videos, interviews, talk-shows, on-demand music shows, and film-related tabloid content such as the popular show, *Koffee with Karan*, hosted by filmmaker/actor Karan Johar. Even 24x7 news channels feature segments based on the latest Hindi films. There have also been instances of famous film stars hosting or judging television shows in the last two decades such as *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (2000-2014, an Indian version of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, hosted by legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan and then the famous Shah Rukh Khan), *Satyamev Jayate* (2012, a talk show addressing social issues, hosted by eminent actor/producer Aamir Khan), *Khatron ke khiladi* (2008, based on *American Fear Factor*, hosted by 'superstar' Akshay Kumar and then by actor Arjun Kapoor), *Bigg Boss* (2006, follows the format of *Big Brother*, hosted by arguably the most adored Indian film actor Salman Khan), *Guinness World Record: Ab Todega India* (hosted by famed actress Preity Zinta), celebrated actress Madhuri Dixit as a judge on the dance show *Jhalak Dikkhla Ja* (2006, the Indian version of BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*), actress Malaika Arora Khan as a judge on several dance shows, renowned actors Hrithik Roshan and Juhi Chawla as part of similar dance show formats, to name a few. The shows ride on the popularity of these film personalities who bring the glamour and popularity of Hindi films to television with their own popular film-dialogues, dance moves, gestures, songs, and more, thus making their way into the homes of people who have hardly ever stepped inside a film theatre.

Television, as I mentioned earlier, is the most widely used medium among women, and my fieldwork showed that my participants use it for getting closer to the world of Hindi cinema in particularly interesting ways. Digital consumption on smartphones, and the use of the internet in general, is still largely restricted to women between the ages of 18 and 30, and, therefore, television has retained its popularity due to ease of access and less dependency on technological expertise for users. Thus, as I observed, watching television

in such a scenario became a direct as well as an indirect mode of consumption of Hindi film.[51] It could also be considered as strategised marketing of Hindi films in some cases, as for many of my participants, TV was the first source of any film-related material. I do not, however, claim that there is no viewership of full-length feature films at all. Watching films is still a part of television viewing in Narwal, but for women, watching features is either restricted to Sundays or to occasions when their household work permits them to spare a few hours at a stretch, which is rare. Film-based television content, however, allows them to feel associated with the world of Hindi cinema. As these shows or segments do not usually require more than 30 minutes of viewing at a stretch, they are more popular than full-length Hindi films. I illustrate this point below.

One of the houses in Narwal shared a wall with a beauty parlour that was owned by the lady of the house herself. This arrangement made it easy for Suman (40), the owner, to shuttle between home and work throughout the day. Inside her parlour, I saw posters of Hindi film actresses in bridal lehengas and sarees. The boxes and cartons in which jewellery and cosmetics were displayed also had printed images of Hindi film actresses. Although all of these materials were sourced from shops in the city, it was Suman's decision to select and place them in her parlour. The interiors of any beauty parlour in Narwal, and numerous ones in India, look like this with similar filmic images, but my field interactions showed that these posters were used to distinguish their parlours from others' by the owners themselves. In Suman's parlour, next to a poster of actresses in ethnic wear (*lehengas*) was an old laminated and framed image of the Hindu Goddess Durga (Figure 01).

[51] By 'Hindi film', I refer to different kinds of content based on Hindi films, including the full feature film

Figure 3.1 A poster in a beauty parlour in Narwal (©Charusmita)

Curious about its placement, I commented, "That seems an interesting place to put up Durga*ji*'s photo". She seemed amused at my remark and said, "This is the most visible wall of my small parlour. This is the first view that my customers see when they enter. I could only think of this place for both Durga*ji* as well as these posters". She shared that she chose these posters because the displayed actresses were most popular in the 1980s to early 2000s when, according to her:

> The women were still in control of their fashion. They had grace and elegance...Look at how the times have changed. Films and television are distorting the meaning of fashion. As more and more people are becoming richer, they are emulating the fashion and style as shown in films and television. They all look the same now. Just like each other.

Seeing my slightly bemused look, she explained:

> If someone is wealthy, they will not go for the old-style *filmi* fashion. These days young married women have *kore haath* (wrists devoid of jewellery). There is no one following the tradition. Look at all these women in television, *kisiko pehchaan hi nahi paogi, ki shadi ho gayi hai ki nahi* (meaning: you will often not be able to recognise by their minimalistic makeup if they are even married).[52]

Suman shared that as she did not have time to watch TV during the daytime, she used to get up at 4:30 am every day and watch repeated telecasts of TV dramas. She added that this was not because she was interested in the content or the storyline, but she did it to update herself with the latest trends in make-up, hairstyling, and clothing. Her daughter, who was also present there at the time of our interaction, said, "You know you can watch bits of it during weekends or maybe a few times a week if that is your purpose. There is no need to wake up each morning and watch it before you start making breakfast". Suman immediately asked her to go to the kitchen to wash the utensils, thus dismissing her daughter from the room. Whether it was the convenient timing that made Suman choose early morning telecasts or the content, it was apparent from her sudden dismissive tone towards her daughter that for Suman, there was more to television viewing than just observing fashion trends. In her case, one could also hypothesise that the timing she chose to watch TV every day indicated her desire to do so when no one was around. There were other slots during the day when there was electricity and she could have chosen to watch

[52] See chapter five for a detailed analysis of all the things that my participants indicated to when they used the word *filmi* (film-related)

it then, but perhaps it would either not telecast her favourite show, or maybe she did not want anyone to know what she was watching. I did not pursue the conversation further as I understood that she did not want to give out more details than she already had.

Television's role has been diverse in this village ever since it was introduced here. For some, it used to be a status symbol, but now is just as regular as any other piece of furniture and serves as a medium of uninterrupted entertainment, but only for men. For women, its use is still constrained, but much more frequent than other forms of media such as mobile phones and laptops.

3.3 Laptops and personal computers

A large number of families falling within the higher income band have at least one laptop in their house.[53] Out of the twenty women I interviewed, nine had at least one laptop in their household. Amongst those nine, two did not have television in their homes. Although this sample set was not representative of the whole village, i.e., the proportion of laptops to the number of households was not the same as my interviewees', it was evident from my four-month-long stay that the use of laptops and digital technology was certainly on the rise.

Film consumption through digital means is gaining popularity among my participants given the erratic power supply that leads to television consumption being unreliable. Young participants whose family members could afford to own laptops were starting to divert their attention to digital technologies, and, as my interaction with a 20-year-old, Surili, revealed, sometimes members in a household agreed to set different time slots to access computers at home. In some cases, even when there was no objection to the kind of content the women were consuming, their preferred timing became an obstacle. The advantage with digital devices was that my participants could personalise their film-use according to the time slots that they got with the device. For instance, watching music videos, video clips, reading/watching actors' interviews, and so on, could be consumed whenever time and circumstances would allow. Thus, with laptops and computers, the 'textually disintegrated' (Allen, 2011) film consumption experience has become a desirable choice for my participants.

[53] These are families where the average family income is above Rupees 25,000 a month

Families that can afford new television sets without much difficulty in Narwal are trying to save their money to invest in laptops instead, as it is 'better than television' and also 'more useful', specifically in households with people under the age of 30.[54] The laptop, thus, is increasingly becoming an 'investment' for families in Narwal, whereas buying a television set is considered as an 'expenditure'. However, laptops are still bought primarily for men or young boys rather than women.[55] As I narrowed my focus down to women users, only a handful of my participants owned a laptop or had access to it within their households. The computers were mostly operated and used by male family members and transferring or downloading any content would be mediated by them. This gatekeeping was not an unpleasant or loud display, rather it was an understood and unsaid element of everyone's routine which was largely unquestioned. However, a few enthusiastic young women I met had knowledge of how to operate a laptop and were allowed to use it at home. Neeta, aged 21, who taught sewing and knitting to young women in Narwal, brought her uncle's laptop to a film screening that I had organised at the ITI. Her brother had pre-loaded the film *Pink* (2016) on it, and she had already watched it. She told me, "I thought you may need another laptop for the screening, so I borrowed my uncle's". When I saw the film already on the desktop, I appreciated her thoughtfulness. She said, "*Bhaiya* (older brother) had got it downloaded. I have already watched it. I also know how to transfer from his pen drive to uncle's laptop, but he usually does it himself. I wanted to get some more movies on the laptop today but then I would have to tell him the reason. *Abhi toh aapke bol kar le aaye* (I got it now stating you as an excuse/reason)". Neeta's family 'trusted her' and knew that she would not 'misuse the laptop', she shared.

It was common for young women to gather functional knowledge of laptops by watching and observing, but not by practicing themselves. This was one of the instances where I witnessed the digital divide between men and women in that space. Moreover, the common assumption among the people was that women cannot skilfully use digital technology, unless supervised by men. Although this notion is something I have also observed in the urban realm, its manifestations were different in a village. Neeta told me

[54] See chapter one for estimates of income population in the village. Families with annual income of 1,20,000 can easily afford a television (the middle-income group in Narwal), but they try to save up to invest in laptops, which they consider to be a 'better investment' than television, due to its value beyond the entertainment as well

[55] I elaborate on this in chapter six

she did not dare to learn the laptop by hit-and-trial method as her brother had said that she will 'break' or 'spoil' the device. Neeta's example was not an isolated one. Women, irrespective of age, talked of being scared of using laptops. The design, size, and cost of the laptop were factors that made this device more precious than the other media devices. It was deeply etched in the minds of my participants that if the device does not function properly after they use it, it will be too great a cost, economically and emotionally, and so they generally refrained from using it. Husbands, sons, brothers, and uncles often managed to damage laptops, or even other devices, but they were not subjected to the same systematic guilt.[56] I suggest that barriers such as these that exist around women's use of media technology highlight an under-researched territory between women's access to digital technology and their actual everyday use of it. This point leads me to discuss the avenues through which computers and digital technology could be accessed outside the households.

3.3.1 The village 'Computer Shop'

Unlike 'cyber cafes' in Indian cities, where there are individual cabins with desktop computers for individual customer use, separated by wooden or fibre planks, there was no space for women in Narwal to access computers privately in exchange for payment. There was a total of five 'computer shops' (*Dukaan*) where people visited for their everyday requirements such as downloading, printing, or transferring documents or media content. It is only with specific motives that women visited these shops in Narwal, unlike men for whom these shops, like many other public spaces in the village, were sites to socialise. Young men and teenaged boys frequented these shops to buy films and music as files on their USB sticks, SD cards, or MicroSD cards. Women either did not visit these shops or went there just to get important documents printed. All forms, circulars and other documents were printed out by *bhaiyyaji* (a reference to the shop operator who was the only one allowed to operate the computers). I visited one of these shops myself and had a brief conversation with the young man who managed it. I use his responses in a few of the later chapters to contextualise women's film-viewing experiences at home and how they are mediated by men in many ways.[57] In researching on the distribution

[56] I discuss such differential barriers faced by women to access media technology in detail in chapter six

[57] Chapters four and six

and consumption of film music in a rural setting, I found Deo and Duggal's study useful (2017), and they wrote that their participants "recounted visits every alternate day to the village square to buy new song folders" (2017:43) where "vendors offered music as folders of digital audio/video files and customers sought music of their choice for uploads on the memory card of their mobile phones" (Deo and Duggal, 2017:46). The 'download vendors' described in the aforementioned study are, in most ways described, same as the computer shop owner I met in Narwal, as such men "acquired specialized literacies in converting audio and video from larger file sizes to smaller ones…'preparing files for the phone'" (Deo and Duggal, 2017:49). This particular film and music distribution system in the village, as I observed and discussed, is best summarised by Deo and Duggal below:

> Digitalization and its sale via SD memory cards for mobile phones had enforced a quantitative approach to music as data. For download vendors, the popular unit of measurement was the gigabyte – or the GB. They sold a range of music and media in digital audio and video file formats including mp3, mp4, 3gp and avi – not as songs or albums but as folders counted in gigabytes.
>
> (2017:48)

In the final two weeks of my fieldwork, I explored two upcoming urban-style cyber cafes, but my participants doubted if they would regularly get to visit those. As Neha, a 22-year-old primary school teacher, shared, "Many of my female friends do not even know what a cyber cafe is, but all of them know about the computer shop". She added, "*Sheher jaisa mahaul toh yahan nahi milega cafes ka...* (meaning: you will not find an urban cyber-cafe-like environment here [in the village])". I probed, "If many women start to go there, won't things change after some time?". Neha responded, "Maybe. But I will probably not feel right (*ajeeb lagega*) sitting with strange boys in that small place...and that too, while they are 'watching the internet'". After interacting with a few middle-aged mothers of young daughters (e.g., Poonam, 50), I was slightly hopeful about women's use of the upcoming cyber cafes, as these were women who wanted their daughters to make use of such shops but never had suitable infrastructure to avail of it. In my experience as a field researcher, it was not a common practice for women to fraternize with other men in a setting like that of a cybercafé at the time, whereas the same place acted as a space for young men in the village to mingle with each other. However, there were small yet possibly significant changes that were imminent, and I will elaborate on Poonam's example in the next section to illustrate the same.

3.3.2 Women and computer education

Spaces like the computer shops, perfectly attuned to existing socio-cultural and gender norms in the village, often effectively but not explicitly excluded the presence of women. Even within households, women had to go through various stages to be able to use technology as they pleased. How then, in such a scenario, were some women learning to use computer technology in Narwal? Poonam, a 50-year-old homemaker and a mother, shared:

> At Insight Computer Classes [in Narwal], they have an arrangement (*vyavastha*) where one or two students get one computer to use. My daughter goes to NIT, which is a smaller computer centre, but they only have one computer for all their students to work on.

Poonam's daughter (21) holds a diploma in Information Technology, and Poonam was confident of her landing a lucrative job in the future. I requested Poonam if her daughter, Meena, could give me a tour of her computer learning centre. Owing to her degree, Meena was adept at using digital technology, in addition to being well-versed with YouTube and U-Torrent. She not only downloaded and transferred preferred films in her phone, but also obliged her friends occasionally by transferring their favourite films, songs or videos to their phones. Since there were a few other young women like Meena who had working knowledge of computers, it was certainly not rare in the village for them to share content among themselves. Meena's example indicated one of the various ways in which women work around the existing system to access film content. I asked Meena, "What if your mother comes to know about this? Will she say something?" to which she responded:

> She already knows. I am not doing anything wrong, and she knows it. She likes films too…[..]…We don't talk about it with each other, but I can see how happy she is if I tell her stories of the films I watch…[..]…Men think women cannot go to the shop and get the films transferred. They are right, because we will do it ourselves.

Meena's statement hinted that watching films, especially by getting them pre-loaded by going to a computer shop, was a transgressive act. She was aware of it. This is one of the

several examples that I discuss in chapter six to argue that women's negotiations around their film consumption are acts of everyday resistance in the face of power.[58]

As suggested by Poonam, I visited the largest computer institute in Narwal, called 'Insight Computer Classes'. My objective was to learn about the courses offered at these institutes and the women participating in them. Avinash, a young man aged 29 who ran the institute, told me:

> There have been several computer institutes before, but they all got shut down due to various reasons…Maybe people trust my work-experience, given that I worked in various cities across India, or maybe they just trust me to provide a safe learning environment for their daughters.

Avinash shared that he did not want to be tied down by a job that did not give him satisfaction. He graduated in computer science, and after working for a couple of years in cities, he started his own computer training institute in Narwal, where he is originally from. He also owned a small photo studio and two large-sized music speakers that he loaned out for weddings and other celebrations within the village. The tuition-fee for the offered computer course was INR 300 a month (USD 4.21). Avinash conducted the classes at two levels – Basics (Microsoft Word and elementary usage of internet), and Photoshop and Corel-draw classes for aspiring graphic designers. His demeanour was professional and composed. His clothing and body language were quite urbane, including the way he spoke about his life in Narwal. Avinash shared that the young women who came to learn computers at his institute were generally more focused on their studies than the men. He added with a hint of pride:

> I make sure cyber literacy is part of the internet basics curriculum. This is not a city, things are different here. Girls are more susceptible to bad-mouthing and stigmas. So, in the world of internet, learning computer for girls can be tricky. I keep giving friendly warnings and explanations about social media's negative effects. I tell them that they may add their close family members online, whom they personally know, but not strangers. Also, it is advisable not to upload any pictures online. There are boys in my classes too, but I make sure '*ki koi uunch-neech na ho*' (meaning: nothing untoward should happen on my watch).

As part of the cyber literacy, he focused on the fundamentals of Information Technology such as (i) emails, including features such as 'forgot your password', 'logging out'

[58] Refer to chapter six for a detailed analysis of how women's film use was questioning the status quo. Also see chapter five, section nine for examples of instances of young women discussing films

immediately after one uses their email ID, 'managing security questions'; (ii) browsing the internet, including Google search with appropriate keyword usage and checking the authenticity of a website; and (iii) suspicious pop-ups, which he warned them about. He also advised them on how to explain undesirable pop-ups to family members who might feel shocked, scandalised or outraged at unwarranted content on household devices. As Avinash put it, "I do not want any of my students to be 'scared' of the internet, especially girls". Men like Avinash seemed to enable young women in Narwal to develop their communication and technological skills, thus strengthening women's own acts of everyday negotiations around their media consumption. I draw on this example again in chapter six where I discuss the role of men in enabling women's movement away from everyday power structures.

In my interactions with female students at the institute, I observed that the primary reason for them to join these classes was a hope for gainful employment. As Surili (20) said, "My mother and father said that I should join computer classes. They want me to get a good job". I asked, "So what work do you plan to do after your course is over? Are you planning to find a job outside Narwal?" She was quiet for a few seconds, and then said:

> No, I do not think my family members will let me go. They want me to learn computers, but I have not thought about what job I am expected to take up once I finish here. My brother went to the city after his course from NIT institute, but my parents will not let me go out.

I added, "But maybe you could start something here…say another computer institute for girls? What do you like the most about these classes?" She said:

> I enjoy the time I get to spend on the computer in class. I download Bollywood songs when Sir is not in the class. My friend and I are very fond of Hindi songs, especially the latest ones. She knows how to download them, and I am on a lookout for sir for when he might come into the classroom.

Surili's friend Binti (19) interjected, "No *didi*! We do not do this often, it was just twice, and it will not happen again". She rolled her eyes at Surili. I understood that she was afraid and unsure of my proximity with her teacher and wondered if I might possibly share this with him, which in turn might have spelt trouble for them. I just smiled and said, "If that helps you in learning about the internet more, then it surely should be a part of your learning, right?" They smiled awkwardly and nodded in agreement. All of the

girls I interacted with at the institute were the first females in their families to pursue a formal computer education. Only one of them had a laptop at home on which she practiced her coursework and occasionally downloaded film music with the assistance of her younger brother. Some of the other institute girls often visited her house to 'practice and learn' using computers and that was where, as Surili said mockingly, 'the real learning happens' (*sahi mayne mein seekhte hain*). Binti clarified, "We strictly follow the coursework *didi*. My brother knows everything, and he will come to know if we use the computer for purposes other than practising Microsoft Word. Surili '*toh kuch bhi bolti hai*' (meaning: Surili is just *saying anything*"). As I stood up to go out, I heard them arguing amongst themselves in low voices. This was one of the many examples that indicated it was still men who were largely in control of women's media use, and yet women often managed to manoeuvre their way into fulfilling, although incompletely, their desire to experience the pleasure of film or its music. This idea, however, was not openly admitted by Binti, who seemed to be fiercely protective of the solidarity that existed among her friends. Surili shared with me later during the week that at the request of 'some students', they were promised to be taught how to access music and videos on the internet, as part of their curriculum set by Avinash. She looked more relieved than happy, having shared with me that crucial piece of information about their little adventures.

Women's use of laptops and desktop computers was not regular or common but, as an observer, it was useful to study this in comparison to their television viewing as well as their relationship with mobile phones. Laptops were more expensive than mobile phones as well television, and for a woman, using them required more confidence and courage than skill. The use of computers also revealed stark differences in the way young and middle-aged women thought about technology.[59]

Television might still be the most popular medium amongst the residents of Narwal, but it no longer enjoyed the social tag of an ultimate status symbol, as shown by my examples of computer-use above. The digital technology was not limited to computers. The use of mobile phones by women of different age groups revealed similarities as well as differences. The availability of mobile technology to access film-related content has

[59] I draw conclusions based on these differences in chapters five and six. The objective of this section is only to highlight the use of computer technology available to women to access film-related content

enabled several new phenomena, such as the use of apps and the internet. I introduce the popularity of mobile phones in the following section, but, as with the above sections, I will come back to the examples and significance of its usage in the following chapters.

3.4 Mobile phones

Mobile phones are not new to the communications infrastructure in rural India. The news reports and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO, Govt. of India) data from recent years showed an extremely optimistic view of ownership of mobile phones in rural India. According to a news report, the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO, Govt. of India) data (2015) revealed:

> People of rural India spend 25.33% of their income on the use of mobile phones and telephones…The rural-urban gap has closed when it comes to communication services, with people living in rural villages spending about 25.33% of their budget on mobiles, while urban families are marginally ahead at 26.33%.
>
> (Kumar, 2016)

Low-cost access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is a necessary condition to boost the digital revolution in rural spaces but not necessarily a sufficient one. The above data is aligned with the fact that the mobile phone is the easiest way to get online for people who cannot afford laptops or desktop computers. Additionally, with dropping smartphone costs due to rising competition, older phones in every household were increasingly being replaced by smartphones, and in most households the mobile phone was the only means to access the internet. Sirpa Tenhunen, whose study was based on the significance of phone-use by women in ten villages in West Bengal, India, presented a nuanced picture that attested to a change that was taking place in those women's inter-personal relationships. She noted that "women in different parts of India have experienced the opportunity to use mobile phones as a major asset although, in comparison to men, their access to mobile telephony tends to be more restricted" (Tenhunen, 2014:157). Assa Doron also observed how mobile phones were mediating social relationships in the city of Banaras and argued that phones were reaffirming dominant norms in households by limiting the use of phones by young women (2012). Jukka Jouhki argued along similar lines in the context of rural Tamil Nadu (South India)

and said that men used phones more actively and freely than women (2013). These studies largely argued that mobile phones were facilitating change in rural India. However, as Jo Tacchi et al reminded us, "they must be understood within their everyday uses and settings, in order to understand the range of ways in which they contribute to social spaces, and what part they play in social and economic meaning-making" (Tacchi, Kathi, and Crawford 2012). For this research, I looked at the use of mobile phones by women for the purpose of consuming film or other entertainment, along with their use for communication within the village. Growing up in Delhi, I observed women often being told by the men that they do not need the new technology because after all, "what are they really going to do with it?". This belief, as I witnessed in Narwal, has largely become an unquestioned rhetoric, and hardly any woman, young or old, told me otherwise, with the exception of Meena, who I mentioned earlier. Aditi Deo and Vebhuti Duggar's study (2017) on use of mobile phones for consumption of Hindi film music had participants from a small village named Tejgadh village in Gujarat (western India), and their experience was similar to my own in northern India; they wrote, "Often in our fieldwork, we observed, the mobile phone's role for listening to music (individually and sociably) took over its communicative function" (Deo and Duggal, 2017:43). This kind of consumption of film music (songs, ringtones, song videos) is what I focus on in section 4.3. Here, I will explain the use of mobile use of women in Narwal, as I observed it.

Most of the women, young, middle-aged, or old, did not own smartphones, and the ones who did were almost all under the age of forty. Within families, this meant that women would get the older phone and the males would get to use the new one. Sometimes, fortunately for the women receiving it, the older phone was also a smartphone. Almost all of these women paid for the internet on their phones monthly, and the average usage was 1-2 GB. A small portion of the savings by the women of the house, *Sanchaya Dhan* (meaning: savings), was often spent on internet data packs. This was mostly for using the social media messenger app, WhatsApp, and in the case of younger women, film-related apps such as Filmora.[60] The smartphone brands popular amongst the women users were Micromax, Intex, Lava, Karbonn, Asus, Samsung and lately, the telecom market disruptor, Reliance Jio.

[60] In Narwal, WhatsApp is widely used for sharing videos, pictures, political messaging, and humorous content via audio. I discuss this in the next chapter

Mobile phones without smart features were common among women family members whose husbands had smartphones that replaced those old phone models. All the women I met, with the exception of two, had at least one mobile phone in their household, usually owned by male members. My participants appreciated the usefulness and ease of mobile phones and were mostly grateful to their menfolk for 'permitting' them to use it and for providing them with bits of technological know-how. My participants did not have their phones in their hand or nearby most of the time during the day. Rather than being a portable handheld device, it had an allocated place where they usually kept it safely along with the phone's charger. It was not apparent in my interactions with any participant whether or not she owned a phone. The fact that I had to explicitly ask if they owned a phone hinted at their handling of the device, which was, for the lack of a better word, 'careful'.

For my participants who owned a phone of any kind, it was their first ever 'personal' device, unlike males who not only owned phones but sometimes had laptops and TV sets bought for them. The personal(ised) nature of mobile phones allowed women, via the usage of its various technological features, to consume film content in different ways. Cameras, touchscreen, internet and social media apps (WhatsApp and YouTube) were some of the features through which my participants were able to engage with multiple text formats on a single device. Vibha (32), who used to get her internet data pack activated every month, complained of her phone becoming a 'public property' (*jan-dhan*) in her house. She had two children aged 8 and 10, who used her smartphone to use WhatsApp and share videos for few hours every day. Although they routinely transferred films or film-videos to her phone for watching them, it proved advantageous to Vibha too. She came to know about the latest film content through her children. At New Year's Eve, Vibha had enjoyed watching the recent Salman Khan film *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* (2015) on her phone's screen with her son (8) and daughter (10). There was a regular arrangement of sorts, that she would sometimes allow her children to 'play' with her phone, and in exchange they would get the latest entertainment content stored on her phone. Vibha's children did not do it 'for her', but she benefitted from it since she enjoyed watching/listening to videos, songs, or feature films. This arrangement came with a downside as she was unable to use it as a 'personal' medium due to her phone being used by others. She neither had the time to explore new content on her phone, nor the inclination to actively download her preferred film content herself. Her children were

well-versed with video-creating apps and games, along with elementary knowledge of internet surfing. The lack of control over her phone and technological skills convinced her that she would end up damaging the phone if she used it for anything other than forwarding images and videos on Whatsapp. I observed that for my participants, access to a smartphone was not the biggest obstacle, but it was its discouraged use and restricted ownership that often destroyed their confidence to use it to full advantage.

For younger women below 25, using digital technology was not an experience that made them feel helpless. Among a group of young women aged 19-21, I witnessed a collective effort to gain access to smartphones, and, ultimately, to nurture their love for Hindi films. Rehana, a 19-year-old participant, opened up to me about an 'arrangement' with three of her friends. She shared that each of them had contributed an amount from their pocket money to buy a Micromax smartphone, a device they owned jointly and that now remained in rotational custody. Rehana told me, "We enjoy watching song videos on YouTube and that is how we prepared a dance sequence for my elder sister's wedding. I have this phone for today". I found this consistent with Madhupa Bakshi and Soumya Sarkar's comment:

> The use of videos to promote the songs has been the most common and effective way for the past couple of decades. The videos are now not only released on the television channels but also on YouTube. The compounded effect of these forces set up the foundation of consumption
>
> (2015:145)

Rehana chose to share this with me in the final week of spending time in Narwal and after three months of knowing them. Just before this interaction, I had shown them some of my own dance-videos on YouTube and had shared how I had not told my parents about posting these online. This is when Rehana asked me, "How do we search for your videos on YouTube?" These girls were evidently well-versed with the features of YouTube and used it frequently. After showing Rehana a video of me dancing with my female friends on a street in Delhi, I noticed a suppressed giggle. Next, I showed her an aerial-view video of the South Bank in London on YouTube. Rehana recognised the imagery and said:

> We have not watched this particular video before but in so many Hindi films we see the same view. I saw *Namastey London* (2007) and this video appears in a lot many movies. Things are not as bad as you think.

A few days later, I attended her sister's wedding where her choreography was widely appreciated. Her parents, along with the parents of her friends, did not know about the smartphone, and these young women intended to keep it that way. This made me wonder: Why are women breaking everyday rules to engage with films? In the course of my research in Narwal, this was a unique occurrence, but I do not rule out the possibility of other such latent networks in the village. Even if this was a one-off instance, it has the potential of becoming known to other young women who might be looking for avenues of ingress into the digital world and Hindi films. For now, Rehana's friends were the only ones who opened up to me about this. I asked her, "Do you think there are other people who also might have bought a phone without the knowledge of family members? Would it not be amazing if you got to know that other girls have this arrangement too?" She appeared concerned, "No *didi*, it is best we do not try to find out. How will we find out anyway? And what if they tell our mothers?" This closed the discussion for us. For a moment, I felt that she regretted sharing this with me, and offered polite reassurance.

Another use of mobile phone technology that my participants enjoyed was the use of the in-built camera. It did not require a technological skill and it was common for young and middle-aged women to click and store their photographs in the phones that they used. The reason I mention phone camera and not just camera can be illustrated by the following example. I noticed a difference in the way my participants perceived a phone-camera and a hand-held one, i.e., clicking photographs of my participants on mobile phones turned out to be a different experience for me than using a DSLR camera. For the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I carried around a Canon DSLR camera in my bag to take some photographs. An hour into my interaction with a group of four young women, I asked them if I could take their pictures. They readily obliged and started shifting to change their positions so as to fit in the camera frame. I took my camera out, looked at them, and instantly realised that the camera was a mistake. The four girls looked uncomfortable, so I asked them if there is something wrong. One of them politely requested, "*Didi, phone se hi khich lijiye na*" (meaning: let us just click a picture from your phone). I experienced this unease with another set of young women. Following interactions after a phone photography session, I tried to find the reason why my participants were fine with their pictures on my phone but not on my camera. I understood later that, blurred by routinisation, the phone cameras did not intimidate my participants

posing for the photograph, but as soon as I took out a visibly heavy device, it represented a 'motive'. The use of a DSLR camera indicated a possibility that their photographs might be used for a purpose unknown to them. As long as the photography was done through a mobile phone, it was considered to be an 'ordinary memory-keeping' exercise. However, this inference needed to be validated. During my interaction with a 52-year-old man, who owned a photo studio in Narwal, I asked him about how his female customers reacted to his camera, "Have you ever felt women customers being hesitant to pose in front of your camera?"[61] He looked puzzled and responded, "Why would they be? Of course, they are not very talkative, but if they come all the way to the studio to get their photographs clicked, it is a task for them to complete". I understood that there was a permanence that was associated with the photographs captured by the 'big camera'. It dawned on me after this conversation that my participants were perhaps unprepared when I took my camera out to click their pictures. Since the only other place where such cameras were used were the studios, it was helpful for me to confirm my notions. The 'big photography camera' required the person to pose and posing indicated the subject's preparedness. As I observed, phones were for personal use and hand-held cameras indicated a possible public display of those photographs.[62] It can also be seen as an act that is more deliberate than taking photographs on the phone that occurs more randomly. Either way, I could not gather more data to confirm the rationale for their different relationship with a DSLR camera and a phone one.

All said, the investment in digitisation was still, as I observed, for the benefit of men and women's media use would be monitored. Research publications by NGOs and international organisations such as BBC Media Action, among others, have explained that mobile apps for rural women's health, education and skills were being developed and women in rural areas were benefitting from such 'communication for development' initiatives.[63] However, as a researcher in Narwal I could not find a single woman using any such mobile apps, and the initiatives are still few and sporadic across rural India. Any social messaging that was done in Narwal was either through television, and particularly

[61] I discuss my interaction with the studio owner in greater detail in section 4.2.2

[62] I discuss later (section 4.4.2) how even the photography studios in Narwal were influenced by Hindi films, but how this influence was different from yesteryear's *filmi* studio photography as described in Christopher Pinney's seminal work, *Artisan Camera: Studio Photography from Central India* (2013).

[63] One of such examples be accessed at – "Design thinking and health communication: learning from failure" (URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/mediaactioninsight/entries/bbf66eff-b109-4f14-8cd9-8473442a7da9)

by the Indian public broadcaster – *Doordarshan*, or through on-the-ground interaction.[64] My point here is that women were not just 'handed' devices like mobile phones, they had to find indirect avenues to get access to those. Men often dismissed conversations about women's media use, citing an 'inability' of females to use even the simplest of technologies. Easily available low-priced smartphones were not a sufficient reason for men to make the devices available to the women in their family. Kanchan, who had recently turned 18, was adept at sewing and designing, and on occasion, stitched shirts, blouses, and *kurtas* to hone her skills. Her mother Suman, who owned a beauty parlour in the village, was present in the room when I had a lengthy conversation with Kanchan one afternoon. Kanchan shared that she wanted to become someone 'who designs and stitches beautiful clothes' and showed me some of her own designed clothes. I asked Suman if she had any plans to send her daughter outside Narwal to pursue a career in design. It was just then that Prakash, Kanchan's 22-year-old brother, entered the room, and I praised his sister in front of him. He greeted me and said that she does, indeed, has a good knowledge of designing and stitching. I put forth a suggestion to him based on an earlier conversation with his sister, "Do you think a camera-phone will be good for Kiran to showcase her work to other people?" I could tell Prakash was not appreciative of the idea. He sat down casually and said politely, "What does she need it for? This place is unsafe. You never know who might be troubling her (*Pata nahi kaun tang karne lage*). Moreover, it is a waste". I nodded in agreement and added, "How about a phone with a camera but without a SIM card? At least she can store photographs of the clothes she stitches or keep the designs of her choice for reference?" He retorted:

> I would rather buy her a cheap camera than a phone. My WhatsApp keeps beeping all day and I get so disturbed. It is not that I cannot afford it, but I do not want her to get into trouble. Today she is asking for phone, tomorrow she will tell me she wants internet. This has no end.

I did not probe further and just nodded in agreement. It was evidently a sensitive issue for him to discuss the question of making technology available to his sister. The line that stuck with me after this conversation was *"today she is asking for phone, tomorrow she will tell me she wants internet. This has no end".* For me, this summed up the intent of those who disapproved of women's media consumption. There were similar cases like

[64] By social messaging I refer to public-service-based television shows and social advertisements

Kanchan's that I witnessed with other participants who were someone's sisters, daughters, or nieces. Even in the cases where brothers, sons and husbands did help women, for instance, in transferring data onto women's phones, they assumed the responsibility of being the 'mediators' between women and the media. I witnessed this dynamic in almost every household that I lived in, and I discuss women's everyday negotiations in the face of this moral panic in chapter six. Thus, women had to use mobile phones strictly in accordance with the existing rules. There have been reported cases of women being made to pay fines if they were seen using mobile phones in villages in the same state as Narwal.[65] In a situation like this, women had access to old, conventional media forms, where their consumption was not monitored and it was perfectly acceptable to consume film and other content through these – radio and newspapers. I explain their relevance in the next section.

3.5 Radio and Newspapers

A medium that used to be immensely popular here but is steadily losing its place to television and digital technology is radio. Radio is still popular among the urban audience due to radio shows that cater specially to an urban lifestyle, but radio in villages, at least in Narwal, was still either considered just a source of news, or a place to occasionally to listen to music. The radio was usually used only when there was no other medium of entertainment present.

Some of my participants had transistors in their homes, but they mostly hold novelty value now. I observed a radio transistor in five houses out of all the ones I visited, and in all except one, all devices needed repairs. There might have been transistors in other homes too, but they were not kept in sight. The radio sets were generally to be seen in the corners of the living rooms for 'emergency purposes', i.e., when all other media were not being used for some reason. These devices were mostly covered with stickers and dust. I captured some of them in my camera, and the photographs can be seen in figures 3.2, 3.2 and 3.4 below. The radio transistors I noticed looked old and, in comparison to the latest laptops, television sets and mobile sets in a household, these looked almost toy-like.

[65] See chapter six, section two for a news report on this issue in May, 2017

Figure 3.2 A radio transistor in a household (©Charusmita)

Figure 3.3 Radio transistor in another household (©Charusmita)

Figure 3.4 An old radio transistor used infrequently in a household (©Charusmita)

There appeared to be a generational divide regarding women's relationships with radio. Four of my participants between the ages of 30 to 45 said that they used to listen to radio on their phones till a few years back, but after the advent of internet and the ease of accessing music on the phone, the radio feature in phones was hardly being used. Many of my younger participants (aged 28 and below) confessed to listening to phone radios even now to listen to the latest songs that were becoming popular. Neeta (21) shared that she liked radio as it had readily available music on her brother's phone without the hassle of getting MP3s transferred on to USB sticks or SD cards, Additionally, with radio no information could be stored on the device. However, I cannot say if this was also a reason why some younger women liked listening to the radio sometimes.

The radio channels catering to Kanpur were also available in Narwal, but the signal was not quite as clear. Radio's presence, however, was still strong in contributing to the ambience of village shops, where loud Hindi film music would be blaring out and one could hear a different song every ten steps of walking through the local market. The only music that played on the radio during the day was Hindi film music or devotional songs. Hindi films' melodies were certainly popularised by radio, thus also reaching those who did not actively seek to listen to film music. Radio also regularly featured shows with gossip on film stars and advertisements with film-inspired content, such as endorsements by Hindi film actors, voice-overs, mimicry, interviews, film songs turned into advertisement jingles, interviews with film personalities, retro film music, and other snippets from the world of Hindi cinema.

The newspaper, on the other hand, is a staple in all households that can afford its cost. It is not only for reading news on the nation, politics and important events. The most widely circulated national dailies in Narwal were in Hindi – *Dainik Jagran, Amar Ujala*, and *Hindustan*. These newspapers carried supplements on popular culture, fashion, lifestyle, and films that both men and women enjoyed. Articles on film personalities, reviews of upcoming films, film show timings in nearby cinema theatres in cities, and advertisements featuring film stars, were common features of such supplements that also published columns on relationship advice, daily predictions of zodiac signs, latest fashion trends, and urban lifestyle trends. With the internet and television occupying centre stage in people's lives for the purpose of entertainment, discussions on newspaper supplements did not provoke eager responses from my participants. However, once I started noticing the presence of this medium in every house, I realised that it acts as a supplement to the

forms of Hindi films in my participants' lives, especially for women between the ages of 30-45. Another observation about the use of newspapers was that, compared to other forms of media, newspapers were not frowned upon by men. I discuss the reasons for this in chapter six, when I outline how women sometimes get to engage with Hindi films through forms that do not seem to 'bother' the men.

Conclusion

The use of infrastructure for communications technology in Narwal is primarily inflected by inconsistencies in gender and income/class distribution. In this chapter, I described the media environment within which women make choices to engage with Hindi films. I focussed on the availability of devices in the village and the ways in which they make various film forms available to my participants. I also briefly introduced the issues around ownership of media technology and mediation of women's media use (which I discuss in detail in chapter six). This chapter set the context for the following chapter, which continues this discussion on the prevalent film culture in Narwal.

I make three points in this chapter. First, media practices are never universal. Each woman's preferred medium for engaging with Hindi film is different, yet there are broad patterns that emerge with regard to the use of television, mobile phones, laptops, newspapers, and radio. The influence of community and family norms is not the same on the use of each medium for my participants. For instance, the use of the internet on laptops and mobile phones is more closely monitored by men and elders in a family than the use of newspapers or radio, and watching television is more acceptable if done together with other family members, than alone. While I am unable to describe definitive patterns according to the age of my participants, I have mentioned relevant information about their preferences in relation to their age groups. My second point is that in a rural sociocultural setting like Narwal, the availability of media technology does not necessarily translate into its ownership by women, and their ownership does not mandatorily lead to engagement. In other words, merely co-existing with this technology does not imply an active engagement, and in some cases, it might even be used for further subjugation owing to existing gender power relations. As I describe in later chapters, moral panic around women's film consumption might lead women to face ridicule, prohibition and contempt within their family. The third point is that among the women,

there was a respect for other females who could operate 'complex devices' such as laptops and smartphones. Since operating digital devices required some form of 'training' or 'smartness' (*hoshiyaari*), it was considered a 'qualification' as opposed to watching television. Possessing a working knowledge of computers also corresponded to a higher status and ambition for women. This may have to do with the fact that learning to use computers potentially leads to paid employment, which is usually the route followed by the men. I see women's media use becoming a balancing act in which social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is being acquired in the form of technological skills. It is a project in itself to explore the ways and constraints within which women, especially under the age of 25 are acquiring this social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As Meena said, "When I watch television, my mother chides me because she feels I am wasting my time. However, she does not question me too much when I am using the laptop".

Acquiring this form of capital within a short span of time also leads to a clash between the admiration gathered and the 'dreaded notion of becoming too modern' (Poonam, 50). In some of the households, women 'becoming too modern' meant that they were not fit for a traditional society, and this would cause anxiety amongst parents who 'let' their daughters 'study too much'. This scenario can be seen to be changing rapidly amongst women's own networks, as I gathered from discussions with them. As Meena's mother, Poonam, said, "If they (females) do not learn about new things, their lives will be spent like ours, going around in circles forever (*chakkar lagate rahenge*)". However, in some cases like Kiran's, mothers were unequivocal about their daughters' future. They had set ideas about the kind of lives they wanted their daughters to lead, and if the daughters had ambitions that radically contradicted the current status quo, they would not be able to adjust with their new family after marriage. The majority of the views on female education of the women I spoke to lay in between those of Suman and Poonam – and sometimes this dilemma was reflected in their ambitions to educate their daughters. My point here is that women's media use was significantly inflected by their families, educational levels, family income levels, and existing socio-cultural norms. The use of a particular technology was also a function of the aforementioned aspects, affecting the ways in which women accessed films and the specific elements of the Hindi film they engaged the most with, such as songs, images, videos, film-based mobile apps, and so on.

My attempt to review the literature on women's media consumption in an Indian village yielded multiple results, from news reports and blogs on development communication, to academic papers and non-academic opinion pieces, many describing how digital campaigns and competitive tech-pricing, combined with greater access to mass media, was 'empowering women' in rural areas. Many of these studies were quick to label any change pertaining to women's media use as 'empowerment'. From my lived experience of Narwal, and another village in North India, I argue that only ethnographic methods can assess whether a newly acquired access to media technology is indeed uplifting women's social status or not. I mention this here to underline the importance of an even deeper understanding of Indian villages, which are far from witnessing a *linearity* in social transformations.

The next chapter discusses the forms in which the Hindi film manifests itself in the village and what meaning that form holds for women in the village.

4

Locating the film:
Sites and forms of film content

4.1 Introduction

A more precise sense of the relationship between women and film consumption in Narwal can be understood by examining the ways in which Hindi film manifests itself in their everyday lives. This chapter goes beyond the use of devices and modes of consumption and discusses the extratextual ways in which the Hindi film exists in the village. It gives an account of a film culture that is characterised by elements of Hindi cinema beyond full-length feature films — such as film music, merchandising, and images — through which the Hindi film can be 'located' in Narwal. It is only through a mapping of all of these interconnected forms that I could understand the nature of this audience group (women in Narwal). In this chapter I argue that for my participants, film audiencehood comprises a set of voluntary as well as involuntary social and individual practices through which they relate to Hindi film and/or its extratextual forms.

4.2 Watching Hindi films - Shauk hai par kabhi poora nahi hua[66]

As discussed earlier, watching full-length feature films was not the most common way of engaging with Hindi cinema for women in Narwal. Unlike urban areas where cinema

[66] Translation: It (watching films) is a desire that never got fulfilled (one of my participants used this phrase, and this was repeated by several other young and middle-aged women who I spoke to)

viewership sets the tone for audiencehood, the rural setting limits people's ability to view films in theatres. For women, engagement with films almost completely depends on film use outside of cinema theatres. In this section, I briefly outline what film viewership means in the absence of cinema halls, looking at various audio-visual forms such as video fragments of feature films, and film content on television.

4.2.1 Viewership in the absence of cinema halls

A few of my older participants, more than 60 years of age, shared personal experiences of watching Hindi films in single-screen theatres while living in Indian cities in the 1970s and 80s. These women had moved to Narwal after marriage and fondly recalled the days when they used to enjoy watching films with their friends, siblings or husband. As I observed during my field visit, the nearest cinema theatre was in Kanpur city, about 32 miles from Narwal, which was a considerable distance for anyone to commute for the purpose of watching a film. Owing to financial as well as social constraints, women hardly visited the city for this purpose. For my participants, deriving pleasure from watching films would place them, according to older family and community members, as non-conformist women who were audacious and seeking escape from their everyday life. Such women would also be considered, by those who disapproved, as someone who sought material comforts that were far beyond her means and needs.

A few kinds of Hindi films, however, lay outside the boundaries of this collective understanding of films as materialistic temptation. Both patriotic films and family-dramas promulgating 'Indian family values' were accepted in the minds and hearts of people across classes and genders in Narwal. As Anamika (40), co-owner of a family-run grocery shop, said, "Instilling family values should be the primary aim of a film. Films these days are 'derailing' [*path-bhrasht*] the minds of our children, and now the responsibility of getting them back on track (with the belief systems) should be on their (filmmakers') shoulders too". I asked, "But do you not agree that times are changing, and that the content should change accordingly too?", to which she said, "Maybe. But since when do films show reality [*vaastvikta*]? When have they ever shown reality? Some children of today consider films as truth, so if they incorporate family values in films, future generations will benefit". Another participant, Nandita (52), said something in a separate interaction which added to Anamika's point, "Look at the movie *Baghban*

(2003). *Woh jitni baar aati hai tv par, hum utni baar thodi bahut dekhte hain aur usi mein ro dete hain* [meaning: Every time it is on TV, I watch parts of it (while doing household chores) and even that much makes me cry]". My observations were consistent with my earlier experience of other rural settings that the notions of family-values and morality were interconnected and quite strong in Narwal. The moral values depicted in a film, thus, changed the way that the film was perceived by my participants. The fundamental idea was that films adhering to the community's moral standards [*sanskaar*] fell into the bracket of 'good' films, while those showing otherwise were considered undesirable for women-viewers.[67] My participants used a number of words to refer to the idea of a moral/social code such as *sanskaar*, *sanskriti*, and *naitikta*, among others contingent on the context.

Exceptions to the above understanding were, in some cases, contingent upon the sites for watching films. On visiting the nearest computer shop that sold downloaded movies on USB sticks and SD cards, I noted the choice of films that were being bought by males to be watched at home. Sometimes these films would also be seen by their women family members on their laptops or phones. My presumption was that the women, since most of these films were not 'good' ones, might not be watching these films (either due to mediation by men or of their own accord), but I observed otherwise. The site of film-viewing changed the rationale for selecting 'watchable' (*dekhne layak*) films for my participants. In an intimate setting, without company, my participants were less conscious of the fact that they might never be able to replicate the life shown in films. In other words, the pleasures of watching films were much more than the satisfaction of being able to relate to the lifestyle depicted in them. For instance, *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* (2015), starring Salman Khan, was a widely popular film among my participants of all age groups in Narwal. The storyline revolved around the themes of love, family, and friendship, set in the context of a princely state in India, where the prince had an identical look-alike who took over the reins in the absence of the prince himself. I screened this film in a house where I stayed, where there were four women aged 19, 27, 35 and 71. The youngest one was the daughter of my host, accompanied by her sisters-in-law, and grandmother (the mother-in-law of the other two). One afternoon, when men and children were away, we decided to watch the whole film on my laptop. Once the movie ended, all

[67] This must be understood in relation to the notion of an ideal 'moral universe' (Thomas, 1995) in Hindi cinema. See detailed discussion on transgression and compliance in the moral universe of the village in section 5.2.

four praised the film and said that it was highly entertaining. I wanted to know specific details about what they really thought of the film's actors, plot, music, clothing, and other aspects. During the screening, I observed different moments in the film when they smiled or gave notable reactions. The oldest one, aged 71, was the most talkative of the four. She described the royal palaces of the olden days in India every time an aerial view of the palatial house of the protagonist was shown in the film. She stopped doing that once she was told by her granddaughter not to spoil the viewing experience for others ["*Dadi ab dekhne bhi dijiye*"]. The *bahus* (daughters-in-law) did not say much for the entire duration of the screening, and their facial expressions indicated that watching a film in present company was not the ideal film-viewing experience they imagined. Before the film I had asked both of them if they wanted me to reschedule it, and they had said, "*Nahi, dekh lete hain, waise kahan dekhne ko milti hai humein filmein* [meaning: No, let us watch the film, for we hardly get to watch any films anyway]". I had noticed their mother-in-law cringe a little at their response, and this strained dynamic continued throughout the screening. I realised that it would be too intrusive for me to get their reaction to the film by involving them in a discussion with each other. The only time one of the daughters-in-law reacted was during a song, "*Bitti isi gaane pe toh thirakti hai din bhar*" [meaning: this is the song my daughter dances to all day]. The youngest of the four (the daughter) had to go to teach at an after-school session at a nearby tuition centre after the screening, and I decided to accompany her to her destination. Initiating a conversation, I asked, "Maybe I chose the wrong time to show the film to all of you, as everyone is generally busy at this time of the day". She smiled politely and said:

> That is not the problem, *didi*. The timing was fine. It is just that my grandmother does not like my *Bhabhis* (meaning: her daughters-in-law) watching films. They are very slow and do everything at their own pace. My grandmother wants everything to be done her way. Now they have stopped watching television as well. I am surprised at how my grandmother even agreed to watch this with everyone today. She does not usually sit with us to watch films.

I had organised the screening to examine reactions that emerged while watching the film, but I later realised that it had turned out to be an incidence of appeasing the guest, who in this case was me. I further inquired, "What about you? Does your grandmother not like you watching films too?", and she said, "No, she does not say anything to me, except that I should spend more time taking care of my younger brother and father. I love films, but

I do not watch them with everyone. I like to watch films alone". I continued the conversation, "Why is that?", to which she responded:

> ...Maybe because I am afraid things will get awkward (*ajeeb*) if it is an *ulti-seedhi* (idiotic) film.[68] I like Salman Khan and how nicely he treats Sonam Kapoor in the film, just like a princess. But my mother and grandmother say that family films focus too much on boy-girl [romantic] stories.

Knowing the 'type' of films was taken seriously in Narwal, as I discuss in detail in section 5.4. If it was a family film, it ought not to include any awkward 'new-age scenes with love affairs', and if it was a patriotic film, it should avoid focussing on anything other than the struggles of an army man or the social issues faced by a common Indian man. Any digression, even if contextual, was not appreciated widely in family viewings. I then decided that screening films with family members present was not the best strategy to explore or examine the film aspects that my participants liked, unless the setting was arranged in a way where my participants did not have to worry about betraying any emotions through facial expressions.

In another screening that I organised for 17 women, 12 were below the age of 30 and this time none were related, in any way, to each other. I had hired a small projector and a screen locally to be set up in a classroom at the ITI (Industrial Training Institute). I met them and the interactions carried on for three consecutive days before the screening. Initially I had planned on screening a family-drama film, but as I discussed a few potential film titles with my participants at the ITI ahead of the screening, they dismissed each as they had already seen those or heard about it and did not like the premise. They asked me if I had a recent film that they had not watched. I suggested watching the film *Pink* (2016) and all readily agreed. During the screening of *Pink*, which tells the story of three young women and their lawsuit against a rapist, Madhu (42), a trainer at the ITI, expressed her dislike of a few scenes in the film. The said scenes showed a young woman in New Delhi being sexually assaulted by her own male friend. Madhu said:

[68] *Ulta Seedha* in this context referred to depictions of conjugal romance in films

> What is the point of such films? All they do is depress us and make us afraid of the world out there. There is no saviour like Amitabh Bachchan in real life.[69] I think we should watch a film that entertains all of us as a family.

While other participants jumped out in defence of the choice of film after her reaction, stating that they liked watching Amitabh Bachchan on screen and that the film was 'good', Madhu chose to go and sit at the back. She did not say a word afterwards and avoided looking at the screen in the scenes where the protagonists in the film were assaulted and humiliated. After the screening I went to speak to her separately. I apologised as I thought she felt uncomfortable, and she shared:

> I know this is an important film, and these things happen in reality, but I always believed watching films should be an escape from reality, to a happy world where everything becomes 'alright' in the end, but nothing is ever going to be 'alright' in my life.

After listening to what she later revealed about her circumstances, it was evident how such films could serve as constant reminders of pain and helplessness for my participants.[70] The aspect that upset Madhu the most was that *Pink* depicted women who were supposedly living a life of financial dignity and liberality in a big city. She asserted, "If it can happen to them, it can happen to us living here in a socially rigid space. In fact, it does. It is a cruel place [*kroor samaaj*]". This was evident of how watching films sometimes, instead of becoming cathartic, opened up old wounds for my participants and reminded them of painful instances from their own lives. It was the theme of injustice, sexual consent, and helplessness of the character that she related to the most. I also observed that although my participants found film-viewing a pleasurable/cathartic activity, they did not get to indulge in watching films as frequently as they would have liked. For instance, Sapna (28) stitched clothes at her home as part-time work but when asked about her livelihood, she preferred to be known as a housewife. She visited Kanpur city once every fortnight with her husband for medical treatment but had only watched

[69] Amitabh Bachchan is one of the most recognised faces of the Hindi film industry and is arguably the most popular film star in India of all time. Bachchan also starred in the film *Pink* as the lawyer who fights the women's case and wins it.

[70] I am unable to discuss the circumstances in this thesis due to ethical concerns

film in a theatre once in her entire life. She had an extremely soft voice and a warm personality, and she shared while we were having tea at her house one evening:

> I love to watch films. I wish I could watch at least two films every week. I watch them sometimes when there is opportunity. Mostly I watch them on television, but I would prefer watching them on my phone. I love television dramas [*Natak*] too. I am learning how to watch films and TV dramas on the internet. One day I tried to watch the film *Raja Hindustani* [1996] on the internet on google just like my son does, but *poora balance hi udd gaya* [meaning: the whole talk-time balance was finished]. Every time I try to watch something online, my phone is out of balance within a few minutes. So, I have to watch it on television, but due to electricity issues and clash of timing with other family members, I am not even able to do that.

This was a unique case where Sapna, who lived in a joint family of 11 members, was able to fulfil her desire, to some extent, for watching films and soap operas despite constraints. Any extravagant claims about viewership of films in an Indian village ought to be tempered by the fact that watching a two-to-three-hour long film was a difficult feat to be achieved by women living in this setting. Some participants considered gaining access to a film as the end point of their cinematic journey, rather than a starting one. Further, since women did not form the customer-base for the village computer shops that sold film content on USB sticks, there was no attempt from their end to cater to the women's preferences. A young man who worked at a computer shop in Narwal showed me his collection of downloaded films and Hindi film songs. In my interaction with him, I learnt that since last two years his customers, almost all males, were increasingly gaining in-home access to downloaded content and therefore, he was not getting as much business as before. To improve this situation he had started to stock digital HD prints of 'South Indian films' (mostly in Telugu) that were dubbed in Hindi, in addition to the Chinese and Hollywood action films which were popular among men.[71] There was no evidence of women avoiding action films but, in our interactions, none of my participants said she preferred an action film over other kinds of available types. Children, however, as I observed, were highly entertained by action films and videos, irrespective of their gender. There was a complete absence of shops specifically selling CD-ROMs or DVDs of films.

[71] Telugu is a language spoken in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and the union territories of Puducherry by the Telugu people

It was only the computer shops selling content on cards and USB sticks that operated in Narwal then. As the shop-owner told me:

> Usually, it is the HD movies that are in demand. No one wants to watch films in the bad quality 'cinema hall print' anymore. They come to my shop for that. I sell five movies in HD print for 20 Rupees. It is mostly only young males who come to my shop for this purpose. For every 50 men, there would roughly be 2 females coming to my shop.

Despite being available on portable gadgets, none of my participants watched films while working or while running household errands. Although these devices could conventionally be classified as media for personal use, they often became sites of collective or family viewing, especially in the case of women.

4.2.2 Fragments of feature films: Videos in circulation

The material specificity of digital technology made it easier for everyone to access full feature films, or part thereof, on portable devices. Since my participants did not often watch full movies due to various constraints as I explained, they downloaded and shared film-related videos, such as film scenes, songs, spoofs, and parodies. These videos were forms of quick entertainment, and my participants watched and shared these as compared to watching full features, thus preventing them from being labelled as *kaamchor* (slacker/useless) who spends too much time watching films.

Film-related videos were not only shared on WhatsApp but were also transferred across mobile phones through Bluetooth or as pre-loaded clips on the smartphones. These were Hindi film videos ranging from high-definition clips of film scenes, songs, humorous or parody video clips based on films, doctored/ edited film clips for political or social messaging, gruesome and gory film clips, and some cut-away segments of Hollywood or East Asian action films. People also shared non-film-related videos such as news videos, viral social media clips, political speeches, interviews for political messaging, and social advertisements.[72]

[72] Most of the political content shared, such as local news items supplemented by unverified video clips, evidently promoted by the ruling national party in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and doubtless originated with the party, as part of their party propaganda machine.

Within households, children were either the primary media content providers or came close to adult male members in doing so, especially for their mothers or grandmothers. They acted as enablers for my participants, facilitating the use of phones for women to watch or listen to their preferred video or song. Women also relied on their children to download or transfer content on to their smartphones. Durga Devi (69), a tailor who worked from home, shared her views on her grandson and granddaughter as (sometimes unwarranted) media content facilitators:

> I hate these *maar-dhaad wali filmein* [action/violence-based films]. My grandchildren keep showing me things on phones and each time I refuse to see those, they start a graphic commentary of the scenes to annoy me. They get these from the nearby computer shop, *bhagwan jaane who log kaahe daalte hain yeh sab phone mein* [God knows why they sell this content on phones].

Children and teenagers of both genders, by virtue of being avid media consumers, also acted as regulators or mediators for the women in their homes. As I saw in most households, boy children watched films or videos first and then 'carefully selected' the bits worth sharing with their mothers, sisters or grandmothers. Little girls and female teenagers also watched and shared content on phones regularly, but they only consumed the content that the males (adults or minors) downloaded/got transferred. Another interesting use of film-related videos by my participants was when they used to visit each other's houses along with their children; they used to give their phones to the children and the videos kept the children entertained while the women conversed at leisure. For one reason or another, these videos occupied important spaces in their smartphones, and in their lives.

Husbands, brothers, and sons too were mindful and aware of the film content that was being consumed by various members in the house. They were the primary gatekeepers of the film content that my participants consumed. Hence, the circulation of fragments of feature films within the village was heavily influenced by the preferences of men, and this is a significant characteristic of the prevalent film culture in a rural setting like Narwal.

4.2.3 Televised film consumption

Adding to previous discussion on the experience of watching television (section 3.2), I will now explain the ways in which my participants consumed Hindi film on television. For women like Sapna (28), watching films on television was preferred over watching them on phones or laptops due to high cost of the internet data or the lack of knowledge of how to manage the cost of internet on their personal devices. But for most of my participants, it was the kinds of limitations on their television consumption that limited their film viewership on it. Younger women (18-24) shared that they preferred individual and personalised film consumption, such as watching films without elders present, using film-based apps, and watching music videos of their choice on YouTube or offline. Women over 25 preferred watching television dramas and film-based television shows as these programmes had fixed timings and did not have a runtime of 2 to 3 hours. Additionally, women who were married with families mostly did not get time with media devices alone and had to consume most media content collectively with other family members.

Although the kinds of content and subject matter in television dramas — soundtracks, storylines, language, and sometimes even actors — were similar to Hindi films (chapter three), watching television dramas did not subject my participants to as much moral scrutiny as watching feature films. For instance, while I was at Sapna's house watching a television drama titled *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* (2010-still running; translation: 'Stand by me, my beloved'), her mother-in-law (65) said:

> What they show in television dramas these days is real. This is exactly how daughters-in-law treat their mother-in-law…The husband only listens to what his wife says. The world is a bad place, and lots of bad things happen that need to be shown. I like television dramas more…but sometimes they use scenes that are too long…with just a song playing in the background…and *bekaar* [useless] love stories. *Yeh sab filmon mein hota tha, ab yeh log tv par bhi dikhane lage hain* [all this used to happen only in films, now they have started showing this on television too].

Curious, I asked her, "So would you, in that case, also like films like *Pink* (I had narrated the film's plot to her earlier)?" She responded, "But the world is a bad place, and despite the girls' suffering, it will not evoke sympathy/pity (*daya*) in the minds of men. So, I do not see the point of such films. It never helps". I observed a difference in the way she perceived television and film, and moreover, filmic content *on* television. The 'reality' of kitchen politics shown on television dramas was something that she related to, and

therefore this theme was significant for her. However, she did not appreciate the love stories' sections of the dramas because she thought these were unnecessary and should only be shown in films. This might have had two reasons. First, because dating and relationships were still considered as the domain of films, and when shown on television, romances either quickly culminated in marriage, with the family's approval, or were shown as a marital relationship between two characters who were flagbearers of tradition and family values. Secondly, since TV soap operas were mostly watched with other family members, even if they were all females, the collective understanding was this: 'you are what you consume', and it was seen to be common sense that the desires of a woman corresponded with the content that she consumed, and how she consumed it. Among my participants aged 60 and above, this rationale was how I observed them to be judging other women consuming media content.

In contrast, the younger women were more appreciative of the film-inspired parts of television dramas. This may have been partly due to their personalised and individualised consumption that allowed them to engage with the content without external family influence, but I could not generalise this reasoning across age groups. While watching the period drama *Jodha Akbar* (2013-2015, with ongoing repeat telecasts) at the house of one of my hosts, there was an intimate scene between the two protagonists on the television screen. There were three people watching the episode, Manisha (10-years-old), Priyamvada (her 35-year-old mother), and me. There was complete silence among all three of us during the intimate scene, but I observed no discomfort or unease on Priyamvada's face. Once the show ended, I asked her, "Do you not think the television dramas have become too *filmi* these days? They show anything on television these days without *lihaaz* (consideration/ being mindful)". She said shyly, "I do not find it odd. Television mostly shows what films show. When in films they do not filter anything out, this was going to happen to the *nataks* (dramas) too". I was curious as to what her reaction might have been if it were her family members sitting there, and so I asked, "Do you prefer watching television alone, when no one is at home?" Without a change in her expression, she said:

> It does not really make a difference, unless you have a scene that the elders might not like. But I feel that it is up to the makers to make whatever they want. If they are showing this, I do not mind watching.

I continued the conversation, "Would you say the same thing about films too?" and she said, "Why not? Unless there is no one else at home, except maybe my sister. We used to watch so many films together before I got married". This was just another instance where my participants engaged with films and television differently depending on their age group and consumption preferences. It also indicated how Hindi films are considered to be the trend-setters in entertainment and popular culture.[73] Films were usually viewed on television only on weekends by the whole family. Although Priyamvada and Sapna, like several other participants, enjoyed those afternoons watching films with their families, they wished that the TV channels would show such films on weekdays too, so that they could watch them at leisure, as on weekends they hardly got to enjoy the films with all the pending household work. On Sundays, it was just the incidence of the family getting together to watch a film that they found satisfying. The consumption of Hindi film through television, thus, went beyond viewing films. As mentioned earlier, there were TV channels such as B4U Music and 9XM that predominantly broadcasted latest Hindi film music, trailers of upcoming Hindi films, star interviews, artist profiles, concerts and music chart rundowns, as well as video request shows. My participants watch these for film-related news, music and celebrity gossip during late afternoons and early evenings. I also discussed earlier how even the seemingly non-film-related TV content, such as daily soap operas, was heavily influenced by Hindi films in terms of titles, plots, actors, and music. While there were several instances where I watched television, films and other content within people's households, I observed that women did not visit others' houses for this purpose, unless they were young girls under the age of 25 who went to their friends' houses under the pretext of 'learning computers'. It was only the men, in my field experience, who went to another's house to enjoy television or listening to music.

The next section is about the Hindi film music which is not just popular in this rural setting but is an integral part of the Hindi film culture globally. I discuss below the presence of Hindi film in Narwal through its music and the ways in which film music is celebrated here.

[73] I discuss the differences in film and television consumption by my participants in chapter five

4.3 Film music

The popularity of Hindi film music within households in Narwal can be attributed to not just television, smartphones, and internet, but also radios on phones and in transistors. The local radio channels, whether accessed through phone, pocket music players, or transistors, play exclusively commercial Hindi film music. In households where there was no television, I observed the presence of devices that could play music, such as phones, portable music players, or old transistors. The in-depth interviews in the final weeks of my field work indicated that women under the age of 25 wished to own music systems of their own in their house, which ideally would only be for their personal use and not for use by other members. I had specifically asked them a question on the ownership of music devices as I wanted to know whether they seek to enjoy film music, or if it is just something that is supposed to be played in the background or at celebrations. Women older than 25 were usually married and, hence, all their activities were closely monitored as compared to the 'daughters of the house'. However, my participants of all ages enjoyed listening to film music and for them this was an activity that they could enjoy while doing other chores as well as something they could enjoy in private.

It was not only women but also children (both boys and girls) who enjoyed songs from Hindi films, in turn strengthening my participants' engagement with films. A primary school that I visited in Narwal had students of 4 to 9 years of age. The female staff members who I interacted with told me about the individual and group activities at school. I learnt from those conversations that popular Hindi film songs were the only music that the children (both boys and girls) would perform to. Deepika (28), who taught mathematics and English language in the same school, said:

> On special occasions such as festivals, competitions, and other cultural events, our children (students) perform to popular film songs. Songs like *Ik uncha lamba kadd* (Welcome, 2007; translation: a tall girl), *mayya yashoda* (Hum Saath Saath Hain, 1999; translation: mother Yashoda), *shanivaar raati* (Main Tera Hero, 2014; translation: Saturday night) are enjoyed by all.

All of the songs she talked about were invariably from Hindi films. It is notable how children acted as sources of the latest film music for some of my participants. The other teachers at the school confirmed the popularity of film songs among children and said that little boys and girls find out about the songs from members of the family and, when they come to school, they spread the word about the songs and the latest films. Once the

children at school come to know about new songs or films, they go home and relay that information to their family members who were most often women, as the mothers, aunts, and grandmothers are the first ones who are available to talk to children when they reach home. Thus, from a very tender age, girls and boys are exposed to different forms of Hindi film. I also noticed some of these children attempting to mimic well-known film actors. The female staff members were also sometimes given the responsibility of choreographing some of their students' dance performances. Some songs which these children chose to dance to had lyrics that may have been considered objectionable by the older people in the community. It is only when I heard young children singing songs with lyrics objectifying women that I realised how deeply the films impact their everyday cultural practices. However, going any deeper into children's film consumption than that was beyond the scope of my study.

Drawing from an earlier point I made, a simple browse through Indian television will show that it has channels that are dedicated to producing content based on films and film music (such as B4U music and 9XM channel). It was during a particularly warm afternoon that I expected to meet one of my participants at her house. While walking through a narrow lane on my way to her house, I noticed a door of another house slightly ajar, just a few metres before her house, inside which I heard a recent popular Hindi film song called *Kar Gayi Chull* (Kapoor and Sons, 2016; translation: she made me go crazy). On getting closer, I realised that there was a young woman watching a video of that song on her TV screen. She was mimicking the dance moves while sitting on her bed. She was in her early twenties and I recognised her from another interaction that I had with her friends. I knocked on her door lightly, but the young woman, still unaware of my presence there, was completely hooked to the song video. The second time I knocked, she noticed me. She stopped dancing, and, slightly embarrassed, she greeted me with a wide smile. I apologised to her for knocking on her door and told her how much I admired her dancing skills. She thanked me and said coyly:

> I just watch these songs when I come back from the school after teaching. I think these [shows] make one feel light and tension-free. I can stop watching them any time I want, otherwise with films, it is difficult to stop. I really like this song and the dance steps of Alia Bhatt [actress]. I thought I will try it too.

She told me how she had just come back home, and since there was no one around, she thought of just watching the TV for some time before her brother arrived.

Drawing on responses to the semi-structured interviews, I noted that my participants watched these music-based channels for varied reasons such as entertainment, learning about upcoming films, watching videos of the songs they would have heard elsewhere, updating themselves with the latest fashion trends, and relieving stress. Although none of my interviewees explicitly cited celebrity-gossip or actor-interviews as reasons to watch TV channels like Zoom or B4U, the younger ones (below the age of 30) recalled and discussed bits of interviews of Hindi film actors/ actresses that they had watched. Ranjana, a 23-year-old participant, spoke on how 'Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh must get married' and went on about how the two looked great together in the interview that was broadcasted a week before on B4U channel.[74] Film trailers, too, were particularly important, as these music-based channels sometimes served as one-stop shops for knowing all about the latest Bollywood films. These trailers sometimes also gave a glimpse of the film's music, which was enough for some of my younger participants to know whether or not they were going to like that music album. As Ranjana shared, "My brother sometimes shows me trailers on Google, but B4U usually shows songs of all new films so I just learn about them on that [channel]. These channels are the only good thing in television". Her mother added, "She keeps watching these songs all day, how is it different from watching films for a whole day?", looking unimpressed. This reminded me of Anna Morcom's argument in her book *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema*, where she showed how "film songs incorporate Hindi films in a parallel way to how Hindi films incorporate songs" (2007:239). Morcom discussed the integration of music in Hindi films by describing a symbiotic relationship between film songs and their parent films. She writes, "In commercial terms, film songs and films are two sides of the same coin" and that "film songs have commercial power, but only when coupled with a Hindi film" (2007:205). However, Bakshi and Sarkar (2015) argued in the context of the popularity of Hindi film music in India, that "The box-office success of the movies depends partially on the extent to which the songs catch the fancy of the population, but not necessarily the other way around." (Bakshi and Sarkar, 2015:142). I cannot say whether my participants were engaging with Hindi films in a purposeful way by *listening* to film songs, but I am certain that the songs made them familiar with the film the song belonged to. The

[74] Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh are popular Hindi film stars who got married in November 2018

popularity of Hindi film music is also due to "the marketing efforts of the music companies, aided by the actions taken by the production houses which are inherently focused on promoting the associated movie." (Bakshi and Sarkar, 2015:144).

In parts of North India, the *baaraat-band*, a vehicle with tableau-style decorations, flowers, lights and loudspeakers attached to it, has been popular since at least the 1980s. These slow-moving vehicles were part of the spectacle of *baaraat* (the wedding procession of the groom to the bride's house), and traditionally had a live singer whose voice blared out from the attached loudspeakers reciting versions of Hindi film songs. I spotted a few of these band-vehicles in Narwal, given on rent for wedding celebrations (figure 4.1). The tracks played on the loudspeakers were pre-recorded, with live voice-overs by a singer, accompanied by the '*Baaja-wallahs*' (trumpet-players), who played differently sized trumpets. This 'band' always exclusively played Hindi film songs and people danced to them during the entire wedding procession. Gregory Booth's article on brass bands (1990) discussed tradition and change in the Indian wedding music and described how significant these bands were to the *baaraat* (the wedding procession). The band used to be hired by the groom's parents to company the *baaraat* (Booth, 1990). Hindi film music was the predominant form of musical entertainment in Narwal today too, just like several other parts of North India. As Booth described:

> Regardless of the function at which they (bands) are performing, a brass band's repertoire is normally based on the same source: Hindi film music. Regional variation is minimal; at any given moment, the same songs will be heard throughout the country…Approximately half this number [of film songs played] will be made up of hits from relatively current films; the remainder will include older film songs whose persistence is due to their extreme popularity or to their filmic contexts, together with some non-film items such as folk songs specific to the community in which the wedding is occurring..
>
> (1990:247)

Figure 4.1 A band-vehicle ('Baaraat-band') spotted in Narwal (©Charusmita)

A lot of mainstream Hindi films after the 2000s have churned out wedding and party songs that have become so popular that they are played at practically every North Indian wedding in urban areas too and "this symbiotic relationship of films and film songs is reflected in the increasing corporate conglomeration of different media in the Indian entertainment industry" (Morcom, 2007:205). The men working in computer shops in Narwal compiled Bollywood wedding playlists and, as I observed, any celebratory event was considered incomplete without these popular film songs. This was one of the shops' most sought-after services and it did not cost much to them or their customers – 20 Rupees (GBP 0.23) for 4 GB worth of content on a USB stick or a memory card. The Hindi film industry has, since long, churned out occasion-specific songs such as for festivals, weddings, and other rituals. For example, the song *Rang Barse Bheege Chunar Wali* (Silsila, 1981) became a nationwide anthem in the popular cultural memory for the festival of Holi and is played in rural as well as urban areas of North India even as of 2019. As my field work did not clash with Holi, I could not be there to experience the festivities, but I did have a discussion with my participants about what celebrations ensue on the day and the days leading up to it. In addition to festival and wedding playlists, the computer shops also compile and sell other recent film music based on film albums, playback singers, and the 'evergreen' film songs from the 1970s and 1980s, often catering to specific occasions. These did not particularly hold a novelty value for my older participants (above 60), who mostly preferred listening to sounds from 'the era bygone' (older Hindi film songs from the 1950s to the 1980s), as well as devotional music whose playlists, again, were immensely popular. These devotional songs too were mostly based on Hindi films' melodies that were popular.

The use of songs' audio clips as ringtones for phones was also popular among my participants (also see Deo and Duggal, 2017). The musical MP3 clips that were in demand by the phone users were (i) Hindi film songs (70%), (ii) *Bhajans* (devotional songs, about 10%), or (iii) film songs that were devotional (5%). Ringtones were sold within the 4 GB package, usually in 200 MB folders that were pre-loaded on to the USB sticks along with other content. Ringtones were also shared among friends and family via WhatsApp or Bluetooth. Although I could not find precise data on the use of such ringtones according to age groups, I noted that my participants between the ages of 30 to 50 were mostly the ones whose phones had film songs as ringtones. However, as I mentioned earlier, they were seldom the sole users of their phones; it could have been their children or other male

family members who set those ringtones. Hence, what I can say with certainty is that ringtones of film music were immensely popular, and the songs almost always belonged to the latest Hindi film releases.

The Hindi film industry has a sub-economy, that of its music albums, which strives to promote an upcoming film by popularising its music and attracting audiences towards it. As Morcom explains:

> Songs are intentionally composed to musically and lyrically express particular cinematic situations, incorporating details of the film story and the characters, drama, visuals (locations, cinematography), as well as the action and timing of the song situation.
>
> (2007:137)

The impact of a film's music album in the case of several films has been much more significant than that of the film itself, depending upon the composer, singer, featured film stars, and so on. Based on my experience in Narwal, I agree with Morcom's assessment that "film songs have commercial power, but only when coupled with a Hindi film" (2007:205). This builds the interest of the audience and is the most widely accessed and favoured film form for my participants.

The next section describes the presence of Hindi film in Narwal's everyday culture beyond consumption of direct filmic elements such as film music, film videos, and full features.

4.4 Experiencing film through visual culture: Images and objects

Extra-textual manifestations of Hindi film in Narwal were also made visible through images that existed as imprints on everyday objects, in sartorial tastes, in profile pictures online, film-based posters, among others. Phil Wickham (2010) advocated a particularly useful tool that I use to explain the film-related visual culture in Narwal. Wickham suggested it for understanding the history of cinema, but I extended it to understand how it is in the relationship between Narwal's visual culture and Hindi film that we find evidence of film's influence in the lives of my participants. Talking about the approach, Wickham wrote:

> This [approach] is through ephemera; the material that exists beyond the text, relating to the film, the practice of production or exhibition, or the personality, but which is not the actual reel of celluloid, the data or the human being.
>
> (Wickham, 2010:316)

Wickham contended that because of its specificity and its address to consumers, ephemera opens up cinema's role in everyday life and its place within individual lives (2010:317). His approach also emphasised on material culture, but my study did not have the scope to investigate everyday material culture in greater depth. I only touch upon the materiality of the objects that had evident relations with Hindi films but do not engage with it in this thesis, but this conception of the approach through ephemera helped me identify the relevant instances from my data to organise this chapter.

During my field work, I witnessed (i) film-inspired fashion, (ii) use of photographs with filmic associations to denote self, (iii) images of actresses on posters in beauty parlours, (iv) use of film-images in other media such as in newspapers and magazines, (v) filmic associations of studio photography, and (vi) images of Hindi film actors/actresses on everyday objects, among others. Film-related images present in various forms had particular associations in relation to my participants' lives. In the following sub-sections, not only do I show that sometimes my participants seek and acquire such objects *because of* filmic associations, but also how they relate to filmic images even when those images just *happen* to be there without any intentional effort. These images contribute to the visual culture of this setting by interweaving the filmic visuals into the everyday culture expressed through images. This gave me a sense of the lived culture of a particular place and time, with people who were witness to the same images, looking at the same objects as them, and sharing the same everyday context. In other words, I felt a sense of immersion.

4.4.1 Images and posters in beauty parlours

The first thing I noticed when I stepped inside a beauty parlour in Narwal were large-sized posters of Bollywood actresses Rani Mukerji, Aishwarya Rai-Bachchan, Lara Dutta, Kareena Kapoor, Katrina Kaif, Priyanka Chopra, and Madhuri Dixit, in bridal costumes posing for the camera coyly, symbolising beauty and tradition with flawless

faces, and wearing every possible accessory that symbolised a traditional north Indian woman. Growing up and having travelled through years in north India, I had noted this trend to be prevalent throughout most of the region, with women's salons in urban north Indian areas in the 1990s also having the same interior decorations. Use of images on such posters in beauty parlours to emphasise Hindi film actresses as models of female beauty was common in all four beauty parlours I visited in Narwal. Some of these posters also had words or phrases printed on them, such as 'Welcome' or 'Have a nice day' (see figure 3.1).

This phenomenon was also observed by Clare Wilkinson-Weber in her study on costume in recent Hindi film remakes (2010), and she noted in the context of popularity of the film *Devdas* (2002):

> The stardom of actresses Aishwarya Rai and Madhuri Dixit were indispensable components of these paratextual ventures, and promotional photographs of both women in the most lavish costumes of the film quickly began circulating as epitomes of female beauty. One poster of Madhuri was tacked on the door of the trainee beauty salon at the hostel where I stayed in 2002.
>
> (2010a:130)

Sunita (42), who ran her own beauty parlour in the central part of the village, told me that those posters were sometimes used as reference points when she had customers requesting bridal makeup. The posters reflected the popular trends in jewellery, makeup and clothing in the north Indian bridalwear and ethnic clothing market. For instance, Sunita had a poster of Rani Mukerji wearing 'smokey-eyed makeup' and bridal lehenga in her parlour.[75] She told me:

> Whenever I have to suggest a new kind of eye makeup, I just point to these posters with different styles. When I started out a few years ago, I did not buy these posters for this purpose, but now I change it from time to time because they are more than just décor. They sometimes help my customers choose their look for their special day.

I noticed that she had bangle boxes, vanity cases, and make-up kits with impressions of film actresses on them (figure 4.4). She continued:

[75] Rani Mukerji is a prominent Indian film actress

> If you notice the posters, they have minimal makeup these days, reflecting the trends in cities. Nobody likes heavy makeup with multiple accessories these days. These posters are not how they used to be, when they showed heavy and rich traditional makeup. Actually, I liked the earlier ones better. They had beautiful jewellery too. If I do not keep up with the trends, who will come to me? They will say I am outdated. I have been around for a long time and I know how things work.

I went to three more beauty parlours where I noticed similar posters of actresses in colourful *lehengas* on the walls, and the owners echoed similar sentiments, that the posters were more than just décor, and that they were specifically printed for the purpose of being displayed in beauty salons. Over time, in the cities, as the scale of operation of the parlours escalated, the décor posters showed the same actresses (Kareena Kapoor, Katrina Kaif, Priyanka Chopra) in urban attires with bold makeup, who gazed straight into the camera, looking anything but coy.[76]

Growing up in Delhi, I saw such posters in the interiors of public vehicles, shops, and other public places. But in the rural setting of Narwal these posters were characteristic of the beauty parlours and such images would only be found in salons, especially the ones with actresses in bridalwear and ethnic clothing.

4.4.2 Photo studios in Narwal

Christopher Pinney's seminal work *Camera Indica* (1997), demonstrated through its study of photo studios in small-town India that, up to the 1970s, the motivation to get one's photograph taken was to record one's identity. In the 1980s and 1990s, this changed and was replaced by a desire to associate oneself with actors and actresses from the Indian film industry. First published in 1997, the book had numerous illustrations from the 1990s (starting from the 1970s) documenting the trend of studio photographs of men and women with costumes and props against scenic backgrounds or with film stars in the frame with them, symbolising relationships that did not exist in real life. The following excerpt summarised this popular phenomenon of the 1990s in Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi:

> (the faces in the photograph) …fractured by the clumsy cutting of the photographers, now sit astride horses clutching guns. The film star Amir Khan puts a friendly arm around the shoulder of one of these interpolated heads, leather-clad starlets strain to press their bodies against the lithe

[76] By the term 'bold makeup', I refer to the glossy makeup that is most often too glamourous to be worn outside the photo studio, often produced for high-quality fashion images

> torso of their photographic partners. Some sit on Bombay's Marine Drive, deep in conversation with Bollywood tough-man Jackie Shroff; others are on intimate terms with Dilip Kumar and Dharmendra.
>
> (Pinney, 1997:210)

The photographs he studied depicted 'filmi poses' (Pinney, 1997:179) as, he explained, customers visiting a studio 'rarely desire(d) realistic (*vastavik*) photographs' (1997:178) at that time. My study indicated that this phenomenon had changed drastically as of 2015-16. This difference was a testimony to a changing film culture, which might easily be mistaken for a declining popularity of recent Hindi films given the absence of 'filmi poses' in Narwal's photo studios. I visited a small photo studio there with minimal facilities. It was the 'good one' out of the two in the village, as my one of my hosts recommended. The other one was smaller of the two. I met its 52-year-old owner and asked him if he used costumes, background posters, or any props in his studio for taking people's photographs. He was amused by my question and said:

> Nobody uses things [props] or costumes these days, *beta*.[77] Nowadays if you come to my studio wearing a *kurta* and *salwar*, I can do the rest through photoshop editing.[78] I can photoshop makeup on them, apply *bindi*s. I can also change the entire outfit - a *salwar suit to a saree*.[79] I can click [the photograph] without any big lighting. I use simple equipment, but a good camera.

His claim of being able to change a whole outfit seemed exaggerated to me at first, but I urged him to discuss if his customers asked to be photographed in the 'filmi poses' as illustrated in Punjabi and Pinney's *Artisan Camera* (2013) which had a collection of studio photographs from the 1970s and 1980s. I also showed him an image from Pinney's earlier book (1997) that had a lady wearing a Rajasthani costume and carrying an earthen pot (Pinney, 1997:179). Bemused, he said, "*Beta, yeh sab ab nahi hota*" [meaning: this does not happen anymore]. There were no direct visual references to films or film actors in his photo studio, and the images that were on display were no longer part of the Indian photo studio tradition of the 1990s that Pinney had illustrated. I observed that the images

[77] Beta is the word used to address a child or a younger person in Hindi. It literally means 'son'

[78] I use the word photoshop throughout to refer to any image editing software, and not only Adobe Photoshop. This word is used commonly used in Narwal for the same purpose

[79] *Bindi* is an accessory to be applied as a sticker-dot or to be painted on a woman's forehead. Salwar suit and saree are traditional Indian attires

that the owner and I were discussing to be *filmi* resembled the photographs illustrated in Pinney's works (1997 and 2013). For the studio owner, *filmi* portraits were exaggerated, and often caricatured versions of the self. The reference to studio photograph I showed him was something he slightly ridiculed [*arrey yeh sab yahan nahi hota madam*], but the idea of *filmi* as only being something from an era bygone is what struck me in our conversation.[80] The high-definition makeup and photography aesthetics that are characteristic of the current film-fashion is noticeably different from the film-fashion of the 1980s or 1990s, and according to Sunita, this was reflected in the current popular taste, whereas no such association was spotted by the studio owner between current Hindi films and his photography. For him, the association with films automatically translated into over-the-top images with imagery of an "unreal" world, like the ones shown in Pinney's book (2013). Midway through our conversation, I thought that maybe the relationship between photography in the studio and Hindi films did not exist anymore, and then he said something that struck me. Following our earlier discussion, I asked him, "So when you replace the clothing of a woman in her photograph, how do you get the new cutting [cut-outs] of the clothes to be used to change a person's clothing?" To this he responded, "You can get that from the internet. Just open Google and look for pictures of models, actors, and actresses. That is where we get the latest clothing styles from, and then just cut and paste". He added that to find suitable clothing cut-outs for photographs, he looked up images based on desirable attires, and downloaded the images that he thought might be required for making cut-outs. I noticed that the ones that he had saved recently were all known faces from television or Hindi films. Although there was not much difference in terms of designs between images of actors/actresses and fashion models wearing similar outfits on the internet, the studio owner indicated that the validation for a good design, for him, was when a known face endorsed it. He said, "If I see Deepika Padukone wear a saree, it must be good, and I am sure girls here will like it [the look]".

At first sight, photo studios in Narwal seemed to have little to do with Hindi film – no *filmi* poses, costumes, or cardboard cut-out of actors posing with the subjects – but the

[80] Throughout my study, I use the word *filmi* to convey an association with the Hindi film, i.e., for the purpose of this study, *filmi* means 'film-related'. However, in chapter five I unpack how the word *filmi* is used by my participants in relation to their everyday lives. This example, however, does not feature there as this was the understanding of a man, and that section of my thesis considered only women's interaction with me.

connection with films in terms of the owner's selection of clothing cut-outs and post-production styling cannot be overlooked. Although the studio owner clearly stated that he did not base this choice of design on any specific actress or actor, he did say that a known face brings credibility. My initial conclusion was that association with film was not something he had given much thought to. However, my reading of the pattern of downloading images of film personalities led me to think differently.[81]

The photo studio owner's *choice* of combining film images with his customers' photographs was similar to the choices made by both Suman and Sunita to relate to their surrounding objects with Hindi films. There is another similar instance of a female tailor, Durga Devi (aged 69), which I discuss in the next section. All of these examples together indicate that they considered Hindi film to be *different* from other images appearing on products, objects, or clothing. They wanted to feel distinguished for making those choices.

The next two sub-sections will discuss this in greater detail before my argument about the role played by film-related images in the lives of my participants.

4.4.3 Imprints of Hindi film on everyday objects

Elizabeth Edwards, in her work on material culture, pointed out that "the material and presentational forms of photographs are central to their meaning as images" (Edwards, 2002:67). Her argument suggested that "photographs are both images and physical objects which exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience" (ibid.), and that the "material forms create very different embodied experiences of images" (2002:68). In my study, I do not discuss the material nature of images in great detail because that would be a digression from my research aims, but I want to point out that the materiality of film-related images in this setting was not homogeneous. These images were present in the forms of physical posters, photographs, in newspapers, as well as imprints on everyday objects. In other words, the same image imprinted on different

[81] I must mention here that my interaction with the studio owner could have been inflected by two significant factors- (i) He was a man, and so questioning him beyond a point was not possible in the social setting of Narwal, and (ii) I did not spend as much time with him as the other three ladies, and this might have affected the way all four of them contributed to my data.

materials would indicate a different kind of relationship of my participants with each of those. I will illustrate the points mentioned above with a few examples below.

After climbing to the first floor of Durga Devi's house, I saw her sitting on the floor with cut-pieces of various colourful fabrics. She was a 69-year-old tailor in Narwal who was introduced to me as the most sought after one in the area for designing the trendiest *saree* blouses for women. During our interaction, she showed me a few pieces that were ready for her customers to collect, and she was packing them in plastic bags. I noticed the bundle of colourful plastic bags that she was using for packing. These bags had an image of Shah Rukh Khan, arguably the most popular film star of Hindi cinema since the 1990s. Adjacent to this image were three words – 'Simply the Best' (figure 4.2).

I was aware that those flimsy plastic bags were certainly not the only ones available in the local market as I had visited local shops before to get bags for packing children's gifts. Moreover, the cost of this bag sold there was more than a plain one or a generic one with a rose printed on it. This made me wonder if this was a matter of choice for Durga Devi. Curious, I diverted our conversation to it and said, "I like this bag [*thaila*]. It is quite colourful. But are plain plastic bags not cheaper than this one?", to which she responded:

> There will be no huge difference [kitna hi fark pad jayega]. I like these bags, this image projects an idea of my clothes being trendy [naye fashion ka lagta hai]. Zyada socha toh nahi par kaam karte karte itna toh pata lag hi jata hai ki kya naya chal raha hai [meaning: It is not a well deliberated choice for me, but it is not difficult to know what is new and popular after so much work experience]. I am old now, I do not know what else will the young girls like. I just know they will like this [Shah Rukh Khan].

The choice exercised by Durga Devi may not be an example of her personal preference for a film-related image for her packaging, but it does touch upon an association which was perhaps partly reduced to routine for her. What was evident here though was a desire to distinguish her product and her brand which was enabled through using a Hindi film actor's image. Durga Devi also had a reference design book in which models were seen facing away from the camera, wearing embellished and printed designer blouses.

Figure 4.2 Plastic bag with an image of Shah Rukh Khan for packaging clothes stitched by Durga Devi (©Charusmita)

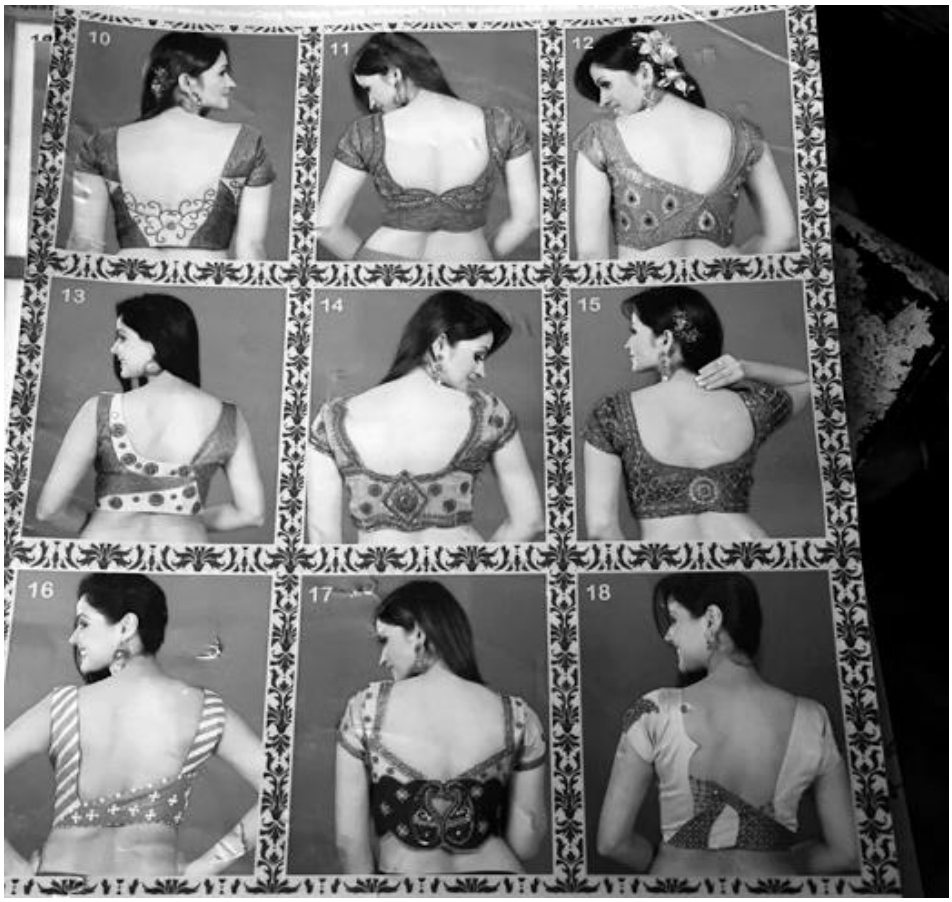

Figure 4.3 Durga Devi's catalogue book for saree blouse designs (©Charusmita)

The sheer variety of designs amazed me, and I asked her, "The blouse-cuts at the back are quite deep, and they look so good. Do people come to you and ask for these designs?", and she said:

> I make the designs according to their tastes [*jisko jaisa pasand ho*], but the cuts are quite conservative [*itni khule khule nahi hote*]. Some of them even bring their own design, or just refer to an actress in a film that they saw and ask me if that design can possibly be duplicated. But this does not happen often, because maybe they think I am too old to understand film talks (references). This did not happen when I was younger, I used to follow films and see the trends, now I know only what is prominent or what these kids like [*kya chalta hai aur kya in bacchon ko pasand hai*]. I still recall some of the older designs and try to fuse them with today's tastes. The older ones were more wearable, like (the designs of) Hema Malini's clothes.

She came to Narwal from Kanpur city after she got married. Her urban upbringing was what she attributed her desire to design clothes to. Durga often consulted her daughters-in-law, who were clearly much younger than she was, on design suggestions as she believed they were relatively updated with films and television. Wilkinson-Weber noted in her study on making of Bollywood film looks, that "ready-made clothing was sparsely available in towns and cities, and even today the local street tailor remains a key sartorial institution" (2010b:10). These are the reasons behind popularity of tailors such as Durga Devi in the village. Although she was by no means adept in highly skilled tailoring, she understood and encouraged women to pursue their tastes pertaining to Hindi film and even had her own repository of suggestions for the same.

There were other materials/objects with imprints of film actors or film references in the village which hinted at an association of the everyday life there with Hindi films. The presence and use of these objects with imprinted images cannot be understood in isolation from the lives of the people who bought or possessed them. These objects were not always bought due to their film-images on them. These images were just present, sometimes as a marketing strategy. The fact that such objects with imprinted images existed in the village could be attributed to the industry's persistent marketing and distribution efforts. Visual culture alluding to popular Hindi film has also been looked at in Wilkinson-Weber's study the making of Bollywood film looks, who noted:

> Indian actors are quite open, even profligate in their endorsements, cropping up for example on advertisements for phone service on the sides of buses (married film stars Ajay Devgn and Kajol) or being pictured on potato crisp packets (Saif Ali Khan).
>
> (Wilkinson-Weber, 2010b:15)

My participants and some of their family members bought such objects with filmic associations to be perceived by others in a particular way, as witnessed in several cases. A few examples show that an image had nothing to do with making a conscious choice about buying that product, such as bangle boxes and vanity cases with the imprints of Hindi film actresses (figures 4.4 and 4.5). In other cases, my participants as well as other residents confirmed that they made a deliberate choice while buying certain products, such as sachets of mouth-freshener being sold on a mobile cart selling confectionary, because it 'looked different from other types of mouth-fresheners' [*alag se dikhta hai*] (figure 4.6).[82]

[82] The packaging of this sachet is a mini version of actor Salman Khan's 2015 film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, which had just released.

Figure 4.4 Cardboard packaging box for bangles in Narwal (©Charusmita)

Figure 4.5 Packaging for women's vanity box in a Narwal household (©Charusmita)

Figure 4.6 Mouth freshener packaging with an image of a film poster featuring actor Salman Khan, being sold on a cart in Narwal (©Charusmita)

Such images on objects sold in local markets were sometimes poorly photoshopped but clearly related to the world of Hindi films in this rural setting. These images that did not have their origins in the village in terms of production. Bangle boxes, film-related posters, food-packaging with film images were imported from cities and I cannot say with certainty whether their production was specifically intended for a rural setting. One could argue, then, that the presence of such objects in the village was purely the result of a capitalistic push, and not because people in the village wanted or demanded them. Interactions and observations led me to witness various instances indicating that film-related visuals were evidence of a strong Hindi film culture in the village and were not there by accident. I knew that not all people who used film-imprinted objects made a purposeful choice of circulating them consciously, but I also observed how the filmic image on an object or thought gave it an edge over others. As Wickham reminded us, "we therefore have to be mindful of the context and extent to which objects interact with particular lives and everyday life in general" (2010:319). Guided by caution, I still found instances of deliberate choices to acquire, distribute, and display these images as discussed above.

Film-images were also present in Narwal in other forms, such as images in newspapers and magazines used to support film-related news articles. Daily newspapers in Narwal included glossy supplements on popular culture and lifestyle.[83] These were tabloid-style pages that also comprised 'film news', as my participants called it. As Chhavi, a 22-year-old teacher at a primary school and daughter of a farmer, said, "I have never been to a cinema hall to watch a film, but I do come to know of all the 'talkies' in Kanpur [Original: *pata lag jata hai*]". She further shared:

> Every day as soon as I get hold of the newspaper, I slip out the *film wala paper* (meaning: the paper with the film-news) and read it. In that, there is a list of movie show timings in Kanpur's theatres and a lot of other new things about latest films.

These supplements featured sections on film-screening timings, film reviews, celebrity interviews, gossip, and news articles on upcoming films. There was very little viewership of full-length feature films in Chhavi's case as she watched only about two films every

[83] I have discussed this in section 3.5

year, and yet she discussed several popular film actors/actresses as well as latest films in her conversation with me. She enjoyed listening to film music on her radio as well and could recall the names of the films those songs were part of, connecting the content on the radio with her reading of the newspaper supplements. The multimodal consumption of Hindi film in Chhavi's case demonstrated how music, videos or images pertaining to Hindi film contributed to my participants' experiences of engaging with film.[84]

Further, in terms of fashion and sartorial, I witnessed instances where women bargained their tastes for film-inspired fashion with their everyday realities. As Clare Wilkinson-Weber pointed out in the context of (largely urban) consumers of fashion inspired by Bollywood costumes, "As an apparently 'lived' commodity image, film costume invites audiences to extend their own agencies through taking on some of the sartorial elements associated with a character, or more particularly a star" (Wilkinson-Weber, 2010b:9). This is also part of the visual culture of Hindi cinema in the village, but owing to the organisation of this thesis, I chose to discuss this briefly in section 4.4.2 and in more detail later in section 5.4.

Film images in some cases also influenced studio photography and images of the self on social media platforms and android-based mobile apps (discussed in the next section), which are not exactly what Wickham would describe as objects, but nonetheless contribute to the filmic influences on Narwal's visual culture.

4.4.4 Use of profile pictures on social media platforms

In the previous chapter, I described the use of social media platforms by my participants, which was largely restricted to WhatsApp Messenger. Only three of all the women I interacted with had Facebook accounts and none of them used platforms like Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat. It may have been that some of my participants used these but did not want to share it with me, or that they used their brothers' accounts to browse through social media networks, but I did not come across any such instances personally. Some of the women I met asked for my phone number to be able to contact me on WhatsApp later on. While going through my phone list, I noticed their display images on the messenger app suggesting possible association with Hindi films. In the following paragraphs, I

[84] I discuss the social significance of using multiple modes of film consumption in chapter six.

exemplify the ways in which my participants engaged in another form of cultural production that alluded to Hindi films.

One of my participants, Shweta (22), was a shy young woman who was about to get married to an army man from a nearby village in a week's time. During a conversation, she asked me if I used WhatsApp and we exchanged phone numbers. I noticed her display picture the next day, a photograph of a male military personnel (recognisable by the uniform), the back of his head facing the camera, being kissed on the cheek by a young woman, possibly a lover (figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7 Public display picture of Shweta (22) on her WhatsApp profile (©Google stock images)

A simple reverse search on Google revealed that the image was a stock photograph. When I met Shweta again, I asked her, "I see the display picture that you have uploaded. Is that you in the picture?", to which she said, half-giggling and visibly blushing, "No! It is not me; it is just a photograph of someone else". I went on, "I see. I mistook it for you as you are getting married in a few days to a man in the uniform", to which she shyly responded, "No, it is nothing like that, I just put it up because I liked the photograph. I like *Fauji* films (soldier-films)". After an hour of talking about her wedding preparations, she shared that her to-be husband looked "a bit like the man in that picture" who she thought resembled Hindi film actor Akshay Kumar. Our conversation suddenly changed from a clear verbal exchange to smiles, giggles and incomplete sentences. Shweta's display picture was an expression of affection for her to-be husband, as well as an instant association of him to her favoured film star. Some of my other young participants between the ages of 19 and 25 had put up similar display images comprising film actors and actresses, often locked in embrace, with a romantic quote in Hindi 'superimposed' on the picture. This phenomenon had riskier consequences for my participants than for women living in urban areas where interaction with film personalities is just a tweet away.[85]

During my stay in Narwal, I did not observe any apparent display of affection or conjugal love publicly. It was considered audacious. Social media apps such as WhatsApp messenger were exceptions because, evidently, it was acceptable to these young women to display such images publicly. These film-images with superimposed text served as images reflecting their thoughts, or as forms of expression. These images were used as their profile pictures that were publicly visible and my participants retained the plausible excuse that they were sharing something which was 'just off the internet' and nothing more.[86] The users were aware that everybody who had their phone number would be able to view that photograph and that they could and would be associated with their displayed profile pictures. I have illustrated these thought-images and their significance in chapter

[85] I discuss the significance of such film-related connections in section 6.3.4., which establishes that women in Narwal negotiate with the everyday norms that govern them by engaging in creative cultural production driven by Hindi films.
[86] Refer to chapter six and chapter four for examples of such thought-images and my participants' use of them for associating with Hindi films

six, section three, where I discuss what this kind of association with films means for my participants.

These profile photos were also sometimes arbitrary pictures like flowers, soft toys, landscapes, and of other girls such as my participants' cousins or sisters who lived in cities. A large number of my young participants (19-25) also routinely uploaded photographs of Hindi film actresses as their profile pictures on social media platforms. The most popular actresses for this purpose were Alia Bhatt, Sonakshi Sinha, and Parineeti Chopra, who were seen wearing fashionable western yet 'un-revealing' clothing with girl-next-door personas. Use of such imagery could be understood as attempts to de-personalise their publicly visible profile so as not to attract attention. At the same time, I understood the thought-images to be highly personal in nature due to the use of poetry/lyrics reflecting a thought which the user *chose* to share publicly (see figures 4.7 and also 6.4).

As I mentioned above, using someone else's photograph sometimes went beyond a filmic association. I noticed that some of my participants between the ages of 26 and 40 had put up pictures of male family members on their WhatsApp profiles. They had a variety of reasons for this. Two of them shared that owing to the unsafe environment in the community for women, it seemed wise to put up these pictures so as to ward off men with 'malicious intent' (original usage: *kharab niyat*). One of them said that since she used WhatsApp from her brother's account, it was his photograph that was uploaded there and not hers. Men, on the other hand, mostly uploaded their own photographs, mostly selfies, on their WhatsApp public profiles. They enjoyed being 'seen' by other men and women. Although not talked about, it was fairly conspicuous that the women were able to 'see' men in the way men want to be seen, but the same did not hold true the other way around due to safety concerns and social constraints.

This section discussed the usage of film-related images in Narwal as I observed. The first was the use of photographs and posters in beauty parlours. The second was the influence of photographs of film personalities on studio portrait photography in this rural setting. The third use related to imprints of images of actresses and actors of mainstream Hindi cinema on objects used and purchased by my participants in their day-to-day lives. The fourth point was concerned with the film-images that my participants used to expressed themselves and their thoughts publicly online. These images uploaded on their social media profiles can be understood as belonging to these three categories: (i) personalised:

film-images expressing their thoughts, feelings and representations of the self, (ii) de-personalised: film and non-film-images images detached from the self, and (iii) of the actual self: their real photographs.

In some ways, I understood the use and purpose of this visual culture as 'domestication of glamour', a borrowed term from Wilkinson-Weber's study (2005) on how costumes in Hindi films have inspired clothing trends in India for many years. She examined how female consumers, largely urban, have managed their relation to film costume through negotiations with their tailor as to how their favourite film outfits can be modified (Wilkinson-Weber, 2005:135). In doing so, she alluded to 'domestication of glamour' that I understood as the process by which Bollywood's cultural influences were transmitted into the Indian consumer market, and eventually into the homes of Indian households. As such, I borrow the term to explain how and why my participants made those choices. Not having enough money to spare for a lavish urban lifestyle did not mean that there was no desire to associate with images that made them *different* in the eyes of others, especially with their use of film. Susan Wadley had also noted in her work on women in rural north India that the rural residents of western Uttar Pradesh borrowed and adapted lifestyles and fashion from the global supermarket and had indeed fashioned these as their own as they defined appropriate dress for teenage girls there (Wadley, 2008:170). She also mentioned women's magazines such as Femina as one of the inspirations for fashion there in the 1970s (2008:166), which published substantial film-inspired fashion content and featured Hindi film actresses. Hindi film embodied certain values for people in Narwal (as discussed in the next chapter too), and if images pertaining to films served as valuable for them to advance their social aims (studio owner), economic aims (Sunita, Durga Devi), or to fulfil their desires in their imaginative spaces (Shweta, Seema), they constitute, this visual culture further fuelled their film consumption, and vice versa. All of these women who were using *different* film images, *differently* and deliberately, were trying to achieve a single goal, which was to bring the Hindi film as close to their real or imaginative life as possible (domestication of glamour). Additionally, if we look at the ages of these women who used images to advance their own aims in real or imaginative spaces – Durga Devi (69), Sunita (42), Shweta (22), Seema (20), and so on – we see that and their ages were only able to influence the ways in which their used the film, but not the desire and the will to do so.

The next section takes the discussion forward and reviews the influence of Hindi films on changing trends in festivities and rituals in the village.

4.5 Filmi celebrations and changing traditions: *"Filmon mein nahi dekha kya?"*[87]

Hindi cinema shares a special relationship with rituals and festivals. There are songs composed specifically for traditional occasions, and the producers often strategically release their films to coincide with major festivals like Holi, Eid, Diwali and Christmas, as mentioned in the previous chapter. There are scenes, songs, and sub-plots in mainstream Hindi films built specifically around these festivities as a marketing strategy. Depicting celebrations of these festivals adds to the vibrancy of the spectacle in cinematography, which appeals to a pan-India audience in turn. In such *masala* films, sub-plots or scenes depicting religious festivals do not even seamlessly integrate within its narrative in some cases. Tejaswini Ganti sums up what has been referred to since the 1970s as the *masala* film (2013) and says that these films refer to:

> those (and not all Hindi films are regarded as such) that contain a blend of elements – music, romance, action, comedy, and drama – designed to impart the most pleasurable viewing experience. The *masala* film has become the global stereotype of Hindi cinema.
>
> (Ganti, 2013:140)

As long as these sub-plots or scenes showing festivities add to the spectacle of the film and are pleasurable to the viewers, they are welcome additions, and as Ganti noted about film scenes that appear like patchwork, "to acculturated viewers, this is an expected feature of popular Hindi cinema" (2013:139). On an occasion of a festival, wedding, or a religious ritual, elements of popular Hindi cinema were seen as being consciously adopted by my participants as an integral part of the celebration. In some cases, I witnessed entirely new rituals being performed or celebrated by my participants, that never existed before in the village, and they alluded this phenomenon to the popularity of Hindi films in some ways, as I exemplify in the following paragraphs. There were

[87] Translation: Have you not seen it in films?

specific examples that some of my older participants over the age of 60 shared about this phenomenon. I thought it would be best to ask them about the changes that the traditions have undergone over time. They cited a few rituals that are different now from how they were celebrated when these participants were middle-aged or younger. The integration of traditional festivities with the recent rituals took place over an appreciable duration and can be understood through oral accounts of the people in the village.

When examining the relationship between films and everyday culture in the village, I must point out that the religious festivities as depicted in Bollywood (or *masala*) films are not necessarily authentic regional representations of those rituals. A festival comprises rituals based on traditional norms of the region, religion, and communal factors. In Bollywood films, these festivals and traditions are often placed like patchwork within the film's narrative, depicting customs that are not identifiable in entirety by any single region of India, i.e., those festivals are not celebrated with precise rituals and customs of any one region. Filmmakers in the Hindi film industry have, time and again, picked up various rites and rituals from all over the country, added their own imaginations, and have produced and popularised *blends* to produce pleasurable viewing experience. Depictions of such festivals in Hindi films resonated with many of my participants. The reasons for them enjoying those representations ranged from common roots of the festival and common worshipped deities, to a few common rituals. Such representations possessed 'a little something for everyone', and my participants enjoyed those irrespective of their own traditional celebrations of the same festival. Owing to popular representations of certain festivals in films, my participants shared instances where they adopted parts of such cinematographic festivities to real life celebrations, thereby adding elements to their traditional celebration which probably came from another region or from the filmmakers' imagination. Thus, Hindi films acted as a repository of rituals and customs for a festival across the country as well as internationally. In some cases, previously non-existent festivals in the region were added to the local culture, and in some others, the existing festivities were modified. I observed how Hindi films played a role in this and I illustrate this point below with the examples of two festivals: *Karwa Chauth* and *Ganesh Chaturthi*.

Karwa Chauth, a north Indian Hindu festival in which women fast without food and water for a day to pray for their husband's longevity, is ritualistically differently in the state of Uttar Pradesh from its depiction in Bollywood films such as *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le*

Jayenge (1995), *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), *Ishq Vishq* (2003), *Baghban* (2003), and *Baabul* (2006). Vineeta (29), a homemaker, told me about how *Karwa Chauth* was celebrated in her mother's time:

> When we were young, we never saw our mothers, aunts or grandmothers follow *Karwa Chauth* in the way it is shown in films. Fasting on *Karwa Chauth* used to be straightforward [*seedha*]. These new traditions that are shown in films are nothing like what they followed, but some of ladies around me are doing all of that…including the *chhani* (sieve) ritual. These all are part of the 'blinding spectacle of the films' (original usage: *filmon ki chaka chaundh hai*).

My older participants (above 60) echoed the above sentiment. They believed that the filmic representations of traditions, ceremonies and rituals solely existed to contribute to the exaggerated spectacle of the films, but these women also added that they enjoyed it, nonetheless.

During my stay there, I also witnessed five-day-long festivities on the occasion of *Ganesh Mahotsav* (literally, the Ganesh mega-fest) or as it is known more popularly, *Ganesh Chaturthi*. This is a festival that celebrates the birth of the Hindu god, Lord Ganesh. The festival traditionally is declared closed on its tenth day when an idol of the Lord is carried by devotees in a public procession with music and group chanting. This clay idol is subsequently immersed in a body of water such as a river or ocean, which thereafter dissolves it. This festival used to be predominantly celebrated in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Telangana, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh, and on a small scale in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. I have been a frequent visitor to Kanpur and its surrounding areas since childhood but had never witnessed *Ganesh Chaturthi* being celebrated in this region on a large scale, until my stay in Narwal for field work. The chants of "*Ganpati Bappa Morya*" echoed throughout the five days it was celebrated. This phrase was in the Marathi language (spoken in Maharashtra) and was part of the traditional chant of *Ganesh Chaturthi*.[88] The rise of the Ganesh festival and chants of Ganesh Chaturthi only have partly to do with films – their popularity is much more complicated. The Ganesh festival's popularity in Mumbai and other parts of the country has been closely linked to right-wing, Hindutva politics, notably the Shiv Sena, and currently, the BJP (see Chatterjee and Kamat, 2016). Raminder Kaur, in her book on

[88] The whole chant is *Ganpati Bappa Morya, Purchya Varshi Laukar ya* (meaning: O Lord/Father Ganesha, we eagerly await your arrival next year).

public uses of religion in western India, explained this rise of the festival, and argued that this festival became not only a site for performative politics but also an arena for non-political activities that were devotional, artistic, entertaining, and socio-economic in nature (Kaur, 2005). As the Hindi film industry is rooted in this region (Bombay/Mumbai, Maharashtra), the depiction of this festival in Bollywood was frequent and popular. There have been numerous Hindi films whose plots were set in Mumbai or parts of Maharashtra, in which the above chant was chanted by the righteous 'heroes' in the film, and I mention the ones my participants referred to, in the following paragraphs. Such scenes were set in the narrative to clearly label the 'good' and the 'evil' in the film, thereby highlighting the path of righteousness and cueing the audiences on how to feel. Such films have depicted the main celebratory event of *Ganesh Chaturthi* – the long procession and the recurring phrase – and popularised it in the cultural memory of people like my participants, thereby consolidating the festival's signifiers in their minds.

Sunita, the parlour owner, shared her views on this phenomenon:

> This trend (celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi and the chants) has started here since people started celebrating it in Kanpur and nearby cities. We never had this kind of a celebration with immersion and chants while growing up. But I know about it, and also the idol immersion. We see it in so many films.

I inquired about the chant, which was in a language not spoken in this region, and she responded, "It is a prayer". I continued, "I have also heard this in films, but I still don't know its meaning", to which she said, "I think it just asks the Lord to bless us". The literal meaning of the chant was a little different in Marathi, as I mentioned in a footnote above, but the chant/phrase had already become a part of this recently localised festival. Curious about *Ganesh Chaturthi* celebration in Narwal, I spoke to my aunt in Kanpur about it, "*Mausi* (aunt), how come *Ganesh Chathurthi* is celebrated in this part now?" She responded:

> It is recent that people have started to celebrate it. I cannot exactly point to what started it, or when, but I knew about it as there are so many films showing this. I largely knew from films what *Ganesh Chaturthi* was, from the start of the festival to the immersion ritual and the chants, so maybe this large-scale festivity here in this Kanpur and everywhere was just a matter of time.

To my knowledge, the role of the Hindi film industry in popularising *Ganesh Chaturthi* on such a large scale in Uttar Pradesh has not been widely discussed. The factors are, of course, wide-ranging like right-wing politics (as mentioned), rural to urban migration, reportage of festivals in news media, television, and the increasingly commercialised nature of traditional festivities across the country. While the news media can only run stories on such festive rituals once a year, Hindi film songs, trailers, dialogues, and visuals can be accessed any time, making them more impactful on the memory of the people. My participants made references to films such as *Agneepath (1990)*, *Agneepath* (2012), *Aasoo Bane Angaarey* (1993), and *Don: The Chase Begins* (2006), to talk about their imagination of *Ganesh Chaturthi* as a festival. Given the multitude of factors that may have contributed to the popularity of this festival in this particular village, and among my participants, I cannot say with certainty whether Hindi films were the reason for this scale of celebration of this festival here. However, I can confirm that my participants or other people in the village frequently referred to Hindi films whenever they spoke to me about the way in which they have seen the festival being celebrated earlier, which was in films. I argue here that the role of Hindi films in the lives of my participants was that of a node through which state politics and cultural ideologies could be permanently assimilated into the local traditions of Narwal.

It was not only large-scale religious festivals whose representation in Hindi films influenced the culture in Narwal, but also the relatively small-scale celebrations such as weddings. The relationship between mainstream Hindi cinema and the wedding industry in India has been discussed by Jyotsna Kapur in her article 'India's Neoliberal Turn and the Bollywood Wedding Culture Industry', and she argued:

> The Bollywood wedding industry, however, packages this yearning for noncommodified forms of affective relations, the celebration of life markers with family and friends—selling it, instead, as a means to tame the profound upheavals that have accompanied the shift to neoliberalism…
>
> (2009:231)

Commenting on the capitalistic nature of Bollywood, Kapur said, "While Bollywood sets fashions, trends, and devises rituals it is also in the business of direct spin-offs [of weddings shown in films]" (2009:225). Large-scale commodified weddings were unthinkable for my participants and their families, but the spectacle and the resuscitation

of family values in the face of aggressive globalisation, was both pleasurable and reassuring. The father of one of my participants (63) shared that wedding celebrations in Narwal over the past few years include pre-wedding rituals that were either not traditionally part of the wedding culture in the region, or were celebrated differently, like the pre-wedding event of Sangeet (musical night) with both the groom's and the bride's side present. I had found this to be true in my own experience, which was in agreement with Madhupa Bakshi and Soumya Sarkar's observation about consumption and popularity of Hindi films' music India that "Other than acting as pop music for the masses, these songs also have permeated into marriage celebrations, religio-cultural gatherings, community pujas…" (2015:142).

Some of my younger participants in their early twenties expressed their desires to integrate elements of a Bollywood-style wedding in their own wedding arrangements. Films not only evoked wishful thinking about weddings in my participants, but also popularised wedding rituals prevalent in another part of the country. Shweta (22), who I mentioned as using a film actor's display picture on WhatsApp, wished to wear *Kaleerein* (elaborate wrist jewellery) at her wedding. This ritual is similar to the tossing of the bridal bouquet at a Christian wedding. This was essentially a ritual in Punjabi weddings (North India) that became popularised by Hindi films. Its visual appeal was enhanced by the accompanying songs and dances, with beautiful actors donning bejewelled attires while publicly displaying their affection for each other in the presence of elders and family members.

The above examples suggest that celebrations, rituals, and traditional festive fashion that are originally North Indian have been picked up and carried by Hindi films across the nation. National and regional politics have also capitalised on Hindi films' popularity to exert their influence on people such as my participants.

Conclusion

The absence of a cinema theatre in Narwal seemed disappointing at first, but I was privileged to be able to observe and document the film culture in this setting as indicated by everyday images, objects, social media, television, popular culture, and changing rituals. The ways in which Hindi films shape the experience of my participants' everyday lives are becoming "less reliant on a film's narrative text, or even the event and

experience of its screening in cinema halls or on television screens" (Hoek, 2016:82), and more dependent on filmic images, music, fragments of the feature, influence of film stars, film-inspired fashion, and celebrity gossip. This nature of film consumption of my participants classifies them as an involved and invested audience group of Hindi cinema.

Watching full-length features was the most socially privileged form of film consumption for my participants, which was still less common than using YouTube on borrowed/owned smartphones, getting a film-inspired clothing, watching television, and daring to use profile pictures with bold filmic associations. Watching a whole film was the ultimate form of film engagement which was the least accessible to my participants. It is hard to say whether regular and unrestricted film viewing would diminish the importance of some extratextual film forms or enhance them in a rural setting, but at the moment, these forms certainly are embedded in the sensorium of my participants, allowing for Hindi film's persistence in this rural setting.

Each film form distinguished itself from the other in terms of use by my participants of various age groups and classes. To put it differently, the relationship of a young woman with Hindi film music will not fulfil the same desire in her as her use of a certain film actress' image as her publicly displayed profile picture. Using the ethnographic data, I wanted to draw insights based on age, class and the use of preferred film form(s), however, it was difficult to get adequately representative samples for each of the categories due to the complex, and sometimes ambiguous, nature of the data.

Having established a prominent film culture here, I wish to present my analysis of the various ways in which my participants imagine and articulate their relationship with films. Discussions with my participants about their film-related experiences evoked a sense of unfulfillment that the films seemed to somehow fulfil in an imaginative, or sometimes real, space — such as new travel destinations, fashion and lifestyle trends, ideating romance, dreaminess, festivities, urbanisation, and freedom. This is what I explore in the next chapter.

5

Outside the Quotidian:
Films as everything the everyday is not

5.1 Introduction

As Janice Radway explained in *Reading the Romance* (1984), the mere act of buying a book does not necessarily indicate a relationship between the book and its reader; to draw any conclusions one needs an understanding of other social, economic and institutional concerns. Similarly, we cannot understand mere film consumption in Narwal to mean that films played a significant part in the lives of the women there. It only served as a starting point for further exploration. In this chapter, I aim to explain the currency that Hindi films held in the everyday lives of these women. In her book more than three decades ago on rural film consumption in rural north India, Beatrix Pfleiderer argued:

> In the popular Hindi film, village life is depicted as the world 'outside' or the world where 'our roots lie'. But this is an urban reflection. It does not reproduce the villagers' needs, neither emotional nor aesthetic. For them, the medium of film represents the 'outside' world, which has no relationship to their own social and psychic world.
>
> (Pfleiderer, 1985:59)

The popular Hindi film industry has changed in many ways since then, and so has village life. However, I partly agree with her assessment as my participants' Hindi film consumption does feed into an imaginative space beyond their everyday lives. I also found that the Hindi film loomed larger in my participants' imagination than television,

which they spent more hours watching. As opposed to television, which was mostly watched within the domestic space, film consumption also took place in the wider world of the village outside the confines of the household and fed into an imaginative space beyond the quotidian. In order to explore the demarcations of the 'everyday' and the 'other' for these women, I also examined my participants' interpretations of the word *filmi* and the connotations this word had for them.[89] I discovered that, in their view, *filmi* largely referred to activities that would, or rather should, not happen within the village. Hence, it is tempting to agree with Pfleiderer's view. The point of disagreement is her comment that the medium of film has no relationship to the village people's social and psychic world (Pfleiderer, 1985:59), and this is what this chapter focuses on. I argue that they have a complex relationship with Hindi films, and I discuss this in detail in this chapter.

Popular Hindi cinema not only has the power to reach and influence people in the most remote corners of the country, but it also disseminates the ideology that it embodies. I wanted to understand what makes Hindi films special for my participants. My initial line of inquiry was this: Are Hindi films broadening the limits of my participants' understanding of the world in some ways? Are films being consumed because taboos make engaging narratives? Are my participants in some ways attracted by the excessive commercialisation that the Hindi film industry promotes? Seeking answers to these questions required me to understand Hindi film consumption as well as other media in the village which support or compete with my participants' film-use.

Films were consumed by women in Narwal in different ways, as I described in the previous chapter. Television was one of them. However, their engagement with Hindi films was way beyond watching a feature film on television, which itself was a rare event. Despite television content being heavily influenced by Hindi films, my participants felt that the content on television lacked the refreshing quality that films typified.[90] What I gathered from my interactions was that that the television in India merely follows the Hindi film industry and the resultant content feels residual and uninspired to them. Fortunately, the textually disintegrated (Allen, 2011) or the extratextual consumption of films offered my participants opportunities to experience Hindi cinema in favourable

[89] *Filmi* is an informal term that is often bandied about, but strictly means film-related, different from 'filmic' in its usage.

90 As I illustrate in the next section

ways. Without using ethnographic methods, I would not have been able to distinguish between their notions of the 'everyday' and the 'other', and how these were influenced by their film consumption. This was in line with Christopher Pinney's observation that "[t]he ethnography of consumption ceases thus to be an 'event'—focused on particular individuals' reception of a specific film—but becomes rather an ongoing project 'living inside' the discourses which are perpetually maintained alongside filmic text" (2001: 23).

The chapter begins with a description of how Hindi film consumption is understood in the context the moral universe of the village. I then move on to explain how films capture the imagination of the women living in Narwal (as compared to television consumption) with their visuals, star attractions, aspirational values, fashion, and ideas of romance and faraway lands. Although I have illustrated some of these in the previous chapters in different contexts, I briefly outline them again here to explain the ways in which they expressed their engagement with Hindi films. I then move on to analyse the different connotations of the word *filmi*, all of which point to something that is outside the purview of the women's routine struggles. The section establishes the word *filmi* as a shorthand to express a body of ideas for my participants in the village.

5.2 Transgression and compliance in the moral universe of the village

Hindi cinema has – to a large extent – displaced folk culture as the main form of rural entertainment. It managed to do that not only through its content but also through its images, ideologies, and commercial and aspirational values that have seduced the urban and the rural audiences alike. I noticed that adherence to a traditional value system to keep the existing social code intact was the rationale behind everyday decision-making for my participants, with few exceptions in certain situations. Some Hindi films, according to them, portrayed freedom for women as an 'absolute', which was seen as irresponsible [*zimmedaari bhi koi cheez hai*] and morally corrupt [*bhrasht*]. Some of my middle-aged participants (40-55) shared that they enjoy slight deviations from their own social context every now and then but were constantly reminded of their limitations and context with phrases such as "*ab kya karenge yeh sab karke"* [what is the use of all this now (that we are growing older)]. Below is a quote from Fatima, a 47-year-old housewife in Narwal:

> Ab hum sheher mein thodi na hain, yahan mahaul alag hai. Aap yahan ke samaaj ke kanoon tod nahi sakte... ki filmon mein jaisi naye zamane ki aazad-khayali dikhate hain, hum waise hi chalenge...
>
> (Meaning: We are not in the city, it's different here. You cannot break the rules of this society... [and think that] the way films show free thinking, we can go the same way)

The representation of freedom as conceived and represented in Hindi cinema is vague, vast and variable, but the images and values propagated by commercial Hindi cinema could be indicative of what Fatima was referring to. For instance, pre-marital conjugal relationships do not conform to the moral norms of this traditional society but are commonly represented in Hindi films as acceptable, with people like my participants even rooting for them. I suggest that instead of understanding popular Hindi films as 'escapist fantasies', it would be useful to understand them as an idea of a reality that exists outside the village boundaries.[91] This idea of films as escapist fantasies suggests they provide a psychological escape from everyday struggles into situations that are considered as exotic or unreal. The notion of film existing outside the day-to-day life does not place the filmic reality in an exotic psychological space but is understood as a real scenario outside the village realm which is more accessible than a fantasy yet less likely to happen within the everyday life of the village.

My participants' rejection of the value system promoted by Hindi films was not always out of disdain for it, rather it was because of the difference between their context and urban life. For some, the pleasure of engaging with a film was more than the ease of relating to its value system. For instance, during my stay with one of one of my hosts, we decided to watch the movie *Jab we met* (2007), which was being aired on television on a Sunday afternoon. There were three of us, the husband (53), the wife (48) and me. During the film, the husband commented on how the female protagonist in the film was a disgrace to her family and parents because she ran away to unite with her boyfriend (even though she was single). I have discussion this incident in detail in section 6.3.7 and have illustrated the powerful yet non-confrontational reaction of the wife to his comments. *Jab We Met*, the film, in this case did not trigger a major change in this woman's life, but it did provide a reference point for her to articulate her own reality in relation to that of the

[91] For discussions on criticisms of popular Hindi cinema as escapist, formulaic, or fantasies, see Thomas, 1985: 119-120, Dwyer, 2010:383; Banaji, 2006:1; Dudrah, 2006:25.

urban-dwelling protagonist. She neither whined about her life in the village, where she 'found comfort' [*humko yahin aaram hai*], nor did she dismiss the decision of the film's character as immoral/ characterless [*charitraheen*], unlike her husband. Through this example I noted how my participants use films to connect with ideas that are beyond their everyday life in an empathetic manner. This also contradicts Pfleiderer's argument (1985) on north Indian rural film audiences that the medium of film has no relationship to rural audience's own social and psychic world (Pfleiderer, 1985:59). This also contradicts her study's finding that film viewers in villages of north India at that time were not empathetic to the film's characters (1985).[92]

An important reminder here is that even today the village is a space that, for women, is largely cut off from the outside world. Men have substantially greater access to the world outside the village than the women. This scenario is changing slowly, but it is still a long way to go.[93] Women hardly travel outside Narwal, let alone go to a theatre to watch a film. This is also a place where, due to social constraints, women are not on any social media network apart from WhatsApp, and do not use the internet heavily, unless accessing content which is in some way related to Hindi films. My point here is that despite all of these constraints, the women I spoke to were not only empathetic to the value systems of an urban and globalised life as shown in films, but also articulated it with references to film content. Hindi films have an immense impact on my participants' social and psychic world, and they are more than just windows to the outside world.

Issues of morality and transgression within a film can be explained when we understand the films as having their own complex value system. In the context of popular Hindi films in the late 1970s/ 1980s, Rosie Thomas (1985) explained that:

> Order, or equilibrium, is presented as a state in which humans live in harmony with fate, respecting social obligations and ties of friendship or family. Disruption of this order is the result of selfish greed, fate (or human meddling in fate) and (hetero)-sexual desire.
>
> (Thomas, 1985:126)

More than three decades on, this argument still describes the narrative of most of the recent popular Hindi films that my participants claimed to like. This does not mean that

[92] See chapter two, section three for Pfleiderer's argument on this

[93] The next chapter discusses the process of this change in detail

the narrative within Hindi films have not gone through change since the themes of the 1970s and 1980s.[94] Thomas (1985) explained that:

> …the 'ideal moral universe' of Bombay cinema revolved around the archetypal figures of Mother and Villain, a good-evil opposition in which good was subtly conflated with the 'traditional', or that which is Indian; bad with the 'non-traditional' and the 'non-Indian'…[..]…The narrative function of the hero/ heroine was not to embody good but to mediate between these two poles. Through such mediation certain elements of the non-traditional could become gradually legitimated and incorporated within the 'traditional' modern – that is, connotations, for example, of love marriage or women driving motorbikes could be shifted over time through careful negotiation of the contexts within which they appeared.
>
> (cited in Thomas, 2013:174)

Sarah Joshi built her argument on this idea of 'moral universe' in Hindi films (Thomas, 1985) in the case of narrative techniques in Hindi films in article 'Transgressing the Moral Universe' (2014) and said:

> The key to a successful film is often the management of the need of appearing familiar, similar to what has come before, and yet new and different at the same time. There is a fine balance that must be achieved, then, and at the centre of this construction is the presentation of values in the film.
>
> (Joshi, 2014:43)

Ashis Nandy pointed out in an interview:

> But they (Hindi films) are not conservative. They have, even if by default, their own conception of limits, and the films can be seen as an exploration of these limits – limits of modernity, of tradition, of mothering, limits of evil and tolerance.
>
> (Nandy, 1995:11)

The notion of an ideal moral universe in films is a filmmaker's belief, rather than a universal one. As Thomas clarifies:

[94] See Thomas (1985) for the themes popular in the Hindi films of '70s/ '80s, the themes being, "(1)'lost and found' (parents and children are separated and reunited years later following revelation of mistaken identities); (2) '*dostana'* (two male friends fall in love with the same woman and the one who discovers this sacrifices his love – and often life – for the male friendship or dostana); and (3) revenge (villains get their deserts at the hands of the heroes they wronged)" (1985:125)

> It is important to stress that the ideal moral universe is not necessarily believed by anyone: it is a construct of the filmmakers, with the connivance of their audience, and is as much a product of the history of Indian cinema and the genre conventions it has evolved as of other discourses on Indian society.
>
> (Thomas, 1995:164)

The act of transgression in a Hindi film narrative can be understood as a temporary divergence that eventually converged into the narrative resolution preserving the overall moral focus of the film. For my participants too, it all came down to what the narrative of the film focused on. For instance, a marriage between the protagonists trumps pre-marital romantic relationships, parental love trumps marrying for love, and empathising with the suffering of a couple trumps parental love. This, as I understand, is the hierarchy of moral and social values that my participants expected to be preserved. I observed that the pattern of thought and behaviour of my participants was in agreement with the above argument. The element of familiarity was crucial in order for them to engage with a film.[95] It was important for my participants to know in advance that whatever they were going to watch, listen to, or engage with, was going to preserve the overall moral hierarchy as I described above. Plotlines, film stars, and film song clips gave them a fair idea of whether or not they might like a certain film.

It was not only the outside world that was made accessible to my participants through Hindi films. Film was also a medium that provided opportunities for self-expression and for the positioning of the self in everyday life. To put it differently, these women's imagination of the 'self' in everyday life was inflected by Hindi films.[96] It was through their consumption (of film) or communication (about it) that they tested the permissible and pushed its limits. I will elaborate this through another example. References to Hindi films, their scenes, songs, and dialogues, were often used to communicate the coding of moral-versus-immoral. For example, a married couple is seen as a single entity bound together in a sacred bond. This belief system has been reiterated by Hindi films time and again. In discussions relating to films promoting family values, *Baghban* (2003) was referred to by almost every participant. In the film, Alok (played by Salman Khan) as the ideal son was complemented by his wife Arpita (played by Mahima Chaudhry) who had

[95] See section 5.4

[96] See section 6.3.4 for a few examples of how this took place

a framed photograph of Alok's parents in a small *Mandir* (temple) at home and prayed to them every day. The perception of the ideal son and daughter-in-law was incomplete without their unquestioning devotion towards the parents. Hindi cinema did not offer only a singular meaning but acted as a point of reference for contradictions and negotiations as well, and I noted this when Rajni (27) shared her views on the filmic representation of the social code versus the lived realities of women like herself. She said:

> Now if the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law are not getting along, what can one do? There are very few films in which the in-laws seem happy with their daughter-in-law, like Salman Khan's wife in *Baghban*. If the mother-in-law is upset all the time with us, how will their daughters-in-law feel happy with their life?

Rajni's comment above gave me a good idea of how she understood and expressed this aspect of her life. This is one example that shows how my participants used film to comment on their everyday reality. There were other aspects of everyday life that found expression through reference to films. Whether it was the desire to own fashionable clothing, an unfulfilled love for travel, a longing for a fairy-tale wedding, or an aspiration to become independent, all of these found expression or an outlet through conversations involving Hindi films. Further, even resistance to these ideas was articulated using film references in some cases. To illustrate this in detail, I will explain the desires, aspirations and relationships that exist between my participants and Hindi film products in the following paragraphs. Before that, I briefly examine television consumption and why Hindi films have a stronger hold on my participants' imaginative space.

5.3 Uninspiring television: The mundane versus the special

A television set was invariably assigned the most privileged position in a household in Narwal. It usually was placed in the living/ drawing room with artificial flowers or small showpieces around it. It was immediately visible upon entering the house. In houses which only had one room or no separate living room, it was still placed in a location where it did not have to compete for attention with furniture or other items of home décor. The significance of a television set in a village household was more than the content that it offered, as I explained in chapters three and four. Despite still being a status symbol, it is increasingly in competition with leaner gadgets like laptops that offer a larger window

to the outside world. However, despite the growing popularity of laptops, television was still the most accessible and conventional form of audio-visual entertainment. Due to the interweaving between films and television soap operas, the television was able to offer a wide variety of entertainment options. Although the viewership of soap operas was evidently far higher than viewership of complete feature films amongst women in the village, the connection my participants had with Hindi cinema appeared to be deeper and stronger. I will demonstrate this using an example from my field visit.

I held two screenings of two different Hindi films in Narwal.[97] During and after the film screening of *Pink* (2016), I noticed that my participants did not once mention actor Amitabh Bachchan's character in the film by its name. In the other screening of *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* (2015), the women referred to actor Salman Khan's character as Salman, rather than the character's name in the film. Contrary to this, I noted that the characters in television series were never called by actors' real-life names in everyday conversations. The popularity of Hindi films was reflected in this recognition accorded to actors, as well as certain filmmakers, whereas in the case of television the recall value of the actors was negligible, as the storyline, characterisation and other devices seemed the priority for my participants. For instance, in a conversation about the film *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008), my participants referred to the protagonists with their real-life names – 'Hrithik' (Roshan) and 'Aishwarya' (Rai Bachchan) – whereas in the television series by the same name (*Jodha Akbar*, 2013-2015), the protagonists were referred to as 'Jodha' and 'Akbar'. Therefore, film stars not only lent their style and acting skills to a film but also induced a desire to forge relationships between my participants and themselves, unlike the star personas of actors on television.

I would extend the above point to say that television serials were perceived to be 'mundane' (*wahi roz ka*) by my participants as compared to Hindi films, perhaps due to their film-inspired content or the treatment of it. As Nandini (43) remarked:

> In the television soap operas, everything they show is the same-old thing, same fights between mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-law. See where the world of films has reached [*kahan se kahan pahuch gayi hai*]. These days they show everything from the world [*duniya bhar ki cheezein dikhate hain*]. In this [TV soap operas], even the songs are from films.

[97] I have mentioned the details in chapters one and four

Television channels in north India such as Star Plus and Zee TV air dramas that are heavily dependent on film songs and content. These channels identify the 'formulae' that work in mainstream Hindi cinema so that they can instantly be adopted by television producers. Some productions exploit the popularity of existing films in ways that include titling dramas based on titles of famous Hindi film songs, or naming series after filmic characters or films themselves.[98] Conversations with my participants showed that they were aware of the film songs or film plots from which the television dramas borrowed. The examples that I cite in the footnote (no. 95) were from my interactions with Narwal women, and it was evident that they felt a deeper connection with film songs, themes, and stars, in comparison to the same elements in a television soap opera. In Narwal, television content is invariably consumed within a domestic space on a particular device, whereas film content is not necessarily consumed within the confines of the household or on the same device, and this affected the relationship of my participants with films and television. My participants seem to understand television consumption as a quotidian task, while film consumption outside of TV dramas is a *slightly* forbidden pleasure.

Accounts of the Hindi film industry have for many years linked its development to the socio-economic development of India.[99] The popularity and pleasures of Hindi films have been analysed by scholars across the globe and continue to spark academic and popular interest in Indian film studies (see Thomas, 1985; Vasudevan, 1989; Dwyer and Pinney, 2002; Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Dudrah, 2012). The current crop of television dramas has not been able to sustain its relationship with the viewers in the same way as films. This, however, does not mean that these dramas are not hugely popular, as demonstrated by scholars such as Mitra (1993); Mankekar (1999); and Mehta (2008). It simply means that television dramas, although watched routinely and keenly, did not evoke the same sense of nostalgia for the past or hope for the future for my participants.

[98] Star Plus aired Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai (2009-present), Chand Chupa Badal Mein (2010-2011), Iss Pyaar ko Kya Naam Doon? (2011-present), Ek Hazaaron Mein Meri Behna Hai (2011–2013), Mere Angne Mein (2015-2017), Ruk Jaana Nahin (2011-2012), Sasural Genda Phool (2010-2012), and many more, all of which also happen to be famous Hindi film song titles. Zee TV's Jodha Akbar (2013-2015) is a historical fiction drama that aired a few years after the success of director Ashutosh Gowariker's Jodhaa Akbar (2008), and evidently borrowed its title to capitalise on the film's popularity.

99 See (Dwyer, 2010)

5.4 Relationship with the world of popular Hindi films

My participants approached films with a complex set of anticipations learned through their long-standing association with films. Knowing the type of a film [*kis tarah ki film*] was important for them before engaging with it for various reasons, such as figuring out whether or not the other family members would appreciate it or not. The English words 'type' and 'family' were used commonly by several participants. Perception of a film as belonging to a particular type, such as 'love films' [*prem kahani*] and 'family dramas' [family type *ki* film] was sometimes more important than the film's actual narrative itself. Lata (48) lived with her husband, in-laws, and two adult sons (26 and 23), and according to her, "films disrupted family life in villages [*parivaar ki mahatta nahi…gaon mein*]". Exceptions to this strong notion were films that promoted a traditional family setup, such as *Baghban* (2003). According to my participants, the underlying criterion for a likeable family-film was that responsibilities towards parents and family must be shown to be given prime importance. This view was common among my participants, irrespective of their age groups. Family dramas were immensely popular. Due to a tightly-knit social fabric, the ideals of contemporary mainstream Hindi cinema were deemed as a threat to the joint-family setup as they promoted an individualistic lifestyle, according to five of my participants (aged 34, 39, 39, and 55).[100] Films with love stories at the core of their diegeses were liked by the women under the age of 50, but the realities of their own everyday experiences made them feel that the romance-dramas could only be a distant dream. For Jyoti (21), she could not relate to most of the contemporary romance-drama films, but they did fuel her desire to consume similar stories. She said, "*Didi*, I like love-films [*pyaar wali filmein*] but where is the environment for that here? But I really like watching it in films". Dramas on family and romance also had the highest recall value among women of all age groups in Narwal. However, it was not just the contemporary films that dominated my discussions with my participants, and although my study is focused on mainstream Hindi films after 2000, my participants' long-standing association with film culture is significant to their knowledge and fondness for films.

[100] The words used to allude to individualistic lifestyle were varied, but pointed to the same set of people who did not strictly follow the traditional joint-family setting. There was *swaarthi* (selfish), *bhautik* (materialistic), and *manmauji* (does whatever he/she wants)

Hindi films were an essential part of my participants' memories, especially for those over the age of 55, and were recalled frequently to describe the time that these women lived in. Some of them shared fond memories of Hindi films of the 1960s, 70s and 80s when they were introduced to the world of Hindi cinema. Their older brothers or fathers would go and watch films in the city and then come back home to a bunch of eager children waiting to listen to 'the story' [*kahani*] of the film. Film songs, newspaper articles, and melodramatic monologues that earned fame at the time were etched in the memories of my participants; some of the middle-aged participants also recalled some of their favourite monologues, such as Rekha's from *Umrao Jaan* (1981), Salman Khan's in *Dabangg* (2010), Amitabh Bachchan's in *Baghban* (2003), Shah Rukh Khan's in *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003). While they narrated their experiences, I observed that Hindi film culture retained its hold on their imagination in the form of dialogues, songs, and their love for film stars of the time. Recalling her favourite memories of films, Saraswati Devi (67) who attended college in a city in Uttar Pradesh before coming to Narwal after marriage, said:

> I used to like Dev Anand and his way of speaking.[101] Not films like *Bobby*… In those days, films had ideals and romantic Urdu poetry [*shayari*] was popular. Men used to write letters to women sometimes using Hindi film dialogues, although it was not too common. Men thought women would not know the dialogue-references, but we knew where those dialogues came from…. [..]...The way they used to show heroines (blushing and smiling), we girls used to feel the same way… Despite that, no one had the courage to confess their love in front of their parents, so such things used to fade on their own. *Saadhana*-cut was very popular in those days.[102] Like Suraiyya, there were several talented heroines who used to both sing and act. Those days are gone now.

Other examples included quick references to their past in their conversations using films. As one my participants (57) shared, "Before getting married to your uncle, I had not seen him. People used to tell them he looked like Rajesh Khanna".[103]

Similar to Saraswati Devi's comments on the *Saadhana*-cut hairstyle, the younger participants (below 40) in my research pointed out that Hindi films have also been the trendsetters in clothing and fashion for a long time.104 Clare Wilkinson-Weber pointed

[101] Dev Anand was a Hindi film actor, writer, director and producer who was immensely popular in 1950s, 60s, and early 70s

[102] *Saadhana*-cut was a popular haircut inspired by renowned actress Saadhana's hairstyle

[103] Rajesh Khanna was a famous film actor of Hindi cinema who is known to have starred in 15 consecutive solo hit films from 1969 to 1971, and was immensely popular as a 'romantic hero'

[104] Also see (Dwyer and Patel, 2002:96-7) on popular Hindi films' impact on various fashion trends

out that “affluent Indian men and women have drawn on film costume to inspire their own clothing choices for several decades” (Wilkinson-Weber, 2005:135), but my field work suggested that this has started to trickle down, albeit slowly and not in the same way, to rural areas in north India as well. Susan Wadley, in her book on women’s lives in rural north India, remarked, “changes in clothing mark more than a change in female status per se: they are also indicative of shifts in how clothing marks identity, and the meaning of identity itself in rural India” (2008:154). Commenting on Karimpur’s residents, she said that they “participate in the global arena while at the same time marking social change relevant to their local situations on the bodies of their teenage girls” (Wadley, 2008:153), and that “clothing is also conceptually allied with the idea of ‘fashion’” (Wadley, 2008:154). My experience in Narwal resonated with her observation that “not only are females more aware of what is available through advertising, word of mouth and television, but they also have greater freedom of movement” (Wadley, 2008:169) as compared to their previous generation. A young participant, Geeta (25), believed that Hindi films are a great inspiration for exploring new hairstyles and clothes. She said:

> Shraddha Kapoor acts badly but her hair is so nice. Deepika Padukone also has a good hairstyle. They show all of these clothes and hairstyles in TV serials as well, but that kind of fashion looks good on older women. It is not new. Those people (in TV) also must be copying from films.

The sartorial sense prevalent in films or television series does not directly translate into an immediate inspiration for clothing for my participants. Most of these trends shown are neither wearable on a daily basis, nor is it economically viable for these women to follow the trend up in real life. Although Wilkinson-Weber pointed it out in the context of urban consumers, this held true in my experience too:

> Some [consumers] asked to combine elements from several costumes in an idiosyncratic bricolage: a kurta (shirt) with a sleeve like ‘the one that Sushmita wore in film x’, with a neckline adapted from ‘what Ash wore in film y’. Others asked to make a copy, but ‘raise the neckline here’, or ‘lengthen the sleeve there’ to produce a more modest outfit.
>
> (Wilkinson-Weber, 2005:142)

These were the kinds of negotiations my participants had to do in order to relate more to their favourite film stars and their fashion inspirations. However, even when the ‘latest’

film fashion trends and styles are not adopted widely or are considered to be too revealing or too bold, they are still being updated in popular memory. In the long run, however, these trends do inspire the everyday sartorial sensibilities for women, such as saree styles, blouse-cuts, and draping styles, as shared by some of the female tailors in Narwal.[105] Sudha (43) shared about her favourite piece of clothing:

> The film *Raja Hindustani* came out in 1996, and I had got an outfit tailored for myself, inspired by Karishma Kapoor's attire in the film. Before I got married, I had fondness for wearing fashionable clothing. People would ask me about it, complimented me. But now after marriage, that has faded.

In her book, *Fashioning Bollywood* (2014), Clare M. Wilkinson-Weber raises a pertinent question: "Why, though, does the wearing of a costume while playing a character exert so powerful a grip on the public imagination?" (2014:163) Sudha's comment above reminded me of this question. The glamour quotient in films was a strong motivation for some of my participants to aspire to a similar lifestyle despite negligible viewership.[106] As she argued:

> Even knowing they could not, or would not, look exactly like the stars and their characters, viewers could carry away the hope and desire that an equivalent costume might, via a similar mediation with the world, enrich their experience.
>
> (Wilkinson-Weber, 2014:163)

My conversation with Poonam (50) confirmed this assessment. Poonam's younger sisters and daughter were always excited about the latest fashions, and "if it were up to them, they would live the same way as film heroines", but there was hardly any money to support that. Poonam felt that films and television often played a negative role by painting the parents and elders as 'villains' or obstacles in fulfilling their desires, especially in the case of a love for fashion. As I mentioned in the context of the television, my participants always recall the name of the film star by his/her real name instead of the character he/she is playing in a film. Similarly, "all the examples of copied costumes are described as garments worn by the *actor*, not by the character" (ibid.). Although in my participants'

[105] I discuss, in bits, the influence of film fashion on the village sartorial sense for women in chapters three and four

[106] See section 5.5.4 for more examples of the influence of Hindi films on the women's fashion in the village

case, any film-inspired clothing was far from a film costume in terms of accentuating cuts, there were demands for similar embroideries, designs, colours, draping styles, sleeves, and saree blouses.

Hindi films expand these women's knowledge of the rest of India and the world. The aspirational value of films for my participants extends beyond clothing and material objects to trips to domestic and global destinations. Images from faraway places made films even more popular since the 1960s. As Ranjani Mazumdar noted, "..by the mid 1960s, we see the emergence of a cluster of films that showcased travel to foreign cities like Paris, London, Tokyo, and Rome" (2011:130).[107] A cosmopolitan lifestyle as promoted in Hindi films too had a far-reaching cultural consequence in rural north India. Until the 1980s, migration from rural to urban used to be solely for the purpose of economic improvement. For my participants, travelling to holiday destinations was usually to places of worship or to family homes of relatives. Hindi films showed a range of holiday destinations, both domestic and international, to a set of people who had never left the village and could not afford to visit those places. However, the culture and lifestyle of a different region within the country, and also outside it, was only made accessible visually through Hindi films as they still were still not able to afford those. I observed the ways in which images of these global cities and distant lands were discussed by my participants. Anushka (18) loved watching videos of film songs that show sea beaches. She said, "*Cocktail* showed seashores, if only I could visit a place like that…". The film she was referring to was released in 2012 and the location Anushka was talking about was Cape Town in South Africa, but she did not know that. Hindi films took these women to places they had not been to before, and probably would not visit in the near future, if ever. Medhavi (20) shared her experience of watching awe-inspiring visuals in the film *Sanam Re* (2016). She said:

107 See (Mazumdar, 2011). She notes that the most important films in shaping the perception of the 'outdoor' were "*Sangam* (Raj Kapoor, 1964), *Love in Tokyo* (Pramod Chakravarty, 1966), *An Evening in Paris* (Shakti Samanta, 1967), and *Around the World* (Pachi, 1967). These were box office successes which inspired other lesser known films remembered today only for their songs, including *Night in London* (Brij, 1967) and *Spy in Rome* (B.K. Adarsh, 1968). This article returns to Bombay's global travel films of the 1960s to unpack the "postcard imagination" that brought jet age aviation, tourism, consumerism, color film stock, fashion, and music into a distinct cultural configuration" (2011:130)

> I am not too fond of watching all the latest films as soon they are released, and I do not even have the time for it. But in the film *Sanam Re* there are some stunning locations. I want to go to a place like that once. Are such places for real?

After my conversation with her, I researched on the filming location of *Sanam Re*. The film, about a romantic triangle, was filmed in multiple locations including Mumbai, Chandigarh, Shimla, Kalpa and Ladakh in India, and Banff, Jasper, Waterton Park and Calgary in Canada. Most of the visuals are heavily edited in post-production and are specially shown to have dreamy landscapes to support the plot. Locations depicting romance and dream sequences were popular among my young participants (below 25). For instance, the photo studio owner in Narwal recalled the film *Chandni* (1989) during our conversations to explain his point about *filmi* poses and locations. His recollection of the image of actress Sridevi and actor Rishi Kapoor could not be dissociated from the pose in the film still from the location. He shared, "They made the film somewhere abroad. The mountains there looked beautiful". Visuals of locations, along with actors and music, made for a long-lasting impact on the minds of my participants. They would associate songs, actors or even the locations with their respective films, which had symbolic associations as mentioned above. Locations could be symbols of romance, fashion, or cosmopolitan and diasporic culture. Malti (42) wanted to visit Kashmir once in her lifetime because of the stunning images that she had seen of the place in Hindi films. She said:

> *Didi*, I have seen in films, Kashmir is a lovely [*pyaari*] place. I have seen films showing that place like *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964) and *Junglee* (1961). Even in films these days, sometimes you get to see Kashmir, like in that (actor) Ranbir Kapoor's film (referring to his film *Rockstar* (2011)), in which I only saw its songs that were shot in Kashmir. The atmosphere of the place is lovely [*khushnuma*], otherwise so many filmmakers would not have shown that place in their films.

The contribution of Kashmir as a location to symbolise romance in the mainstream Hindi cinema has long been significant, as exemplified by the films mentioned by Malti.[108] I also observed in my interactions that metropolitan cities like Mumbai or Delhi have come to be associated with crimes and chaos. For instance, as Chhavi (20) shared after the screening of the film *Pink* (2016):

108 See Dwyer (2010), Mazumdar (2011:129), Ahmed (2015) and Gaur (2011:73)

> Mumbai [*Bambai*] and Delhi [*Dilli*] would be too chaotic [*bahut maara-maari*]. I do not know what is there in those cities in reality, only my elder brothers have gone there to study. But what I see in films makes me question, what will happen if I go there alone? We just saw in this film what can happen to a woman there.

The scepticism in her comment about the big cities in India partly came from Hindi films like the one I showed in the screening. A dense population, different languages and cultures, and competition for limited resources typifies these metropolitan cities, as is also represented in films. Depiction of urban life sometimes fuelled the fear of my young participants, who seemed afraid such dystopian situations. Images of international locations in Hindi films also expanded the world view of my young participants (below 25). While showing photographs of my university in London, I showed Rehana (19) and her friends a few aerial photographic shots of the South Bank in London, and Rehana commented:

> *Didi*, wasn't this shown in that film *Desi Boyz* (a 2011 romantic comedy) too? And in *Namastey London* (2007)? They show this scene (shot) in many films and now I just know that the film is set in London when they show this.

Her comment demonstrated how global symbols of a cosmopolitan city like London were propagated through films. Such images were icons signifying particular locations, and through these images, my participants were able to develop their perceptions about those locations as the films showed people speaking the same language as them in another country. For young females like Rehana, cities like London did not seem to be a faraway place which she cannot imagine. The curiosity about places and cultures was both fuelled and satisfied by Hindi films in cases like these, perfectly typifying the commercial nature of Bollywood. Cities like New York, Tokyo, and London were no longer unfamiliar among my participants because of their extensive visual treatment in Hindi films.

It was not just the cultures of foreign lands that were brought to my participants through films. Festivals celebrated in different regions in India were also popularised by Hindi films, among other factors, and I illustrated this in chapter four with the examples of two festivals, *Ganesh Chaturthi* and *Karwa Chauth*. What I could not discuss in those chapters was that the lyrics of Hindi film songs often borrow phrases from other Indian languages, and I noted an example where this phenomenon widened my Hindi-speaking

participant's curiosity about knowledge of other parts of India and their languages. Neetu (23), while watching a film music video on a music-based TV show, said:

> *Didi*, in the song *Jiya Jale* (film *Dil se*, 1998), what is the language in the song? I do understand a few phrases of Marathi and Punjabi now…they are so common in films, but not this. My brother [*bhaiya*] said it is the language of Kerala. Is that the case?

I nodded affirmatively. The lyrics were indeed in Malayalam, a Dravidian language primarily spoken in the Indian state of Kerala, and one of the 22 scheduled languages of India. Neetu's brother had obviously found out the language of the lyrics and shared the information with her. Thus, the curiosity around the unknown part of the song lyrics was aroused through a film song. There are numerous other Hindi film songs that borrow phrases or poetry from other languages for lyrics in songs that are primarily in Hindi. These languages are not just Indian, but range from Spanish and French to Arabic and Nepali.[109] Neetu spoke of her love for such mixed-language Hindi songs to me, "*Didi*, it feels like I am listening to things that I don't know, but still understand", and evidently she was curious about it. Hindi films were her favourite form of entertainment, she shared.

My interactions in the field also helped me understand ways in which they express their imagined relationship with Hindi film stars. Studies on fandom or stardom in the Hindi film industry (see Punathambekar, 2007; Mazumdar 2012; Singh, 2017) have highlighted the fact that the figure of the star has acquired a new force in recent years. In an earlier decade, Christopher Pinney's 1997 account of photo studios in the 1990s painted a picture of the intimate association that the audience wished to forge through posed photographs, as discussed in chapter four (section 4.4.2). In the context of my study, I wish to distance myself from scholarly descriptions of fandom as a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that evade the preferred and intended meanings as represented by popular media (Gray *et al*, 2007). The relationship between my

[109] A few examples are: '*Senorita*' from *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011) that borrowed phrases from Spanish, '*Nashe Si Chadh Gayi*' from *Befikre* (2016) that borrowed part of its lyrics from French, '*Bore Bore Boro Boro*' from *Bluffmaster* (2005) that had part of the lyrics in Arabic, '*Musu Musu Hasi*' from *Pyaar Mein Kabhi Kabhi* (1999) and *Kasto Mazza* from *Parineeta* (2005) which borrowed part of their lyrics from Nepali. Among other Hindi songs that used phrases and poetry from other Indian languages are: *Chammak Challo* from *Ra One* (2011) that used Tamil phrases, and *Monta Re* from *Lootera* (2013) that had Bangla bits.

participants and film stars did not have the required communal effort to be considered a study of fandom as described above. Having said that, it was fairly common for my participants to engage with a Hindi film because of its star cast value, as I showed in the comparison between television and Hindi films as well as through other examples in chapters three and four. In Narwal, images of Hindi film stars were popular as imprints on everyday objects.[110] The widespread use and presence of these images hinted at a possible association between the people living here and their favourite actors/ actresses, as I have discussed in earlier chapters. Conversations with my participants revealed that a film star was most often the first point of attraction for anyone willing to engage with a Hindi film. If we understand the Hindi film as a "moral fable that involves its audience largely through the puzzle of resolving some (apparently irresolvable) disorder in the ideal moral universe" (Thomas, 1995:163), then its 'hero' and the 'heroine' are almost always at the helm of affairs, ensuring that the desires and emotions of the audiences are represented on screen. The relationship between film actors/actresses and my participants was a personal one; it did not translate into a communal effort or an engagement with the stars off-screen. However, it was powerful enough for women to engage with film culture in a setting where it was frowned upon for them to do so. Among the female staff (18-55) in the schools that I visited, I observed young females made fun of each other about film actors, and sometimes even making a teasing remark about their middle-aged colleagues' fondness of a particular film star. Jaya (22) was among the eight women I interacted with at a secondary school in Narwal. The women in this school (ages 20-52) obliged me and stayed back after work hours to sit with me to have tea and samosas. For the first ten minutes, it was only the younger women who were talking. When I asked their colleague, 50, to join in and participate, she blushed and said, "*Arrey* I am old now, what will I know about these things", at which Jaya loudly remarked, "Ma'am only likes Salman Khan. So, if you talk about him, only then she will answer", and all of them burst out laughing. Contemporary actors who were popular among my participants included Ajay Devgn, Akshay Kumar, Salman Khan, Amitabh Bachchan, Shahid Kapoor, and Varun Dhawan, and the actresses included Deepika Padukone, Karishma Kapoor, Kareena Kapoor, Kajol, Alia Bhatt and Shraddha Kapoor. The reasons for their popularity apart from acting skills ranged from their appearance, voice, and fashion choices on and off screen, to their image as stereotyped by their filmic personas. For

[110] See chapter four

instance, Ajay Devgn's name came up a few times in my conversations with women between the ages of 35-50. Nandini (43) opened up about her fondness for the actor and said, "*Uski ankhein achhi hain* (His eyes are nice)". On being probed, she shared, "I mean I like his films. He always saves everyone in his films. Just by looking at his eyes, you know that he will *do something*, and not just sing and dance". The persona of actor Ajay Devgn for my participants was that of an intense, brooding man who was responsible for saving not just his family and friends but also the society. Similar to this perception was the popularity of film star Akshay Kumar. As Swati (20) shared, "Akshay Kumar can do everything. I like his patriotic [*desh-bhakti*] movies. He looks good too". Amitabh Bachchan was a name that came up in almost every conversation about film stars. Actor Salman Khan was another favourite among my participants.[111] Younger actors Shahid Kapoor (38) and Varun Dhawan (32) were talked about for their dance moves and their image of being a 'romantic hero'. In terms of actresses, women still considered actress Madhuri Dixit to be the one of the best in the Hindi film industry for her looks, dance moves, and acting skills, apart from her smile and clothing. As Sarita (40) shared, with nods of agreement from the two other women (45 and 50) present there, "There is no match [*jod*] to Madhuri Dixit. She looks so beautiful in a saree. She acted so well. Even after so many years, there is no one like her". Younger actresses Deepika Padukone (33), Alia Bhatt (26) and Shraddha Kapoor (32) were seen as fashion icons who inspired fashion trends among my younger participants and were adored for their screen presence. Karisma Kapoor (45), Kareena Kapoor-Khan (38) and Katrina Kaif (36) were actresses whose photographs were the most common ones on the bridal posters in beauty parlours in the village, but were considered to be actresses "whose world is very different from ours" [*Inki toh duniya hi alag hai, aur rehen sehen ka dhang bhi*]. Due to the short duration of my field work, I was not able to deepen my understanding of the nature of such relationships with stars that existed beyond mere liking of a particular film-star. Stardom as a cultural phenomenon in rural Indian settings requires further study. Film stars ranged from being the object of attraction to an embodiment of the fulfilment of moral expectations.

The role of a film in embodying a value system is central to my study and in the course of my research I was curious to understand the ways in which the commonly heard word

[111] See figure 4.6 for an imprint of Salman Khan's image from his latest film on a sachet of mouth-freshner being sold in Narwal's market.

filmi was used. Through an explanation of the various connotations of this word, I present my analysis of filmic associations of my participants with not only the film's stars but also its music, images, and ideology. In the following sections, I describe the ways in which my participants considered an idea, object, relationship, person, or an image, to be *filmi*. I also explain how the word *filmi* has become a 'cultural trope' that is integral to the everyday life of women in Narwal.

5.5 Connotations of the word *Filmi*

During the semi-structured in-depth interviews that I conducted in the final three weeks of my field work, I specifically asked my participants who or what they considered to be *filmi*. I asked them for a precise definition, which no one could give me. I observed that they were surprised by my direct questions on the meaning of *filmi* and most were hesitant to respond. The ones who did answer said, "Someone who watches a lot of films" or "a situation where something miraculously happens [*chamatkari tarike se sab hone lage*]". However, the word was in common parlance and used in a variety of ways, so my analysis primarily relies on the informal everyday interactions or conversations that I was part of during the field work. The idea was to find out what aspect of themselves or others did my participants find *filmi*, if any.

In a space where the pleasure of engaging with films can itself be a transgressive activity, I concluded that *filmi* connotes anything that is 'other' to village life in these women's imaginations. I analysed all the things they meant when they used this word and found that 'being filmi' refers to attributes varying from being an avid film consumer, to being stylish, romantic, a slacker or jobless, unrealistic, rebellious, boycotted, or devoid of moral values.

5.5.1 *Filmi* as an avid film consumer

In the interviews, the most common response of my participants in relation to the meaning of the word *filmi* was someone who is an avid film consumer, unlike the generic meaning of *filmi* (pertaining to film). This usage relates directly to a film consumer in the most obvious ways – one who watches films, listens to film music, shares video clips of films, reads interviews and features about actors/actresses, and is interested in film stars' lives.

There was one response that articulated the perception of *filmi* as someone who is extremely fond of Hindi films. Jyoti (21) shared that:

> My elder brother and younger sister are so filmi that in the name of entertainment [*manoranjan*], they only watch films. Even when we go for family events to the city or adjacent village, my brother downloads and saves the latest Hindi films in his laptop or phone and both my siblings watch it wherever we go. Father does not like it, but my other cousins join in too, so he does not say anything.

This broadly referred to the one for whom films were the most important source of entertainment. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in this notion of *filmi*, watching a film became a slightly forbidden activity.

In another conversation, Rehana (19) revealed:

> My father loves [*shauk hai*] the old film songs sung by Rafi and Kishore Kumar. My uncle too is quite *filmi*, he remembers all the songs from the old Hindi films by heart even today.

A love for films, their songs, storylines, actors and film star lives, was widely believed to be a *filmi* characteristic, a common notion among the participants and their families. This notion mostly was referred to when talking about others and not oneself. Further, I observed that in the case of older men in the family, their love for films or film songs was considered *filmi* but the term was used in the context of light-hearted banter, unlike for women, who had to be (slightly) audacious to be able to confidently declare their fondness for films. The above examples are of women aged 19 and 21, however, there were a few middle-aged women too who referred to their children, husbands or other family members as being *filmi* because those people loved films.

5.5.2 *Filmi* as an exaggerated version of the self

In chapter four I discussed a conversation I had with a photo studio's owner (52) in Narwal, who dismissed the photographs from Pinney's book, *Camera Indica* (1997), as being too *filmi*. He used the term to slightly ridicule the references to film in studio photography of the last two decades, but the idea of *filmi* in the context of a bygone era is what struck me. The 1990s' studio photography denoted people who wanted, through their photographs of the self, to depict a relationship that did not exist. This relationship

was mainly between a famous film star and the subject of the photograph, where young men and women visited photo studios and got photographed with backgrounds of still images from Hindi films. They posed for the camera as an actor would pose for a still or a poster of a film. These were people who not only wanted to be seen as desirable like the film stars, but also in the same frame as their favourite actor/actress. These photographs were characterised by painted backdrops (similar to landscape images as shown in the film's stills), elaborate costumes, makeup, film-related poses and stiff body language. These photographs were not only intended to depict their subjects as modern and urbane, but also to fulfil their desire for a perceived association with Hindi films. However, this phenomenon typically characterised the photo studios of the 1980s and 1990s, and according to the Narwal studio owner, those images would "probably be laughed at" now. He said, "Now where does this happen? Someone should have told these people just standing next to a film-person [*film-walle*] does not make them like that". F*ilmi* according to the studio owner, was an exaggerated version of how people wanted to be seen.

5.5.3 *Filmi* as melodramatic

On an afternoon in the home of one of my hosts, I was part of a conversation that indicated that *filmi* could be used alongside another phrase, *kop bhawan*, which was commonly used by people in the region. *Kop Bhawan* has been a part of the local vocabulary for centuries as it originated from Sanskrit. *Kop Bhawan* literally translates as 'sulking chambers' and refers to a room inside a king's palace or aristocratic household in ancient times, that was a dedicated space to calm oneself after a moment of rage. It appears in Hindu mythological epics like the *Ramayana*.[112] Anamika (40) was at home with her mother-in-law and her sister, and I was talking to them about a recipe. They had a moment of disagreement and Anamika thought it best to go inside the kitchen at that instant to calm herself down. A few seconds after she sent away, her mother-in-law remarked, "Oh, look now the queen [*maharani ji*] went away in anger, her tantrums are so *filmi*". I said, "Let me go and check in on her, and I can help with the cooking as well. I think she has just gone inside the kitchen", and she responded:

[112] *Kop* means anger/rage whereas *bhawan* could refer to a house, hall or a room

> Ab kop bhawan mein jaayein ya kitchen mein, yehi sab filmi nakhre hain aur kuch nahi. Hamare time pe aisa nahi hota tha.
>
> (meaning: Now whether she has gone to a *kop bhawan* or to the kitchen, these are all *filmi* tantrums, nothing else. This did not used to happen in my time.

Growing up, I observed *Kop bhawan* being used in a condescending manner by mothers-in-law in north India to describe the behaviour of disobedient daughters-in-law. Anamika's mother-in-law felt that her daughter-in-law acted out in a dramatic manner as she had no respect for the traditional family hierarchy. She felt that Anamika had 'trapped' her husband using emotional drama [*rona-dhona*]. Melodrama as a film device has been a distinguishing feature of Hindi films.[113] Associating *filmi* with melodrama, thus, did not surprise me. However, *filmi* as a metaphor for melodrama alongside the usage of *kop bhawan* made me think of two possibilities. First, *filmi* may have referred to Anamika's act of getting up abruptly and leaving as melodramatic since it made a statement about her flouting the older woman's authority, especially in front of me. Second, *filmi* perhaps indicated Anamika being pompous since the mother-in-law also called her a *maharani* (queen) and remarked how she behaved like one by not giving in to what her mother-in-law was saying.

In another instance, 32-year-old Vibha described her mother-in-law as being too *filmi* for "manipulating my (Vibha's) husband by crying and telling her about how miserable her life is all the time [*zindagi dubhar ho gayi hai*]". Vibha also shared in a separate conversation about how her mother-in-law's behaviour would completely change to that of a melodramatic mother [*naatak-kaar*] when the son was around her. *Filmi* as dramatic or melodramatic was not only used by mothers-in-law or daughters-in-law to complain about each other, but these two examples show that when *filmi* means melodramatic, it was always used to describe the 'other', and not oneself.

5.5.4 *Filmi* as fashionably transgressive

Ritu (28), a housewife who lived in a house with seven family members, was a self-confessed fashion-loving woman. I interviewed her. Her idea of *filmi* was initially unclear

[113] See (Thomas, 1995; Vasudevan, 1989; Ganti, 2004 and 2013)

to me, but multiple references to it made her response understandable. After a long pause, she said:

> A lot of things can be considered to be *filmi*. Such as it can mean entertaining…or maybe luxurious [*aish-aaram*]. Only fancy [*shaukeen*] people can live like film-people…maybe *filmi* can be someone who just loves movies.

On being asked what she liked most about Hindi films, she said:

> I really like *filmi* clothes. They have great designs [*ek se ek designs*] and beautiful colours. Here we cannot wear those kinds of clothes, but design and colours can be worn during weddings and all [*shaadi-byaah mein*]. I find Deepika's and Madhuri's (actresses) sarees and long-sleeved blouses to be beautiful. These days there are a lot of *filmi* blouse designs in trend, like the ones Deepika wears. Now there are many designs that we can actually wear (in the village).

Broadly, *filmi* in this sense connoted a manner of dressing that did not follow the sartorial conventions of everyday life in the village.[114] Wilkinson-Weber used the word *filmi* to refer to the "Bollywood archetype" (2010a:142) in the context of costumes used in Hindi films, and argued:

> The residual tension surrounding the heroine's costuming becomes apparent when we consider that audience appropriation of costume has often involved adaptations of the outfit that stripped it of its most dangerous 'filmy' connotations.
>
> (Wilkinson-Weber, 2005:142)

While watching a film together, I showed some of my participants a photograph of me in which I wore a dress with long boots. I asked, "Do I not look too *filmi* here? I was trying to dress up like (actress) Katrina Kaif", to which one of them (22) responded:

> But *didi*, there (in London) everyone wears the clothes that you are wearing. Your clothing is not different from what everyone wears there. You are not looking *filmi* at all. Here (in the village), you instantly come to know if someone is wearing something glamorous [*chamak-dhamak*] that is from films or TV.

[114] See section 5.4 for a brief discussion on Hindi film fashion and its consumers among my participants. The argument in this section follows from that.

Women who possessed and wore this kind of clothing were thought of as *filmi,* i.e., she was considered to be embracing trendy clothing, accessories and designs; someone who chose to appear distinguished from other women in the village. *Filmi* as fashionably different or transgressive was a recurring signification that I observed among my participants to describe a specific manner of clothing and lifestyle of other men and women in the village. Among my participants aged 35 or below, this connotation seemed a positive one, but older women did not entertain the idea of a fashion sense that was too different from the everyday clothing style in the village. The colour palette, fabric and prints of the clothing of women who liked to dress up fashionably was different from the locally produced clothing in the sense that they either (i) got an outfit stitched in the exact colour of a star's clothing, (ii) took pains to get a film-inspired embroidery done on their clothes, or (iii) asked a friend/kin to *bring back* a certain piece of clothing from *outside* the village. There were more such instances that indicated the difference between a *filmi* and a non-*filmi* clothing, and I discussed an example of saree blouse-designs in the context of a female village tailor in chapter four. This process of adaptation of film fashion has increasingly become more complex and elaborate. Susan Wadley made a note of such fashion-related inspirations in 1998 in a rural setting:

> The key 'fashion' of the time was the polyester see-through sari which was featured in magazines like Femina. These saris, popular with young women through the 1970s, brought on the wrath of their mothers-in-law who found the synthetic material to be too revealing. These synthetic saris were seen by the older women as a sign of moral decay and of the loss of the modesty of women that rules of purdah mandated.
>
> (2008:166)

She also mentioned that women in the late 1990s who used village tailors would "have him add ruffles and other decorative items not found on earlier clothing" (2008:167). During my stay in Narwal, I observed that synthetic saris were common and not at all scorned upon. The limits had been pushed further since, of course. However, the socio-economics of the village life still did not regularly allow the women there to consume updated fashion trends in comparison to cities, i.e., the quality of fabric, the latest tailored cuts, and the changing print designs were not easily accessible to my participants as compared to their urban counterparts, and therefore, the use of the word *filmi* by my participants became even more significant to denote sartorial transgressions.

Durga Devi, a 69-year-old tailor who I referred to in the earlier chapters, did not precisely use the word *filmi* to describe the artwork on plastic packaging bags that she used to sell her clothes. However, for her, the use of Shah Rukh Khan's image signalled to her customers that she was a tailor conscious of trends in ladies' fashion. Being aware of Hindi films with their songs, images, stars, and storylines, counted as being modern. For my participants such as Durga Devi, being modern indicated being updated with the latest technology, closely imitating filmic fashion trends, comparing oneself with the urban in terms of lifestyle, and claiming to build a secure future by migrating to big cities [*sheher jaake apni zindagi banana*].

5.5.5 *Filmi* as romantically bold and expressive

Durga Devi's life had been exceptional in terms of her marriage with a man she fell in love with. She got married in 1966 in Kanpur, where she lived earlier. She then moved to Narwal, where his family lived. She has two sons now, and three grandchildren. Both her sons had arranged marriages in the same caste and the whole family now lives together in their ancestral home in Narwal. I spent several days in their house and observed the relationship between Durga Devi and her daughters-in-law. In one of our conversations about women's lives before marriage, the older daughter-in-law said:

> *Arrey* what will she know of an arranged marriage? Her wedding was so *filmi* itself. In those days, it was a love marriage. They used to meet sometimes, and he asked her father for her hand in marriage. They even watched movies together before their marriage.

Marriage alliances in this region, and largely throughout rural India, are still arranged between families on the basis of caste, class and other socio-economic considerations (see Chaudhry, 2016; Chowdhry, 2004; Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996). According to my participants, themes of romance and marrying-for-love have predominantly been the domain of Hindi film. At the centre of most Hindi films is a passionate love story. Thus, Durga Devi's unusual situation, i.e., a love-marriage, was considered to be *filmi* by not only her daughters-in-law but also by other women in the village. They saw such alliances as an influence of Hindi cinema and the films' urban or Western values [*West ki sabhyata*]. Marrying for attraction, without considering the family background and

values, threatened the core cultural values of the family life that my participants lived. Malti (42), in a conversation about the Western influence on Indian society, said:

> Westerners [*firangi*] project us as backward [*pichhde*] if we are conservative [*dakiyanusi*] about our traditions [*prathaayein*]. But in their own homes, their marriages are falling apart, children do not respect their elders, they leave ageing parents behind, and then they say we are backward. In our (culture), we are taught the value of families staying together. I do not understand all these *filmi* people who marry someone just because *pyaar ho gaya* [because they fell in 'love'].

People saying that Hindi films promote Western values was not a surprising notion to me growing up in India, and this belief was common amongst sections of urban and rural audiences in the country. However, according to my observation from my interactions with women in Narwal, the bold expressions of love and romance as depicted in Hindi films were embedded within these so-called Western values. Depictions of love in Hindi films were considered to be a fleeting feeling by my participants [*do din mein chala jaata hai*]. They felt that 'love' as shown in Hindi films was considered to be a feeling of infatuation/ attraction [*lubhaavna*], and hence, was not a good enough reason to get married. More importantly, the fact that they met and got attracted to each other before marriage showed that they transgressed the segregated lives that young men and women ought to live before they get married. I summarise my lengthy interaction with Malti regarding the family drama *Baghban* (2003) below:

> What Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini (depicted in the film as a righteous ageing couple) had for each other as husband and wife and as parents was respectable. All these *filmi* stories show the boy and the girl meeting and falling in love. We get attracted to the idea, and we root for them being together [*chahte hain ki ladka-ladki shadi kar lein*] at the end, but no one would like to see that happen in real life. They put all that *filmi* music and we are supposed to think it is true love [*jaise bada mahaan prem ho*]. Life is not about roaming around aimlessly with boys [*awaaragardi*] and degrading the family name.

Despite criticism from some of my participants, love stories were popular among women film audiences in Narwal. The discouragement of marriages in real life based solely on 'love' was based on social and cultural considerations which were contextually more important to keep the social fabric intact. For younger women (below 25), getting married for love was an idea that they could only dream of, but something that was aspirational and close to their hearts. Babita (22), who lived in a nearby village, had come to Narwal to attend a class at the ITI. She shared:

> *Didi*, I think it will be better if my mother and father choose someone for me. I have never even talked to another man except for my brothers. I have never had a male friend. Why should I dream of a *filmi* marriage? Even if I do, it will never happen.

Thus, the connotation of a *filmi* marriage was a 'love-marriage' as opposed to the one set up by families or relatives.

My participants also considered grand gestures of affection to be *filmi*. Drawing on my conversation with Malti, I observed that everyday expressions of romance that were elaborate or too affectionate according to traditional sensibilities were also seen as *filmi*. For example, Malti spoke of Renu, her 38-year-old neighbour:

> Many women have husbands who are very *filmi*, they get them many sarees and take them out. I do not have time for all this. Now tell me, what should a husband do – should he spend time with his wife all day or do some work [*joru ka ghulam bana rahega kya]?*

It would be incorrect to say that the expression of romance would not take place here if not for the films, but the individual choices made regarding ways of expressing romance in everyday life between a woman and her husband were heavily influenced by the way the families were organised social context. As I understood from my interactions with my participants, the ways in which Hindi films portrayed conjugal romance did not represent an accurate depiction for them of their everyday experience of love. The reason why certain expressions of love were considered *filmi* by my participants and others could have been due to the absence of an on-screen depiction of love which was at all close to their way of living within the village. For instance, the fact that Renu's neighbour's husband took her out to the city often was a rare situation in the village context. Although this had nothing to do with Hindi films directly, the idea of conveying love had come to be associated with Hindi films that showed songs picturised on couples showering affection on each other openly. Expressing love publicly was not common, as one had to be extremely shameless [*nirlajya, besharm*] to do so. This boldness of expressing love became a *filmi* aspect in such cases. Hindi films were often criticised as well as celebrated for promoting escapism. This paradigm of a typical (*masala*) Hindi film inspired yet another connotation of the word *filmi* which I describe in the next section.

5.5.6 *Filmi* as a slacker

Women in Narwal spent time every day on activities that involved film such as listening to film music, watching movies and interviews, reading magazine columns about films, consuming film-inspired content on television, looking at film images on everyday objects, and sharing video clips and ringtones over WhatsApp.

My participants above the age of 60 had a dismissive attitude towards younger men and women who watched films, but I did not observe them to be vocal about younger people engaging in other film-related activities such as listening to film songs, sharing videos, or making film-based videos on mobile apps. Viewership of films was perhaps criticised by older women because, in their view, watching a two-hour-long Hindi film meant the bulk of their time was being spent on 'unproductive activities'. I met Kishori Devi (76) in the village temple, who was introduced to me during an everyday prayer ceremony. I asked her about her family, and while talking about her two grandsons, she said:

> My older grandson is good at studies, but the younger one is absolutely *filmi*. He keeps watching films in his mobile, songs, photos all day. *Maar-dhad* [violence] and god knows what all is going in his brain all day. No one can make him work when does not want to move. He takes after his father. My younger son, who is also very *filmi*, does not do any work. If he worked and was employed, he could bring some money into the house.

Kishori Devi used *filmi* to describe someone who she considered to be a slacker due to their high level of engagement with films. This indicated a person who had no inclination for occupational work and was understood as an escapist who 'just wasted time' [*khali samay vyarth ganwaana hai*]. Such people were looked down upon or mocked by their own family members too. As Kishori Devi added in a tone of disappointment:

> People in films can do whatever they want. They leave everything to go to sing and dance, but we do not. Life is filled with struggles.

The conception of *filmi* as a slacker, lazy or jobless person needs to be contextualised. First, when my older participants felt that the focus of their young ones or family members was not to make their everyday life better, but to spend time on entertainment, their economic struggle seemed harder than it was. Second, Hindi films showing the characters singing, dancing and falling in love instead of spending time in a real workplace could not be related to by my older and middle-aged participants in this village

setting, where the primary concern for most people was the improvement of their economic condition. Although it was understood by them that the diegesis cannot focus on every detail of human life, it irked several of my older, as well as middle-aged, participants that films were negatively influencing the younger generation. For instance, during our conversation, I asked Sunita (42) if she considered herself *filmi*, given how fond she was of the actresses and their fashion, style and glamour. She said:

> Not at all *bitti* (endearment for 'daughter'), when am I *filmi?* I have to work, I have to run a household. Although in films they show a bit of real life, but people are never shown to be working. Now if children grow up seeing films, all they will think is that there is no need to work or have jobs.

It was implied by her that young people who engaged in a lot of film consumption were less motivated to face the difficulties of working hard to earn money. What I noted here was that Sunita, who ran a beauty parlour herself and was closely connected with the world of Hindi films (chapter four), saw the engagement with films by younger people in this way. Further, her idea of *filmi* too was about others, not herself. When discussing films, she was accepting of the fact that she consumed film forms, but the word *filmi* was not something she identified herself with at all. Could it be that middle-aged and older women film consumers in the village did not deem films fit for consumption by younger people? Or was it just the word *filmi* that that led them to decide what was or was not acceptable behaviour in the rural community?

Filmi was not just used for people who spent time sitting idle or entertaining themselves rather than spending their day in 'fruitful' work-related activities. It also referred to a person with expensive tastes, having a grand but unrealistic view of the world. This is not far removed from my questions above. I explain this in the next section.

5.5.7 *Filmi* as unrealistic

Sunita (42) and Kishori Devi (76) were not the only ones who thought of *filmi* as something that deflected people from the realities of everyday in the village. Growing up in India, I have observed that Hindi films have a high aspirational value for audiences across the country. International locations, expensive clothing, and luxurious lifestyles in Hindi films show a lavish lifestyle as the norm. During my field work, the elected village

head of Narwal was a young woman in her late thirties, born and brought up in Kanpur city.[115] She prided herself on her sparing use of media devices such as phones and laptops, and film consumption. In a conversation that lasted close to two hours, she spoke on the mindset and hardships of the people living in Narwal:

> People need to be realistic about what they can have in life. When people know they have to live within the village, then what good will it do to them to be curious to watch films all the time? Studies, marriage, kids, and a job [*roji-roti*] do not leave any time for all this. It is the same in the city. There are only a few *filmi* people…god knows what it is that they expect from the world. Especially young boys. There was that film about motorcycles (*Dhoom*, 2004, known for luxury motorbikes) after which *bauaa* (brother-in-law) started demanding a bike from my husband. All of these bikes are so expensive, where is the money for that? If he brings in a bride tomorrow, maybe he will ask for a Madhuri-Dixit-Saree for her.

In another example, Sudha (43) pointed out:

> Filmon mein toh garib bhi ameer hai, aur garib ki tarah koi dikhta hi nahi. Ab ya toh hum filmi logon ki tarah khayali duniya mein rahein, ya apne aas paas jo kuch hai, usi se khush rahein.
>
> (meaning: In films, even the poor are shown as rich, and no one looks like the poor. Either we can live like *filmi* people, in our imaginary world, or we can be happy with whatever we have around us.

Sudha's comment referred to the way some Hindi films have depicted poverty, especially the way she has seen it around her. According to her, even the poor and the middle-class people were represented as having a lavish life as was visible in their lifestyle and clothing. I asked her if she had any specific film in mind, but she did not. If I believed Sudha and Sonal (above), the depiction of rural poverty and its complexity is not represented in a way that Sudha would be able to relate to. However, some of the recent films Sudha's daughter later named after being asked about it by her mother were films that were based on small towns and not in a village like Narwal like *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* (2015). For instance, in a film that was released after my field work, *Bareilly ki Barfi* (2017), the female protagonist was depicted as a woman who was oddly immodest as compared to the women that actually live in Bareilly, a small town in the same state as Narwal. As the 'heroine' shared a cigarette with her father and went around on bikes, wearing jeans, chasing an unknown man who she thought understood her completely, her

[115] I have provided a brief description of her in chapter one

mannerisms, clothing, hairstyles, and cultural values did not even remotely resemble a young woman living in a small town. Sudha's comment played on my mind while observing the characters in *Bareilly ki Barfi*. However, I was also cautious of painting this as the response that all my participants would have had. I wanted to compare Sudha's response with some of my other participants, especially younger ones who was more aware of the latest Hindi films. So, I asked Ranjana (23) about it, "Do you think films are not able to show the problem of poverty in a proper way?"[116], and she told me, "No, it's not like that completely…there is that film *Manjhi* (2015) which I really liked. I have seen such people. I could understand his woes [*vyatha*]. There are many such places where there are no hospitals and people die (due to lack of medical care)".

The discourse on realism within Hindi film narratives was beyond the scope of this study. However, it was relevant to describe how my participants saw themselves in relation to the people shown in Hindi films. There was no single point of view. I noted a few similarities with Rao's study (2007) in terms of non-elite film audiences and their responses to the issue of representation of the 'non-elite' in films, as exemplified above. An 'unrealistic' world view was often deemed to be film related. This connotation of a *filmi* person or idea stemmed from the unrealistic representations of people and far-fetched aspirations that some of my older participants felt characterised Hindi films. These were not only economic but also social. The socio-cultural setup in a rural area has rigid norms under which the everyday operates. Thus, a *filmi* person sometimes referred to one who broke these norms to fulfil an ambition or a personal desire, as I discuss this in the next section.

5.5.8 *Filmi* as rebellious

The neighbouring house of one of my hosts looked like an uninhabited building from the outside with tattered walls outside and house plants overgrowing it. Curious, I inquired, "Does any woman live in that house?", to which my host (58) replied, "Yes. Why?". I said, "She never joins us in the evenings for walks or in the afternoon. Can you introduce me to her?" At this point I witnessed a polite yet dismissive look on her face. She said:

> Well, her husband married into another caste. She comes from a lower caste and their marriage is still frowned upon. God knows if his decision was influenced due to his stay in the city or whether

[116] I discuss other responses by her in chapter four, section four.

> he was this *filmi*. When he knew that he would have to come back and live in the village, then why did he do it? His wife does not mingle with people too much. In some ways, they are socially boycotted here.

The passing mention of *filmi* in this context tempted me to probe further. I asked, "Where did *filmi* come in all of this?", to which she responded:

> *Aur nahi toh kya* [What is this if not this….] This is what films are showing these days. As if you can get married to anyone without even thinking about your parents or society. No film shows people inquiring about each other's castes [*jaat-paat*] before marriage. Even today knowing about all of these things, such as caste, family, are important before marriage.

Two things were evident by my host's responses: (i) Caste was still an important criterion for marital alliances, and (ii) in her view, Hindi film's love stories did not seem to have 'real-life' considerations such as caste and parental consent. Getting married in another caste automatically made one an outcaste (Chaudhry, 2016:33-42). Such people were considered to be worthy of punishment. Some men and women who migrated to cities and have been living there for generations still experience feelings of nostalgia for their ancestral villages, which they consider as the root of their cultural values.[117] Therefore, the village as a social unit becomes much more significant for researchers as the preserver of traditions and indigenous Indian cultural thinking. I inferred from interactions with my participants that Hindi films were seen to encourage young men and women to take a stand against their parents, thus becoming 'unreasonable' [*dheet*] and rebellious. Rebelling to get married was not the only act that would lead someone to be socially boycotted.

My interlocutors who were more middle-class in the village indicated that certain professionals such as writers, performing artists and painters, commanded less social recognition and respect as compared to government employees, engineers, doctors, businessmen (including shopkeepers), real-estate contractors, computer-professionals

[117] The cultural role of village in nation building has been discussed in scholarly as well non-academic writings. For a discussion on role of the 'folk' in Indian nation building, see (Kumar, 2012:62); for a discussion on rural nostalgia as a coping strategy for migration (from Bihar, India), see 'Culture and Emotional Economy of Migration' (Narayan, 2017). Although Narayan's point of reference is also Bihar migration to Suriname and other countries, the village as comprising the cultural heritage of India is a common notion I have grown up with. My parents migrated from villages in Uttar Pradesh and it is in common conversation that I derived this longing for the time spent in the village.

and teachers. My own experience with families with young males seeking employment confirmed this. Owing to the economic conditions of families in the village, professional ambitions were only encouraged when they focused on conventional occupations such as engineering, medicine, teaching, law, the civil service and so on. As the husband one of my hosts remarked, if a secondary school mathematics teacher decided to build a career in theatre, this would be deemed a deliberate attempt to deprive one's family of social prestige and financial stability. People who knowingly made their family go through this 'ordeal' to chase 'castles in the air' [*hawai-mahal*] were socially boycotted (*bahishkrit*). The fear of losing long-standing traditions and cultural values fuelled the need to preserve them strongly. This was where *filmi* people, with their 'oft-confused' and 'unrealistic/impractical' ideas *(nasamajh* or *phoohad),* were also looked upon with contempt by the older members of the village community, both males and females. Therefore, it came as no surprise that some of my participants also used *filmi* to refer to someone devoid of moral values, as I discuss in the next section.

5.5.9 *Filmi* as devoid of morals and cultural values

There was a strong moral panic regarding women's access to film, and more broadly media, in the village among most of the older community members (men and women) as well as men (of all ages), as I observed. There were several reasons for this, which primarily stemmed from patriarchal beliefs that were constantly reproduced in this setting.[118] Sunita (42), the beautician in Narwal, was preparing to get her daughter (18) married next year (2017). Sunita was up to date with the recent trends in film fashion as she "*had* to know what is going on in the field of fashion and makeup". However, she specifically said that she was not essentially a huge fan of Hindi films. She remarked that there were people who were so *filmi* that they forget their *sanskaar.*[119] While talking about marrying for love, she said:

> This kind of a *filmi* mentality [*soch*] cannot work in a place like this, my dear. These days, it is difficult to meet someone with their cultural and moral values [*sanskaar*] intact. I will not let my daughter live in this *filmi* way. All of this does not happen in real life, generations are destroyed, families are destroyed due to such thinking.

118 I have addressed this briefly in chapter four and will discuss it at length in the next chapter.

119 Moral values imbibed in one's culture

Despite the moral universe being preserved towards the end of a film (Thomas, 1985), transgressions by the younger generation, especially young women, of the moral code of this village setting were seen as wrong by men and older residents. Despite the films' overall moral focus, most of my older and middle-aged participants could not overlook the *filmi* individual decisions made by protagonists and continued to criticise specific parts of the film's narrative. It was only the strongly family-oriented films like *Baghban* (2003) that restored the faith of my participants in films. It was because the focus of such films was closer to the moral compass of those participants themselves. Due to the strength of the central theme of *Baghban* (unconditional love for parents), the other factors that were outside their own everyday reality did not hinder their attachment to the film. The word *filmi* was used by them to indicate people who did not believe in the values that were thought to have kept the traditional way of living.

Conclusion

My objectives in this chapter have been twofold: to describe village women's relationship to Hindi film consumption as they expressed in their conversations with me, and to arrive at an understanding of how this differs within my participant group. I have collated ethnographic evidence from previous chapters as well as added new observations to explain how my participants relate to the world of films and analysing the connotations of the word *filmi* seems to crystallise that relationship most clearly.

Hindi films hold the imaginations of women in the village by offering them a world of new possibilities. The pleasures of consuming film sometimes translate into transgressive activities, such as watching films at a relative's place when the parents disapprove, listening to film songs on a mobile phone that one is not supposed to have, dreaming of a grand fairy-tale wedding that is beyond the household budget, displaying affection on a social media app which you are not supposed to share publicly, dressing up in a manner that deviates from rural sartorial tastes, and marrying a man from a different caste, thus wreaking havoc. These examples demonstrate various ways in which the women there were negotiating their quotidian reality and trying to gain control over their own lives through the consumption of Hindi films. In the domestic space, in which women's everyday activities were mainly situated, television was the medium that was mostly

watched for entertainment. Despite this, films had a lustre that television lacked. The word f*ilmi* had an emotional charge around it. While television lay within their quotidian world, films were everything that their everyday lives were not.

Filmi signalled everything that resided outside my participants' immediate realm of experience, i.e., the everyday village life. I observed that none of the connotations of the word were particularly positive, which the tone and words that my participants used while talking about it confirmed. The use of *filmi* to describe an avid film consumer, melodramatic, stylish, and romantic, was commonly used by younger as well as some middle-aged participants. On the other hand, its connotation as an exaggerated version of oneself, slacker, unrealistic, rebellious, and devoid of moral/cultural values, was mostly in use by my older and some middle-aged participants. My older participants (above 60) were quick to paint Hindi films as a monolithic entity in the way they discussed them [*filmon mein toh sab aise hi hota hai…*]. In contrast, females below the age of 40 were more appreciative of the diversity that existed within the narratives of Hindi films. They had specific films that they liked for a particular reason, just as I described in the first half of this chapter. I cannot generalise and say that for younger women the connotations of *filmi* could not be negative in Narwal, or for older women *filmi* cannot signify something that is a positive trait. But I make an overall argument that my participants' engagement with Hindi films was a way through which they understood their day-to-day selves as well as the 'other'. Despite having multiple significations, anyone who uses the word need not clarify what it is that he/she precisely means by it. The listener understands the exact connotation that *filmi* carries in that particular conversation, and for me, observing the seamlessness and versatility of this word to discuss day-to-day things in the village was deeply intriguing.

Understanding a Hindi film, which preserved ideas of both the 'everyday' and the 'other', was also central to my contextual understanding of what constituted *filmi* in this village. This was similar to watching a Hindi film itself where it was apparent what was real and what was not, what was within our power and what was unattainable, yet both were essential to create a pleasurable experience.

The next chapter explores the potential advantage films have in advancing the social aims of women and how the everyday negotiations by women in Narwal around media consumption are helping to bring about a change in their lives.

6

“But if he can, why can’t I?”: Restrictions on and negotiations around women’s film consumption

6.1 Introduction

Life in Narwal is slow-paced but hardly devoid of day-to-day struggles for women. The interests of the village community are favoured over those of an individual. Against this background, Hindi films offer my participants a peep into a world that often goes beyond the permissible ways of life for women living here. A victimhood narrative of women’s everyday lives in the village would fail to show the other side of their existence, which is filled with instances of joy, resistance, negotiation, and little victories. At the risk of sounding simplistic, my current understanding of this relationship is one in which the man in the village is akin to the narrator of day-to-day life whose account is validated by the societal norm, while the woman is placed in the position of being like the bard, who tells stories involving different voices at different times for different people, but whose voice is not yet documented in the narrative of everyday life and in the media representations of this. I investigate how my participants’ multimodal long-term Hindi film consumption played a role in producing different, sometimes self-referential, narratives of their everyday lives using film.

The question that I want to answer through this chapter is: Has there been any socially significant change in the village that has been connected to women’s film consumption? In other words, is women’s relationship with Hindi films socially significant at all?

Moreover, in what ways does their film consumption get affected by the society, and in what ways does it affect the society in turn? I will discuss two interactions with my participants in the following two paragraphs. The first one is an example of how my participants' love for films *gets* affected by the prevalent social norms. The second instance will explain how some of the women *question* these norms precisely because of their fondness for films.

As I sat in an empty classroom inside the Industrial Training Institute (ITI Narwal) talking to my 18-year-old participant Anu, she suggested that we move to an adjacent classroom. On being asked for the reason, she said that it was further away from where the boys had just finished attending their class on electrical wire-fitting. Singing in the presence of strange men and, thus, attracting their attention was something she wanted to avoid. She did not mind singing on another day in front of her female classmates and some other young girls from the neighbourhood. It was singing amidst male presence that made her uncomfortable, and she said, "What if they can see my through the window? It does not look good". My conversation with Anu was one of the twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews that I conducted in the final weeks of my field work. At the end of our half-hour interaction, she offered to sing a song for me. This song, from a recent Hindi film *Dhoni* (2016), ran: *Kaun tujhe yun pyaar karega* (Translation: Who will love you as much as I do?).[120] She remembered the lyrics perfectly and used slight hand gestures while singing with closed eyes. When I complimented her on her voice, she said, "*Didi*, I listen to film songs a lot. I listen to them so many times that I learn them by heart. Sometimes my mother tells me to sing. I sang this song on Anku's *Mundan*".[121] Anu shared that she never thought of professional singing despite people suggesting she do so. She said, "People tell me that if I could get training for singing, I would have been able to sing like those TV people (referring to reality tv talent shows). I love film songs. I see the songs (videos) and listen to them numerous times till I memorise them". Anu's mindfulness about making me change rooms so that no male can 'see' her sing was a manifestation of the social norms of gender segregation in a public place (such as the ITI).

[120] The film was a biographical feature on Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni, released in September 2016

[121] *Mundan* ceremony is a Hindi ritual practiced in North India wherein the head of a child aged 3 or 4 years is shaved. This is done in the hope that the child will have thicker and healthier hair in the future. This is celebrated in the households of Narwal as a family event with music and dance to celebrate the child.

Like Anu, Kanchan (18) was also immensely talented. I mentioned her in chapter three in the context of her brother's refusal to buy a smartphone for her.[122] Her mother shared, "Kanchan does embroidery, gets inspired for new designs from here and there", to which Kanchan added:

> There are a few designs which girls from the ITI give me; they get these from their teachers in their (stitching) class. But if I have to make a new design then I can easily find ideas in films [*filmon mein dikh jaati hai*]. In *Devdas* (2002), the Bengali sarees were shown to have lovely [*pyaare*] blouses.

Kanchan was a soft-spoken girl with creative interests. She showed me a long shirt that she had stitched for which the creative input came from actress Alia Bhatt, and said, "These days heroines are wearing loose-loose [*dheeli-dheeli*] long shirts". After some time, when we had a conversation in which her brother (then present) shared his concern over her potential usage of the internet – and subsequently its corrupting influence – her mother politely told Kanchan, "Let it go, he's your brother". To this, Kanchan's instant response, "Mother, he has two (smartphones) himself. If he can, why can't I?". The moment she posed this question to her mother, I noted an instance of questioning the status quo, even if it was meant to be rhetorical. Her mother did not respond, and Kanchan did not take it up any further. Her protest had been registered.

Kanchan and Anu's examples are very specific instances of two 18-year-olds, demonstrating two different points, as I mentioned before. There were more such instances across age-groups in different ways which I discuss in this chapter. These seemingly insignificant instances of answering back and questioning the status quo become crucial when we understand them in the context of the prevalent social setting. Susan Wadley's work on residents of Karimpur village (1994) partly resonated with my own experience in 2016 and made these instances of non-conformation remarkable. She noted:

> Within the family, sons are challenging parental authority, whereas women's demands for equality are muted. Women are neither asking to govern nor declaring the family an irrelevant institution. But as disorder increases, gender control becomes the focus of greater attention. Control of women becomes the symbolic focus of male control and control in the community. Yet this inward turning to control within the family is itself challenged by women's education and demands to ease purdah restrictions.

[122] See chapter three, section four for the whole conversation. I discuss this interaction again in the sections below

(1994:5)

Although I did not witness any community-wide, organised resistance by women during my field visit, there were instances of resistance at both individual and household level. These instances were not only questioning the gender norms by comparing women's status with men's, but also seeking to distinguish themselves in the social space of the village. For instance, Durga Devi (69) used plastic bags with an image of Shah Rukh Khan to distinguish the clothes she sold. In order to advance her economic aims, she made use of a distinct (filmic) image which marked her out from other tailors in the village. The upward social mobility that she felt she achieved through that small act substantiates the rationale of this chapter, i.e., to sketch the ongoing reorganisation of gender power relations in Narwal.

At the start of my analysis, I broadly wanted to understand how film consumption as a cultural activity was influencing other socially significant processes. In order to understand the changes that this village was going through – social, cultural, especially gender-specific – Pierre Bourdieu's conception of *field* proved immensely useful (Bourdieu, 1984b). Bourdieu noted that a field is a space in which a game takes place, a field of relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake (Bourdieu, 1984b). An agent in such a field may be assumed to be seeking maximum power within it. The aim is to "*rule* the field, to become the instance which has the power to confer or withdraw *legitimacy* from other participants in the game" (Moi, 1991:1021). Bourdieu's conception of *field* was especially useful in making sense of my ethnographic data and using it to identify the structures of power in my participants' everyday life. It is through my engagement with this conception that I started to look at my participants' actions and non-actions as responses to the factors that governed their lives, and specifically their film consumption. His sociological work on domination explained why the power structures existed, what kept them the way they were, and which processes led to their rearrangement. This led me to briefly engage with his conception of *habitus*, which Bourdieu defined as a system of dispositions adjusted to the game of the field (1984b; also see Moi, 1991:1021). He specified that:

> Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and

> structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these.
>
> (Bourdieu 1984a: 170)

However, while engaging with Bourdieu's field theory was useful in recognising and identifying the power structures in the village affecting my participants, it did not help me identify the *agents* in the field. Bourdieu conceived that these agents aim to dominate in the field, and I could not see the struggle to dominate. This does not mean the village was not a site of struggle, it just meant that my participants did not aim to dominate other powerful agents in the field namely men and older community members. Women here were certainly questioning, negotiating, and in some ways resisting the constraints imposed on their film consumption practices, and this is what I explain through this chapter. My observations and interpretations pointed to how these acts were forms of everyday resistance, and I discuss that in the last section of this chapter. As Vinthagen and Johansson remind us, "Everyday resistance is a practice (neither a certain consciousness, intent, recognition, nor an outcome)" (2013:1).

I also particularly explored the notion of 'cultural field' as conceived by Bourdieu (see 1984 and 1993) to understand the core of my study – film practices of my participants in the village. I was hoping to theorise the way the film content is created, distributed, and consumed by my participants in the village. Bourdieu's 'cultural field' situates artistic works – such as film, artwork, novels, and so on – within the social conditions of their production, circulation, and consumption (Bourdieu, 1984 and 1993). Through this, Bourdieu wanted us to understand the field as a sociological whole where 'activities' of production, distribution, and consumption take place within 'structures of power'. However, in my study, I look only at the context of consumption of film by women in a village. My data on the creation of film content (such as videos on film-based mobile apps), the distribution (through computer shops, online downloads), and the consumption (film-content consumed in different forms), was not sufficient to identify a cultural field in Bourdieu's sense of the term. This was because the 'artistic form' in question was Hindi film content, which was not wholly *produced* in the village. It was beyond the scope of my study to see how the consumption practices of film by these women are affecting the creative processes of actual Hindi film production, which would be essential in order to outline the 'cultural field' of Hindi film in this village. The concept of *habitus*,

too, can only be theoretically understood as existing within a field. I draw on this notion, however, to explain how the constraints on women's media consumption are maintained, and how any rearrangement in this power structure is met with resistance from men and older family members. Hence, at this point, although the field theory offers a useful conceptual framework to understand the cultural production process as a whole, I had to disengage with this theoretical apparatus due to the scope of my study.

The aim of this chapter is to explain the ways in which (i) women are constrained in their use of media, and more specifically, Hindi film, and (ii) how they are questioning, negotiating or resisting the existing gender power structures due to their engagement with film forms. I also describe the role of men in facilitating this change in several ways, sometimes by just *looking away*. The chapter argues that women's relationship with Hindi films is more than just an 'enjoyable deviation'; it can be used to socially distinguish themselves, question the power structures, pursue their unfulfilled desires, and in some cases, restructure the existing gender relations, thus driving a moment – a long moment – of change.

6.2 The status quo: Concerns regarding women's media use

There was a minor incident while screening the film *Pink* (2012) at the ITI in Narwal that would set the tone for a discussion on concerns regarding women's film (and media) use in the village.[123] About thirty minutes into the film screening, a young man probably in his mid 20s barged into the classroom where the screening was held. Our classroom was not bolted from inside, as I was not expecting any interruption having sought permission from the head of the institute. I immediately sensed the unease that gripped several of my audience members who were all women. Several females who were sitting in a relaxed position on the desks, with their faces resting on their palms, instantly sat upright. The young man came in and parked himself on one of the tables near the room window. He crossed his arms, looked at the screen and narrowed his eyes to have a clear look at the paused feature-film and said without looking at me, "*Humein kyun nahi bulaya gaya bhyi? Hum bhi dekhein sab kya dekh rahe hain* (meaning: Why have we (or I) not been invited to this? I also want to watch what everyone is watching)". The authoritative tone

[123] See section on methodology in chapter one for more discussion on the film screening at the ITI

of his statement further fed into the unease of the women. I told him, “If it were meant for you, you would have been certainly invited. I have permission from your principal”. When he did not budge, I said, “We have very little time today and I need to finish my discussion (with the women). Could you please wait for some time and we can talk later?” He still did not leave. This time, he looked at me. Nobody else spoke to him except me, not even the two women instructors who were present. He said, “If it is being held here (at the campus), I want to know about it. You are the one who has come from outside”. I asked him to take it up with the principal and encouraged everyone to leave the room since the man was making it difficult for my participants to watch the film. It is at that moment that he left. As soon as he left, I could sense the disquiet and a reduced interest in watching the film. After he left, two of my participants explained to me that he teaches on one of the other courses for electricians and wire-fitters at the same institute. I wondered if it was his sincere concern as a teacher that made him do this. However, a conversation with the principal later on revealed that the man already knew about the screening and the principal had explained it to the whole staff so as to avoid any disruptions during the screening. The young man’s attempt to disrupt the screening was, therefore, deliberate. Such a scenario would be unimaginable if the situation were reversed in that setting, i.e., if there was a room full of men watching a film in the village, a woman could not simply walk in knowingly. If she did, she would be met with glares, shouts, and unwelcoming comments. This dynamic between the social behaviour of men and women was confirmed by one of my hosts (52) when I told her about the incident. She was not surprised at all, and told me:

> *Beta*, if four (several) men in the village are talking to each other, how can the girls go and just start talking amidst them? God knows what they might be watching.

The privacy of the menfolk was not an easy territory to invade, unlike women’s. In his paper on the (limited) effect of cultural globalisation in India in the early 2000s, Steve Derné pointed out that “the effects of cultural changes in media on non-elite men have been limited because the institutional arrangements these men live with and the institutional constraints that they face have changed little in recent years” (2005:34). My own experience in the field and otherwise was in alignment with Derné’s above assessment. His argument also confirmed Ann Swidler’s explanation that cultural “consistencies across individuals come less from common inculcation by cultural

authorities than from the common dilemmas institutional life poses in a given society. Not shared indoctrination but shared life-structuring institutions create the basis for a common culture" (2001:176). By institutional arrangements, Derné referred to an existing social order that existed in the form of joint family setups, arranged marriage, and established gender relations. As discussed in my earlier chapter reviewing the literature, his study was on men living in Dehradun (a town in North India). Earlier scholarly accounts of women in joint-family setups (Kakar, 1981; Obeyesekere, 1984), living within the confines of a caste system (Douglas, 1966:124-125; Ganesh, 1989) were still relevant as of 2017.[124] My (limited) data on men's attitudes towards women's film consumption found resonance with the accounts of the same in Derné's study (2005). My interactions with men and detailed ones with women about men's role in their film consumption gave me an indication of the rules that govern women's film consumption. Below, an excerpt from Derné's (2005) article explains this:

> Some men seem to enjoy their exclusive use of cinema-hall public spaces, while emphasizing how this contrasts with women's home-based lives. Tahsin, a married 25-year-old, describes his compelling attraction (*chaska*) to Hindi film as so strong that he sees at least two movies a week, but he proudly relates that his wife is so "home loving (*gharelu*) that she even objects to seeing movies with her own husband." For Tahsin, the cinema hall is a place that men enjoy, while women should remain at home. Tahsin doesn't watch television at home much. "It's for women and children," he says.
>
> (2005:38)

Derné's ethnographic data gave various examples of men's attitude of towards women's film consumption. Although the men he interviewed were from a city, unlike Narwal, the attitude of these men was close to those I observed in Narwal. Films were for men and television dramas were for women.

Hailing from urban North India myself, I observed fundamental differences between the film consumption patterns of women in urban and rural society in north India. The examples with which I began this chapter, Anu and Kanchan's, show the attitudes of men who act as gatekeepers of media, especially of films, for women. My observations indicated that such exclusion of women from the media and communication discourse is

[124] My own experience confirms this. For a detailed discussion on marriages being arranged within the caste, see (Chaudhry, 2016:42)

a preemptive tactic employed by men in their broader struggle for control over women's lives.

Like women in most of rural North India, the majority of women in Narwal are financially dependent on men, discouraged from working full-time outside their homes, and expected to cater to household needs with unquestioning devotion. As Rehana's mother pointed out:

> I keep explaining this to both of them (my daughters), that once you get married, then you can do what your heart tells you. You can roam around with your husband, can go wherever you want, can do whatever you want to do. Then you will know better, and your husband (can decide). But the reality of life is, *bitti* [darling daughter], once you get married, then it is all about mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, children…Then whatever your in-laws want, you will have to live accordingly. They will think that whatever roaming-around you had to do, you must/should have already done that in your childhood before marriage. Then (post-marriage) it will be time to look after the household, there are hundreds of tasks every day. Life is not about having fun [*Mauj masti zindagi thodi na hai*].

Rehana's mother summed up the general idea about women's way of living in this part of India. This greatly affected their media consumption practices too.

This also reminds me of Patricia and Roger Jeffery's account of women's everyday lives in another village in Uttar Pradesh (1996). Here is how they outlined the lives of women before and after their marriage:

> Throughout a girl's childhood, her parents would prepare her for her inevitable marriage, for she was "someone else's property" [*paraya dhan*], a temporary resident in her parents' house and destined to live elsewhere. Their love for her would be reflected in their concern that her upbringing ensured that she was sufficiently tamed and domesticated to become an acceptable bride and one who would fit in with her in-laws' ways…[..]…Her activities would be monitored in an attempt to ensure that she had no sexual liaison before her marriage.
>
> (1996:6)

Transgressive habits or desires of the daughters ought to have been monitored by the parents lest the in-laws pin the blame on the girl's natal kin for her culturally corrupt conduct. An avid film consumer would not make for an ideal daughter-in-law, and my observations, particularly the significations of *filmi*, confirmed this. Keeping this in mind, I will now focus on specific attitudes and concerns of the village residents towards women's film consumption as well as their media use in general.

6.2.1 Safety concerns around women's media use

Mansi, an 18-year-old student, shared her experience about her brother's filmgoing adventures:

> My brother goes…to Kanpur and all where all the new movies are being screened…something like once in two weeks…The city is too chaotic [*bahut bheed-bhaad*] …my parents are afraid of sending me there because it is not safe [*surakshit*] for girls.

The concern for safety of women is a valid one here as the city is far away. Hence, even when the young men of the family visit the cities for occupational and recreational purposes, women stay back in the village. I observed that, in the cases where young women did travel outside Narwal, going there for the purpose of watching a film is not acceptable. I remember the reaction of the wife (52) of a host when I asked her if she would accompany me to Kanpur to watch a film. She looked at me amazed and amused, and said, "*Sheher? Film dekhne? Akele*?" (meaning: City? To watch a film? Alone?). This was considered an urban activity that was still outside the norm in the village, as I explained in the previous chapters.

Sneha, a 22-year-old schoolteacher, told me:

> *Didi*, I do not use my real photograph in WhatsApp anyway. I usually check WhatsApp on my father's or brother's phone. They also feel that unknown boys might call and annoy (harass) me [*pareshaan karenge*]

There were very few women in Narwal (between the ages of 18-24) who uploaded their actual photographs publicly as their profile pictures on WhatsApp messenger. It was not deemed acceptable to put themselves (in this case, their actual photographs) 'on display' publicly. The impermissibility of public display of their real photograph was characteristic of women's usage of social media in this setting. It was considered to be borderline promiscuous behaviour, as though she was asking for attention and therefore, for trouble [*yeh sab karengi, toh aur kya hoga*].

6.2.2 Rules guiding women's media use within households

Women were expected to live within the understood norms even when it came to engagement with films and other media within the household. Shivani, a 46-year-old tailor, said:

> It is almost impossible [*naa ke barabar*] for me to watch television in my house. There are so many people in the house, how will I (watch)? My son watches it during the day and my husband in the evening/night. Rest…the (older) members do not like it if I watch TV with my husband. Immediately their eyebrows are raised [*bhauyein tan jaati hain*] …It does not look good in front of the elders, no?

The older men and women in the family set the domestic guidelines for women younger than them, who may be daughters, daughters-in-law, wives, sisters, and sisters-in-law.[125] In terms of these younger women's film consumption, it was either limited or dependent on men and children (mostly sons, sometimes daughters). Even within a household where there were as many or more women than men, television was not a 'personal' medium for them unless they were at home alone. Swati, a 20-year-old college student, shared:

> I enjoy dancing to film songs, but I do it when no one is around to see me at home. If my father came to know about it, he would be furious that I am wasting time on useless [bekaar] activities.

A commonly understood premise by the community was that media devices and entertainment content were a waste of time (*samay ki barbaadi*) for women and had a corrupting influence on them engaging them in a world that they were not encouraged to pursue. I observed several people, mostly men and old women (above 60), dismissing the use of media as an 'undesirable activity' (*anishtha*) for women belonging to a 'reputable household' (*achhe ghar ki*), such as in the case of the brother who was unwilling to buy a smartphone for his sister citing safety and moral concerns [*ulti-seedhi baat badhegi*].

For some women, using or even seeing a computer was a rare occasion due to poor financial conditions of their household. A male child or adult belonging to a poor household would not necessarily be deprived of this privilege, as they would gain access to computers through friends or other sources. In the case of Radha (42), her husband described her as a woman belonging to an extremely poor household in another

[125] 'Older women' refers to mothers, mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law

downtrodden village before she married him. To me, his tone seemed disparaging. He said:

> (You) just understand…the place where she comes from does not even have a post-office. Only after coming here has she seen the world. Before she got married (to me), she had not even seen a computer. Imagine, there was nothing in her village [*kuchho nahi tha inke gaon mein*]. *Bitti*, I have heard that you have come to do research here? Take her interview too… [Then he turned towards his wife and spoke] …Tell her everything truthfully. Whatever she asks, answer it [*Jo puchein uska jawaab dena*].

Radha's husband described her lack of access to a computer as something she was deprived of *before* her marriage to him. His tone suggested that he was aiming to appease me rather than talking about an aspect of his wife's life. Radha was silent and looked at him, and then down. He continued, "I have work, you can talk to her. Whatever you ask her, she will answer (respond to) everything". The dynamics of their relationship, in that moment, prompted me to wonder whether he had already spoken to Radha about me, since he knew I was conducting research in Narwal. He reiterated the word *ghareeb* (poor) several times in relation to Radha and hinted at her less privileged background as her qualification to be a 'subject' of my research. Shortly after, he left for work and Radha did not refer to his comments about her to me in our subsequent conversation. Men, in their limited conversations with me about the women in Narwal, often opined that women in their households 'just sit idle all day and watch TV'. Radha's husband said the same to me in another conversation I had with him on another day. Some men (among my hosts and interlocutors) indicated that it is in women's interests that they do not watch 'too much film and television' simply because these days, 'TV and films have frivolous [*faltu/ ulta seedha*] content, and nothing useful [*matlab ka*]'. This attitude has an important bearing on women's access to media – and especially film – as I discuss in the next section. Men used morally loaded arguments to justify their purchase of media gadgets as an investment for the household [*ghar ke hi kaam ayega*]. This inevitably led to a situation where the control of the media technology was in the hands of men, leaving women to be largely dependent on men. This was not just the case in Narwal. For instance, in March 2017, according to an NDTV News report (NDTV.com, 2017), Mandora's Village Council in Uttar Pradesh announced that women seen talking on cell-phones in public would be fined Rupees 21,000 (GBP 245).[126] This subjugation of

[126] Village Mandora is in the same state as Narwal, geographically 585 kms (363 miles) from Narwal

women is institutionalised not only through the support of, but also as an initiative of, the local authorities, as in the case of Mandora village.

For most married women, conversations about their media consumption turned into a detailed narrative of what their husband and children liked to watch/ listen to and how they did that. It was a difficult task for me to keep the discussion focused on the women, and it took me a long time to get them talking about what they like. I sensed that a few of them felt hesitant when I asked questions about film or media, probably due to a fear of being perceived as too *filmi* or because they did not want to be seen to be unaware and backward owing to their restricted and regulated access to media. It might have also been simply because they had never been asked questions about this aspect of their life before. Archana, a 32-year-old married woman pursuing a Diploma in stitching and embroidery at the ITI, shared:

> I get to know about everything through him (husband). He and (my) son tell me which films to watch, which songs to listen to. My son keeps changing my (phone's) ringtone.

I noted that they were more willing to discuss the media habits of husbands, brothers and male children (responses to what is being consumed, who likes to watch what, how men are consuming media and so on), suggesting that men's media consumption is perceived by women to be varied and fashionable trendy, while in the eyes of the men I interacted with, women's engagement remains limited to *phaaltu* (useless) entertainment.

6.2.3 Differential barriers in accessing and using technology

While interactions with my participants helped me to find where to look for concentration of power in terms of media consumption in Narwal, they also revealed some common notions around the use of technology in general. The engagement of my participants with Hindi film was technologically driven in certain ways, such as watching films and listening to film music on laptops or phones and sharing content on smartphones. Therefore, the ownership as well as the use of technology to access media – and especially Hindi films – become relevant in examining the nature of the power structure within which women's film consumption is situated.

A study conducted on ICT use in India found that technology was socially contextualised and gendered, with differential access to and use of ICTs by men and women (Arun, Heeks and Morgan, 2007:297). The study identified this gender dimension of the 'digital divide' and raised concerns that ICTs will be applied in ways that maintain or even exacerbate existing gender inequalities (ibid.; Jorge 2002; Marcelle 2002). I sought to understand this issue in the context of Narwal. The gendered access to and use of technology helped to maintain the status quo in the village, i.e., men were at the forefront of any kind of media consumption. The belief that men are *predisposed* to utilise technology better than women gave them an edge over females in terms of ownership of media technology and regulation of film content. Every participant I interacted with regarding ownership of media technology - such as laptops, smartphones and television sets - believed that their menfolk are more *naturally* capable of engaging with media owing to a need to be 'aware' or just for unwinding after a hard day at work.

With competitive distribution and lower broadcasting costs, combined with easy access to personal and mass media, media and entertainment are being consumed at an unprecedented rate in rural India today.[127] My study also found that the digital revolution has not trickled down to these village-dwelling women, who are still marginalised in terms of technology ownership due to the reasons explained above. In all the households I visited, only the men of the family owned the latest portable media devices and electronic gadgets. This observation reminded me of Scott's argument that the "process of subordination firmly anchored in material practice" (1990:188). However, ownership is not the only barrier for females. Women who do own mobile phones use either old phone models or the discarded smartphones of the men in their household. Further, even the low cost of phones is not an incentive for women to purchase them because they do not have the authority to make decisions regarding such purchases within the household. I used Kanchan's example at the start of this chapter and am reproducing a part of that interaction below to discuss the arguments used by her brother. Kanchan, who designed and stitched clothes taking inspirations from film actresses, expressed her desire for a smartphone in a conversation with me and her mother. She wanted to capture and share photographs of her work with her friends and family members. Her elder brother, who

[127] See (Aneja, 2018) for the detailed report

owned two Samsung smartphones himself, immediately interjected and invalidated any need for her to own one. His reasoning was this:

> I myself spend a lot of time on Whatsapp and Facebook. It is very bad for women...[..]…If I buy her a phone, then she will demand an internet connection. I do not want her to waste her time unnecessarily. It is much better this way. What if something untoward [*unch-neech*] happens tomorrow? There are all kinds of people here.

This interaction was similar to other instances where men were apprehensive about the extent and content of media consumption by women, and therefore, labelled the lack of ownership as 'good' and 'safe' for women. A concern for their safety often only existed in the case of their film - or more broadly their media - consumption. For instance, on another day, there was a second conversation between Kanchan's brother and me. He asked, "I am thinking of getting a job in Delhi", to which I responded, "If you go to Delhi, who will take care of your younger sister here?" He said proudly, "These days girls are very smart. Now she has grown up, she handles the whole household on her own". This comment was from a brother who believed his 'younger' sister is grown enough to handle the everyday life in the village and was confident that she would manage things when he was away but felt uncomfortable about buying a smartphone for her. The men's fear for the safety of their women in several cases became an umbrella belief underneath which there were some genuine safety concerns and some that arose due to attitudinal opposition to women's media consumption (and power).

An effort to acquire media technology by females is also deemed unnecessary because of the notion that such an investment will not yield any economic benefit in the case of women. In terms of household investment, laptops in Narwal were increasingly being prioritised instead of television sets as an investment for the future. However, as Binti (19) pointed out:

> Computers only came/ are bought for sons. *Bhaiya* (elder brother) or *chacha* (paternal uncle) know how to use it. Only they (the men) use it. It is important for their work (job).

While a few teenaged girls and young women received computer education in the only institute in Narwal, they did not own that equipment, thereby making it difficult for them

to enhance their knowledge of computers beyond basic functionality.[128] It was not just at the level of the household or training institute that women were not able to engage with technology as much as men. They were also absent as customers at the locally existing 'computer shops' in the village. As described in chapters three and four, these shops had a repository of downloaded film music, video clips, and feature films. It was only men who went outside of the household for the purpose of downloading or buying films and songs on memory sticks that were topped up with the latest content by the shop workers. In my conversation with the young man (~25 years) running the computer shop, he pointed to the absence of female customers in his shop. He shared:

> We (his co-workers at the shop) download content that will be liked by everyone. We keep all the latest popular films…We do not keep different [*alag type ki*] films…I usually ask the boys (here in the village)…they tell me what is the latest and what people want to see…What is the point if no one likes it? All these boys know more than me, what films are releasing, what music videos are popular…I just download what everyone likes.

I asked him, "(What) everyone likes? This is great, brother. Even girls and mothers and everyone?", to which he responded after a brief pause, "Yes". This young man knew that it was mostly men who were his customers and catered to their choices. Some of the men I spoke to confirm his statement about downloading whatever his customers ask him to. The man running the shop believed that if women wanted to watch/ listen to something, they could convey it to their brothers, sons or husbands, and they in turn would then ask him to download the content. He did not see men as barriers or deterrents to women's film consumption. Rather, he saw them as a bridge between the film and its female audience. This was exemplified when he said, "My sister tells me, '*Bhaiya*, I want to watch this film', and I bring (download) it for her. She likes film songs more". This tells us three things, if what he said about his sister was true.[129] First, there were females who actively sought to engage with Hindi films. Second, the fact that men stored and distributed film content had a strong implication for women's film use. Finally, despite the final approval being that of the men (in terms of access and content), women were pushing these boundaries as far as they could in this context, in terms of their film consumption. The question I faced then was this: How did this expansion of women's

[128] There were 20 girls out of 80 students in the entire batch. See chapter three for details about the institute

[129] I had seen brothers and male children sometimes lobbying for women's media use in the family, and hence, I chose to consider this man's statement

boundaries take place? What did this changing dynamic say about the significance of women's film consumption? I address these questions in later sections in this chapter. Before that, I want to draw on my participants' responses about their own film consumption, as discussed in the previous chapter. My conversations with them suggested that the underlying rationale of men about women's film engagement was largely this: If women's participation in film-related activities increases, it may give them 'undesirable' and 'unrealistic' ideas about their roles as women living in a traditional village setting, i.e., lying outside the domain of their everyday reality.

Even if women *did* acquire ownership of the media technology that would enable them to consume their preferred film forms, the cost of maintaining that technology had to be borne by the women themselves. If that hurdle was crossed, then it was the film content that the men objected to. As I understood it, the barriers to women's film use were differential. Television consumption by women within the household was not considered by men in the same way as these women's film-use. The fundamental concern was that women might go beyond the mundanity of the kitchen politics shown in TV soap operas and be exposed to ideas that lay outside the realm of their everyday experience, such as those propagated in Hindi films.[130] Numerous mainstream Hindi films have been criticised for reinforcing gender stereotypes, thus reproducing the same structural arrangements. As discussed at length by Wimal Dissanayake and K.M. Gokulsing two decades ago (1998), the representations of women in popular Hindi cinema were often sketched around these four roles: ideal wife, ideal mother, the vamp, and the courtesan (Dissanayake and Gokulsing, 1998:7). These roles and constructions of women are reflected in numerous popular Hindi films even now. Ramasubramanian and Oliver (2003), in their study on portrayals of sexual violence in popular Hindi films from 1997-99, conducted an exploratory content analysis which suggested that moderate sexual violence is depicted as fun, enjoyable, and a normal expression of romantic love in popular Hindi films, where victims were more likely to be women rather than men, and sexual violence committed by heroes was a common portrayal, particularly moderate violence such as harassment of women with whom the heroes ultimately became romantically involved (Ramasubramanian and Oliver, 2003:1). Both of the aforementioned studies were published some years ago (1998 and 2003) and the Hindi film industry has taken many new directions since then. The non-transgressive

[130] I have compared women's television consumption with their use of Hindi films in the previous chapter

representations of women on screen still exist but this has been challenged by many popular Hindi films. Some of them referred to by my participants were *Chak De! India* (2007), *Kahani* (2012), *English Vinglish* (2012), *Queen* (2013), and *Pink* (2016). These were extremely popular films and most of my participants aged below 40 had watched at least one of them. However, women wanting to watch films like *Pink* (2016) that showed explicit and disturbing images of sexual assault, were discouraged by men from doing so. During the screening of *Pink* that I organised, a young woman (22) said, "My (elder) brother told me not to watch this. He has watched it, so he told me it is not worth watching for me [*hamare dekhne layak nahi hai*]". The reason for my participant's brother discouraging her might have been to protect her from viewing images depicting sexual abuse. I cannot say that with certainty based on her comment. However, my point here concerns the choices women have; access to Hindi films is largely an activity of the privileged gender in the village.

The lack of ownership of media technology was a primary factor affecting how women engage with media, and consequently with Hindi films, but as I mentioned earlier, it was not the only barrier for women. This is an aspect that the NGO and government development programmes on gender and communication may want to explore in greater depth. Research projects by international organisations like BBC Media Action, among others, periodically publish reports about mobile apps for women's health, education and skills and claim that the village women benefit from these.[131] However, in my experience as a field researcher, I did not find a single woman using such a mobile app for this purpose. Any social messaging in such villages is mostly still done through the Indian public broadcaster or through on-the-ground interaction.[132] However, I did find that mobile apps like *Filmora* were being used by women aged 18-25 in order to create their own little films and images, as a form of self-expression.[133] Such acts of transgression made these young women producers of cultural content, thereby challenging the status quo, but an overall examination of the use of film and other mass media suggested that men were at the top of the power hierarchy due to their complete control over ownership

131 For an example, see report - "Design thinking and health communication: learning from failure" (URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/mediaactioninsight/entries/bbf66eff-b109-4f14-8cd9-8473442a7da9).

132 By social messaging I refer to public-service-based television shows and social advertisements.

133 I discuss this at greater length in a later section. This discussion was also initiated in chapters three, four and five.

of media technology. Women's use of film and media was still considered to be an act of transgression in the village.

6.2.4 Women's social position in public spaces within the village

Political content in the media, such as the national news or a discussion of national politics, was still viewed as the domain of men in the village. The men in the village had more ingress into public spaces of political discussion than the women – such as local teashops, banks, local administrative workplaces – thereby often acting as political influencers and opinion leaders for women. This did not mean that women were completely absent in workplaces or public spaces. Parmeswaran (2001) drew on Altorki and Fawzi El-Solh (1988) to describe gender segregation in modern India, which also fits my own observation in Narwal, as a "less stringent bifurcation of social life, whereby women venture into public spaces and participate in numerous male spheres but must nevertheless observe real or decorous distance from men" (Altorki and Fawzi El-Solh, 1988:5 as cited in Parmeswaran, 2001:83). This was precisely the reason why Anu (at the start of this chapter) wanted to ensure appropriate distance from the classroom where boys had gathered to attend a class, before starting an intimate conversation with me. Greater access to discussions on socio-political and economic affairs of everyday life consequently gave men the upper hand over women in everyday decision-making about media consumption, and more specifically film consumption. If even the basic political communication was regulated for women, considering unregulated film consumption by women was a far-fetched possibility. But with changing modalities of film engagement by women, was men's control over this loosening? I observed the status quo as well as transgressions within the village in my research. Largely, the reality of gendered consumption reinforces the fact that access to media – and especially films – in everyday life strengthens the dominant voice in the village (men's) while rendering the other half (women) less visible.

Even when women were present in spaces of political importance in the village, it was not guaranteed to raise women's social position there. To explain this point, I recall my interaction with a woman at the helm of the village's administrative affairs who exercised self-censorship in exerting her political power. The elected village-head of Narwal at the time of my field work was a young woman born and brought up in Kanpur city. She held

an MA degree in Sociology. An in-depth interview with her gave me an insight into the day-to-day working of the local administration through the eyes of a woman holding the most important office in the rural governance. At the time of my meeting, she was living in Kanpur at her parents' house. She was pleasant, intelligent and articulate. In the previous election term, it was her father-in-law who had won an elected seat and was the village head for two terms. This time, the seat was reserved for a female as per the Indian constitutional setup for village-level administration. Hence, it was 'understood' within her family that she would stand for election, and the election campaign was openly backed by the previous village-head, her own father-in-law. Her contestation, and subsequent detachment from village affairs, was not objected to by anyone in Narwal, according to her. She explained how she had only a small role to play in the civil and criminal cases concerning the village:

> Now, will I sit there to resolve the civil and criminal cases of the menfolk? I just sign the papers and papa (father-in-law) handles the rest. He has a lot of experience, and he has been (involved) in the district matters from the start, it will not be difficult for him to do all this.

She also told me that she took interest in the matters raised by women, such as domestic violence and health issues, but she seldom went to the village herself for this. Her husband was in the armed forces and she lived in the city for half the year. Despite being in a position to wield authority, she did not demonstrate any real power or independence in matters of village administration. She added, "Women can come and tell me about the problems they face. But I can only help them so much, and for the rest I convey the issues to my papa (father-in-law) for him to tackle (the issues)". Her situation had an important bearing on my understanding of the gender power relations within the village. Her involvement (or lack thereof) reinforced men's social and political position as being more powerful than that of the women. As a city dweller, her own use of media, however, was varied and not restrictive in terms of access. From watching news and soap operas on television and using WhatsApp messenger on her smartphone without many restrictions, to listening to music on her phone and on television or going out to watch films with her family members, her life was starkly different from her counterparts in the village that she notionally headed.

6.3 A moment of change: Forms of everyday resistance and negotiations

Women's engagement with media, especially Hindi films, can be understood as a microcosm of existing gender relations in Narwal. The trend of women's unequal relation to technology has been observed by many other scholars in the context of other developing countries. As noted by Arun, Heeks and Morgan, "gender relations often determine the use and impact of technologies" (2007:298). In my field work too, I observed that new technologies were driving social change in the existing gender relations in addition to a (gradual) change in the socio-economic condition of women. More female children were being sent to school as compared to ten years ago (as reflected by the records in schools), more young women are attaining higher education than before, acquiring stitching and knitting skills at the ITI, learning to operate computer systems at the local institute, operating WhatsApp on smartphones, teaching children in primary and secondary schools in the village, watching Hindi music videos on YouTube to acquire choreographic skills, and so on. In other words, they are acquiring more social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This is part of a larger process of social and cultural change that is taking place in the way women live their everyday lives in the village. However, this change is gradual, contradictory, and complex in nature.

The gender power structure continues to exert a strong influence on women's Hindi film consumption, but as I noted during my stay in Narwal, there were instances where women of various age groups deviated from their expected behaviour and either negotiated, questioned, or resisted the impositions on their direct/indirect film consumption. The question that emerged from my observations was this: Can we say that gatekeeping of women's film use has slowly started to weaken due to women questioning men's control over their film, or more broadly, media consumption?

Instances of women carrying out such negotiations or deviations were not openly confrontational and generally occurred under constraints. For instance, when Rehana (19) bought a smartphone without her parents' knowledge, she understood that she had broken a norm.[134] She knew she was not supposed to possess that phone and yet she could not resist the pleasure of engaging with her favourite film music videos on YouTube. I

[134] Refer to chapter three, section four, for details of this interaction

noticed her negotiation with the patriarchal norms as she not only hid it from her parents but also from her older brother. Such a strategy can be understood as a 'bargain with patriarchy', a term coined by Turkish sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti (1988). As Kandiyoti explained:

> Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints, which I identify as patriarchal bargains. Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct 'rules of the game' and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.
>
> (Kandiyoti, 1988:1)

Anu (18), whose love for Hindi film songs began this chapter, smiled coyly when I appreciated her singing, but at the same time, she also said:

> I know a lot of songs and I am fond of films [*shauk hai*], but father or my elder brother never take me to Kanpur to watch films. They say I should not waste my time with all this when I should be studying and doing work at home…I have never even asked them to take me.

I understood her love for memorising the latest film songs as both an expression of *resistance* (she was proud of her ability to memorise and sing film songs despite being asked to stay away from 'wasting her time' on films) as well as *acceptance* of the status quo (not being able to watch films in the theatre) at the same time. This was the kind of negotiation or 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti, 1988) that other women also made on an everyday basis to nurture their liking for Hindi films. Even during our conversation that took place outside her home and away from her parents, Anu requested to move to a different room so that the boys could not hear her sing.[135] Such everyday dilemmas, silences, failures, and little victories of women in consuming Hindi films, were pushing, even if slowly, towards an erosion of norms that were once impossible for women to break. I wanted to understand if it was the Hindi film itself that was influencing their negotiations, or the rise of the technology and increased acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that was popularising Hindi film consumption among my participants

[135] As described in this chapter's introduction

in this manner. Maybe it was something completely different, or maybe a combination of the above.[136]

In his noted book *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), James C. Scott argued persuasively in the context of peasants and factory workers in a Malaysian village that resistance is most often rooted in everyday material goals rather than revolutionary consciousness. His attention to detail in his conception of resistance was useful in analysing the responses of my participants who shared instances of their transgressive behaviour by narrating stories of their everyday lives. Scott (1985) also warned against overestimating what everyday resistance is capable of and advocated recognising the complex lives most people lead (also see Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996). Therefore, discerning what is resistance and what is not was no easy analytical task. In their study on the everyday lives of women in a North Indian village, Jeffery and Jeffery argued:

> Typically, such (everyday) forms of resistance are spontaneous and individual rather than highly organised social rebellions. They are generally mundane rather than spectacular challenges to the status quo, avoiding open confrontation rather than being revolutionary. They often entail subterfuge and secrecy. They might seem devious and underhand to the powers that be. They are also likely to be rather elusive for the transient researcher. Incontrovertibly, however, this is important material to document, for portraying subordinates simply as passive and obedient can provide only a seriously lopsided account of social order.
>
> (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996:15)

In the following sections of this chapter, I cite instances which, I felt, disrupted the status quo of women's film engagement and in some way, fit the narrative of everyday resistance as theorised by Scott (1985). Here, I do not claim to be sketching a grand narrative of a social or cultural overhaul in the village, but I put together instances that indicate conflict and negotiation by my participants. My analysis is inflected by incidents that revealed my participants' own prejudices about other women within the village, and outside of it, including the actresses depicted in Hindi films. Hence, even the instances that I describe, of questioning the status quo, carry within themselves certain contradictions that challenge the image of a neatly characterised social change.

[136] I recognise that there were personality and age differences within my participants' group, apart from their socio-economic positions within the village. However, the popularity of Hindi films among the women in this village exhibited some common influences on my participants and what I am presenting in my thesis is a study of film consumption as a broad social trend of women's film habits.

6.3.1 Negotiation through the use of multiple modes of film engagement

As we have seen, the advent of technology has weakened the patriarchal control over women's lives to some extent, as the use of multifarious modes of film engagement has catalysed the instances where women feel they can break the norms of their film consumption. Women in the village are now closely in touch with Hindi film culture, which was earlier dominated by men. Even if women cannot visit the city to watch films or view them with their husbands on television in joint family settings, they engage with films in different ways that cannot be completely controlled by men. This happens due to the 'textually disintegrated' (Allen, 2011) nature of film consumption.[137] In particular, there was little viewership of films in Achala's (19) case, as she watched only two or three full-length feature films a year on television. But she fostered her film-use through other modes simultaneously. She knew the names of almost all the contemporary Hindi film actors, actresses and the latest box-office hits of Bollywood. She enjoyed listening to film music on her phone's radio and brought up the names of several films that she either read about in newspapers or heard songs of in recent times. She combined the (i) content (music, film related interviews) on radio with (ii) her reading of film-related sections in newspapers and (iii) recommendations of songs from friends, constituting her knowledge of a particular film. Combining multiple forms of consumption, Achala shared:

> Whenever a new song plays on the radio, I memorise/remember the name of the song and the film if it is mentioned (on the radio) … If the song is new, then the newspapers must be having something (information) about the new film it is from – where it is playing, and who the hero is. The whole story (plotline) of a film can be read about in the newspapers, including the cinema hall where it is playing, so neither is there any pressing need for me to watch the films nor have I the time.

The examples cited above led me to question the role of technology in enabling women to challenge the rules that govern their media usage. To explain how useful this multimodal consumption is for my participants, I draw on Bakshi and Sarkar's observation about their rural and semi-urban participants:

[137] See chapter three for a discussion on various modes of consumption of Hindi films by women, where I also discuss Allen's (2011) 'textually disintegrated' phenomenon of media consumption

> They also observed that this incessant promotion and word-of-mouth communication often made them visit the YouTube channel of that particular movie. As for the older respondents, none of them were into buying recent releases but the old classics were collector's items for them. The new releases are collected in their laptops, or mobile devices through sharing. Even people without Internet access were not buying [conventional CD-DVD style of] music.
>
> (2015:148)

This observation indicates that even within the consumption of one mode of film (its music), there were differentiations such as consuming music online, on mobile phones, laptops, and so on. Therefore, using different modes of film consumption meant a much more complex film consumption. This was useful for my participants of all age groups. However, a technologically deterministic approach provides an incomplete account of their film and other media consumption. The social constraints as described in the previous section ensured that the ownership of technology itself was restricted for women. I do not wish to exaggerate the role played by technology, but I want to point out that once my participants decided to do so, the technology enabled them to a large extent.

6.3.2 Away from the watchful eyes: Consuming film through print medium

Women's engagement with Hindi newspapers, their supplements and magazines, has not so far been the object of scholarly discussion on private media consumption in non-urban social spaces. The supplements of national newspapers in India are localised and mostly styled and fashioned as tabloids. They not only carry film reviews, plot summaries, celebrity news, interviews, features, upcoming film information, film-fashion reviews and gossip, but also show timings for film releases. The newspapers and their supplements in Narwal are mostly in Hindi. The most widely circulated ones are *Hindustan*, *Dainik Jagran*, and *Amar Ujala*. These carry localised content at the city level and Kanpur papers are circulated in nearby villages like Narwal. Since they are primarily aimed at readers in Kanpur, the papers publish show timings of the latest Bollywood as well as Hollywood films running in cinema halls there.

Hindustan newspaper's popular weekly supplement is named 'Movie Magic'. Here are a few samples of its front pages and a feature article in this supplement that provides glimpses of its content:

Figure 6.1 Front page of 'Movie Magic' newspaper supplement - 01 (©Hindustan Times Media Group, source: htmedia.in)

Figure 6.2 Front page of 'Movie Magic' newspaper supplement - 02 (©Hindustan Times Media Group, source: htmedia.in)

रंग-तरंग

हिन्दुस्तान • मूवी मैजिक • रविवार • 24 मई 2015 • 02

हॉट सीट >>

माधुरी की जगह अब मीनाक्षी

कुंदन शाह अपनी आने वाली फिल्म 'पी से पीएम तक' के लीड रोल में माधुरी दीक्षित को लेना चाहते थे, मगर मुख्य किरदार करने का होने की वजह से माधुरी ने यह फिल्म करने से इंकार कर दिया। तब कुंदन शाह ने इस भूमिका के लिए मीनाक्षी दीक्षित को चुना। मूल रूप से लखनऊ की रहने वाली मीनाक्षी की हिंदी में भले ही ये पहली फिल्म हो, पर वह दक्षिण भारत की स्टार हैं। उन्होंने 2009 में तेलुगू फिल्म 'लाइफ स्टाइल' से अपने अभिनय करियर की शुरुआत की थी।

अभिनय का सिलसिला कैसे शुरू हुआ?

अभिनय की तरफ मुड़ने के लिए मुझे सतीश खान जी ने इंस्पायर किया। अभिनय को करियर बनाने की बात वैसे अंदर उन्होंने ही भरी। उन्होंने ही मुझसे कहा कि मैं एक अच्छी डांसर होने के साथ ही खूबसूरत हूं, इसलिए मुझे अभिनेत्री बनना चाहिए। जिस हद तक मैं 'जब तक है जान' को लेकर क्रेजी हूं। बड़ी तो थी, उन्हीं के साथ से मेरे पास टीवी सीरियल व फिल्मों के प्रस्ताव आने लगे थे। इस सीरियल की वजह से तेलुगू फिल्म 'लाइफ स्टाइल' का ऑफर आया। सतीश जी ने सलाह दी कि मुझे इस प्रस्ताव को स्वीकार कर लेना चाहिए। मैंने अपने दिल की बात सुनते हुए यह ऑफर स्वीकार कर लिया। अब कुंदन शाह निर्देशित हिंदी फिल्म 'पी से पीएम तक' में मुख्य भूमिका निभा रही हूं।

सुना है कि पहले यह फिल्म माधुरी दीक्षित करने वाली थीं?

आपने एक दम सही सुना है। पर सच यह भी है कि एक दिन मुझे पता चला कि एक हिंदी फिल्म के लिए ऑडिशन हो रहे हैं तो मैंने भी ऑडिशन दे दिया। जिस वक्त मैंने ऑडिशन दिया था, उस वक्त मुझे नहीं पता था कि इस फिल्म को कुंदन शाह निर्देशित करेंगे। ऑडिशन देने के बाद मुझे पता चला कि इस फिल्म में एक बड़ी डेवेलपमेंट को लेने पर विचार किया जा रहा है। कुंदन शाह की पहली पसंद माधुरी दीक्षित थीं। मैं इस ऑडिशन की बात भूल गयी थी। फिर एक दिन मुझे संदेश मिला कि कुंदन शाह मुझसे मिलना चाहते हैं। मैं उनसे मिली। उन्होंने लंबी बातचीत की, फिर अपने अंदाज में तीन-चार बार मेरा ऑडिशन लिया।

इस फिल्म में आपका क्या किरदार है?

इसे आप तेज कुंदन शाह स्टाइल की फिल्म कह सकते हैं। यह अवतार प्रयोगात्मक फिल्मों ही बनाते रहे हैं। वह अपनी हर फिल्म में हास्य के साथ कुछ न कुछ कहने की कोशिश करते हैं। वह फिल्म कलयुगी बाप की एक रोचक के कुख्यात बेटी बनने और प्रधानमंत्री पद की सशक्त दावेदार के रूप में उभरने की बात है। इसमें मैंने कलयुगी का किरदार निभाया है। ज्यादातर अभिनेत्रियां इस तरह के किरदार निभाने से परहेज करती हैं, माधुरी ने भी इंकार कर दिया, अब कैसे तैयार हो गयीं?

माधुरी दीक्षित जी मुझसे बहुत ज्यादा सीनियर अदाकारा हैं। उनके साथ मेरी कोई तुलना हो ही नहीं सकती। पर इस तरह का किरदार देखते हुए इस खेल में आगे बढ़ गये हैं, उसके चलते मुझे लगता था कि किसी भी किरदार को निभाने में कोई संकोच नहीं। अब चरित्र निभाना भी अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर का हो गया है, इसलिए कलयुगी भी मेरा के लिए एक चैलेंज था।

फिल्म का जैसा विषय है, उस हिसाब से तो इसमें काफी एक्सपोजर भी होगा?

बिल्कुल नहीं। इस फिल्म की स्क्रिप्ट-वर्सन बोल्ड है, पर इसमें कहीं भी अंगप्रदर्शन नहीं है। यथार्थवादी तरीके से बनायी गयी फिल्म है यह। यह मुद्दों पर आधारित व्यावसायिक फिल्म है और इसमें अश्लीलता नहीं है। कुंदन शाह ने इस फिल्म को बहुत ही क्लासिक अंदाज में बनाया है।

आप किस तरह के बोल्ड सीन देना चाहेंगी?

इसके लिए मैंने कोई स्थान नहीं सोचा है। सिचुएशन हो इस बारे में कुछ सोचा नहीं है। हां, कॉन्टेन्ट से जबरन दूर नहीं। जो चीज खूबसूरत दिखे, उसे करने से हिचक नहीं होगी।

अब किस तरह के किरदार निभाने की इच्छा है?

मैं लिटरली में संतुलन बना कर चलना चाहूंगी। मैंने जिस तरह की फिल्म से ब्रेकथ्रू किया है, उस तरह की सशक्त किरदार वाली फिल्में भी करना चाहूंगी।

सुना है, आपके माता-पिता नहीं चाहते थे कि आप फिल्म इंडस्ट्री से जुड़ें?

मेरे माता-पिता ने बहुत सहयोग-प्यार से मेरे व्यक्तित्व को ढाला है। इसी के चलते उन्हें डर था कि उनकी बेटी बुंदों या चेन्नई जैसे शहर में अकेली किस तरह से काम कर पायेगी? आज मेरे पिता इस बात को लेकर खुश हैं कि मैं अपनी जिंदगी में जो करना चाहती थी, उसे करते हुए खुश हूं।

कोई दूसरी फिल्म?

इस साल मेरी तीन फिल्में रिलीज होने वाली हैं। तीनों फिल्में दक्षिण भारत की हैं। जहां तक हिंदी का सवाल है तो दो फिल्में और साइन की हैं, पर उनके बारे में अभी से बात करना ठीक नहीं होगा। मैं एक फिल्म संजय पूरण सिंह चौहान के साथ भी कर रही हूं। कुछ और फिल्मों के भी ऑफर हैं।

स्वतन्त्रलक्ष्य तिवारी

Figure 6.3 Third page of 'Movie Magic' newspaper supplement (©Hindustan Times Media Group, source: htmedia.in)

Supplements (both daily and weekly) carrying extensive coverage of the Hindi film industry are a common feature in all the national newspapers that are circulated in Narwal. I noted that while reading film-related material in these supplements, women did not attract a lot of attention from men as compared to them using mobile phones, television or laptops. This is because men no longer consider newspapers and radio to be transgressions from the everyday culture. Digital technology is now the corrupting [*bhrasht*] influence. I noted several women flipping through newspapers, especially the colourful supplements, in their homes during the afternoons, which led me to think that reading newspapers and magazines is certainly not regulated in the strict manner that the newer forms of media are.

Naazneen (34) looked forward to reading these supplements as often as she could, which was once every two or three days, quickly slipping them out from the folds of the main newspaper, once her husband and children left for work and school. It was not that she thought she had to keep her interest in these supplements a secret from her husband, but she preferred to browse through them when she was alone: "When he (husband) and children are around at home, when (how) can I read it? …He never said anything if and when I read it, but I feel odd myself [*ajeeb lagta hai*]". I wanted to talk to her about the off-screen lives of actors and actresses who featured in the newspaper she was reading. I learnt that she particularly looked for film-related news and interviews of Hindi film actors, especially Salman Khan and Ajay Devgn. She said, "I like reading about what is going on (in the film world). I just like it, what else [*aur kya*]. I get to know about all the films". Similar to Naazneen, for whom reading film-related content in newspaper supplements was pleasurable, there were other women who turned to newspapers in order to delve into the world of Hindi cinema and its glamour whilst being fully aware of their own everyday reality. All but two of the middle-aged women in my study denied reading newspaper supplements. I came to know that they read them through the younger women in their family who were candid about it. A young participant aged 19 mentioned in a casual conversation about her sisters-in-law and mother skimming through it when they got time. This remark was immediately met with scorn and an instant reaction from her mother present there, who retorted, "When have you seen me reading that? You are lying. I just wanted to find out what you and your sisters-in-law keep reading all day". I did not succeed in understanding the popularity of newspaper supplements among the middle-aged women through conversations with them, but indirect references to them made by

younger female family members proved how fiercely protective the older women were about their personal preferences when it came to conversations about consuming film through stardom, celebrity engagement, and content that is typically associated with 'foreign countries' [*bahar videsh mein sab chalta hai, hamare yahan aise kapde nahi pehenta koi roz mein*].[138]

6.3.3 Strategies within the household

Wives, sisters, and mothers sometimes requested the husbands, brothers, and sons to access films, songs, film-video clips, and film ringtones. I spent an afternoon in Santoshi's (64) house when her three sons were at work, and the rest of the family members were at home. Out of her nine family members, five were females. She had three daughters-in-law [*bahus*], a granddaughter and a grandson. Sushila (28), the youngest *bahu*, was the most talkative and had an eight-year-old son who was excited to show me his new gadget, a low-cost neon-green smartwatch. Although just eight, he was adept at using the technological features of his smartwatch as well as Sushila's smartphone, which he mostly kept with him during the day. Sushila told me that her son had to be 'bribed' (*rishwat deke karwana padta hai)* in order to upload videos for her onto her own phone. She told me, pointing towards him, that he was a 'good son' (*raja beta*) who helped his mother watch devotional videos, *bhajans* and occasionally, a few Hindi films.[139] The last one she saw was *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* (2015). She said that she would have preferred to watch television but due to constraints (she hinted at her other family members through her eyes), she has to rely on her son and his knowledge of operating her smartphone. She said:

> You see *didi*, if only I could watch television in the afternoon, it would have been *badhiya* (great). We pay so much for the cable TV and we have a good television (set), but there is no electricity. I cannot watch anything when I want. The cable TV charges are a waste for me then, as I get time for TV only in the afternoon, and in the afternoon, there is no power [*batti-gul*]. This (TV) is only (useful) for everyone else.

When compared with men's claims that women have plenty of leisure hours in the afternoons to rest and watch television, Sushila's comment suggested that limited

[138] Refer to the attached images of the Movie Magic supplement of *Hindustan* newspaper (figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3)

[139] Bhajans refer to Hindi devotional songs

availability of electricity in the afternoon hinders women's media use and favours the men's as the usable hours of electric power coincide with men's media usage. In the households with power backup, television is not prioritised to be powered by the backup as it is considered to be a luxury possession, unless men want to use it for watching news. However, the way she hinted with her facial expression towards her other family members, it was also likely that she wanted to put part of the blame on them too, for her not being able to use the television as she wished. It was difficult for me in this case to know the exact reasons, but drawing on my other interactions, I can say that a joint family setting was one of the reasons for participants like Sushila not being able to watch films on television. I suggested watching her favourite TV series on YouTube to her, to which her response was:

> *Arrey kahan didi* (oh come on *didi*!) …I *am* trying to learn the (inter)net. My son sometimes shows me how to *do* Google etc…But watching all things on internet is expensive. It is better that I wait for the electricity timings to change.

Her response indicated that within households, women find it useful to collaborate with their sons (or in some cases, other male members) to access films and other media.[140]

This kind of collaboration mostly happens because knowledge of using mobile phones and laptops for everyday film use is not common among my participants. I wish to reiterate my point about differential barriers to women's media use here. If a woman gets access to a phone, the chances are that it will not be a smartphone; if she gets her own smartphone, it is likely that she will not be optimising its use; if she uses it, the internet charges are too high; if she wants to watch the television as a cheap and easy alternative, there is no electricity during her spare time, and so on. Hence, strategies within households also include use of a platform like WhatsApp messenger, as they find this relatively easy to use and to share and receive film content from others without restrictions such as electricity hours, presence of family members, and so on. I noted that instead of downloading content online, transferring content from other devices and watching films on their phones (which was done mostly by sons, brothers), they rely more on shared content from their family members or female friends. This also hints at the

[140] See section 6.2 for a conversation with the young worker at the computer shop who downloads and gets film content for his sister back home

possibility of a greater homogeneity in terms of content shared among women, who are less likely to optimise the features in their smartphones. In other words, at the village level, the film-related content by women using WhatsApp – music, video clips, mass-texts, among others – is likely to be similar to other women residents.

Vinita, a 42-year-old mother who ensured that her daughter attained basic computer education, shared:

> I always felt afraid of these wire-electricity things [*taar bijli wali cheej*]. Computer, phone, machine, everything. I do not want my daughter to have the same fear. These days, one must know computers for a good job…[I asked her, "what if she only watches films on that?"]…so what if she starts to watch films on that, if she likes watching films, she can start learning the computer from that itself. Those who have computers at home, their sons also watch films day and night.

I asked then, "What does uncle (her husband) say about this?", to which she responded:

> I have not told this to him yet. I will tell him when the time is right. For this, I will make sure that he is convinced. I will tell (ask) him, do we want our daughter to be illiterate (uneducated); how will she get a good boy (groom)?

Vinita had not discussed this with her husband, but she had prepared her reasoning. She was convinced that her rationalisation would work on her husband because the aspect of their daughter's marriage would certainly make him agree with her. Vinita did not share with her husband the way she feels about her lack of confidence with technology, but she wanted her daughter to engage with the outside world more, and for her, '*net seekhna*' (learning the internet) would enable this. Vinita was absolutely on board with her daughter's love for Hindi films if that would enable her to engage more with technology.

6.3.4 Negotiating through creative production

The ways in which my participants interacted with mobile apps such as Filmora and WhatsApp, among others, can be understood as cultural productions. This strategy meant indulging in creative processes through which my participants could use their imaginative space to see themselves as someone outside of their own reality, in a new realm that has Hindi film songs playing in the background. I will illustrate this point through a few examples.

Women uploading their own photographs on social media networks was mostly restricted to WhatsApp messenger.[141] Here, I will use an example of a WhatsApp display picture used by one of my participants, Seema (20). The image (figure 6.4) was on her public profile and was automatically visible to any user of this app who had the phone number of the device she was using. The image in question was from the popular film *Bahubali* (2015), with Hindi text (*Devanagari* script) placed on the image for contrasting effect. The text on the image read, "*Nadaan hain bahut woh, zara samajhaiye use, baat na karne se, mohabbat kam nahi hoti*", which translates as:

> He is too naïve,
>
> (Someone) make him understand,
>
> That despite (him) not talking (to me),
>
> Our love is not diminished.

[141] See section 4.4.4 from where this discussion follows

Figure 6.4 WhatsApp display picture of my participant, Seema (20) (source: participant's WhatsApp profile)

The image portrays an expression of conjugal romance and the text positioned on it could be understood as implying either a form of admiration for the image or the text, self-expression, or as a message to someone. In any of these cases, I saw the use of this image on a public profile as a form of negotiation – borderline rebellion – that was tied up with women's basic struggles and conflicts. In the rigid boundaries of their everyday lives, where even interactions with their own husbands within their home are limited (see Liddle and Joshi, 1986; Omvedt, 1980:170; Sharma, 1978), a young woman chose to display an image/text which was not an acceptable form of public communication. There were other such examples where women's desires found expression through the use of films and their images. Seema shared, "*Didi*, now you see, we cannot use our own photographs, so I thought maybe I will put something that I like. Then they (people) will know this is me when they see me in WhatsApp". I read Seema's act as borderline rebellious because she used an openly 'suggestive' image in response to the restriction imposed on her of not being allowed to upload her own photograph.[142] Use of this image can also be probably explained by a (her) desire to be recognised by others in a way that would somewhat be defined by that image. This was not a unique case among my participants under the age of 25. This act of transgression is a negotiation with Seema's reality, as she was aware that uploading her own photograph on social media might attract unwanted attention and also that her elders in the family would disapprove. I understood Seema's case as being similar to Shweta's (22), who had uploaded an image (figure 4.7) of a couple resembling her to-be husband (in military uniform) and herself on WhatsApp.

In another example, Barkha (21) shared the ways in which she, like Seema, indulged in film-related creative pursuits. She introduced me to an app named Filmora on her android smartphone. This mobile application is a video editor app which enables the user to create videos with music, images and effects. Barkha showed me videos that she had made and said, "*Didi* see this, in this you can put (upload) your photos, and search for a song which you want to play in the background, and this immediately makes the video and gives it". The images used in these videos were mostly her selfies taken at various places in the village, gazing into the phone camera or looking sideways. In some videos, there were photographs of her with female friends on farmlands or inside ITI's classroom. These videos could then be shared on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and so on.

[142] I use the word 'suggestive' to convey the contrast between what is morally acceptable in the village and the boldness of the image that Seema uploaded

Since I did not observe any of my participants using Instagram or YouTube, it was not surprising that these videos were not on those networks. However, WhatsApp played an important role in distribution of these videos. Barkha told me, "I send this to my maternal aunt's daughter, and sometimes to my friends... (on being asked what is so special about this app) ...I just like it". I noted that the videos were a representation of the way that she looked at herself or the way she wanted to be looked at.

Self-representation through videos as a form of creative production became more significant for me as cultural production when she informed me that some of her other friends use this app too. Through these creative productions, it was evident how important a role Hindi films play in these women's imagination of the self. Hindi films are where they want to be in their imaginations, with film songs playing in the background. My participants shared that they do not share these videos with any men in the village (*Kewal ladkiyaan-ladkiyaan hi*) out of the fear that women will face a backlash from male family members. As Barkha said, "If father sees it, he will be angry". Such activities took place strictly outside the direct surveillance of the male family members. Indulging in creative production was an important form of negotiation for my participants and had a significant implication on the production of culture at village level.

6.3.5 Men's uncomfortable relationship with women's preferences

Men's gatekeeping of women's film consumption transpired in several ways such as citing of safety concerns, moral loaded arguments, rules guiding film content for women, among others mentioned in first part of this chapter. During my field work I observed that there were men who distanced themselves from the thought that Hindi films might be significant to aspects of women's everyday lives. One such example is of a 54-year-old male tailor in the village. Upon entering his shop, he asked me where I was from, and if I had got a sample *kurta* as a measurement reference.[143] I explained to him that I was not there to get an outfit stitched. I asked if he gets requests from women to stitch designs inspired by fashion trends in films or television, in response to which he looked me without saying anything for a few seconds. He then said, "Earlier people used to ask me. They used to bring designs' cut-outs [*parcha*] (possibly from newspapers or magazines).

[143] *Kurta* is long shirt-like outfit worn mainly in South Asia over *salwar, churidars,* or *pyjama*

But I told them clearly that I am not 'that kind of a tailor'". I probed, "Uncle, 'that kind of a tailor' meaning?", to which he said:

> I do not know from where, from films or elsewhere, these people bring designs. What will the women (of this village) do with all those film and TV designs? Where will they wear such lace-and-embroidery blouses? I just ask them to give their measurements, and make the clothing according to my own understanding, the way it is worn here [*jaisa yahan ka chalan hai*]. There are one or two more tailors here, but most ladies come to me for getting clothes stitched, I am the most experienced one. And if you want so much design in the clothes you can look for a female tailor.

I nodded in agreement and did not ask any more questions. His comment was in contrast to what I had gathered from my conversations with the female tailor in the village. It was understandable to me that women were more comfortable with female professionals, but the refusal of the male tailor to engage in or entertain a conversation on film and television-inspired fashion among women in Narwal showed that in his view, film fashion was not wearable in women's everyday lives there. I understood from our interaction that for him, discussing this topic would not evoke a more elaborate response. This reminded me of the kind of relationship men shared with certain aspects of women's everyday lives there. In this case, the tailor was not willing to cater to the possibility of something that was outside his view of village women's lives. My participants had told me that sometimes men in their families too were uncomfortable with discussing certain topics or directly confronting young females about aspects such as clothing, jewellery, and others that were considered the domain of the mothers or older females in the house. This sometimes gave my younger and the middle-aged participants an opportunity to seek pleasures, such as fondness for films, that would otherwise be frowned upon by men and other older family members. The negotiation of women's film engagement took place when they were away from the male – and largely patriarchal – control.

6.3.6 When men choose to 'look away'

Men may not be present in women's conversations among themselves about Hindi films, but they play a significant part in women's film and another media consumption. Till now, I have explained the restrictive influence of men on women's media related activities, but in some other ways – deliberately or by chance – men are facilitating change in women's film engagement in Narwal. For example, as shown by my interaction

with the young man who worked at the computer shop in Narwal, he downloaded films and songs that his sister asked him to and took the content home on a memory stick for her.[144] I posed a question in section 6.2.3: Are some men enabling women's film consumption in conscious ways? This young man's example did not clearly indicate whether he chose to regulate his sister's film consumption. Did he ever say no to her if she asked for a particular film or song to be downloaded? Surely, there must be some content that his sister could not have asked him to download owing to moral constraints. I could not cross-question him over this due to a lot of people present at his shop. Male family members such as fathers, uncles, brothers and sons frequently lent their phones to female family members. Women used WhatsApp on men's phones in some cases and watched films in several others. In the third chapter, I explained how a laptop in a family was supposed to be under the control of the male members. However, with help from fathers or brothers, several young women have gained a degree of access to these devices. For instance, there were two young sisters (aged 17 and 20) who shared that their older brother (23) is not aware of what their female friends who hold IT diplomas or are attaining computer education are doing. These friends download films and music and transfer it on to their female friends' brothers' laptops when visiting them. This has a certain degree of overlap with section 6.3.3 where I discuss how women negotiate their film consumption through collaborating with male members, but the point of departure is that, in this case, they watch films or listen to music when their brother is *not* around, pretend to study with their friends and then delete the content afterwards. The older of the two sisters shared with a shy smile:

> Our older brother knows that we keep doing 'something-something' on his laptop (when he is away), but he does not say anything to us or to our father.

In another example, Seema (20) shared:

> I thought my father would see my WhatsApp profile photo and scold me, but he did not say anything. Perhaps he does not know how much I like films [*filmon ka kitna shauk hai*].

[144] See section 6.2.3

I discussed my interaction with Seema in an earlier section in the context of negotiation through creative production. One reason why her father did not object to or confront her regarding her WhatsApp public photo could be that it is not her real photograph that she used there. However, the image depicted a couple in an intimate pose with the actor gazing daringly at the face of the actress, and the actress seen as looking away with a smile on her face. This image had a chunk of text positioned on it, which Seema thought her father might object to.[145] This may be seen as a way of Seema's father's denying his daughter's public display of her association with filmic images, or it could be that he chose to look away as he did not think of it as something to confront her over.

I observed that some other male family members in the village too chose to refrain from confronting their female family members about their film use. The men, when enabling film-consumption by 'looking away' or actively helping women, were removed from the authoritative influence of the everyday rules that apply on women. For instance, a brother will let his sister use his laptop/phone only when they are not in the presence of anyone who harbours moral panic around women's film consumption. In this case, the authoritative presence could very well be an older man or even an older woman in the house who disapproves of the act.

6.3.7 What men cannot control

In this section, I focus on aspects of women's media consumption that the men cannot control. These include women's love for style and fashion as shown in Hindi films (discussed above), songs that women choose to dance to during women's only wedding rituals (*Sangeet*), women's attraction towards certain film actors; their ideas about romance and love, and their admiration/condemnation of various characters in the film.

I observed that the belief that men are more skilled at technology than women was largely unquestioned by people there, even by women who used technology themselves. Exceptions like Kanchan, who posed a question to her mother about an unequal status compared to her brother, challenged the gender power relations in a small yet significant way. In some cases, like Maithili's (discussed below), men could not control how women felt about a certain character or a theme in a film. Sometimes, my participants would curb

[145] See section 6.3.5 for the filmic association of the image

their reaction due to family members being present, when it was not clear how they felt about certain scenes or characters. But some of my participants had various ways of expressing their like/dislike for the film's content even in the presence of other family members, without explicitly stating so.

The following example showed how a woman's admiration for a film protagonist's way of living differed from what her husband thought of it, and how she chose to express her liking for the film by expressing her disagreement with her husband. Her chosen way of expressing her disagreement with him, as I observed, was not openly confrontational. During my stay with a family in Narwal, we started watching the movie *Jab we met* (2007) on a Sunday afternoon. There were three of us, Maithili (48), her husband (53), and I. Maithili's husband constantly commented on how the female protagonist in the film was a disgrace to her family because she ran away to unite with her lover in the film. Maithili did not react to several comments that he went on to make about the film character's jovial but escapist attitude [*kabhi yahan, kabhi wahan*]. Finally, he remarked on how the female protagonist fell in love with another man after shown to be chasing some other man throughout the movie. His comments were clear, in full sentences and morally loaded [*aajkal yehi sab chal raha hai duniya mein*]. At this point, Maithili got up and left abruptly on the pretext of washing dishes in the kitchen. The abruptness of the situation prompted me to get up and follow her shortly afterwards, pretending to look for her to ask for something to eat. I observed the way she got up suddenly right after the husband remarked on the film and her disapproval with his comments was evident. In the kitchen, before I could even ask about the film, she said:

> He always does this. We have seen this (film) before too, I do not understand what his issue [*dikkat*] with the character is. Sure, she is not like us, she does not live in a village, but she was brought up in a city, what does he expect? Is every woman going to be like us (or me)?

Immediately after this comment, she added softly:

> I like the way we live [*rehen-sehen*] here, I do not wish to be like her. But if someone is free-spirited [*unmukt*], lives according to his/her own will, isn't it good?

Maithili made it clear that she did not agree with her husband's constant rebuke of the protagonist's life choices, yet she chose to talk about it inside the kitchen rather than to

openly challenge him verbally. What she thought of the character and the rest of the film was different from her husband's views, and she no longer depended on his comments to make sense of the film. Thus, while men can control women's access to films, they cannot lead them to find the meanings in it they want. Finding value in a film is a process that is intrinsic to women's own relationship with a film, and this process is significant in the negotiations around their film consumption.

Conclusion: Theoretical implications

In studying women's film consumption in a rural setting, I gathered evidence of moments or acts where women questioned, negotiated or rejected certain social norms because of their relationship with a film form. The nature of this resistance was also shaped by the power structure itself. Moments that defined this kind of everyday resistance were not the most effective in most cases. Sometimes, it was merely the process of registering a protest that I observed. In this way, I understood women's *agency* in their film consumption as different from their *resistive* ways. In some examples where women's acts of resistance were *self-defeating* or *self-destructive* (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996:16), I was tempted to give up on the idea of studying their acts as everyday resistance altogether. For instance, Kanchan's insistence on getting a smartphone was met with a refusal by her brother because of what she wanted to do with it, and he anticipated that she will start demanding more once she gets the phone, such as an internet connection. Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson's article on everyday resistance as a concept was useful in understanding this phenomenon in Narwal, and they explained:

> Everyday resistance happens in other spaces and times or in other relations. In this sense it becomes the silent, mundane and ordinary acts that are normalized. Therefore, actors themselves are not necessarily regarding it as "resistance" at all, rather a normal part and way of their life, personality, culture and tradition.
>
> (Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013:9)

They argued that this concept must be understood as something that is "*done routinely*, but which is *not politically articulated or formally organized* (yet or in that situation)" (2013:10). It made me understand that I had almost overlooked this *resistive* aspect of women's film use because such acts could be "*made* invisible by society, by not being

recognized as resistance" (ibid.). This is what I meant to draw out partly through examples in the previous section too, and I understand this process as a (long) moment of change. Despite the existence of power structures that are overarching and overwhelming for my participants, these women find creative ways of negotiating with their everyday realities in order to associate themselves with the world of Hindi films.

There is negligible dialogue between men and women around the negotiation of men's control over women's media habits. The everyday life of the village does not provide time or space for a discussion of women's media use specifically. I suggest that women's media consumption must not be studied as a space of contestation between men (who dominate the village mediascape) and women (who are dominated in the village mediascape). This would imply that men and women are competing to get maximum access to film consumption or media use, which is not accurate. How then, can we best understand what is going on here?

James C. Scott's theoretical contribution in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990) was his distinction between *public transcripts*, which he defined as "a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (1990:2), and *hidden transcripts*, which he characterised as the "discourse that takes place 'offstage', beyond direct observation by powerholders" (1990:4). He made out a case for "a different study of power that uncovers contradictions, tensions, and immanent possibilities" (1990: xii). In Scott's view, the public transcript is a conventional pattern of speech for the subordinated, but it is, in reality, only a stylised performance which witnesses forms of deference and respect for the powerful which are necessary to avoid conflict with them (1990). Further, not only is the public script only skin-deep, but the role of the dominated becomes crucial beyond such open interactions. This means that "the dominated are by no means taken in by their own affirmations of the justice and good manners of their masters, and behind the scenes we may expect to hear much raucous laughing, merciless lampooning, and bitter criticism" (Little, 2009). As Scott explained:

> Offstage, where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power, a sharply dissonant political culture is possible. Slaves in the relative safety of their quarters can speak the words of anger, revenge, self-assertion that they must normally choke back when in the presence of the masters and mistresses.
>
> (1990:18)

In his study of peasant workers above, he terms all interactions that take place beyond the surveillance of the powerful as hidden transcripts (ibid.). The nature of what I witnessed during my field work was the closest to what Scott explained as hidden transcripts and I will discuss this shortly.

Examining my evidence required the identification of the subordinate, which was a challenging task. My initial focus was on women as the dominated group in the village. The problem lay with referring to women as a *whole* as the subordinate community. In citing evidences of women's negotiations, I noted that in numerous cases women were pitted against each other (also see Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996 for similar observations in another North Indian village). Mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, female relatives, and even women in the natal kin became a part of the patriarchal structure that governed the social norms within the village. This was because women generally have "greater stakes in the system, at least in the long term" (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996:18). They are, in this way, different from other subaltern groups (ibid.). A woman's different roles within her family keep shifting her position within the domestic space. For instance, a sister-in-law (*nanad*) might hold a higher position over the wife (*patni*), but when the same sister-in-law gets married and goes to another household, her position as the daughter-in-law (*bahu*) of the new family is lower than that of her mother-in-law or her husband's sister. With time, these women tend to gain greater power in everyday decision-making within the household. For example, she may enjoy relatively more personal space, she might have fewer responsibilities once a younger daughter-in-law enters the family, bearing children (especially sons) is highly likely to put her at a higher position, and so on. Studying women's relations with each other, as well as those with men in the village, complicates an analysis of power relations and its impact on women's media use.

Evidence from my field work suggested that in several cases of women-to-women relations, women not only endorsed the terms of their subordination but were "willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination" (Scott, 1990:4). I noticed this especially in the consumption of film on television in joint families where daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law and mothers-in law affected each other's media habits. As Jeffery and Jeffery

noted, "The twin tendencies of romanticising women's resistance and seeing it as coterminous with agency contain their own difficulties" (1996:16).[146]

As I found in my study, men are increasingly recognising women's acquisition of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) – education, skills – and, in my limited interactions with them, men acknowledged that the society is indeed changing, and that women are changing along with it [*zamana badal raha hai*]. However, even in those interactions with men, this change that they referred to was 'not necessarily desirable' [*achha nahi lagta*]. The question now is this: Are the women of Narwal moving towards a slow-but-steady socio-cultural transformation? Can we understand my participants' negotiations theoretically through Scott's model of resistance, which was developed to discuss peasants and factory workers (groups that are clearly subaltern)?

I argue that the role of Hindi films in the everyday lives of women in Narwal is a transformative one for them because they see filmic representation of a world beyond their everyday, and also mobilise in order to engage more with it. Film consumption is not the sole enabler of this change, but many of the examples of resistance I observed were closely related to it. This change is subtle and reflects the fact that women are moving away from the rigid structures of power to fulfil their desires in their imaginative spaces. This in turn tells us how important Hindi films are in persuading them to break those rules. The heterogeneity of women's experiences in consuming films, and media in general, can be observed to be thriving underneath the surface, bolstered by women's interpersonal networks, as well as digital technology, which is making it increasingly difficult for women's media consumption to be monitored by men. In the case of Maithili, who disagreed with her husband's constant patronising commentary of a film, the woman's expression of disagreement lay in between a public and a hidden transcript.[147] Was her interaction with me in the kitchen a hidden transcript? Or was her gesture of getting up suddenly and leaving the living area an open declaration of disagreement with her husband? In the previous chapter, I cited my interactions with my participants where they indicated their personal relationship with Hindi films. Some of these conversations were shared in the presence of other women, and possibly existed with the knowledge of men too. However, most of the women confided in me only after spending a considerable

[146] The authors draw this observation on the work of Mani (1990) in her discussion of *Sati* (widow immolation), Abu-Lughod (1990), and Rajan (1993)

[147] See section 6.3.8 for a detailed narration of the incident

amount of time with me. They also asked questions as to whether I would share their responses with their parents or other elder people in the village, confirming that they were sharing information that was not supposed to be a part of their everyday discussions with all family members. Also adding to the insight, the manner in which women spoke about restrictions on their film or media consumption showed how they use hidden transcripts to share their power struggle in domestic situations. For example, Shivani (46) spoke of how her family members restricted her consumption of films and television.[148] Her tone and the use of the phrase "*Turant bhauyein tan jaati hain*" (the eyebrows are instantly raised) indicated how unhappy she was with the restrictions imposed by her family members. As I showed at the start of this chapter, Kanchan (18) did raise questions about her brother's use of two smartphones and his refusal to buy her one. However, this conversation took place only once her brother had left. The question was not posed with him present in the room. The moment when the status quo was challenged was outside the scrutiny of her brother, and in front of her mother, with whom she felt she could share it. What women say behind the backs of men and other subjugating family members constitutes the 'hidden transcripts' of their everyday lives. Interactions from my field work suggested that in the case of women in Narwal, the 'hidden transcript' is only "occasionally openly declared in the face of power" (Scott, 1990:6). In most cases, it remains in the background of their domestic life. I suggest that discussions about their engagement with Hindi films, comprising their lived experiences, are a major part of their hidden transcripts *because of* the contentious nature of film consumption and their close relationship with it.[149] The point of departure from Scott's conception is that hidden transcripts in the context of my participants are disruptive or sudden, rather than sustained or occurring in a routinised away. Hidden transcripts must be understood to include the acts of non-cooperation, or open questioning of the status-quo by my participants, in order to get the full picture of the transformative role that Hindi films are part of. These interactions, stories, myths and rituals in which the women of Narwal participate outside the direct observation of power holders (men and older women) largely exist within rigid social structures.

An aspect of utmost significance is the role that Hindi film plays on women's agency within the family. If and when women questioned the norms around their media

[148] See section 6.2.2 for the words she used

[149] As I have delineated in section 6.2, women's film engagement is contentious within the village

consumption, it was often “against considerable odds and with little guarantee that their resistance could be very effective” (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1996:17). The ways in which these women consumed Hindi film were diverse and, therefore, the nature of how they strategised around their preferred film form was also contingent on it. Thus, women’s agency was evidenced in different guises (ibid.).

Sketching the sustenance of power and also its erosion – or rather redefinition over time – in a north Indian village shows some commonalities with accounts of other subaltern or subordinated groups globally, but due to the complicated definition of women as the subaltern, defining a conceptual model for ‘resistance’ poses several problems. I understand this process of social change as the presence of a growing cluster of hidden transcripts of women about their love for Hindi films, in which the powerful position of the male gradually begins to be brought into question.

Conclusion

My investigation of the long-term and multifarious modes of consumption of Hindi cinema has revealed that films play a role in fulfilling the desires of rural north Indian women in both their real and imaginative lives (chapter five). Hindi films not only expand these women's view of the world outside the village but also of worlds outside India. My stay in Narwal exposed the strong influence of social values that authorise or forbid certain activities for women, especially when these relate to the use of technology for film consumption. My participants' negotiations and resistances around their film-use are not revolutionary or rebellious, but they are also not of an unnoticed or ineffectual kind (chapter six).

As far as I know, my project is the first ethnographic study to specifically focus on rural women as Hindi film audiences in North India. I discovered that age, gender, class, social capital and family setting are the primary factors that affect women's film – and more broadly media – consumption, and the different media through which they engage with film (chapters three and four). My thesis speaks to the gaps highlighted in my review of the literature (chapter two) and attempts to sketch a picture that (I hope) is empathetic to my participants' lives. A constant concern was whether, in my writing, I was simply *stating the obvious* or if I was looking at my participants with a lens so convex that I was overlooking other significant aspects. This study discussed certain facets of rural popular culture that were comparatively new and are political in nature. Although my study makes no claims to be a feminist ethnographic work, it is in agreement with Vani Prabhakar's assessment that "all spheres of lives involving any relationship is [sic] political; that millions of women are silently (and not always very successfully) waging a struggle against the patriarchal and feudal forces that seek to confine and contain them" (2004:258). The point I am trying to make here is that conducting a study in a rural area as opposed to an urban location, complicates the picture. Hindi films may evoke similar responses from both rural and urban women in terms of their preference for a genre/type

or their dislike for particular themes or actors, but the difference lies in the way both sets of women choose to consume, understand, and position films in their lives. The glamour of the Hindi film industry itself does little to bring a revolutionary change in the lives of my rural women, but the desire to be associated with it encourages my participants to break some of the rules that constrain their everyday lives.

Building a film theatre in a village is not expected to be advantageous for theatre owners as Hindi films need to recover large profits to match their production costs, and thus tickets would be too expensive for a regular village viewer. While it is not mandatory for my participants to *see themselves* in a film to be able to enjoy it, I suggest that if they were able to relate more strongly to Hindi films, this might lead to the start of a commercially viable rural viewership. Moreover, unlike men in Narwal who could go to the city and frequent cinema halls as lived experience, my participants could not even manage that small shred of connection to a filmgoing experience in a city theatre. As one of my findings suggested, *filmi* indicates situations that lie outside women's everyday experience within the village realm. Extratextual forms of Hindi films can, to a large extent, popularise films and fulfil the desires of my participants relating to films, like fashion trends, travel aspirations, exposure to foreign countries, learning about new cultures, and so on. However, sharing the values and ideology of the Hindi film by actually watching full-length films cannot be perfectly substituted by 'textually disintegrated' forms of engagement with film (Allen, 2011).

In the light of the above observation, my study finds itself at a moment in time that is at a crossroads. On one hand, there is absence of cinema theatres, a situation that is not expected to change any time soon, with various other manifestations of film, consumed through new as well as old media, offering a film culture beyond viewership. On the other hand, there are small yet significant technological initiatives that might change, entirely, how films will circulate in rural spaces in India a few years from now. PictureTime, a company that began its operation in 2015, has started travelling-DigiPlexes: its small trucks can travel to remote areas and villages and in just a few hours erect a DigiPlex that can seat up to 150 people. These are made of all-weather material, are air-conditioned, and have comfortable seating resembling the multiplex theatres of the big cities. Inside, they have big screens with Dolby surround sound systems (figures 7.1 and 7.2).

Figure 7.1 PictureTime's truck housing the portable DigiPlex (©PictureTime, source: twitter.com/PictureTime4/status/668714617070354432)

Figure 7.2 PictureTime's DigiPlex from the inside in Delhi (©PictureTime, source: twitter.com/PictureTime4/status/1078217469070839810)

Indian venture capital firms and corporations (such as Zenrock Comtrade) are investing money in such DigiPlexes and they are expected to expand rapidly (Laghate, 2019). They screen advertisements (social as well as commercial messaging) and also hold special screenings for women and children in small towns and cities. Ventures like these, if grown in number, are expected to introduce a new modality of film viewing practices and there are plans for the company to venture further into rural spaces. When I came to know about it, I was particularly interested in the implications this might have for women living in these villages. Will such screenings bring about a change in the way women discuss films among themselves in rural areas? Will it even be socially acceptable for them to attend such screenings? Is this form of film viewing going to reduce men's agency over women's film-use? Will special screenings in DigiPlexes be able to offset, to some extent, the moral panic around women's film consumption? These questions will only be answered in a few years' time depending on evolving film practices in rural settings like Narwal. However, this does underline the importance of my study, which offers a unique snapshot of a moment in time that will soon be over. In this globalised era where films shape and perpetuate ideas of identity, gender, nationalism, and sexuality, and where digital and mobile phone technologies offer unprecedented but not unlimited access to film culture, this thesis has identified power structures within the village that affect consumption of film *itself*.

A challenge that limited the scope of my study was the duration of my fieldwork. Although I used ethnographic methods to address my research questions, I cannot claim this study to be a conventional anthropological ethnography. My personal background enabled an early familiarity with Narwal, but a few months are not enough to understand the complexities of village life and the ways in which gender gaps manifest themselves in everyday decision-making. A longer duration of fieldwork would have allowed me to gather data in a more organised way, such as representative samples of women of various age groups, classes, and castes. For this study, I had to mostly rely on my interlocutors to point me to potential research participants.

Moreover, rural life in north Indian states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan differs greatly from that of states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and even Maharashtra in terms of gender rules, rituals and socio-economic organisation. Although the economic and caste inequalities plague most of rural India, I hesitate to generalise my findings from Narwal to women living in villages elsewhere. A similar study carried out in different villages in

states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan would contribute greatly to the sociology of women's film consumption in rural north India.

My study also hopes to contribute, even if in a small way, to the field of Communication for Development (C4D) and to throw light on the context within which ICTs can be studied with regard to the rural Indian context. I question the findings of studies that, in my view, have put forth quite a generic perspective on the technological transformation that the ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) have brought into the lives of women in rural India.[150] Such studies have made convenient connections between the advent of technology, rural women's economic development and social change. The reason I deem them convenient is that although the use of ICTs by women is broadly acceptable to the village community, the most popular use-case of the media technologies by women in this village, Hindi cinema, is still a transgression of the prevalent social values. However, if there is one aspect that is bringing social transformation in unexpected and unintended (by the rural social institutions) ways, it is women's use of Hindi films in this village. For example, in chapter six I discuss women's position in public spaces within the village as well as the households. I have shown how this rural space is undergoing a long moment of change where the women of Narwal exhibit agency through the use of multiple modes of film engagement. I have also shown how various media forms attract varying degrees of attention from men and elders who seek to restrict women's media use. Women indulging in film-related creative media production, devising strategies within the household, and reading about films through newspapers and relatively older forms of film-related material, give rise to long-lasting social implications. Not only women, but men too, willingly or otherwise, contribute to women's film use in several cases. Such findings can lay the groundwork for organisations and policy-making that promote ICTs for social development in rural areas in developing countries. This research highlights the nature of micro-level resistance that enables women to take greater control over their everyday decision-making with regard to their media usage as well as in identifying the key enablers for designing ICT-related policies.

As long as women in Narwal continue to enjoy the pleasurable 'irregularities' that Hindi cinema brings into their everyday lives, films will still matter here. I close with an account

150 For example, refer to Waheeda Sultana's study on ICTs in the development of rural women across India (2006)

of what Rehana (19), who shares custody of a smartphone with her friends, told me in context of watching film music videos on YouTube, “Everyone asks us to perform whenever there is a wedding or any other (family) event. Where do they think we are learning the dance steps from?”.

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APPENDIX I

A sample of an interaction: The researcher and the participant

Name: Soni

Age: 29 years

Caste: *Yadavas* of the so-called lower caste

Time of the interaction: 11.00 am

Members in the family: Husband, two daughters, a younger brother-in-law

Apparent financial condition: Her husband is a farmer with mid-level income.[151] Her brother-in-law is preparing for the upcoming village-level election and is financially supported by Soni's husband. Their house is bigger than the other ones in the vicinity.

Outside the house: I am on my way to Soni's house after crossing the main village road. The pathway leading to her house is not *pukka.*[152] Cattle and goat are tied to pillars outside houses on either side of the narrow lane. The walls of the nearby houses are all made of mud. I reach her house, dodging my slippers from the fresh cattle-dung lying on the road. I don't see any children around. The timing suggests they are in school.

Details of the interaction: Upon entering the house, I see an open ceiling in the middle. The walls of the house are made of bricks cemented together but no cement or plaster over it. This house, in comparison to other houses in the vicinity, is *pukka* and spacious. The interior is more traditional. The floor of the house is coated with a mixture of cow-dung and water. This paste is spread on the floor traditionally in other Indian villages too and is said to possess disinfectant properties, she explains, and she did it all by herself. All women do it, irrespective of their background here, she says. There is an enormous pile of haystack in a corner of the house and beside that, there is a small 'study table' for her older daughter. There is a functional toilet, but it lacks a door. One of the corners is

[151] Relative to the income levels in the village

[152] *Pukka* refers to a unit that uses stone or cement to be built

covered on three sides by five feet of cemented bricks and there is a bucket of water inside for use. All family members use the same toilet and it is kept clean.

There is a "*chaarpaayi*", a traditional clay "*chulha*", three plastic chairs stacked up near another corner. I can smell the fresh cattle-dung outside and hear the sound of goats and calves tied to the neighbours' houses.[153]

Just when I enter the house, Soni's husband is about to leave. I know Soni through him, and I have obtained his approval to converse with her in their house. He greets me with enthusiasm, and Soni is standing behind him, wearing a faded but clean-looking yellow *saree* with one of the corners of the fabric in between her teeth to hold the fabric from falling off her head. It is a mark of respect to cover your head with the '*Pallu*' when around an elder or a revered guest. I am four years younger to her in age. But she prefers calling me '*Didi*'.[154]

Her husband starts talking to me after a brief greeting. He says, "You can talk to her (Soni) about anything you want. You will get a good idea about the village life here because she comes from an extremely poor family. Her village is nearby and it is so financially backward that they do not even have a post office there. So, it is evident that she is not educated. But she is happier in this village now. She will tell you everything you want to know." He bids goodbye and walks out. Soni does not say anything. She turns away quickly and I am unable to gauge her reaction. I am unsure whether she felt embarrassed or is used to being spoken about like that. But given that it is not unusual at all, I do not ask her about her husband's words. She quickly gets a chair for me from the corner and herself sits down on the ground. I insist on sitting on the ground with her. She insists otherwise and confesses softly, "We live in a village, what if someone enters the house and see us like this? You must sit on the chair. I am very comfortable on the ground. What will someone think if they see us? They will say that the *Bahu* has made the guest from the city sit on the ground. It will not look good." Her tone is concerned and polite. She does not mention our caste difference, but her husband mentioned it a few times in

[153] *Chaarpayi* is a four-legged bed made out of weaving jute rope on wood, and *chulha* is a small earthen stove, usually made of bricks or clay/ mud

[154] *Pallu is t*he edge of a saree that is placed over the head as a mark of respect, and *didi* is the Hindi word for elder sister

his conversation on his way out. This might be the reason she does not want to sit with me.

She tells about her two daughters who have gone to school. She wakes up at six in the morning and prepares tea and breakfast for the day. After feeding her daughters, husband, and brother-in-law, she gives food to the goats and calves that they own. She then gets children ready to go to school and then starts working in the kitchen again – preparing lunch. It is one task after the other. I offer to help her cut the vegetables and she insists politely that I just sit and talk to her while she cuts them herself.

I ask her if she enjoys music, films or television. She says, "We don't have television at home. There is no computer in the house too. Simi's (her older daughter's) father might buy it this year when our daughter's exams are over. But he has his phone (smartphone) and we all listen to music through that sometimes. My older daughter goes to the computer shop and gets some videos or songs downloaded in her father's phone. I chide her so that she studies properly, but she enjoys watching films sometimes on his phone. He allows her to do that when he is at home and does not need the phone. I have so much work that I hardly have time for anything else. My daughter gets the content and then shows it to me if she likes it. She likes action movies too, as does my younger daughter. Both of them sometimes also go to our family friends' place to watch television in their house." I ask Soni, "But what about you? What do you enjoy in what the kids show you?" She smiles lightly and is silent for a few seconds as I sense she does not fully understand what I said. I ask a different thing this time, "Does Simi's father (Soni's husband) know what you enjoy watching/ listening to?" She blushes and tucks the corner of the fabric between her teeth again. She explains, "What will I say to him even if I want to watch something? I hardly watch anything. I do not even go to the city. I hardly go there. I am not allowed to go out much. They ask me to stay here and look after the household and the kids."

There is a long pause and I insist on helping her with the vegetable-chopping again. This time, she lets me chop some tomatoes.

I ask, "Do your kids encourage you to listen to music? Do you talk to them about what they like?"

"No. They say, "*Mummy ke paanv bohot chal rahe hain*" (meaning: she is out and about a lot these days).[155] My younger daughter says, "You go outside with father but forbid me to do the same". But I go out mostly only for social obligations and to the temple."

"Ah! I see. Speaking of social obligations, what about weddings? Do you enjoy the festivity in the weddings? What kind of music do they have there?"

"It is only at weddings that I mostly get to engage with music and dance as entertainment. People replace tunes in *Bhajans* (songs of devotion) with *filmi* tunes. If a girl was getting married before, there were folk songs, and traditional wedding songs. They are still there, but the young girls do not memorise them anymore. For them, wedding music is all about films these days. And films have so many nice wedding songs. But I do not enjoy when they mix film music with devotional lyrics. This should not be mixed up. But half the tunes I hear in such events, I am not even aware that they are from a film until my daughters tell me."

"Have you seen the picturisation of these songs? Any actors/ songs/ lyrics that you recognise or remember?"

"No, no! Where will I see them? I only see the dances that our girls (young girls in the village) perform at these weddings. They select the songs, the dance, and the dresses. We mothers are losing all control these days", she nods her head and smiles.

"Do you believe it is a bad thing?"

"Not really, I like how happy they look. Times are different now. Our times were good too, but girls have more freedom these days. My daughters are very *tej* (meaning: sharp). It is good. They look cheerful."

She gets up to put the chopped vegetables in a vessel to cook the curry. Just at that moment, two ladies (presumably from the neighbourhood) enter and start talking to Soni about some upcoming *Pooja* the following week.[156] They are looking more at me than her. Perhaps they are suspicious of our conversation, or just curious. I tell them my name and ask theirs. They do not seem to want me as a part of their conversation. I can sense

[155] This sentence has a negative connotation attached to it, it is a sly remark by Radha's daughters on their mother

[156] Religious ritual

the urgency from their side to ask Soni questions about our interaction. I ask for her permission to leave and promise to come by the next day.

APPENDIX II

Points of discussion with my interview participants

BASIC INFORMATION

1. Name
2. Age
3. Marital status
4. Occupation
5. What is your routine
    a) At home
    b) Part Time work (2-4 Hrs.)
    c) Full Time work (more than 5 hours)

ECONOMIC CONDITION

6. Pocket Money or Disposable salary? Amount ___
7. Effect of demonetization on your pocket money:
    (a) Very affected (my spending on entertainment reduced greatly)
    (b) Not that affected (it is still the same)
    (c) Not affected at all
8. How many hours of usable electricity do you get? ____ Power backup? Yes/No
9. How many times do you visit outside the village in a year or month? _____

SOCIAL CONDITION AND FAMILY

10. Members in the household ____

11. Favourite member of the household _____

12. Does caste matter? (only to lower caste)

13. Who are the other members of the house?

14. What do you do on your birthdays?

FRIENDS/ SOCIAL CIRCLE

15. What leisure time do you have?

16. Do you have many friends? ___

17. When do you spend time with friends? ___

18. Do they feel they can easily watch films or listen to film songs? Are there parents alright with this?

COMPUTER CLASSES

19. Has anybody else in your family ever taken computer classes? (Formal or informal)

20. Who encouraged you in your household to take these up?

21. Who is paying for it?

22. What do you expect to get out of it? (a) Employability (b) Learning new things (c) Internet

MEDIA USAGE

23. How do their husbands (according to them) access films and/ or its products?

24. How do their brothers (according to them) access films and/ or its products?

25. How do their sons (according to them) access films and/ or its products?

26. What is being consumed?

27. Who is consuming it in a household? Who likes to watch what?

    (a) Father

(b) Mother

(c) Son/ brother

(d) Sisters-in-law

28. How are they consuming it?

29. What devices are there in the house? And how many?

(a) TV

(b) Laptop

(c) Smartphone

(d) Newspaper

(e) Radio

(f) Other (specify)

30. Do family members have access to films? Or its products, such as film music, videos, newspapers, television programmes on film music?

31. TV viewing

a) Per day b) Per Week c) Per Month d) Few times a year

32. Film viewing

a) Every day b) Once a week c) Once a month d) Few times a year

33. Mobile use _____ Model name_____

34. Extras (if using mobile, circle)

Touchscreen , Internet, Camera, Whatsapp, Social Media

35. Most used media _____

36. Regular used media

(a) Newspaper

(b) TV

(c) Internet

(d) Radio

(e) Others ___

37. How do you access films? _____

38. How do you come to know about the latest fashion? ____

39. How do you come to know about the latest songs? ____

40. Do you share your passion of films with any family member? Who? _____

ON THEIR 'IDEAL' FILM AND MEDIA'S ASPIRATIONAL VALUE

41. Parameters for an 'idea' film according to you?

(a) Favourite actor/ actress

(b) Location

(c) Drama

(d) Romance

(e) Film songs

(f) Popular

(g) "Clean"

(h) Aspirational?

(i) Nationalistic

(j) Cheap tickets

(k) Easily downloadable

(l) Easy access

(m) Your partner/ family members prefer it too

(n) Non-violent/ violent?

(o) Available on TV

(p) Good fashion

(q) __

(r) __

(s) __

42. What is entertainment for you?

43. What do you consider to be filmi?

44. Celebrations, festivals, how have they changed over the years? Festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi & Durga Puja, how have these celebrations changed over the years?

(a) More festive

(b) Less festive

(c) Same as before

45. Why do you think this has happened?

(a) Films

(b) Awareness

(c) Capitalism

(d) Community economic progress

46. Have you wanted to go to any place shown in any movie?

Movie_____ Place _____

47. Have you wanted to own any dress seen in a movie?

Movie_____ Actress_____

RELATIONSHIP WITH FILM STARS

48. Favourite actor (2-3)

(a) __

(b) __

(c) __

49. Favourite actress (2-3)

(a) __

(b) __

50. Latest movie that you

(a) Watched ___

(b) Would like to watch ___

(c) That you liked ___

(d) That you didn't like ___

51. Film that inspired:

(a) Patriotism ___

(b) Family values ___

(c) Romance ___

FILM MUSIC

52. What kind of music do you like?

(a) Bollywood contemporary

(b) Old hindi film songs

(c) Bhajans

(d) Other (specify)

53. How do you access your favourite kind of music?

54. How do you access film music?

55. What kind of music would you like to be played in the weddings?

56. Given a choice, would you like to have your own music system?

57. Do you like listening to music alone or with someone? (do you enjoy company while listening to music?)

APPENDIX III

List of participants cited

1. Achala, 19
2. Anamika, 40
3. Anu, 18
4. Anushka, 18
5. Archana, 32
6. Ayasha, 20
7. Babita, 22
8. Barkha, 21
9. Binti, 19
10. Chhavi, 22
11. Deepika, 27
12. Durga Devi, 69
13. Fatima, 47
14. Geeta, 25
15. Jaya, 22
16. Jyoti, 21
17. Kanchan, 18
18. Kishori Devi, 76
19. Lata, 48
20. Madhu, 42
21. Madhvi, 20
22. Maithili, 48
23. Malti, 42
24. Manisha, 10
25. Mansi, 18
26. Meena, 21
27. Naazneen, 34
28. Nandini, 43
29. Nandita, 52
30. Neeta, 21
31. Neetu, 23
32. Neha, 22
33. Poonam, 50
34. Priyamvada, 35

35. Radha, 42

36. Rajni, 27

37. Ranjana, 23

38. Rehana, 19

39. Renu, 38

40. Ritu, 28

41. Santoshi, 64

42. Sapna, 28

43. Saraswati Devi, 67

44. Sarita, 40

45. Saroj, 38

46. Seema, 20

47. Shivani, 46

48. Shweta, 22

49. Sneha, 22

50. Sudha, 43

51. Sugandha, 38

52. Suman, 40

53. Sunita, 42

54. Surili, 20

55. Sushila, 28

56. Swati, 20

57. Vibha, 32

58. Vineeta, 29

59. Vinita, 42

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