Of Names of Women in Hindi Cinema
An Exploration in Semantics

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Names are of central import for characterisation in Hindi cinema and more so for women because their roles are often not very well sketched out. Women are given less screen time than their male counterparts and therefore, to establish their 'character' names function as a shortcut tool. Semantics- the study of meaning is applicable to a plethora of subject areas and names are definitely an important focus point. [This is a Semantics Assignment in Masters in Linguistics, Part II, Mumbai University. February 2006.]

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The ontology of names and their semantic import is perhaps as abstruse as the question, "What's in a name?" Onomastics, the study of proper names of all kinds, primarily lays stress upon the etymological aspects of names. But there is definitely more to names then etymology. Are names indexical, metaphorical or just tag names with pleasant phonetic rings?

The kind of proper names--- by which I mean given first names of men and women--- that are discussed here, are of course, markedly different from the names that constitute the basic level of language according to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein revolutionised the philosophy of language when he stated in the *Tractatus*[1] that a name *means* the object that it designates. So, the object being pointed at literally *is* the meaning of its name. He is talking about word names here, but if applied to literature and cinema, the names of characters are thus indexical to the characters themselves. Since the character isn't a real object in the world, the name is indexical of a set of variables in isolation or combination. These variables include the character's physical appearance, disposition, background and a host of other features. So the name of a particular character in the cinematic narrative can invoke any of these variables in the audience. And because of the pre- conceived notions and knowledge of the meaning of these 'names' that the audience possesses, the qualities are thus transferred onto the said character. With repetitive use these names become metonymic wherein the audience starts relating the 'meaning' of the name to the nature and disposition of the character that bears the name.

In his early work, Wittgenstein said that language mirrored reality. Each level in the structure of language corresponded to a level of the world. However, in his later work,[2] Wittgenstein refuted this view to propose that there is no reality over and above our conceptualisation of the world. According to him, the meaning of our thoughts and expressions do not exist independently of language. So it is possible to say that ---a word, in this case a proper name--- with its semantic baggage can construct the virtual reality of cinematic characters.

In Occidental society, the meanings of first names are not generally known by the people at large. A teenager named 'Vanessa' might gasp if asked what her name means. But in India, a little child will be able to tell you what the meaning of his or her name is even though Indian names often have complex constructions.

Wittgenstein asserts that understanding of what is designated by a particular word may sometimes depend upon a previous experience of whatever is designated by that word. For example, to understand the meaning of the word 'joy', it may be necessary to have experienced joy. In order to imagine another person's joy, it may be necessary to recall one's own previous experience of joy. This is very interesting in the context of cinema. Filmmakers often reuse and recycle the names of characters in popular movies. Good examples of this in Hindi Cinema would be 'Rahul'[3](Shahrukh Khan) and 'Vijay'[4] (Amitabh Bachchan) with more than five instances in each case. This makes it easier to establish the character since the previous movies have already done that job.

Names can signify power, wealth, social rank, artistic qualities, beauty and so much more. Names that seem to have no surface meaning can still be valued semantically as they can invoke connotations by poetic devices such rhyme and onomatopoeia. Names in cinema generally play upon 'connotative' meaning apart from their basic conceptual meaning rather than the other types of meaning that the semanticist Geoffrey Leech[5] lists out, namely: stylistic, affective, reflected, collocative and thematic meaning.

What is the point of a discourse like this? For one, a novice scriptwriter in the Hindi film industry who is intimated of the overriding importance of the semantic nuances of names would never name his young and virtuous female lead 'Lily'. It would be blasphemous if he did so.

This does put a blanket generalisation about characterisation in Hindi cinema; but it is true that these movies are abundant with stereotypes. It must be noted however, that names form only a part of the character; with dress, make up and acting methodology amongst others, making up the rest.

I
Hindi Cinema and its Women

The Bollywood film industry makes around 800 films a year, which is more than any other country's film industry, and almost four times that of Hollywood.
Indian popular culture is saturated with Bollywood films and more than 1.2 million people go to the movies every day in India. Bollywood movies are also widely viewed by other countries, with 40 per cemt of their profits being made overseas. These films are the most viewed in the world, reaching 3.6 billion people. The first film was shown in India on July 7, 1896. Khundiraj Gobind Phalke made the first Indian feature film, a religious movie entitled 'Raja Harischandra' in 1913.Bollywood films emphasize tradition and family values as well as mythological stories. More often than not they have moral themes where good triumphs over evil. These traditional and ethical ideas carry over to projection of women as well. In order to understand this representation of women, one must first know the history and general themes prevalent in the Bollywood film industry, as well as the role of women in traditional Indian culture, and how both the traditional and unconventional Indian women are portrayed in films.

Talking specifically about movies that centered on women, most early Indian films in the pre-independence era explored traditional culture, folk culture and mythology. These would employ foreign actresses because Indian women were hesitant to expose themselves to the camera. Popular films include '*Hunterwali*'[6] (1935), which showcased Mary Evans, an Australian actress of Greek-Welsh origin. Hunterwali was the story of a woman who fights oppression and helps the poor a la Robin Hood. The image of a masked woman with a whip played on many a submerged sexual fantasy for a predominantly male audience. The audience called her 'Fearless Nadia'. This was a very bold characterisation for a woman in Hindi cinema in the 1930's compared to the regressive portrayal that followed in the decades to come.

Though women were ubiquitous in popular cinema, they were inevitably denied depth or dimension. This could be attributed to the fact that the audience was pre dominantly male and so were the filmmakers and technicians. In the fast changing scenario of the post-independence years, the portrayal of women showed some change.

The position of women in society is an important index of the progressiveness of the society in general. Cinema is a mimesis of life and thus, movies are indispensable in studying this index. Film scholars, and especially those with a feminist bent have read into the portrayal of women in cinema. In her extraordinarily perceptive book- *From Reverence to Rape,*[7] film critic and scholar Molly Haskell examines the vast range of images spanned in the iconography of the American woman in cinema. She draws on her wide reading of Hollywood movies to show how producers, directors and even film critics from the 1920s onwards have constantly altered their presentation of women through the years.

In traditional Indian society, women have only three roles: the daughter, the wife, and the mother. During childhood, females are subjects of their father, during youth they are subjects of their husband, and upon death of their husbands, they are subjects of their sons. If a woman attempts to separate, or becomes somewhat independent from her father, husband, or sons, she is shunned and reprimanded. This connection is shown in the ancient, and influential text *Manusmriti*, a text of classical ethical codes whose laws are the roots of Hinduism, and central to traditional Indian beliefs. These roles govern the lives of women in traditional Indian society, and are articulated in Indian popular cinema as well.

II
A Timeline: Post Independence

In the 1950s, rebel filmmakers like K. A Abbas, Bimal Roy and Guru Dutt portrayed strong women characters in their films. Their women (even if illiterate and homebound) had a voice of their own and were shown striving to establish their identity. Of course, they were by no means typical of the Bollywood of the 1950s. In the 1960s, more heroines started appearing as doctors, dedicated teachers or social workers.

An interesting twist was the introduction of Eastman Color in the early 1960s, which led to abandoning studios in favour of the open vistas and outdoor locations, especially for the quintessential Hindi movie 'song picturisation'.

Cultural and Regional Barriers Broken Down
The stories revolved around a young cosmopolitan man and woman traveling to an idyllic holiday resort where, after a few complications and reversals, they fall in love. These films like 'Love in Tokyo'[8] (1966) and 'Evening in Paris'[9] (1967) flaunted signs of modernity: travel, tourism, and mobility. And this worked to erase regional and ethnic boundaries by allowing young people to break away from traditional parochial bonds.
This also meant that the names, in order to reflect this cosmopolitan and non-parochial attitude would be universally 'Indian'. In Love in Tokyo, the female lead is called Asha, which means 'hope' in Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati and a host of other Indian languages. Similarly in Evening in Paris, the heroine is called Deepa (earthern oil lamp) and her alias is called Roopa (beauty). All these three names are very transnational and truly cosmopolitan.

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In the 1970s, Hindi films featuring women as central protagonists began to show evidence of change. More Hindi films started portraying working women from the lower and middle classes. Several leading actresses essayed a variety of professions - Jaya Bachchan was a knife sharpener in 'Zanjeer' and a singer in 'Abhimaan'. Rakhee played corporate secretary in 'Trishul' and a doctor in 'Kala Pathar'.

 Still, a majority of the films portrayed women as naïve belles. Rekha in her first movie 'Sawan Bhado'(1970), is one such village belle. She is called 'Chanda' which means 'moon'. The name is earthy and connotes closeness to nature which translates into the fact that she is devoid of the artifices of city girls, apart from the apparent conceptual intent that she is as beautiful as the moon.

In the 1980s, Bollywood actresses displayed a penchant to play cops - Rekha in 'Phool Bane Angare', Hema Malini in 'Andha Kanoon' and Dimple Kapadia in 'Zakhmi Aurat'. These roles were not played in a vacuum. This was the time when more women reported instances of sexual abuse and violence across the country. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, heroines were not only shown as working women - often as sole breadwinners in the family - but also as women who fought several social battles through their work.

In the 1990s, however, women appeared to lose the space they had created for themselves. As films became glossier and more hi-tech, the men took centerstage and the heroines became mere appendages - they were there mainly to provide glamour. Their presence did nothing to move the story forward.

The more India became global the more the films seemed to regress. Some of the blockbuster movies of the last few years show a decided nostalgia for a traditional way of life when

women kept the home and men earned the bread. When Madhuri Dixit charmed the audiences the biggest hits of the '90s, 'Hum Apke Hai Kaun', she also established the trend of heroines who would never put their own dreams ahead of the aspirations and desires of their family or men.

Recent films like 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum', 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai' and 'Biwi No.1', all have women as docile homemakers. In none of these films made by contemporary young filmmakers do the lead women have a career - though the ones who lose in love do. Sushmita Sen (Rupali) is a model in 'Biwi No.1'[10] but then she is also the evil woman who tries to breaks up a marriage and the forgiving homemaker wife, Karisma Kapoor (Pooja), puts up a fight to 'win' back her man from her. *Pooja*, which means the act of praying is the good wife, devoted to her husband as she is to God. *Rupali* means silver and she's all that glitters but not worth much, just like silver.

In 'Aitraaz'[11] (2004) there is a similar good v/s bad dichotomy clearly represented by names. Priya (lovable) is the good wife while the bad woman Sonia, is the 'other woman' who is trying to seduce her husband. In this movie, unlike Biwi No.1, Sonia is a very successful woman and so she is 'golden' in this narrative. Priya has to put up a substantial fight to free her husband from the clutches of a Sonia. The lure of gold is afterall, greater than that of silver.

The name Sonia also has layers of stylistic meaning since it is often found in Europe and South America. One of the aspects that Stylistic meaning deals with the social circumstances of use. The 'foreign' association of the name adds to the conditioned hatred that the audience has for the despicable, westernized 'Other' woman.

III
In the Name of God

The two great literary epics: *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* define Hindi culture, even today, and have influenced the narrative structure of Indian films, giving them endless digressions, detours and sub plots. They also introduce the idea of "Seeta" as the ideal wife and woman. There is a strong emphasis on Seeta, who is always loyal to her husband and obeys his wishes unquestioningly, in both Indian society and films.

Indian popular cinema has perpetuated this ideal of a wife's selfless devotion. In famous films of the yesteryears like 'Sati Parvati' (1920), 'Sati Seeta' (1924), and 'Sati Savitri' (1932), women are depicted as formulaic and banal, with no ambitions or desires for themselves, only for their husbands, sons or fathers. It is no wonder these women are so dutiful to their men, as *Sati* means 'extreme devotion to her husband'.

Seeta symbolizes virtue and careful control of sexuality, and is thus the feminine ideal. Characters emulating her, and being emphasized as the ideal, can be found in numerous movies. For example, the traditional wife who is pure and chaste wins the man from the bad, modern, ambitious woman as in the examples of Aitraaz and Biwi no.1 mentioned before.

Ramesh Sippy's 'Seeta aur Geeta'[12] (1972) is about twin sisters separated at birth and subsequently by their class location, which casts them as polar opposites: Seeta is quiet, demure and repressed while Geeta is tough and street smart. Just by hearing their names, we are instantly aware of the nature of the two women. The name Seeta invokes religion and centuries of myth. This tale resonates clearly with the epic Ramayan, in which Ravan kidnaps Seeta and Ram's loyal follower, Hanuman, rescues her. There is an outstanding difference between the two: In the film, Seeta's sister is the one to stage the rescue. Seeta is helpless and bound, she is trapped in the *laxman rekha* which encircles her. It demarcates how far she can go. In this case, unlike in the epic it isn't a physical boundary but boundaries of propriety that she cannot transgress. This mythic line embedded in the patriarchal imaginary psyche prescribes limits on the behaviour expected of women and is carefully upheld by Hindi Cinema.

In 'Sangam'[13] (1964) there is a love triangle between Radha, Gopal and Sunder. From the very popular religious notion of the divine couple Radha-Krishna, we immediately know who Radha 'really' loves because Gopal is just another one of Krishna's names. However, in the movie, Radha ends up marrying Sunder instead of Gopal. This is synchronous to the myth because though Radha is upheld as Krishna's divine consort, they did not get married. Moreover, in this story, Radha and Gopal are childhood lovers. The other subtle connotation which plays on this bit of information is that the name Gopal is generally used to refer to the younger Krishna.

In Indian nationalistic films, the mother figure is represented as the land, and the land as the mother. This is true for both society and film. The greatest epic melodrama in India about motherhood, which displays this parallel, is the classic 'Mother India'[14] (1957) directed by Mehboob Khan. It is the quintessential Indian film for celebrating the mother as the nation and the nation as the mother.

This movie invoked mythology to comment on the suffering that the 'mother' undergoes though not very explicitly. In the film, Radha, a peasant woman raising her children on her own, becomes the leader of the villagers' fight for their land. Nargis is Radha and her husband (Raj Kumar) is Shamu which is a dialectical variation of Shyam (another name for Krishna). Though this movie is not a love story, naming the couple Radha-Shyam connotes the 'ideal pair' and by association Radha, even after her husband's death is the ideal woman.
In folklore, though Radha's love was not unrequited, she is often represented as the 'wronged' one- pining and waiting for Krishna. Her struggle for love in Indian mythology is totally different from the struggle of Radha in Mother India, yet, in more ways than one the name is very apt because of the shared associations with struggle, loneliness and distress.

In 'Matrubhoomi'[15] (2003)- a revolutionary movie about female infanticide, we are given a glimpse into a nation without women. Kalki (Tulip Joshi) is one of the few young girls who remains. The *Mahabharat* is invoked by reference to the forecast of Vishnu's tenth and last incarnation, Kalki who is to arrive to mark the end of the dark phase called Kalyug. After suffering torture by her inlaws and a failed attempt to escape, Kalki is chained to a cowshed. There, she is repeatedly raped by numerous people including 'low- castes'. She

becomes pregnant and a caste-war ensues with all claiming for paternity. It kills nearly everyone in the village and Kalki gives birth to a girl, thus bringing an end to Kalyug.

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Moving on to representation of different religious groups in general, though the 70's supposedly ushered in 'the new cosmopolitan', these cosmopolitans were always Hindu, often upper class (and, by implication upper caste).

Even in the movies of today, radical action is at best conceived in terms of violating class boundaries within heterosexual romance. Caste and religious boundaries are hardly ever transgressed except when the movie specifically revolves around that theme like 'Bombay'[16](1995). If signs of caste and religious differences are invoked at all, it is by casting a minority community member as the protagonist's faithful friend or loyal servant. Therefore friends or companions of the heroine could be Hasina or Rifat as in Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998).

'Julie' [17](1975) revolved around the theme of pre marital sex. Julie, the protagonist, as the name suggests was not Hindu. She was an Anglo Indian and lived with her family in Goa. The fact that this story had to be centered on an Anglo Indian girl when that segment of society was highly underrepresented in Hindi cinema is worth noting. The story of a Hindu girl caught in a situation like this would not have gone down too well with the pre dominantly Hindu audience. And 'Julie' was a decidedly not a Hindu name.

A little aside on surnames: North Indian surnames predominated Hindi cinema, and indeed they still do, since the primary target audiences for Hindi cinema were previously from the Hindi belt. Things are changing now with the overseas and national market expanding and audiences opening up to the idea of period stories and drama set in various parts of India. We have had a huge influx of such movies in the last few years: 'Khamoshi' (1996), 'Hum dil de chuke sanam' (1999), 'Devdas' (2002) and recently, 'Parineeta' (2005).

IV
Ways of Women

Women in popular Indian cinema are not forbidden from love - that is, as long as it is all consuming, untainted, and eternal. The women who live by this standard of romance are happy, but those who do not are punished and victimized for their taboo type of love[18]. In her book called Cinematic ImagiNation[19], Virdi says that if a woman character is privileged with complex characterisation, or when she is afforded centrality- the narrative themes are mostly about suffering. The sacrifice, restraint, forbearance, chastity and stoicism strengthen and ennoble these women in the face of hardship.

In Shakti Samanta's 'Aradhana'[20] (1969) the protagonist is a woman- Sharmila Tagore and her name is Vandana (paying obeisance) in keeping with the title of the movie. In Hindi, Aradhana means 'worship'. Aradhana is not a one-time worship; it connotes sacrifice and

penance over an extended period of time. Which is precisely what Vandana has to undertake, all for committing the grave sin of pre- marital sex. An enormously successful film, Aradhana depicts a woman's youthful passion turning into lifelong trial and tribulation. The story goes thus: a young Vandana returns from college to live with her widowed father and falls in love with an Air force pilot- Arun (Rajesh Khanna), who dies just before they are to marry. Vandana discovers that she is pregnant, suffers rejection from Arun's family, endures her father's death, and after further misadventures gives up her son to a childless couple. She gains employment as the boy's governess, but her happy years as a surrogate mother end abruptly when a man who tries to violate her honour is killed accidentally in a scuffle with her and her son, Suraj who intervenes to help her.
Vandana is a prayer in offering, she is to be revered, her virtue cannot be violated. It is interesting that the lead women who are raped in Hindi movies generally have names with deep religious or mythological import. This magnifies the import of the crime in the psyche of the audience.

Vandana is released from prison after twelve years where she meets an adult Suraj and the movie ends with him recognising her as his mother. This is the reward for her lifelong Aradhana. While we are at names, it is notable that Arun and Suraj both mean 'sun'. The movie is unusually suggestive about how a son displaces a husband in a woman's life by having the same actor –Rajesh Khanna- plays both the lover and the son.

While most popular films of the time absorbed principles of female chastity, Aradhana was the first to explicitly associate romantic love with sexual desire. But still, we are to hold in reverence our heroine (possibly cause they were to be married). She is called Vandana, thus symbolifying how pure and chaste she 'really' is and how the impulsive act of love was a mistake.

In this genre of Hindi movies the suffering woman is held up as a model of womanhood-idealised, honoured, and decorated. We see this at the end of the movie, when Suraj recognises his mother and shares the State bestowed air force decorations with her.

Aradhana spawned a virtual woman-victim sub genre in the early 1970s. These narratives recuperated all kinds of 'fallen women', deifying them and their suffering, and setting then up as objects of reverence.

Grapes of Wrath: Case Study of 'Insaaf ka Taraazu'
In the early 1980s, the ferment surrounding woman's issues and its unsettling impact on gender relations featured in popular films. 'Insaaf ka Taraazu'[21] (The scales of justice, 1980) tackled the subject of rape. In the 1980's women's groups all over India coalesced in the laws dealing with rape, and this structures Insaaf ka Tarazu's narrative. The movie arrived at the historical moment that the infamous Mathura rape case outraged women across the nation. In 1979, the Supreme Court overturned a high court ruling and freed two police constables accused of raping Mathura, a minor, in police custody. The director, B.R Chopra, was a reigning auteur in the film industry since the 1950's. The movie marked a beginning of the re entry of a discourse on women's place in the private and public spheres framed in terms of women's rights- not reform.

In *Insaaf ka Taraazu,* the film's eponymous heroine, Bharati (Zeenat aman) is an independent career woman working as a model. Now in ordinary cinematic situations, careers like modelling would best be left to the 'other woman' and she would have a decidedly modern name but here our protagonist has a very traditional name- Bharati, which is indicative of her traditionalism and virtue. Through the course of the movie, Ramesh, a longstanding admirer of Bharati rapes her. Bharati reports the incident and presses charges against him but loses the lawsuit because of loopholes in anti-rape laws.

Later on in the movie when Ramesh rapes Bharati's sister Nita. Bharati is outraged and she kills him. She represents herself in the court and in an impassioned speech about the miscarriage of justice for women, she fights for justice. The proceedings take a dramatic turn when the judge, impressed by Bharati's arguments, sets her free.

In Insaaf ka taraazu the victim becomes vengeful and victorious not only against the man who victimises her but against the entire misogynist judicial system. She is fighting not only for herself and her sister but on behalf of all Indian women.

Her name, 'Bharati', is of central importance in this symbolic fight for justice.

The primary conceptual meanings:
-   another name of the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Saraswati.
-   related to Bharat (India).

The connotative meaning of being a goddess of knowledge is that all Indian women should be empowered enough to fight for their rights. And by virtue of being related to Bharat, she is every Indian woman. She is the quintessential woman of India.

The film valorises a revenge fantasy. Something that Bharati- as a representative of the women in India undertakes. This is in keeping with the ferment of the nationwide women's movement . The film carefully implants a woman character who was once a victim but now ready to fight back. By virtue of (1) it encourages all Indian women to fight for their rights since 'one from among them' is depicted doing that. (2) is a comment on the sanctity of Indian women in general.

The Other Woman
An important contradiction exists in Indian cinema between the portrayal of an accelerated process of modernity and the woman who identifies with this modernity being portrayed as decadent and punished. Consistently till the 90's, the first ideal of 'pure Indian woman' is pitted against this decadent creature- the vamp.

The role of the vamp is usually very undefined and vague. Women who try to create careers for themselves, or be something other than devoted to a man, are punished and used as a device to idealize those women who are traditional. Many movies have a plot in which the hero chooses between the two. A vamp is generally a more adventurous, independent, and sometimes adulterous woman who is often given a western name, such as 'Dolly' or 'Lily' (And this is what enlightens the aforementioned novice screenwriter).

'Teesri Manzil'[22] (1966)- a plot involving mystery and intrigue is primarily about Sunita (Asha Parekh) and Anil (Shammi Kapoor). Ruby, the 'vamp', (Helen) who makes her living as a nightclub dancer, only plays a miniscule part in the whole story. Yet, she is singled out as Sunita's antithesis. The 'difference' between Sunita and Ruby is that Sunita is the object of desire. Ruby transgresses the line. She is a sexualised subject with a desire of her own as she aggressively pursues the man she loves. She must pay for it with her death.

The actress Helen, who plays a Ruby-like figure in scores of films, is iconic of the vamp. Names like Ruby portray not so much a 'wicked' image as a 'naughty', sexually alluring and immodest one. The image is coded by her erotic and nimbly performed dance numbers.
In Teesri manzil, within the pleasures and dangers of a liminal but exciting nightlife, the role enacted by Helen is that of the 'bad', undomesticated woman. For this she is punished by death. Not altogether insignificant are the communal overtones of Helen's off screen minority status as Christian.

The vamp's names, like her character are without much depth. They are very rarely 'Hindu' and almost always something superficial like:

For instance, Helen's names in various movies were: Miss Suku, Dolly, Jenny, Sherry, Salma, Haseena, Ruksana, Laila, Champakali, Cham Cham.

As the Helen-type figure atrophied in Hindi films during the 1970's, the female lead by the 1980's was transformed from a childlike innocent being into a sexually alluring creature. The vamp was thus redundant. The heroine took over the vamp's job when Madhuri Dixit danced to *Ek, do, teen* in 'Tezaab', or later when she gyrated to *Choli ke peeche kya hai* in 'Khalnayak'. It made more economic sense — the producer needed a single mainstream heroine who could worship, dress up or dress down, dance, be moral, altruistic and occasionally seductive as well. Names moved from super sweet to 'common'. The heroine did not have to be an epitome of goodness, she did not have to be a 'Vidya' or 'Bharati' anymore. She was all rolled into one and had names like Sunita, Neha, Madhu and Juhi.

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If this so called westernised and untraditional woman has more than a miniscule role in the movie or in the rare occasion of the movie revolving around her we might have a name like 'Maya' which means Illusion. In Hindu mythology it is often associated with lust and greed and has negative connotations.

Two specific instances:

   - In Zameen Asman[23] (1972), disciplinarian Shanti Swaroop (Ashok Kumar) alienates
   himself from his wife Urmilla (Indrani Mukherjee); son, Ravi (Sunil Dutt), and daughter,
   Roopa (Yogeeta Bali). His wife passes away, and he marries another woman, Maya (also
   Indrani Mukherjee), who looks like his wife. Maya is far from an ideal wife and also has
   an on-going affair with another man. After a fall from the staircase makes Swaroop lose his

eyesight and be at the mercy of his wife, she and her lover plot on killing him. His nurse Kalpana (Rekha) is the saviour as she foils their plans.
- In Maya Memsaheb[24] (1992), Maya (Deepa Sahi) is seeks an extra marital affair with a younger man. She has unsatiable needs and desires and engages in affairs with numerous other men before committing suicide.

'Fallen Woman' with a Heart of Gold
Another representation of women is the role of the courtesan, who is an ambiguous character, as she is not traditional but not the vamp either. This character exists outside the normal domestic domain and provides the male protagonist with comfort, care, and physical happiness. She generally falls in love with him, although the hero never really falls in love with her. The courtesan is socially decentered, yet respected and admired because of her artistic and musical training. This character is a woman who is independent and earning her own wages, yet the courtesan is still accepted because she shows feminine bias and desire, not simply independence. However, by the end of Bollywood films, tradition always wins, and the courtesan is reproached and shown alone and rejected. The role of the courtesan shows that even if women are subservient to men, they will only be accepted and loved if they are traditional.

Courtesans in Hindi cinema are almost always Muslim. Apart from using religion as tool to show her social decentralisation, this is also because factually, the famous and talented courtesans have been known to be Muslim. Rekha, in 'Mukkadar ka Sikandar' (1978) is called Zohrabai. She is the proverbial fallen woman with a heart of hold. While she loves the male lead in the movie unconditionally, he years for another woman- who is well bred and virtuous and called 'Kaamna' which means 'wish'.

In 'Pyasa' (1957) the prostitute who is pitted against the lead woman is called Gulabo. Similarly, in 'Pakeezah'(1971) the heart of gold metaphor is put forth in the name, which literally means 'pure heart'.

The names of these fallen woman are generally indexical of physical attributes while the lead women rarely have names which have overtly physical connotations. In 'Amar Prem'[25](1971), Sharmila Tagore who is a prostitute is called 'Pushpa" which means 'flower'. Madhuri Dixit in 'Devdas'[26] (2002) is Chandramukhi which means 'moon faced'.

V
What's in a Name?

Apparently a lot, as the instances above suggest. Names are of central import for characterisation in Hindi cinema and more so for women because their roles are often not very well sketched out.

Women are given less screen time than their male counterparts and therefore, to establish their 'character' names function as a shortcut tool. Semantics, the study of meaning is applicable to a plethora of subject areas, and names are definitely an important focus point.

It goes to show that a popular rhetoric might soon lose currency.

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