UNRAVELLING THE WORLD OF HINDI B GRADE CINEMA: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF SLEAZE, GENDER, AND SEXPLOITATION (1990-2014)

*Dr Satyendra Kumar Prasad
Assistant Professor, MIT World Peace University, Pune.
Email: kashyapsatyen@gmail.com

**Dr Sandeep Kumar Gupta
Assistant Professor, School of Mass Communication, IMS Unison University, Dehradun.
Email: sandyreporter12@gmail.com

Abstract

The research investigates the evolution of Hindi exploitation cinema between the 1990s and 2014, emphasizing the rise of sexploitation films and their portrayal of gender. Following the decline of the Ramsay Brothers' horror movies, directors such as Kanti Shah and Kishan Shah embraced this genre, producing films with explicit sexual content that drew audiences seeking erotic and provocative themes. The study focuses on Kanti Shah's films, including *Gunda* (1997), *Bedroom* (2005), and *Angoor* (2005), to highlight the cultural and cinematic narratives surrounding sexuality and exploitation. It discusses the challenges posed by limited budgets and technological shifts, exploring the broader implications for Hindi B-grade cinema. Through ethnographic interviews and film analysis, the study contributes to an understanding of the informal networks and socio-cultural norms that define this genre.

Keywords: Hindi B Grade Cinema, gender, sleaze, B-circuit, Kanti Shah, sexploitation, genre, exploitation cinema.

Introduction

This research paper offers a comprehensive exploration of Hindi B-grade cinema between 1990 and 2014, a period that witnessed significant shifts in the genre landscape of Indian films. Following the decline of the Ramsay Brothers' horror productions, a new wave of low-budget exploitation cinema emerged, often characterized by provocative and explicit content. Directors such as Kanti Shah, Harinam Singh, Kishan Shah, and Teerat Singh ventured into this niche, producing sexploitation films that catered to audiences seeking bold and titillating content.

The study delves into the socio-cultural, technological, and economic factors that contributed to the rise of this genre. It also investigates how the films navigated themes of sexuality, gender representation, and exploitation while operating within the constraints of small budgets and limited resources. The advent of technological advancements, such as the video cassette recorder (VCR), and changing audience preferences further shaped the production and consumption patterns of these films.

By analyzing key films, including Kanti Shah's *Gunda* (1997), *Bedroom* (2005), and *Angoor* (2005), the research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on representation, censorship, and cinematic aesthetics in Indian cinema. Ethnographic interviews with filmmakers provide valuable insights into the informal networks and production practices that defined the Hindi B-grade film circuit. This study offers a nuanced understanding of the intersection between cinematic expression, cultural norms, and market demands.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are twofold:

Emergence and Transition of Hindi B-Grade Cinema:

- Analyze the emergence of Hindi exploitation films between the 1990s and 2014.

- Understand the transition within the B-grade cinema landscape after the decline of the Ramsay Brothers' horror films.

- Investigate the rise of sexploitation cinema as a distinct genre and its impact on the portrayal of gender in B-circuit movies.

Detailed Analysis of Key Films and Filmmakers:

- Conduct a detailed analysis of three films directed by Kanti Shah: *Gunda* (1997), *Bedroom* (2005), and *Angoor* (2005).

- Explore the socio-cultural norms and informal networks associated with B-grade cinema through ethnographic interviews with key figures such as Kanti Shah and Kishan Shah.

- Examine the factors contributing to the production and exhibition patterns within the context of technological, economic, and cultural transformations during the specified period.

Methodology

This study adopts a multi-pronged research methodology comprising ethnographic methods, film analysis, and historical research.

Ethnographic Approach:

- Interviews: Conducted direct interviews with prominent B-movie producers Kanti Shah and Kishan Shah to trace informal networks within the B-movie industry.

- Insights: Gained perspectives on scriptwriting, censorship, and filmmaking processes within the constraints of small-budget film production.

- Documentation: Recorded conversations with filmmakers to understand the challenges and opportunities associated with producing and exhibiting B-grade cinema.

Film Analysis:

- Focused on three specific films directed by Kanti Shah: *Gunda* (1997), *Bedroom* (2005), and *Angoor* (2005).

- Visual Analysis: Employed visual analysis tools to dissect scenes, character dynamics, and narrative structures.

- Themes: Examined thematic elements, production values, and the portrayal of sexuality and gender in these films.

Historical Analysis:

- Investigated contextual factors influencing Hindi cinema during the specified period.

- Technological Shifts: Analyzed the impact of technological changes such as the advent of the video cassette recorder (VCR) and the rise of multiplexes in 1997.

- Economic Changes: Explored post-liberalization and globalization effects on film content, exhibition patterns, and audience preferences.

This comprehensive methodology ensures a nuanced understanding of Hindi B-grade cinema, its evolution, and its socio-cultural implications.

Sexploitation Film: An Overview

A sexploitation film, also known as a "sex-exploitation film," is a low-budget independent feature film. The term originated from American exploitation films popular in the 1960s and early 1970s, often characterized by non-explicit sexual scenes and gratuitous nudity. This genre emerged as a subcategory of exploitation films and has been in use since the 1940s. Sexploitation films were typically shown in urban grindhouse cinemas, which were precursors to the adult movie theatres of the 1970s and 1980s.

In the Hindi film industry, the sexploitation genre emerged in the 1990s to depict repressed sexual desires through portrayals of semi-nude men and women. These B-films often followed similar plotlines and filming techniques, making them appear as copies of one another. Both avant-garde and rearguard films share similar cultural notions, marked by an overt male sexual expression and a distancing from mainstream cinema.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the conversion of capital highlights the coexistence of B-movies with mainstream films despite occupying distinct cinematic worlds:

"This abstract operation has an objective basis in the possibility, which is always available, of converting one type of capital into another; however, the exchange rates vary in accordance with the power relation the holders of the different forms of capital." (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 125)

As Jeffrey Sconce notes in his influential paper *Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,* paracinema represents a dedicated cinephilic subculture that valorizes cinematic "trash":

"In short, the explicit manifesto of paracinematic culture is to valorize all forms of cinematic 'trash,' whether such films have been either explicitly rejected or simply ignored by legitimate film culture." (Sconce, 1995, p. 372)

Sexploitation cinema, the erotic genre, rape-revenge narratives, and small-budget action films all fall under the category of B-movies. This study employs these terms interchangeably to reflect the overlapping dynamics within the Hindi B-grade film industry.

Kanti Shah

After the fall of the Ramsay Brothers, Kanti Shah emerged as a big figure in B and C-circuit. He acquired a cult status over a period and has made more than a hundred films of different genres from adult to horror to rape-revenge drama to bandit queen films. The actual number of his films is not known to the film industry. Nonetheless, Kanti Shah and his brother Krishna Shah's movies have consistently been sidelined and attributed a role as debased social-cultural norms stowed away from general visibility disparaged, and prohibited from film accounts.

In this section, I have taken Kanti Shah's three films *Bedroom* (2007), *Gunda* (1998) and *Angoor* (2005), to analyze the content and production value of these films. I have adopted an ethnographic method to trace the informal networks of B-movies. Utilizing direct meetings with movie producers Kanti Shah and his sibling Kishan Shah, who talk about the script, censoring, and filmmaking process of small-budget film industries.

These films were made on a shoestring budget and released in partially ruined exhibition spaces. Numerous variants of similar filmmaking, adjusting to various presentation destinations and stages, never truly turning out to be a completed item yet something that is constantly trapped in the condition of turning out to be. The stylish sitting at the convergence of film, video and computerization got in the scarcity of spending plans.

The journey of Kanti Shah is a fascinating one of rags to riches. In his initial days in Mumbai, he used to sell pillow covers, bedsheets, and towels outside of CST station in Mumbai. He did odd jobs as a car mechanic and a supervisor at a construction company. After a suggestion from his friend, he joined the film industry as a spot boy. Later he was promoted from production assistant to production manager. He worked in almost all departments of filmmaking including acting before he tried his destiny as a film producer, as recalled by him. In a personal interview, he says, "We brothers had a passion for filmmaking and have worked on film sets that start from seven in the morning to midnight." [Ibid]

To comprehend the nature of B-movies in the 1980s and 1990s, it is essential to examine the transformations that occurred within the visual culture sphere during that period. The "cassette culture" emerged in the 1980s, VCR was introduced at that time and more than ten lakh colour TV sets were imported by the government, which changed the landscape of cinema viewing culture. In the early 1980s, the total number of television sets expanded from 5000 to five million in just two years (Ganti, 2012, p. 82). The video intrusion brought about a culture that led to incalculable video libraries. Their fundamental worry was to figure out how to connect robbery in the video market that led to "neighbourhood laws and entertainment world restriction" to include acquiring of most recent movies from worldwide circuits fit to be circulated and shown in little libraries also called parlours (Sundaram, 2010,). He recommends that this feeling of emergency caused a talk of dread around Delhi and subsequent world-class endeavours reducing to what he calls a 'pirate modernity'. On the other hand, pirate industries of innovation and media - going from limited scope production and administrations to vagrant settlements and pilfered programming, motion pictures, music, and equipment - are inferior metropolitan structures that rely upon casual courses of action outside the legitimate constructions of an arranged city and produce a minimal expense, inculcate reuse (*jugaad*) for a commoditized metropolitan experience for the city's less fortunate populaces.

In the history of cinema, the 1950s and 60s decades are considered as the golden period whereas the 1980s decade is notorious for sleazy and *trashy* content. In terms of filmmaking aesthetics, the 1980s is considered a lost decade.

The introduction of the video cassette recorder (VCR) in the 1980s not only revolutionized the film-viewing experience but also had a profound impact on the content of films. In the initial days, VCRs were very expensive; only the elite and upper-middle-class could afford them. With the upper and working classes withdrawing from theatres, films were visited generally by the lower working-class people. Exhibitors and movie producers accepted that this adjustment of crowds made films attributable to an adjustment of taste. So, it was an endless loop. Movies began to weaken in their substance since they needed to appeal to construction workers, migrant daily wagers, and the lower middle class, which implied a more simplistic sort of movie (Ganti, 2012).

At that time exhibition halls were also decaying; only a handful of cinema halls were in good condition. Mainstream films were trying to cope with the audience's taste. They also tried changing the content of films, but the scenario was different for small-budget *massy* films. They were catering to the taste of the audience's lower rungs of society. These were the times Ramsay Brothers captured the audience of B- and C-circuit exhibition halls. Finding essential business sectors in the B, C and D focus, the siblings had figured out how to evade showing imposing business models in A circuit, delivering just twelve or on the other hand prints for less trustworthy performance centres in urban communities, catering fundamentally to a group of people living on the periphery. The Ramsay siblings, notwithstanding, were by all accounts not the only players around during the 1980s as different movie producers encouraged by the Ramsay Brothers' prosperity bounced onto the little film cart creating a powerful blend of frightfulness, tension, and

thrill rides (Nair, 2010). Joginder's popular horror films *Pyasa Shaitan* (1884) and *Adamkhor* (1986), Vinod Talwar's *Raat Ke Andhere Mein* (1987), Mohan Bhakri's film *Kabarastan* (1988) were among others catering to the tastes of lower working-class people.

With the invention of VCR and colour TV, box office collections collapsed as the upper-middle-class preferred to watch films in their house instead of going to the theatre. In this environment of falling film industry collections, he cast yesteryear mainstream actors like Mithun and Dharmendra in the lead roles. In a personal interview with his brother, Kishan Shah said that he has worked with Dharmendra in more than 10 films and with Mithun in around half a dozen films. Then Shah moved onto the cheap thriller genre film after achieving success with the film *Maut* (Death, 1998), which was a semi-hit in B/C- circuit theatre. These films were made on a shoestring budget of 5 to 7 lakh. In terms of budget, this can't be compared with the mainstream film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998) which made a budget of forty crores and made a profit of over one billion.

The post-liberalization and globalization period that was introduced in 1991 by then finance minister Manmohan Singh changed the Indian economy entirely. The Film Industry was not an exception. This also affected film content and exhibition patterns. In India, the multiplex was introduced on 7 June 1997 by PVR. The economics of the exhibition of films changed by the early 2000s. It allowed a new way of imagining India as a shining nation, urban India as representative of the leaps India was making as a nation, and high-ticket prices as a license to better standards of living, many more choices of entertainment "counter to the unitary propensity of the single screen hall" (Sharma 2003), and "niche middle class-oriented films emerged in a range of styles not previously viable with the old massy audiences". (Athique and Hill, 2010, p. 40). Aparna Sharma has worked extensively on Indian multiplex culture. She writes:

> While the masses take to cinema readily, given their financial capacity and lack of identification with the plush appearance, products and services at the multiplex – in any case targeted at the socially and economically mobile sections – this numerically significant chunk of audience has remained confined to the outer edges of the multiplex experience. And it is unlikely that the dynamics of the multiplex in its present avatar will manage to secure their participation. Spatially too, multiplexes can mostly be spotted in affluent neighbourhoods, within the easy reach and concentration of young audiences (Sharma, 2003).

Athique and Hill show how the multiplex in India has been generally seen as reacting to an inert interest among the upper working classes for adequately sanitized and controlled public space where the mass public is unable to afford multiplex and middle-class behavioural norms. This exhibition practice has also changed the content of the film.

The new strong metropolitan middle class wants to watch films in multiplexes. Partha Chatterjee has commented on the emergence of new socio-cultural spaces, and that "the elite will form its community - a spatially bound interpersonally networked subculture… (with) segregated

and exclusive space for shops, restaurants, arts and entertainment aimed at this clientele." These "spectacularized urban spaces" (Debord) became new sites for metropolitan audiences.

In the early 2000s, mainstream Hindi cinema was catering to the taste of the NRI audience and urban middle class. In that period regional films especially Bhojpuri, Marathi, and Bengali films revived. This phenomenon, I have discussed in length in my M.Phil. dissertation titled "*Bhojpuri Cinema; Production, Culture, Identity"* (2014). The Hollywoodization of Hindi film content left a bulk of the audience to reach out for regional films. Since the Bhojpuri region is the least urbanized, and most of the people still live in villages and semi-rural-urban areas - these working-class and lower-income groups of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh state don't relate to the candy floss romances of Bollywood. This has provided the space for the re-emergence of regional Bhojpuri cinema (Prasad, 2019, p. 27).

So, mainstream cinema was more focused on multiplex audiences. Massy audiences don't relate to the content of glossy films. Regional cinema was revived and pulled the bulk of its audience to homegrown entertainment. In the meanwhile, Hindi low-budget films enter into the terrain of erotic films. Kanti Shah went totally for sensual movies. His brother Krishna Shah who worked under him as an assistant director answered that:

> Depiction of sex was there even in the 1980s in the form of horror, action, and bandit queen genre films. The bulk of our audiences shifted to Bhojpuri films in the regions of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi NCR, and in the Mumbai region in the early 2000s. Our small-budget action films were not getting success at the box office. Our brother tried his luck to make out and out erotic films. Kanti Shah directed two films *Angoor* and *Bedroom* in 2005 and they were a hit in B and C circuit cinema halls. So, we made many films related to this genre. Even mainstream director Mahesh Bhatt is making this type of film. The only difference is in budget. Mahesh Bhatt is shooting in a 5-star hotel. We are shooting in a bungalow (Personal interview, October 2018).

These are some examples of his growing number of films in this genre. He made more than 50 films, which are expletive, dealing with taboo topics like adultery, incest, impotency, erectile dysfunction, and the portrayal of hypersexual men and women.

Film analysis of *Bedroom* (**2005**), *Gunda* (**1997**) and *Angoor* (**2005**)

When B-grade king filmmaker Kanti started making movies in the 1990s, it was an unsure period overpowered maybe by the sheer consistency of another and new visual culture. After globalisation and liberalisation of the 90s, everything was changing like the roads, the shopping culture, the public spots, and the business sectors with uproarious publicizing, new brands and wares changing the optical system and existence of individuals. Television and private visual culture changed with the appearance of satellite TV and the selections of stations that accompanied it. This was likewise the youngster phase of the web. In a movie, a big family drama unfolded on

the set, and one of the earliest films to do this was Sooraj Barjatya's *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* ("Who am I to You?", 1994). It became the first in a series of many family dramas that came after it. *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (*HAHK*) was a huge hit and told the story of a happy North Indian family during a wedding. As described by Ranjani Mazumdar:

> "Familial values of devotion, Hindu rituals, traditional costumes, and the moral universe of the joint family saturate the rather thin story of the film. The film is dotted with innumerable characters that help construct the carnivalesque utopia of the great Indian family, in which conflict is minimal and the desire to be united is powerful. Thus, servants and dogs, friends and foes, Muslims and Hindus, men and women, children and adults are all enjoined in a carnival of traditional values" (Mazumdar, 2007, p. 122)

Expanding on Richard Dyer's appearance in "Amusement and Utopia", Rustom Bharucha declares that in the realm of diversion the genuine strains of regular living that individuals experience like 'shortage', 'depletion', 'bleakness', 'regimentation' are subbed by industrialist ideas of 'wealth', 'straightforwardness', 'force' that are given out to the crowd camouflaged as arrangements (Bharucha, 1995, p. 801). In *HAHK*, he finds this ideal world of plenitude in riches and family where everything is appropriate and right without any hints of battle, where everybody offers and adds to the satisfaction of the family because without issues happiness can be achieved by each one (Bharucha 1995). "Everything is genuine, *seedha-saadha*," he says, "[a]and thus the only choice accessible is to seek the appearing euphoria of this remarkably glad family" (Bharucha, 1995, p. 802). Depicting HAHK as a 'family carnivalesque' for Shohini Ghosh the family in *HAHK* is a 'fantasy family' exploring its way through 'social customs' easily evading all emergencies and battles to depict an 'inconceivable dream' of a unified local area in the chipping nineties full of collective strains" (Ghosh, 2000, p. 84-85).

The romantic tales from the mid-nineties were populated by an alternate arrangement of characters. Gone were the sweethearts from various classes, gone were the common heroes. With heroes hailing from a similar foundation the family dramatizations embodied by *HAHK*, at this point, did not put together their struggles with respect to class contrasts but directed them rather to "singular longing and obligation to one's family" (Ganti, 2012, p. 99). Sooraj Barjatya's assertion on the family enlightens the subjects behind his movies, "I make films with the family at its centre, and for the family, since I've been raised in a climate where the family made a difference more than anything else. So, it is nevertheless normal that my movies mirror this perspective. My childhood, however, not moderate, has been conventional, and it is this conservatism you see reflected in the film" (referred to in Ganti, 2012, p. 105). As per Valentina Vitali, *HAHK* tracks down an option in contrast to the promoted modernization of its time, and it does so inside the locus of the family utilizing anything but a space to traditionalize advancement when truth be told at the time there was an overall state of mind to modernize the conventional family (Vitali, 2001-2002, Issue 42, p. 104). The conservatism in these family dramas tried to change the account whereas Tejaswini Ganti proposes, "after *HAHK* and *DDLJ* (*Dilwale Dulhaniya Leh Jayenge*), the

subject of agreeable darlings, willing to forfeit their affection for family honour and concordance, turned into the predominant standard" (Ganti, 2012, p. 100). "The family has been a focal worry of Hindi film and since the late nineteenth century," (Vitali, 2001-2002, Issue 42, p. 105) and it is the unit of the family that is vital to Kanti Shah's suggestive movies, however despite standard Bombay film, his families are no markers of conventional qualities or dedication.

The Intricacies of Intimate Spaces and Hidden Desires in the film *Bedroom* and *Angoor* (2005)

In the film *Bedroom* (2005), the narrative revolves around a twisted connection between a stepmother, Sapna, and her stepchild, Shankar. The story unfolds against the backdrop of the scenic slopes of Shimla, where Shankar and Sapna find themselves deeply in love. Shankar, driven by his newfound love and desire to marry Sapna, musters the courage to approach his father, Mr. Bajaj, with his intentions. However, Mr. Bajaj adamantly rejects Shankar's request and demands his immediate return home. Disheartened, Shankar and Sapna decide to part ways.

Months later, within the comfort of his home, Mr. Bajaj finds himself in search of a new companion. By a twist of fate, his business associate, a wealthy tycoon, introduces him to Sapna, and Mr. Bajaj instantly falls for her charms the moment she emerges from the pool. He proposes marriage, and Sapna, thinking he is a wealthy man, accepts. However, when she arrives at the house, she is shocked to discover her former lover, Shankar. After the first night with Mr. Bajaj, she realizes that he cannot fulfil her desires and longs for Shankar's youthful presence. Their love for each other rekindles as Sapna and Shankar continue their illicit affair within the confines of the bedroom. As a means to weave the story together, Sapna uncovers the truth that Bajaj is the person responsible for the assault and murder of her mother, and she vows to seek revenge. However, in the end, Bajaj meets his demise at the hands of someone else. It is important to note that vengeance is not the focal point of the film, but rather the complex relationships it portrays.
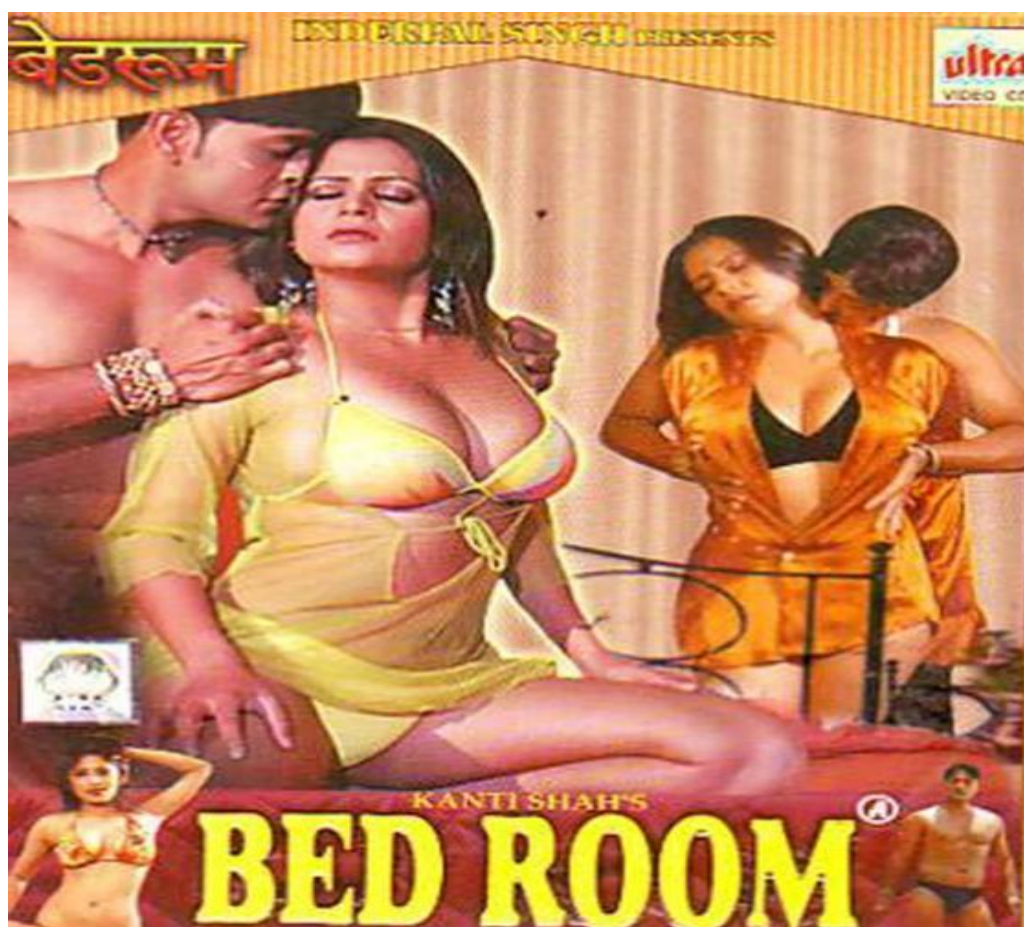
Figure 1: Film Poster of *BedRoom*. Image Courtesy: Kanti Shah

Figure 2: Screenshot of Sapna from *Angoor* (2005). Image Courtesy: YouTube Video Link, Accessed on 25th December 2021.

Director Kanti Shah breaks away from conventional romantic clichés by emphasizing the complexities of relationships. Instead of reaching the climax towards the end, *Bedroom* starts where most mainstream films would approach their climax. The initial few minutes of the film transport the viewer to the picturesque hills, where fresh air and green meadows create an atmosphere that promises a blossoming romance. However, the name Shimla is mentioned several times without any visual evidence, and in some shots, the trees and meadows resemble a lower-quality version of a Mumbai retreat. This contrast between promise and reality is highlighted when Shankar's dream of marrying Sapna is abruptly shattered by his furious father's stern disapproval. Shankar, reminiscing about Sapna, lies on his sofa in the drawing room, and the camera, serving as a conduit for his thoughts, pans across the room, eventually focusing on a clock and a portrait of a nude woman from a bygone era resting in an idyllic meadow. The artwork, accentuated by flashes of lightning, disintegrates into the title card, where the word "Bedroom" appears in a disheveled white font, followed by Kanti Shah's name and more fleeting images.

The film unfolds with a typical poolside sequence, captured mostly in long shots, where Sapna dances on a bed in a courtyard, possibly the pool area from the previous shot. Once again, the viewer is led to anticipate a conventional narrative, as the romance and routine establish a familiar setting. The song concludes, and we are transported back to Shankar's room, where he struggles to suppress thoughts of Sapna. He attempts to distract himself by watching television and even flips through a handbook of *Kamasutra*. However, these attempts only evoke memories of their passionate lovemaking, ultimately leading him to find solace in self-gratification in the bathroom.

In *Bedroom*, the intimate spaces within the film are carefully constructed to regulate the characters' most authentic selves. These spaces, veiled in intimacy, serve as a backdrop for revealing the characters' deepest emotions and true identities. The father, before his marriage, candidly discusses his loneliness with a sex worker. The son, torn between duty and desire, grapples with the family's honour. The wife, torn between loyalty and passion, battles her inner turmoil. Profound revelations occur within the confines of the bedroom: the wife discovers her husband's alcohol addiction, the lovers reunite, and the husband uncovers the connection between his wife and his son, even delving into flashbacks within the room. The display case that Sapna discovered near her dying mother reappears on Bajaj's bed, which she uses as evidence against him. Thus, the bedroom serves as a space where many of these narratives unfold, where conservatism and dutiful obligations oscillate between docile adherence and primal desires.

However, this sanctuary of security and intimacy is not as inviolable as it initially appears, as it is repeatedly intruded upon through the metaphorical keyhole. To be acknowledged, intimacy and self-identity must be exposed through display. The hidden, true self can only exist when it is revealed. In a voyeuristic practice reminiscent of a peep show, the viewer is invited into the private

worlds of the characters, even delving into their thoughts, where dreams and vices are performed and showcased.

In this manner, the film *Bedroom* mixes closeness and display, where closeness benefits the scene and where exhibition becomes closeness. Standing out from the family films, it relinquishes outward display just to interiorize it, moving to expose as opposed to covering up. Ranjani Mazumdar explains the house in *HAHK* consequently,

> "Prem Niwas is the house where the vast majority of the account is found. From the outside, it's anything but a huge, white, two-story manor encompassed by lavish nurseries. The inside looks more like a middle-aged castle, with steps that lead to an open exhibition encompassing the front room. Bended columns, glass crystal fixtures, luxurious furnishings, and quality of strictness mark the inside space. Sculptures of divine beings; blossoms swinging from the railings, emblematic of Hindu strict services; and a feeling of the enormous joint family is reliably positioned in the film, to play out custom through custom practice" (Mazumdar 2007, 123).

In stark contrast to the grandeur and opulence often portrayed in mainstream family films, the interior scenes of *Bedroom* evoke a sense of sensuality and a departure from traditional notions of modest accommodations. Rather than showcasing lavish settings, discussions about wealth and glory become the primary means through which these elements are hinted at. The interiors of the film radiate an enticing energy that seems to defy values of restraint and modesty, dismantling the expectations associated with affluent settings typically seen in family-oriented cinema. In *Bedroom*, the intimate space of the family, often depicted in mainstream movies like *HAHK*, where grand weddings, elaborate rituals, extended joint families, and palatial interiors take centre stage, transforms. It is stripped of its expansive scope and internalized within the confines of a single room.

The story centres around protagonist Sapna's life and how she exploits marriage as a tool to become rich in Kanti Shah's film *Angoor* (2005). She marries Rahul, a considerably older man, for financial reasons so that she may support her younger sister's college fees. She discovers, however, that Rahul is too old for her to satisfy her physical needs. Eventually, she forms a special bond with her husband's younger brother Vicky and makes a physical relationship with him. The majority of the movie focuses on their incestuous relationship and hidden romance with the husband's younger brother.

Gunda

Gunda is a 1998 crime drama film directed by Kanti Shah and starring Mithun Chakraborty, Shakti Kapoor, Mukesh Rishi, and several other co-stars. The film was written by Bashir Babbar and produced by Anil Singh, and its music director is Anand Raj Anand. *Gunda* is one of the highest-rated Hindi movies on IMDb. This is a story based on a violent encounter and

confrontation between an honest man and several gang leaders, to whom he later takes violent vengeance when his father, sister, and lover are murdered in his youth. The film begins with the corrupt politician Kafanchor and Lambu Atta's deal, where Lambu gets the job of killing Bulla (Mukesh Rishi). Lambu declares this war by killing Bulla's man, while Bulla kills his brother Kundan. Lambu takes revenge on his brother by raping Bulla's sister and killing her too. Bulla finally kills Lambu Atta to put an end to the war and declares to be the undisputed leader of the underworld. Coming under the shelter of corrupt politician Bacchubhai Dhithana, he entrusts Bulla to kill the Kafanchor, for which he enlists his right-hand Kala Shetty (Rami Reddy) to execute. Shetty then kills the Kafanchor's leader in front of the police force, but the police do not react. Then a young man named Shankar (Mithun Chakraborty) becomes an obstacle in his way and gets him arrested by the police. Shankar earns his living as a porter and occasionally at the airport where he leads a simple life with his father and younger sister. Shankar has a lover named Ganga, who is eager to marry him in any way, but Shankar refuses to marry her as he is determined to fulfil his responsibility.

Figure: 3. Screenshots of *Gunda* grab by Author. Image Courtesy:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRrRhvLxbXw, Accessed on 10 December 2021

Figure: 4: Screenshots of *Gunda* grabbed by Author. Image Courtesy:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRrRhvLxbXw, Accessed on 10 December 2021

A fan of *Gunda* film, Sauvik has given 10 out of 10 rating on IMDb and has commented that

> "This movie is more complex than Donnie Darko. Apparently, the entire
> plot occurs in a parallel universe where via Space-time warps, anyone can
> commute between shipyard/dock, airport/runway, desert/construction site,
> etc. in split seconds. The viewer must be aware of the fact that the time
> progression of the parallel universe is quite different from this universe as
> suggested by the rapid-moving events. It must be also mentioned that the
> Newtonian laws of physics that hold true in this universe cannot be applied
> elsewhere. I am no authority over Newtonian physics but I believe Kanti
> Shah wanted to tell us that there exists no inertial frame of reference."
> (IMDB review)

The current rating of *Gunda* is 7.3 despite not being written and executed well, which shows the popularity of this B-grade film. It has acquired a cult status over the years because the audience doesn't only appreciate beauty, but also admire the bizarre, the ugly and the uniqueness of the films, thereby making it a cult following. *Gunda* has all the elements of a 'very bad film'. The cult following of *Gunda* has been discussed in the last chapter.

Conclusion

Kanti Shah, Harinam Singh, and Kishan Shah's films provide insights into the uncertain and transformative period of the 1990s marked by globalization, liberalization, and the emergence of

new visual culture. Through a meticulous combination of film analysis, ethnography, and historical research, this study delves into the emergence and evolution of a distinct genre, marked notably by the rise of sexploitation cinema and the portrayal of gender.

Kanti Shah, along with other directors like Harinam Singh and Kishan Shah, emerges as a pivotal figure in the B and C-circuit, filling the void left by the decline of the Ramsay Brothers' horror films. This transformation is rooted in the filmmakers' keen observation of audience preferences, capitalizing on the allure of low-budget horror combined with explicit on-screen eroticism. The films analyzed, namely "Gunda" (1997), "Bedroom" (2005), and "Angoor" (2005), provide a lens through which the representation of sexuality, gender dynamics, and exploitation in B-grade cinema can be scrutinized. The historical backdrop of the 1990s and 2000s further elucidates the contextual factors influencing the cinematic landscape. The advent of the video cassette recorder, economic changes post-liberalization, and the introduction of multiplexes in 1997 transformed film viewing experiences and audience preferences. Mainstream cinema, veering towards urban middle-class tastes, created a vacuum that regional cinemas, particularly Bhojpuri, Marathi, and Bengali films, filled. In response, B-grade filmmakers like Kanti Shah ventured into erotic films, catering to the tastes of the masses that sought an alternative to glossy, urban-centric narratives.

The conclusion drawn from this study underscores the cultural and cinematic forces driving the transformation of Hindi B-grade cinema during the specified period. Kanti Shah's films, despite their unconventional themes and modest budgets, have acquired a cult status, signifying an audience appreciation for the unique and the unconventional. The study sheds light on the intimate spaces within films like *Bedroom* and *Angoor*, where the complexities of relationships, desires, and hidden truths unfold within the confines of unconventional narratives. In essence, this research not only contributes to the understanding of the cinematic evolution in the 1990s and 2000s but also provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics, economic influences, and audience preferences that shaped the trajectory of Hindi B-grade cinema. As B-grade cinema continues to occupy a distinctive niche within the broader cinematic landscape, this study serves as a stepping stone for further exploration into the nuances of this genre and its enduring appeal.

References

Athique, A., & Hill, D. (2010). The Multiplex in India: A Cultural Economy of Urban Leisure. New York: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Chatterjee, P. (1994). Whose Imagined Community in The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 3-13.

Greenberg, C. (2003). Avant-Garde and Kitsch. In C. Harrison & P. Wood (Eds.), Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas 1900–2000. Oxford: Blackwell, 539—549.

Manuel, P. (1993). Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mazumdar, R. (2007). Bombay Cinema, An Archive of the City. University of Minnesota Press.

Nair, K. (2013). Taste, Taboo, Trash: The Story of the Ramsay Brothers. BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies, 3(2), 123-145.

Prasad, S. (2014). Bhojpuri Cinema: Culture, Production, Identity. Jawaharlal Nehru University: Unpublished MPhil Dissertation.

Prasad, S. (2019). The Re-ascendance of Bhojpuri Cinema. Mass Media, 7(82), January.

Sconce, J. (1995). "Trashing the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style." Screen, 36(4), 371-393.

Shah, K. (2018). Personal interview with Kishan Shah was conducted in Mumbai.

Sharma, A. (2003). India's Experience with the Multiplex. Seminar, 525.