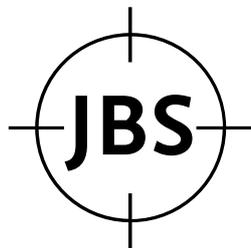# Female Bonds in Bollywood

AJAY GEHLAWAT

James Bond Studies is a burgeoning field, with new critical perspectives increasingly incorporated into the analysis of spy-thriller films and their secret agents. Yet broader gaps in Bond Studies still exist, particularly with regard to non-Western spy-thrillers. While increased attention has been given to issues of race, gender, and ethnicity within James Bond films over the past decade, critical analyses of such themes beyond the scope of the Bond canon remain few and far between.[1] While recent collections such as Lisa Funnell's *For His Eyes Only* (2015) speak to the increased attention given to representations of gender and sexuality within Bond films, the figure of the action heroine similarly continues to represent a "methodological crisis" in this field (Hills 1999, 39). As Elizabeth Hills has observed, "the feminist theorist must also find new ways of negotiating the figure of the female-as-hero" (1999, 47). Though Funnell (2011, 2015, 2018) and others

---

1   The first part of the recent collection, *The Cultural Life of James Bond* (Verheul 2020), includes a chapter on Eastern European spy dramas by Mikolaj Kunicki and my own chapter on Bollywood spy films; however, of a total of 15 chapters, these are the only two to move beyond the Bond canon. Similarly, the collection *For His Eyes Only* (Funnell 2015) includes numerous entries examining issues of race, gender, and sexuality within the Bond franchise but only one (out of 28) explores such themes outside this canon – Jeffrey A. Brown's study of the Hollywood spy thriller, *Salt* (2010). The most extensive study of such themes beyond the Bond canon is the collection *James Bond and Popular Culture* (Brittany 2014), which features chapters on Japanese, Italian, and Bollywood spy thrillers.

Ajay Gehlawat is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Theatre, and Film at Sonoma State University, California.

have taken up this task admirably in recent years, there is no comparable work currently being undertaken outside the parameters of the (Western) Bond canon. This article will therefore mark a double intervention, expanding both the cultural parameters of Bond Studies and specifically focusing on the "methodological crisis" posed by female figures in non-Western, non-Bond spy films. Following and inverting Funnell's provocative conception of Bond as the Bond Girl, in which the former replaces the latter as "the locus of visual spectacle" (2011, 464), this study examines the Bond Girl as Bond, even as, in the process, it explores what precisely is entailed by such monikers ("Bond girl," "female Bond") and how they are reformulated within the context of contemporary popular Hindi cinema, also colloquially known as "Bollywood".

In the process, this study will also examine the corresponding evolution of the Bollywood film form in the 21st century, as well as the subsequent broadening of the conception of the film actor/performer in such films, to include requisite skills of dance. This will in turn be used to explore parallels between the "item girl" in the contemporary Bollywood film and the Bond girl.[2] In the process, this study will consider differences between female representations in the opening credits sequences of Bond films and the end credits sequences of Bollywood films. If the former sequences – particularly when featuring songs performed by female singers – can be said to introduce a "feminine quality" (Piotrowska 2015, 167), I would like to examine how such an element is also introduced via item numbers featured in the end credits sequences of Bollywood spy thrillers. Additionally, I will examine how such sequences in the Bollywood spy thriller allow the heroine to reassert herself in a manner that distinguishes her broader skill set, even as it perhaps compensates for her lack of presence within the filmic narrative. While analysing how such end credits item numbers function in relation to the rest of the film, I will also examine how they serve as promotional items for the larger film, and how they utilise the female figure to do so. This study will thus take up numerous and differing iterations of "female Bonds" in 21st century Bollywood, particularly as essayed by contemporary stars like Katrina Kaif, Taapsee Pannu, and Alia Bhatt, in order to explore broader questions of female representation and agency. The films discussed here have been selected both for their box office success and range of depictions of female agents. This study will proceed by examining each of these films and, in the process, developing a broader understanding of the range of action heroines in

2   The colloquial term "item girl" is given to the woman who performs "item numbers" – big-budget song and dance sequences inserted into the contemporary Bollywood film.

Bollywood. I will conclude by assessing the ways in which female agents in such contemporary Bollywood spy films articulate their agency as well as what this portends for the broader field of Bond Studies.

I would like to begin by briefly reviewing Funnell's overview of the various historical phases of the Bond girl. This figure was "originally presented in the role of English partner (1962-69)", followed by a transition "into the role of American Side-Kick (1971-89)", and then, "in keeping with shifting notions of femininity in the 1990s", this figure evolved into "the American Action Hero Bond Girl (1995-2002)", constructed as "a bona fide action protagonist" who, "in addition to being a physical and intellectual match to Bond, is presented as a sexually equal and thus heroically comparable character" (Funnell 2011, 465). From partner to sidekick to action hero, the Bond girl, in the current fourth phase, has undergone "a significant reworking", which has resulted in the dispersal of qualities typically associated with her across multiple characters (Funnell 2018, 13). As a way of approaching the subject at hand, one can position such a "distribution of Bond Girl elements" within the hybrid form of the Bollywood spy thriller, with its mix of action and song and dance sequences, what has previously been called its "masala" aesthetic.[3] Such a hybrid film form also "confound[s] binaristic logic in a number of ways", as the heroines in such spy films access "a range of emotions, skills and abilities which have traditionally been defined as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'" (Hills, 39). Such a broadening of the range of the action heroine in turn creates "a fluidity of meaning" (Hunt 2011, 62), particularly in light of the multiple disparate elements brought together under the Bollywood umbrella, including intense action sequences and equally intense song and dance sequences. In what follows, I would like to consider how such disparate elements allow the contemporary action heroine in Bollywood multiple platforms through which to express new (and hybrid) articulations of femininity – those confounding the "binaristic logic" or "either 'masculine' or 'feminine'" (Hills, 39).

EK THA TIGRESS: THE CURIOUS CASE OF KATRINA KAIF

Ek Tha Tiger (*There Was a Tiger*, Kabir Khan, 2012, hereafter *Tiger*) is the first of behemoth Indian film producer and distributor Yash Raj Films' Spy Universe franchise, which focuses on a series of fictional and real-life Indian spies, usually working for India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the equivalent of the British MI6. *Tiger*, like the typical Bond film, is set (and filmed) in multiple global

---

3   Masala is a spicy mix and a frequently deployed metaphor for the hybrid Bollywood film form, which blends a variety of generic elements.

locations including India, Turkey, Ireland, Cuba, and Thailand, and was the highest grossing Indian film of 2012 (BoxofficeIndia 2012). The film begins with its eponymous protagonist Tiger, a RAW agent played by Bollywood superstar Salman Khan, tracking down and killing a former colleague in Iraq who has defected to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, the Pakistani equivalent of RAW. Following this opening sequence, Tiger is sent to Trinity College in Dublin, where he poses as a writer and monitors the Indian professor Anwar Kidwai (Roshan Seth), who is suspected of sharing his nuclear weapons research with Pakistan. It is at Trinity that Tiger meets Zoya (Katrina Kaif), Kidwai's personal assistant, who is also choreographing a theatrical production at the college. Tiger subsequently discovers that Zoya is actually an ISI agent – also sent to monitor Kidwai – and the competing spies decide to join forces, first attending a UN meeting in Istanbul together before deciding to abscond to Havana, where their respective agencies try to track them down. Following more action, Tiger and Zoya elude their agencies and, at the film's conclusion, Tiger calls his RAW boss, informing him that he and Zoya will only return when Pakistan and India no longer need ISI and RAW.

With a run time of 133 minutes, *Tiger* includes a number of intense action sequences, as well as a handful of song sequences. In the "Making of" featurette, director Khan repeatedly references Kaif's "physicality", noting that he wrote Zoya's character with the actress in mind (*Tiger* 2012). More than in any of the film's numerous action sequences, one witnesses an effective, and alternative, display of Kaif's physicality in the item number included in the film's end credits, entitled "Mashallah" (an Arabic phrase used to express awe at the beauty of someone or something). In addition to being featured during the film's end credits, this song and dance sequence was released approximately one month prior to the film's release and became a big hit, subsequently winning the People's Choice Award for Best Song in India in 2012. "Mashallah" conforms to the general logics of both the Bollywood song and dance and the item number more particularly, even as it reflects contemporary shifts in Bollywood regarding song and dance.[4] *Tiger* features three additional songs within the film itself, though only one adheres to generic definitions of the Bollywood song and dance, featuring lip synching and dancing, mainly by Khan.[5] "Mashallah" is thus the only true "item

---

4 As Bollywood films have grown increasingly streamlined over the course of the 21st century, one witnesses a subsequent diminution of the role of song and dance within films and the accordant increase of their positioning within end credits sequences, where they are featured as item numbers. See Gehlawat (2017).

song" of the film (although positioned within the end credits) and is allegedly set in Morocco, a setting unreferenced by the film itself.[6]

The "Mashallah" sequence takes place in an unidentified "Arabic" marketplace and features a significant amount of direct address, not just by Kaif but by the majority of the "locals". While the film's end credits scroll horizontally across the bottom of the frame, we first see Khan/ Tiger enter the marketplace, his eyes, filmed in extreme close-up, scanning the setting as if searching for someone. Kaif in turn is first presented via an extreme close-up of her eyes, looking at the camera in direct address. This image – of Kaif watching the approaching Tiger unobserved – recurs through the beginning instrumental portion of the song, then shifts to full-body shots of Kaif and other women, all wearing veils and looking back at Khan or the camera as he and the mobile camera move forward through the semi-covered bazaar.[7] Khan's eyes, again framed in extreme close-up, track the various veiled female figures and, as the instrumental music builds, he guesses correctly, reaching out with one hand and pulling the veil off Kaif, a gesture followed by a reverse shot of Kaif gazing in direct address at the camera/Khan. This opening visual exchange between Kaif and Khan is followed by the start of the male playback, to which Khan lip synchs as he dances, accompanied by multiple male background dancers. This is followed by the start of the female playback, to which Kaif lip synchs and dances, accompanied by multiple female background dancers.[8] Kaif and the other female dancers again enact direct address while engaging in "Middle Eastern" moves, including faux belly dance moves. Adhering to another staple of the Bollywood song and dance, Kaif goes through three costume changes in the course of this four-and-a-half-minute sequence, beginning with a black bustier and translucent yellow skirt, and culminating with a white top and skirt. It is while wearing this latter outfit

---

5   In Bollywood, actors generally do not sing the songs themselves but rather lip synch to their pre-recorded vocalisation, provided by playback singers.

6   Though made to appear as if it were shot in a Moroccan setting, this sequence was actually filmed on a constructed set on the outskirts of Bombay ("Making of Mashallah" featurette).

7   As in conventional Hollywood film editing, the male point of view (POV) is conflated here with that of the camera, thus reaction shots (e.g., by Kaif and the other veiled women) are simultaneously addressed to the viewer and to Khan, with whose POV the camera/viewer has become conflated. See Mulvey (1975) for more regarding the specifically gendered nature of such cinematic interpolation.

8   It is worth noting the gendered division of the choreography at the outset of the song and dance, pitting Tiger and the male dancers "against" Kaif and the female dancers, who occupy separate frames.

that she performs what she calls her "little Moroccan move" ("Making of Mashallah"). The dance choreographer, Vaibhavi Merchant, characterises this move as "very difficult" to perform, entailing "tak[ing] your entire body weight and then go[ing] against that body weight and do[ing] a move" (ibid.). Here we see an (alternative) instance of what director Khan described as "Kaif's physicality"; in this case, learning and employing intricate bodily techniques required to execute not a villain but an extremely difficult dance move necessitating "muscle memory" (ibid.). It may very well be for such reasons that Kaif is described as "set[ting] new standards" with her song and dance performances (ibid.). While the sequence is essentially detached from the film, it can also be seen as reiterating, albeit in highly abstract ways, several of the key themes of the film (e.g., pursuit, detection, mystery). Simultaneously, however, the sequence can be seen as deploying various Orientalist motifs in its iteration of such themes – the opening sequence featuring the veiled Kaif being unveiled by Khan brings to mind Fanon's (1965) description of the gendered colonial encounter – and, in some ways, thus aligns this end credits song with several recurring motifs featured in the opening titles sequences of Bond films. The "reciprocity" provided via Kaif's frequent direct addresses throughout this sequence, however, coupled with her execution of difficult and impressive bodily movements, does challenge such an Orientalising logic, to some extent. In order to more fully appreciate how such a deviation is achieved, let us briefly review the opening titles sequence of the Bond film.

FROM OPENING CREDITS TO END CREDITS

The opening credits sequences of Bond films, which immediately follow a brief opening action sequence, are notorious for their blatant displays of female bodies. In her analysis of such sequences, Sabine Planka argues that the "(semi-)nude female body is served up as an appetizer to a presumed male audience in order to peak [*sic*] their interest in the forthcoming film" (2015, 139). Planka goes on to provide an overview of opening credits typologies, distinguishing between "1. Title Sequences that have No Direct Connection to the Diegetic Space"; "2. Title Sequences with a Connection to the Diegetic Space"; and "3. Interaction between Credits/Titles and Actors or Crew Members" (ibid., 140). She locates the opening credits sequences of Bond films in the first of these categories, claiming that their "sole function is to attract and hold the attention of the assumed male spectator" (ibid., 142). Planka further notes the objectification, fragmentation, and de-individualisation of women in the opening credits sequences of Bond films, as well as their subsequent dehumanisation (ibid., 142-143). Such effects are achieved

through the frequent use of silhouettes which "show no individual features" yet "emphasize the feminine contours of the body" (ibid., 143, 141).

The opening credits sequence from *A View to a Kill* (John Glen, 1985) provides a good instance of such dynamics. Though the sequence begins with a close-up of a woman's face gazing at the camera in direct address, the woman and the camera immediately tilt their respective gazes downward, as the woman unzips her top to reveal her cleavage, within which the opening credits are literally interspersed. Here we see how the woman is immediately fragmented into discrete body parts – her breasts, in this case – as well as how her body is assigned a palimpsestic function in this sequence, becoming the de-individualised surface upon which the film's title credits are superimposed – a form of branding, as it were. The rest of this opening three-minute sequence offers multiple variations on the same themes, featuring anonymised women in black lighting with strategically placed flecks of paint semi-covering (and semi-illuminating) fragments of their bodies as they dance languidly, resembling the model/mannequins of a Robert Palmer video.[9] None of these women is individualised the way Kaif is in "Mashallah" (following her "unveiling"), nor is their dance vocabulary anywhere near as complex or forceful as Kaif's. Furthermore, moments of direct address, in which "the woman knowingly looks at the camera – the audience – and thus exposes the viewer's voyeurism", are "exceedingly rare" in the Bond sequences (Horak 2020, 259). In comparison, it is not only worth noting Kaif's frequent direct addresses to the camera but also when they take place, namely, following each nimbly performed erotic movement or, indeed, per her "little Moroccan move", while she is performing it. In other words, the viewer is immediately confounded by Kaif's look – a return gaze of sorts, challenging the implied (male) viewer ("Can you do this? Aren't you impressed?") – while, in the Bond sequence, the direct address precedes the disembodied shot of breasts which, in turn, is unaccompanied by a subsequent look; the viewer, in other words, is let off the hook, i.e., free to gaze without reproach.

The subsequent opening titles sequence for *Licence to Kill* (John Glen, 1989, hereafter *Licence*) provides another interesting point of distinction between the Bond opening credits and the Bollywood end credits, namely, in its use of the female voice. Anna Piotrowska claims that Bond title songs, particularly those performed by female singers, introduce a "feminine quality" which "can be in-

---

9   Interestingly, Palmer's videos for "I Didn't Mean to Turn You On" and "Simply Irresistible", both of which feature an array of models blankly moving in unison in the background as they mime playing their instruments, were released in the following years (1986, 1988).

terpreted as aural compensation for the insufficient portrayal of women on screen" (2015, 167). Furthermore, "the fragile balance between men and women is negotiated, in part" by this aural "feminine quality" emerging from the title song (ibid., 175). The title song for *Licence* is powerfully performed by African-American singer Gladys Knight. However, unlike Sheena Easton performing the title song onscreen in *For Your Eyes Only* (John Glen, 1981), Knight's image remains absent from *Licence*'s opening sequence, with her voice paired instead with the typical, anonymised silhouettes and blurred images of "(semi-) nude" female bodies (Planka, 139).[10] The "feminine quality" introduced by Knight's sultry, deep-pitched voice is thus arguably countermanded, rather than enhanced, by what Horak describes as the "obsessively repeating motifs" (250) of such opening credits sequences, which work to tip the balance Piotrowska describes firmly in the direction of Bond – a dynamic which Planka in turn describes as "superficial empowerment and inevitable subordination" (144). In "Mashallah", on the other hand, Kaif lip synchs to Shreya Ghoshal's husky voice, while performing intricately choreographed moves and maintaining direct address.[11] Such a combination – sonorous female playback matched with assertive physicality and direct address – arguably counters the "recipe of classical cinema" (or the recipe of the Bond opening titles sequence, in this instance) and turns the woman (Kaif in this case) "into the person that looks" and, via playback, "speaks back" to the male gaze (Mulvey 1975; Nijhawan 2009, 107). All of these elements allow the Bollywood action heroine/female sidekick to reassert herself in a manner that distinguishes her broader skill set and, to invoke Piotrowska, compensates for her "insufficient portrayal" within the film narrative.

A final element relevant to our understanding of how such end credits sequences function in Bollywood, and how they differ from the opening credits of Bond films, is the pacing and related cinematography of these sequences, as well as their relationship to the larger film. Whatever dancing there is in the opening credits sequences of Bond films is generally slow-paced, with the camera similarly "caress[ing] body parts with slow moving pans" (Horak, 259); this may be one reason Kristin Hunt compares these sequences to "strip shows" (68). In comparing the languid pace of these opening title sequences to the frenetic movements of both Kaif and the camera in "Mashallah", the viewer is literally disallowed the type of "erotic contemplation" provided by the "abstract images of

---

10 Easton was the first title song artist to appear onscreen during the opening titles sequence.

11 Ghoshal notes that she does not usually sing in such a low (pitched) voice but that "Mashallah" provided her with the chance to do so ("Making of Mashallah").

happily sensual women who blithely display themselves for the camera" in the Bond titles (Hunt, 65); instead, one's gaze is frequently assaulted by the cinematic, choreographic, and sonic energies which are arguably less on "display" and more actively performed.[12] Furthermore, while the Bond opening credits sequences feature anonymous, de-individualised women who never reappear within the film itself, the Bollywood end credits sequence features a return of (or, another turn by) the film's female protagonist who engages in a different mode of (arduous, sensuous) physicality in these sequences. And because it is the same performer performing these disparate forms of physicality – action moves within the film, dance moves within the end credits item number – such bifurcation paradoxically allows for a new synthesis to emerge. This not only confounds the "binaristic logic" of "skills and abilities which have traditionally been defined as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'" (Hills, 39) but, in the process, creates a "fluidity of meaning" that offers viewers multiple ways to read both the movie and, even more particularly, Kaif's multifaceted performance (Hunt, 62).

To return to Planka's culinary metaphor for the opening titles sequence in Bond films, and to her typology of title sequences, one could say that the end credits item number such as "Mashallah" in the Bollywood spy thriller functions as a digestif yet also serves as an "appetizer" in its function as a pre-release promotional item. Similarly, the end credits sequence featuring the action heroine as item girl arguably does and does not have a "direct connection" to the film diegesis (Planka, 140). In some ways, one could even liken such a moment to what Noel Carroll calls "amplification", in which cinematic innovations are devised by "synthesizing familiar schemas in fresh ways" (qtd. in Bordwell 1997, 153-154). To invoke Monica Germaná, one can ask whether the Bollywood action heroine/item girl such as Kaif can "twist the known paradigm" of both the item number and the spy thriller through such juxtaposition of roles and performances (2019, 201). Related to this question are the ensuing shifts the Bollywood form has taken in the 21st century, nowhere more vividly on display than in the "uneasy harmony" between the dynamics of the action film and its end credits item number (Hunt, 68).[13] Do such latter sequences allow for "the subversive potential" of the dancing female spy to emerge, even as they remain "tightly con-

---

12 At just over four-and-a-half minutes in length, "Mashallah" contains over 200 cuts, i.e., roughly a cut per second. This fast-paced editing is further enhanced by the song's quick tempo, particularly compared to the title songs of Bond films, the last three of which, incidentally, have featured slower and more sombre songs and, relatedly, not much dancing. See *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012), *Spectre* (Sam Mendes, 2015), and *No Time to Die* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2021).

tained" (Hunt, 62)? In order to address this issue, we must first examine the subsequent spy thrillers Kaif has made in Bollywood, along with the arguably less "Bollywood" spy films of Pannu and Bhatt.

THE SPECTRAL PRESENCE OF BOLLYWOOD AND BOND

Kaif appeared in three additional spy thrillers in the five years following *Tiger*: *Bang Bang* (Siddharth Anand, 2014), *Phantom* (Kabir Khan, 2015), and *Tiger Zinda Hai* (*Tiger is Alive*, Ali Abbas Zafar, 2017, hereafter *Tiger Zinda*). Each film builds on her role in *Tiger*, if not overtly then obliquely. The first of these follow-up films, *Bang Bang*, is an official remake of the Hollywood action film *Knight and Day* (James Mangold, 2010) and went on to become the highest grossing film in India in 2014. As in the original Hollywood version, Kaif's character, Harleen Sahni, a naïve bank clerk in Shimla, gets inadvertently caught up in the affairs of a globetrotting spy posing as a jewel thief, played by Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan. Kaif's character here loosely references the civilian cover role she assumes in the first half of *Tiger*, and viewers may very well have speculated whether her character would similarly emerge as a secret agent in the second half. Although Roshan's character does refer to her as "Agent 000" at one point, Kaif remains a naïve bank clerk – though it is she who eventually saves Roshan towards the end of the film. As with *Tiger*, *Bang Bang* includes a mixture of intense action sequences and, following its conclusion, a big budget item number, "Bang Bang", featuring Kaif and Roshan, who is also known for his dancing prowess. Whereas "Mashallah" arguably invokes and reprises key themes from *Tiger* (e.g., pursuit, mystery), "Bang Bang" is more purely an item number, i.e., one devoid of any specific connection to the film or its themes and included, in large part, to showcase the dancing skills of its lead duo.[14]

Kaif's subsequent spy thriller, *Phantom*, again directed by Kabir Khan, features the actress appearing once more as a civilian asset to an Indian RAW agent, here played by Saif Ali Khan, bent on capturing the terrorists responsible for the attacks on Bombay in November 2008 (also known as the 26/11 attacks). Though she initially claims to be a civilian "security advisor", it is eventually revealed that

---

13 Director Khan noted that *Tiger* is "a very fast-paced thriller though it's a love story, it's been cut like a thriller, it moves like a thriller, so it was very difficult for us to try and include a song into the narrative [*sic*] because we just felt that it would slow down the proceeding. But at the same time for a, you know, a big ticket film with Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif, you have to have that one big song and dance extravaganza" ("Making of Mashallah").

14 As with "Mashallah", the "Bang Bang" music video was released prior to the film as a promotional item.

Kaif's character Nawaz Mistry is in fact a RAW agent as well. The film is based on S. Hussain Zaidi's book *Mumbai Avengers* (2015), and includes no song and dance sequences, neither within the film nor in the end credits.[15] Director Khan again noted Kaif's "physicality" being well-suited for this role, though here such "physicality" is primarily on display in the film's numerous action sequences, as Kaif and Khan travel around the world in pursuit of the terrorists ("Making of *Phantom*"). Along with eschewing song and dance, *Phantom*'s overall look is decidedly less sanguine. Along with the omission of any songs, one sees the lack of the typical glamorous look for the lead duo in the film's promotional imagery, particularly when compared to the previous year's *Bang Bang* poster. In a related vein, Kaif's appearance as Mistry in *Phantom* deviates from the initial description of her character (named "Laila Borges") in Zaidi's book, where she is described in the following Flemingesque manner:

> The other person was a woman who they knew was in her late thirties but looked considerably younger. She was wearing a dark grey pencil skirt that accentuated her curves and showed off her shapely legs, and the white shirt she wore fit her snugly, its top two buttons open to reveal a little more cleavage than was necessary. (Zaidi 2015, 51)

In her first appearance in the film, Kaif's character wears an outfit that neither "accentuate[s] her curves" nor "reveals a little more cleavage than was necessary" (ibid.); rather, she dresses demurely, both in her initial appearance in London and throughout the duration of the film. Such deviations, both in the film's and Kaif's appearance, signal *Phantom*'s distance from typical Bollywood fare like *Tiger* and *Bang Bang*, both of which include song and dance sequences in their end credits and feature Kaif sporting a more glamorous look and couture. These departures simultaneously signal *Phantom*'s deeper investment in a realist aesthetic and the concomitant inability of such an aesthetic to accommodate the Bollywood form and its related *accoutrements*.[16]

The sequel to *Tiger*, *Tiger Zinda* is the second film of the YRF Spy Universe series and, like its predecessor, was a box office success, also winning the Filmfare Award for Best Action in 2017. Following Tiger and Zoya's decision to jointly ab-

---

15 One song, "Afghan Jalebi", merely plays on the soundtrack and is enfolded within the film's plot, simply serving as a background score to the film action.

16 In another deviation from the typical happy ending of Bollywood films, *Phantom*'s lead spy, played by Saif Ali Khan, dies at the end, after being shot and falling into the Arabian Sea, where he is unable to grasp Mistry's outstretched hand.

scond from their respective intelligence agencies (RAW and ISI) at the end of the first film, the sequel begins with them living in an isolated cottage in a snowy, mountainous setting with their son, Junior. Tiger is soon called back to duty to rescue a group of 25 Indian nurses being held hostage by a terrorist group in Iraq; although there are also 15 Pakistani nurses being held hostage, the Indian government claims its mission is only to save the Indian nurses. Tiger assembles his team but Zoya is left out – or rather, left at home with Junior. Or so one surmises. Such a move, coupled with the sequel's opening premise of conjugal bliss for the former spies, seems to indicate a tendency Funnell has previously identified, in which "the heroic proficiency of the Bond Girl is (partially) undermined […] by the heterosexual romantic conquest mandated" (2018, 16). Zoya has indeed been "transformed into wi[fe] and/or mother figure" at the start of *Tiger Zinda*, thus demonstrating perhaps that patriarchy is also *zinda* (alive) (Purse 2011, 188). Yet, just as the viewer begins to believe that this is indeed the case, Zoya emerges onscreen unannounced, approximately 30 minutes into the narrative, and just in the nick of time to save Tiger and his team. Such episodic appearances by the erstwhile female agent recur intermittently through the film – approximately every 20 to 30 minutes, Zoya reemerges to save Tiger – yet each reemergence is, in turn, followed by her subsequent disappearance. In other words, though she nominally takes part in the film' action sequences, and technically saves Tiger from danger on a number of occasions, Zoya's character is neither consistently nor substantially developed in this sequel. Though Tiger and Zoya, as agents of RAW and ISI, again join forces to fight a common enemy, her character and onscreen presence remain secondary to that of the male agent.

Nevertheless, as in the first *Tiger*, Kaif reemerges in the film's end credits item number, entitled "Swag se Swagat" ("Welcome with Style"). As in "Mashallah", Kaif dominates this item number (Salman Khan being nowhere near as good a dancer as Hrithik Roshan), performing a series of intricate and audacious dance moves while again going through numerous costume changes and consistently engaging in winking direct address. These knowing glances – which, as Horak has previously noted, are "exceedingly rare" in the Bond title sequences (259) – directly address the camera's gaze and, coming as they do after each of Kaif's provocative costume changes, "expose the viewer's voyeurism" (ibid.), as in "Mashallah". Despite, or perhaps due to, such winking acknowledgment, coupled with Kaif's nimble and sexy moves to the catchy tune, "Swag se Swagat" has been viewed more than 900 million times on YouTube, arguably supplanting the pop-

ularity of the film itself.[17] Though Zoya helps to save the 15 Pakistani nurses being held hostage within the film proper, her performance in the end credits is arguably more memorable. In other words, Kaif's (dual) performances in *Tiger Zinda* illuminate "the blurred boundary between 'item girls' and film actors" (Kumar 2017, 340), even as they again allow a performer like Kaif to showcase skills not conventionally (or, perhaps more precisely, not Eurocentrically) considered part of an actor's toolkit, particularly in a spy thriller. Yet the question of how such items, with their attendant "feminine qualities", are ultimately "packaged", and whether they amplify or undercut the female agent's performance within the film proper, remain salient, particularly in an industry in which song and dance arguably still play an outsized role.

NAAM SHABANA AND THE NIRBHAYA EFFECT

Such questions become all the more pertinent when turning to the next Indian spy thriller featuring a female agent, *Naam Shabana* (*Name Shabana*, Shivam Nair, 2017, hereafter *Shabana*), which was released the same year as *Tiger Zinda*. *Shabana* is actually a "prequel/ sequel" to *Baby* (Neeraj Pandey, 2015), an action thriller whose plot, like *Phantom*'s, is centered around capturing the purported culprits behind the 26/11 attacks in Bombay. Taapsee Pannu is featured as one of Agent Ajay Singh Rajput (Akshay Kumar)'s team, employed as a "honeytrap" to ensnare one of the terrorists. Though her appearance in the film is essentially limited to a 20-minute action sequence, it is a particularly intense sequence, as the director notes in the "Making of" featurette. Pandey claims they wanted someone "who's very vulnerable, and that she looks vulnerable", even though, as he goes on to note, Pannu's character, Shabana, is obviously not, despite superficial appearances. Indeed, according to the director, Pannu "trained very hard", for approximately a month, to prepare for the brief role. Pannu explains that she was given a trainer by Akshay Kumar (himself trained in martial arts), who trained her in Krav Maga, a military self-defense and fighting system developed by the Israeli Defense Forces and derived from a combination of boxing, wrestling, judo, aikido, and karate ("*Baby*: The Making"). Her subsequent description of this combat training experience – "I had to, like, break myself and build myself simultaneously" (ibid.) – calls to mind Hills' observation concerning the (Western) action heroine, namely, that such a figure "'reassembles' her body" (48).

---

17 Here we see both how "films may be unable to contain the 'item songs'" (Kumar 2017, 341) and how such a sequence can function as a metalepsis, "fill[ing] in for the larger work in many ways" (Gehlawat 2017, 213).

Here we see an interesting counterpart to the training Kaif received for *Tiger*'s "Mashallah" sequence; while Kaif was trained for dance and Pannu for combat, both women are provided "the means of creating a new body", and Pannu's ensuing "re-assemblage" arguably "transgresses the hierarchical divisions and limitations posed by the gender system" (ibid., 45). Thus, we see how Pannu engages in a different form of cine-choreography, one arguably less informed by a feminine quality, but which is, precisely for this reason, more effective in helping her succeed in her mission. As per the director's comments, Shabana's casting as the "honeytrap" is paradoxically contingent upon her perceived vulnerability as a woman.

While Pannu's training is included in the "Making of" featurette, it is not included within *Baby* itself, where her presence is limited to the resulting 20-minute action sequence. Yet due to the positive feedback her performance generated, the subsequent "prequel", *Shabana*, was released two years later, providing the backstory for her character; that is, how Shabana Khan became an agent. This is something, as Klaus Dodds has observed, that is generally not included in Bond films.[18] Even prior to witnessing her training and ensuing transformation into a secret agent, however, we see what leads to Shabana's recruitment in the first place, and, in turn, what motivates her to develop her subsequent combat skills. If ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan inform the *Tiger* films and *Phantom*, one of the key Ur-texts informing *Shabana* is the violent 2012 Nirbhaya rape case which took place in the Indian capital of New Delhi.[19] Sangita Gopal describes a number of films that were released following this event which, while not making any direct reference to it, are shaped by what she calls "the Nirbhaya effect" (2021, 43). *Shabana* follows this pattern, introducing us to its eponymous female protagonist early on, when she is attending college in Bombay while also training in Kudo, a mixed martial arts form. One evening, when she and a male friend, Jai, are returning home on Jai's scooter, a group of men in a passing jeep begin bothering them, making lewd comments about Shabana and questioning Jai's manhood. Shabana, whom we have already seen is unafraid to stand up for

---

18 "The audience", Dodds notes, "is never shown Moneypenny [Naomie Harris]'s training or the institutional testing/confirmation of her skill set" (qtd. in Funnell 2018, 17).

19 "Nirbhaya", which means "fearless" in Hindi, was the name given by the Indian press to Jyoti Singh Pandey who, on the evening of 12 December 2012, was returning home with a male friend on a bus when they were brutally beaten and Pandey was gang-raped by the five assailants and penetrated with an iron rod before being thrown, along with her male friend, onto the street. Pandey died a few days later. As Sangita Gopal notes, news of the incident "spread like wildfire and [...] provoked large-scale and nationwide protests and demonstrations" (2021, 43).

herself, becomes incensed and tells Jai to stop the scooter. Jai refuses and drives on; however, they are soon ambushed by the same group of men, who proceed to attack the couple and kill Jai before driving away. Following this traumatic event, and the police's lack of progress in the case, Shabana receives a phone call from a mysterious man who asks if she wants to avenge Jai's death. The man, it is soon revealed, works for a secret government agency that has been tracking Shabana for some time, seeing her as a possible recruit. After being aided in her escape once she kills the ringleader of the group that attacked her and Jai, Shabana joins the secret agency and her training commences. The film includes detailed scenes of this training, which show Shabana learning how to fire weapons and further develop her fighting skills.

As in the making of *Baby*, Pannu underwent extensive physical training (offscreen) for *Shabana*. Yet diverging from *Baby* and most Bond films, her training here also becomes part of the filmic narrative, thus showing us not only her backstory and ensuing motivation to become an agent but also devoting a significant amount of film time to chronicling the development of her requisite skill set. As with *Phantom*, the film does not feature its combat-trained titular heroine in any song and dance sequences, neither within the film nor in its end credits. Thus we see an inadvertent resurgence of the type of "binaristic logic" that Hills previously referenced, in which time and attention are now devoted to chronicling the training and subsequent fighting skills of the female agent. However, this only comes with her concomitant abnegation of the other type of physical activity previously performed by agents like Zoya in the *Tiger* films; namely, dance. Shabana's combat training is effective, as she single-handedly and arduously fights and kills the villain at the film's conclusion; however, dancing, which is imbued with more of a "feminine quality", is no longer part of this agent's skill set. If one sees the female agent's performance of song and dance as compensating for her relative lack within the (action-driven) film narrative, then one could point to Shabana's increased participation in the film's action as the reason such compensation is no longer needed. Yet one could also argue that Shabana is in the process relegated to a kind of "hard femininity" (Germaná 2019, 213); and while "the hardness of their muscular physiqu[e] resists a patriarchal notion of feminine fragility" (ibid.,), it also seems to relegate the female action heroine to one side of Hills' "binaristic model" of gender, rather than providing the means of creating "a new body" which transgresses the "divisions and limitations posed by such a model" (Hills, 45). To some extent, one could even argue that such a division is also evident in the *Tiger* films, in which Kaif's song and dance perfor-

mances are essentially relegated to the end credits sequences. The ensuing question, with which I like to conclude, then becomes whether or not it is possible for a female agent to become adept in physical combat while retaining her "feminine quality". To address this question, I turn to one final film and the first Indian spy thriller to be directed by a woman, *Raazi* (*Willing*, Meghna Gulzar, 2018).

DOMESTICATING THE BOLLYWOOD SPY THRILLER

Raazi is based on the novel *Calling Sehmat* (2008) by Harinder Sikka, itself based upon true events. The film chronicles the experiences of Sehmat, a twenty-year-old Kashmiri college student whose father, an ailing RAW agent, asks her to take his place and serve as a spy in Pakistan during the lead up to India's war with Pakistan over the independence of East Pakistan in the early 1970s. Sehmat, played by Bollywood star Alia Bhatt, agrees to marry the younger son of her father's friend, a Pakistani brigadier, and then proceeds to use her position as wife and daughter-in-law within the brigadier's household to conduct surveillance and relay relevant details to her commanders in India. As in *Shabana*, the film chronicles Sehmat's rigorous training and transformation from naïve college student to spy, as she learns to fight, fire weapons, and use Morse code, which she will subsequently employ to relay coded messages from the brigadier's house. The film, which was both a critical and commercial success, deviates from previous Bollywood spy thrillers in a number of ways, most notably in its depiction of Sehmat and of the traumas she experiences in completing her mission, which includes killing two men. As Kavita Daiya notes, the film draws upon two themes: "the suffering yet agentive woman" and "the divided family", the latter of which can be read allegorically to refer to Partition and the ensuing India-Pakistan divide (2020, 132). The film also offers an alternative representation of the female spy, depicting Sehmat as a "traumatized figure" (ibid., 131), critiquing "the masculinity of violence" and "embrac[ing] femininity as a source of power and moral strength" (Shandilya 2022, 2). Additionally, the film presents Sehmat's relationship with her Pakistani husband, Iqbal (Vicky Kaushal), as a more complex relationship than that of Tiger and Zoya in the *Tiger* films. Though Iqbal ultimately discovers that Sehmat is a spy, and Sehmat points a gun at him upon realizing her cover has been blown, the film also vividly depicts her emotional struggle and ensuing difficulty in pulling the trigger. Unable to kill the enemy (her husband), Sehmat instead flees her in-laws' household and attempts to escape from Pakistan. However, in the process of extracting her, her RAW handlers seem willing to sacrifice her life in order to kill Iqbal; though she survives, like Daniel Craig's Bond in *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006) she is emotionally scarred

by her experiences and walks away from the Indian spy organisation disillusioned.

Raazi differs from previous Bollywood spy thrillers not only in conveying its female agent's disillusion but in its overall depiction of this figure, which include "visual markers of femininity – long hair, traditional clothes", and, as Krupa Shandilya observes, "she wears the beautiful, light clothes of a homemaker even when she is at war" (2022, 5).[20] The film also deviates from typical Bond and Bollywood spy fare by making the home the center of the action; as Bilal Qureshi notes, "[b]y day, [Sehmat's] playing the role of dutiful, doting, and smiling housewife", and the "battlefield" of the film essentially becomes the domestic spaces of her in-laws' household, whose private rooms and corridors she navigates with stealth (2018, 68). Similarly, Raazi's action sequences are framed differently from those of more conventional spy thrillers like the Tiger films or Shabana, showing not only the tension Sehmat experiences in performing lethal acts but, even more importantly, her ensuing grief. It is precisely in such a way that Sehmat "cannot let go of her femininity" (Shandilya, 8). Rather than adhering to the type of "hard femininity" on display in other films featuring female agents, Raazi avoids such a "binaristic model", depicting its heroine as both competent in completing her missions and humane in her subsequent emotional reactions.

All of these differences set Raazi and its female spy apart from previous iterations of such a figure and such a genre; as Shandilya notes, "Sehmat's tears belie her words" (ibid., 8). By candidly showing the character's emotional struggles at key moments in the film, Meghna Gulzar seems to affirm that it is possible for a female agent to become adept at physical combat while retaining her "feminine quality". Yet precisely because, as the film seems to suggest, she retains this quality, she experiences an emotional breakdown, which serves as a compelling critique of the human toll of such missions. The film also echoes its female protagonist's disillusionment by concluding not with a celebratory item number, but on a more ambivalent note. As Shandilya observes, unlike other recent female-led action films such as Shabana, Raazi's conclusion, rather than rewarding women for their violent actions, suggests that "patriarchal structures" are the source of women's oppression and women, too, become "compelled to act with

20 The director, Meghna Gulzar, also emphasises this costuming choice in the "Making of" feature: "I wanted her [Sehmat] to be feminine and in soft, flowy silhouettes, because we're used to the stereotype that, if a woman is doing action or, you know, she's playing a character that's going to be doing physical things, she needs to be in masculine clothes or tight clothes or dark clothes. And I really wanted to go against the stereotype on this one" ("Making of Raazi").

violence to protect their own interests" (ibid., 12). This accords with Gopal's earlier critique of female-led action films influenced by the "Nirbhaya effect", in which female protagonists' "desires for self-assertion" and their subsequent, decisive actions can nevertheless be "harmful and destructive to self (and society)" (51). In vividly depicting such gendered struggles, however, a film like *Raazi* arguably succeeds in drawing attention to what is otherwise all too conveniently elided in such spy thrillers.

CONCLUSIONS

In concluding, I would briefly like to turn to some of the critics' responses to the first film discussed in this study, *Tiger*. Two points are salient here. First, in the *New York Times*' review, Rachel Saltz begins by lauding the film's "glass-shattering, rooftop-hopping action sequences," but makes no mention of the film's songs and dances, including the item number from which the image accompanying her review stems (2012, n.p.). Why is this? Is it possibly because this element – and the actors' subsequent performance of it – is not central, or even tangential, to her consideration of the film's merits? Whatever may be the case, the omission of any discussion of the film's song and dance replicates the typical, Aristotelian view of such elements (music and dance) as inconsequential to the overall drama. Yet, as this discussion has shown, it is precisely sequences like "Mashallah" that showcase their female agent's alternative skill set, one that reframes her character (and, in the process, the *telos* of the film), even as the sequence itself remains "tightly contained" (Hunt, 62). In relation to this, to address the question of whether or not such items amplify or undercut the female agent's performance (and agency), it is again worth noting the response of a critic. Longtime Indian film reviewer Anupama Chopra claims that "what's enjoyable is that Katrina also kicks butt" (2012, n.p.), and yet, like Saltz, makes no mention of the film's item song. However, as I have shown, participation in the item song requires just as much – if not more – skill, and also functions as a powerful, albeit different, moment for the female agent.

To extrapolate from such responses and from the insights of earlier feminist theorists of the "female-as-hero" (Hills, 47), one could argue that, by offering an array of differing representations of female agents, who also signify their difference in differing ways, contemporary Bollywood spy thrillers create a broader "fluidity of meaning" which collectively offers viewers "multiple ways to 'read' each movie" (Hunt, 62) and, in particular, their female protagonists. This is due in part to the elasticity of the Bollywood form, comprised of multiple generic elements through which, in turn, aspects of the female agent may be disseminated.

While the tendency to downplay song and dance risks overlooking the importance of such moments for their expressions of female agency, one must similarly avoid the "binaristic logic" in which heroines like Sehmat or Shabana are seen as "stronger" or "weaker" because of their attendant skill sets or differing emotional reactions. Rather than framing female characters as being more or less "powerful" based on their proximity to figurative masculinity, one would do better – particularly in the context of Bollywood – to view these films, both individually and collectively, as providing multiplicities of meaning, numerous ways for female agents to demonstrate their skills and, in turn, reshape their narratives.

To return to Funnell's taxonomy of the Bond girl, one could argue that the qualities typically associated with this figure, which are dispersed across multiple characters in contemporary Bond films, are reconsolidated in Bollywood within one female figure. Similarly, one could argue Bollywood reconfigures the spy thriller via its masala, and that the key figure in this operation is the female agent whose prowess and agency manifest themselves in ways that both exceed and reformulate the Bondian parameters within which female agents are typically positioned (and theorised). Simultaneously within its own ecumene, Bollywood provides multiple iterations of the spy thriller and the female agent, no longer bonded to normative gender roles but able to rearticulate such configurations through gender fluidity; not only "kicking butt" but, in the broadest sense of the word, outperforming Bond and the master spy narrative. Female Bonds in Bollywood thus reshape not only their own narratives but also the broader contours of Bond Studies, allowing for new perspectives to emerge regarding female figures and their agency.

REFERENCES
A View to a Kill. 1985. Dir. John Glen, Eon Productions.
Baby. 2015. Dir. Neeraj Pandey, Cape of Good Films.
"*Baby*: The Making". 2015. *Baby* DVD Special Features, Super Cassettes Industries
      Pvt. Ltd.
Bang Bang. 2014. Dir. Siddharth Anand, Fox Star Studios.
Bordwell, David. 1997. *On the History of Film Style*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
BoxofficeIndia.com. 2012. "Ek Tha Tiger Collects 10 Crore in Week 3". 7 September.
      https://web.archive.org/web/20120910004543/http://www.boxofficeindia.c

om/boxnewsdetail.php?page=shownews&articleid=4869&nCat=. Accessed 8 January 2022.

Brittany, Michele, ed. 2014. *James Bond and Popular Culture: Essays on the Influence of the Fictional Superspy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.

Casino Royale. 2006. Dir. Martin Campbell, Eon Productions.

Chopra, Anupama. 2012. "Anupama Chopra's Review: Ek Tha Tiger". *Hindustan Times*. 16 August. https://www.hindustantimes.com/movie-reviews/anupama-chopra-s-review-ek-tha-tiger/story-01h3jMcHHxROFeVsJ9EIaK.html. Accessed 8 January 2022.

Daiya, Kavita. 2020. *Graphic Migrations: Precarity and Gender in India and the Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Ek Tha Tiger. 2012. Dir. Kabir Khan, Yash Raj Films.

Fanon, Frantz. 1965. *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Monthly Review Press.

For Your Eyes Only. 1981. Dir. John Glen, Eon Productions.

Funnell, Lisa. 2011. "'I Know Where You Hide Your Gun': Daniel Craig as the Bond-Bond Girl Hybrid in Casino Royale". *Journal of Popular Culture* 44(3): 455-472.

Funnell, Lisa, ed. 2015. *For His Eyes Only: The Women of James Bond*. New York: Wallflower Press.

Funnell, Lisa. 2018. "Reworking the Bond Girl Concept in the Craig Era". *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 46(1): 11-21.

Gehlawat, Ajay. 2017. "The Picture Is Not Yet Over!: The End Credits Song Sequence in Bollywood". *South Asian Popular Culture* 15(2-3): 203-216.

Germaná, Monica. 2019. *Bond Girls: Body, Fashion and Gender*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Gopal, Sangita. 2021. "Lethal Acts: Bollywood's New Woman and the Nirbhaya Effect." In *Bollywood's New Woman: Liberalization, Liberation, and Contested Bodies*, eds. Megha Anwer and Anupama Arora. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 40-53.

Hills, Elizabeth. 1999. "From 'Figurative Males' to Action Heroines: Further Thoughts on Active Women in the Cinema". *Screen* 40(1): 38-50.

Horak, Jan-Christopher. 2020. "Branding 007: Title Sequences in the James Bond Films". In *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007*, ed. Jaap Verheul. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 249-268.

Hunt, Kristin. 2011. "Beyond the Spiral Barrel: A Critical History of Dance in the James Bond Films". In *James Bond in World and Popular Culture: The Films*

Are Not Enough, eds. Robert G. Weiner et al. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher: 60-75.

Knight and Day. 2010. Dir. James Mangold, Regency Enterprises.

Kumar, Akshaya. 2017. "Item Number/Item Girl". *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40(2): 338-341.

Licence to Kill. 1989. Dir. John Glen, Eon Productions.

"Making of Mashallah". 2012. *Ek Tha Tiger* DVD Special Features, Yash Raj Films.

"Making of *Phantom*". 2015. *Phantom* DVD Special Features, Reliance Big Entertainment.

"Making of *Raazi*". 2018. *Raazi* DVD Special Features, Reliance Big Entertainment.

"Making of the film". 2012. *Ek Tha Tiger* DVD Special Features, Yash Raj Films.

Mulvey, Laura. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Screen* 16(3): 6-18.

Naam Shabana. 2017. Dir. Shivam Nair, Cape of Good Films.

Nijhawan, Amita. 2009. "Excusing the Female Dancer: Tradition and Transgression in Bollywood Dancing". *South Asian Popular Culture* 7(2): 99-112.

No Time to Die. 2021. Dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga, Eon Productions.

Phantom. 2015. Dir. Kabir Khan, UTV Motions Pictures.

Piotrowska, Anna. 2015. "Female Voice and the Bond Films". In *For His Eyes Only*, ed. Lisa Funnell. New York: Wallflower Press: 167-175.

Planka, Sabine. 2015. "Female Bodies in the James Bond Title Sequences". In *For His Eyes Only*, ed. Lisa Funnell. New York: Wallflower Press: 139-147.

Purse, Lisa. 2011. "Return of the 'Angry Woman': Authenticating Female Physical Action in Contemporary Cinema". In *Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture*, ed. Melanie Waters. London: Palgrave Macmillan: 185-198.

Qureshi, Bilal. 2018. "In Love and War: The Duplicitous Women of New War Cinema". *Film Quarterly* 72(2): 67-70

Raazi. 2018. Dir. Meghna Gulzar, Dharma Productions.

Saltz, Rachel. 2012. "Love as Espionage, and Vice Versa". *New York Times*. 16 August. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/17/movies/ek-tha-tiger-by-kabir-khan.html. Accessed 8 January 2022.

Shandilya. Krupa. 2022. "Bollywood's New Action Cinema: The Woman-led Action Film and the Nation". In *Action Cinema Since 2000*, eds. Yvonne Tasker, Lisa Purse, and Christine Holmund. London: British Film Institute: 1-12. Manuscript in preparation.

Skyfall. 2012. Dir. Sam Mendes, Eon Productions.

Spectre. 2015. Dir. Sam Mendes, Eon Productions.

Tiger Zinda Hai. 2017. Dir. Ali Abbas Zafar, Yash Raj Films.

Verheul, Jaap, ed. 2020. *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Zaidi, S. Hussain. 2015. *Mumbai Avengers*. Noida: HarperCollins.