

# Bodies, Bollywood and Bond.

## The evolving image of secret agents in Hindi spy thrillers inspired by the 007 franchise

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**Abstract.** In the 1960s, after the international commercial success of the James Bond films, many imitations and parodies of the original were made in different parts of the world. In India popular Hindi films were also inspired by the 007 franchise, beginning with the action thriller *Farz* in 1967. From then on a new genre was formed in the Bombay cinema: Hindi Bond films. These derivative productions were deliberately created to replicate the plot formula and narrative structure of the original Bond series. They underwent considerable development from cheap, amateurish B-movies to big budget commercial hits such as *Ek Tha Tiger* in 2012. Also the leading characters in Hindi Bond films, the secret agents of the Indian police and intelligence, evolved from the innocent, happy-go-lucky youngsters in the 1960s into the tough, world-weary men of action in the 2010s. One of the most important factors of this gradual change is the way the heroes' bodies were shown on screen. The focus on the esthetics, the musculature, the physical abilities and sex appeal of the Bombay Bonds was different in every decade. This article concentrates on the evolution of Hindi Bond films: the genre as well as the leading characters.

In 2002, Shah Rukh Khan, the Bollywood superstar, said: 'James Bond always does well in India—that's a Hindi film. Man, I want to be James Bond. Please make me the first Indian James Bond' (Govil 2008, 201). Apparently, the famous actor was not aware that he was regrettably late with this declaration, because the first Indian James Bond appeared on screen 35 years earlier, in 1967. And his successors continue to entertain the audience even today. This article intends to introduce the reader to the leading characters of these exotic, obscure and fascinating productions known as Hindi Bond films.

In many aspects the first three films about Bond, *Dr. No* (1962, dir. Terence Young), *From Russia With Love* (1963, dir. Terence Young) and *Goldfinger* (1964, dir. Guy Hamilton), are the most important for the whole series. They introduced the leading character, a British spy James Bond alias 007—ruthless assassin, irresistible womanizer and globetrotting snob created by British writer Ian Fleming.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Technically, before *Dr. No* there was *Casino Royale* (1954, dir. William H. Brown, Jr.), American TV adaptation of Ian Fleming's novel. But the leading character, a U.S. intelligence agent named Jimmy (!) Bond, does not resemble Fleming's 007 in the least.

They established a successful formula for the series: the secret agent equipped with futuristic gadgets undertaking dangerous missions in exotic and lavish places all over the world, spending his time in luxury and enjoying the company of beautiful women. These three films also marked the beginning of ‘Bondmania’, the international popularity of 007—the hero as well as the series.

The commercial success of entertaining spy thrillers full of action, adventure, elegance, eroticism and humour, encouraged the producers from other countries to make their own imitations of Bond films. These low-budget, derivative productions, made mostly in France and Italy in the 1960s, were mockingly called ‘Eurospy’ films. One of the prominent ‘Eurospy’ action thrillers is the French/ Italian film *Banco a Bangkok* (1964, dir. Andre Hunebelle)—also known as *Panic in Bangkok* or *Shadow of Evil*—based on the novel *Lila de Calcutta* (1960) by the French author Jean Bruce. The leading character, agent OSS 117 (Kerwin Mathews) is a dashing, debonair James Bond-type superspy.<sup>2</sup> He investigates the mysterious death of another OSS operative and discovers that the agent was killed by the henchmen of an evil Indian scientist, Dr. Sinn (Robert Hossein), who wants to destroy the world with a deadly virus.

Three years later *Banco a Bangkok* was remade in Andhra Pradesh as a Telugu production, *Goodachari 116* (1967, dir. Mallikharjuna Rao M.). The star of this film, Krishna Ghattamaneni, later would earn the nickname ‘Andhra James Bond’, because in subsequent years he quite frequently played secret agents, for example in the production *James Bond 777* (1971, dir. K.S.R. Doss).

In the year of its release *Goodachari 116* was remade as a Hindi action thriller *Farz* (1967, dir. Ravikant Nagaich). The hero, agent 116 alias Gopi (Jeetendra), just like OSS 117, has to investigate the death of another operative worker, 303. He discovers that his colleague was killed by the gang of terrorists who try to destroy India’s crops with toxic fertilizer. The mastermind of this operation is a mysterious man in a Mao jacket called Supremo (Rajanala): a yellow-skinned, slant-eyed, racist caricature of a Red Chinaman. Agent 116 single-handedly brings the gang down, saving his country and winning the heart of the innocent daughter of one of the terrorists’ accomplices.

The film was a commercial success and today is considered the first Hindi equivalent of a James Bond film—or, for short, a Hindi Bond film (though, as a matter of fact, *Farz* is not directly inspired by any of the original Bond productions; it is only the remake of the remake of the adaptation trying to cash in on the success

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to stress that Jean Bruce created OSS 117 in 1949—four years before publication of Ian Fleming’s *Casino Royale* (first novel introducing James Bond). Also, the first film adaptation with OSS 117, *OSS 117 n’est pas mort* (1957, dir. Jean Sacha) was made five years before *Dr. No!* However, Jean Bruce’s creation has never become such a worldwide phenomenon as Bond. Moreover, the film series with OSS 117 gained popularity only after *Dr. No* and *From Russia With Love* were released and ‘Bondmania’ started.

of the 007 franchise). After *Farz* there were many other productions (obviously inspired by the adventures of Bond) that eventually formed a sort of separate genre in the Bombay cinema.

### **On Mother India's secret service: What is a Hindi Bond film?**

One might argue that the term 'Hindi Bond films' is somewhat arbitrary, because—as in the case of *Farz*—the references to James Bond are so vague that there may be some reasonable doubt whether they even exist. But the term 'Hindi spy films' would be irrelevant because: a) there are many Hindi spy films that are not related to 007 in any way—such as *Samadhi* (1950, dir. Ramesh Saigal), *Night in London* (1967, dir. Brij) or *Saazish* (1975, dir. Kalidas); b) there actually exists a cluster of Hindi films deliberately created to resemble the Bond productions as much as possible.

An additional problem is that many 'masala movies'—popular entertaining films made in Bombay—include blatant, sometimes bordering on plagiarism, references to the Bond series, even if their plot has absolutely nothing to do with espionage and secret agents. For example, the opening credits of action thriller *Warrant* (1975, dir. Pramod Chakravorty) are illustrated by Monty Norman's *The Bond Theme*, mixed with Lalo Schifrin's tune from *Enter the Dragon* (1973, dir. Robert Clouse); both used without permission by the film's music director, R.D. Burman. The climax includes scenes either plagiarized (such as the villain's lair hidden under the mountain lake), or literally edited (the helicopter fight) from *You Only Live Twice* (1967, dir. Lewis Gilbert). Another action film, *Shaan* (1980, dir. Ramesh Sippy) begins with a musical sequence obviously mimicking the so-called Bond credits (opening titles juxtaposed with the silhouette of a dancing woman) and the film's villain, Shakaal (Khulbhushan Kharbanda), seems taken straight from Bond's world with his larger-than-life demeanor, the ever-ready army of henchmen and a secret tropical island headquarters (and the fact that Shakaal is clearly modeled after an old Bond adversary, Ernst Stavro Blofeld, also plays some part). The same with another arch-nemesis: the infamous Mogambo (Amrish Puri) from *Mr. India* (1987, dir. Shekhar Kapur).

But could these productions be called Hindi Bond films? Definitely not, because they lack the most important, defining element of the formula—that is Bond himself, or rather his Indian counterpart. If we would be so generous as to call them Hindi Bond films, we would be obliged to do the same with most of the 'masala movies', because it is hard to imagine a decent masala without such necessary ingredients as over-the-top villains, gadgets unknown to modern science, elaborate death traps and a spectacular climax in the villain's secret headquarters. These integral elements of the Bond formula became the elements of the masala recipe.

To avoid potential problems, this article focuses only on the productions that most faithfully recreate the plot formula and narrative structure of the 007 series—‘a secret agent is assigned on a mission to fight a terrorist organization while enjoying the luxurious life of a playboy’—even if they do it in such an indirect and roundabout way like *Farz*.

### **From Bombay with love: The differences between 007 and Bombay Bonds**

The best way to start the analysis of Hindi Bond films is to show the most important differences between the original Bond series and its Hindi derivatives.

First of all, there is no such thing as ‘a Bond series’—a long running adventure serial with one leading character—in Hindi cinema. The film producers in Bombay assumed that the audience despises sequels; they felt obliged to show a new leading character in every film. Even in 2006, Derek Bose claimed: ‘Hindi film-makers are scared stiff of producing sequels and would rather turn out remakes and copies of proven hits from the past’ (Bose 2006, 59)—how ridiculous these words sound now, when sequels are the norm of practice in Bollywood! In the case of James Bond, making a film series would present an additional problem for Bombay producers—007 romances a different girl in every movie—if an Indian hero were shown being this promiscuous, it would not have been accepted by the Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC) nor the conservative audience. Nevertheless, there actually were a few feeble efforts at creating an Indian equivalent of the Bond series. After *Farz*, agent 116 was the hero of *Keemat* (1973; this time he was played by Dharmendra!) and *Raksha* (1981, played by Jeetendra again) while another agent, Gun Master G-9 (Mithun Chakraborty), appeared in *Surakksha* (1979) and *Wardat* (1981)—all five films were made by the same director, Ravikant Nagaich. Also, in the end credits of *Spy in Rome* (1968, dir. B.K. Adarsh) a sequel was announced (*Our next: Operation America*), but the film’s fate remains unknown.

Secondly, spy films—especially in the 1960s—seldom reached the mainstream Hindi cinema. Most of the spy thrillers from Bombay were half-amateurish B-class films with schematic, often ridiculous plots, repetitive songs, crude humor, choppy editing, deficient set design and an almost non-existent budget—making Bombay Bonds stand incomparably lower than the British original, on both the technical as well as the artistic level. An additional problem was the cast. In the 1960s and 1970s the Bombay Bonds were played by relatively unknown actors such as Dev Kumar, Sailesh Kumar or Mahendra Sandhu. Even the actors who are revered as movie stars today—e.g. Jeetendra or Feroz Khan—had not yet reached stardom and popularity when they were cast as secret agents. There are also some notable exceptions such

as Dharmendra or Amitabh Bachchan, but spy thrillers are a rather small and insignificant part of their filmography.

Finally, the rules of Bombay film entertainment (especially in the 1960s) demanded that the leading character should be supported by a comedian—a clumsy, motor-mouthed, feather-brained sidekick contrasting in every way with the perfect, noble and valiant hero. Such hapless assistants were played by experienced comedy actors like Mehmood, Dhumaal, Jagdeep, I.S. Johar or Rajendra Nath. They marked their presence even in Hindi Bond films, usually playing lower ranking secret agents, helping the heroes accomplish their missions. Unfortunately, their comedy antics usually had the effect of breaking the mood of the spy adventure (in *Farz* one of the dramatic fight sequences turns into a slapstick comedy full of throwing pies and silly sound effects) and removed even the last remains of credibility from the films. In the world of James Bond such ‘assistance’ would be unthinkable, though in *Never Say Never Again* (1983, dir. Irvin Kershner) 007 was helped by extremely incompetent clerk played by Rowan Atkinson (then again, this film does not belong to the Bond canon, so the argument might be invalid).

### **The cop who loved me: Why did the secret agents work for the police?**

In the case of *Farz* and other Hindi Bond films it might be debatable whether to call them spy movies is justified at all because the leading characters did not work in intelligence. They were secret policemen working for the CID (Crime Investigation Department) or the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation). In other words, the Hindi Bond films are spy movies without spies! There are several reasons for this phenomenon.

The early Bond films were a deliberately de-politicized escapist fantasy. If 007 fought with Soviet spies, they usually did not work for KGB, but for the fictitious organization SPECTRE, detached from the political spectrum of the Cold War (Chapman 2009, 60). In *Dr. No* it was even said explicitly that James Bond did not work for MI5 or MI6, but for some nonexistent government agenda called MI7. The filmmakers from Bombay went even a step further. Because of India’s non-alignment policy they were forbidden from making any references to the Cold War or the foreign affairs of their country. The villains were usually defined simply as ‘dushman’ (enemy) with no specific information as to their politics or nationality. Even if they were deliberate caricatures of Chinese communists, like Supremo from *Farz*, they were never identified as Chinese citizens. They just came from some unidentified country north of India where people simply happened to have yellow skin, slanted eyes and names like Chang, Wong or Ming.

Someswar Bhowmik describes the 1960s as the time of the ‘CBFC’s ever-growing intolerance towards cinematic images or messages, which were overtly political or even implicitly critical of central government policies’ (Bhowmik 2009). For the Bombay filmmakers, the mere subject of espionage was a dangerous area to steer away from. Especially, because the 1960s was a very turbulent decade, marked by two wars: with China and Pakistan. In both cases, Indian intelligence—The Intelligence Bureau—failed miserably at gathering military information abroad. In 1968, the government of India established a new organization named Research and Analysis Wing, usually abbreviated as RAW.

Some distant echoes of the Intelligence Bureau’s disgrace can be heard in the Hindi Bond film *Ankhen* (1968, dir. Ramanand Sagar), released coincidentally in the same year when RAW was established. Despite its obvious escapism, this production did vaguely refer to the actual situation. In the film India is threatened by mysterious enemies and the government cannot rely on its official intelligence, so a group of concerned citizens, mostly veterans from World War II, decide to help their motherland. The patriots form their own spy network, both in India and abroad. But despite their self-proclaimed status they are not actually professional agents, only talented amateurs, not connected with the Intelligence Bureau or RAW. One of them, Sunil (Dharmendra), is the leading character of *Ankhen*; it’s one of the very few exceptions when the hero is a spy and not a policeman.

But even Sunil has many ethical doubts about his profession of choice—another reason why secret agents in Hindi films usually work for the police. The film hero, especially in the 1960s, should be the epitome of all possible virtues and moral integrity; that is why it’s so easy to make him a policeman, who in Hindi cinema is always shown as the protector of common people and preserver of law and order. On the other hand, a spy lies, cheats and exploits other people’s weaknesses. He does not play fair, and although one might argue that some of the Hindu gods and mythological heroes, e.g. Krishna, also tended to break the rules in order to achieve the goal, it is obvious that the Bombay filmmakers preferred to avoid any moral doubts and uncertainties, portraying the heroes as unambiguously honest and trustworthy. Sunil from *Ankhen* remains on the good side only because all the dirty tricks he performs serve a noble cause—the protection and safety of his country (and the fact that Sunil is played by matinee idol Dharmendra helps his case tremendously).

**Parties are forever:  
Secret agents as the overgrown teenagers**

The filmmakers from Bombay put much effort into making the heroes look as similar to James Bond as possible. Secret agents in Hindi films are young, handsome, elegant

men wearing tuxedos and bow ties or, optionally, a tie and jacket (and occasionally a hat). They have a full arsenal of spy gadgets concealed as the objects of everyday use. They even ride in sports cars equipped with machine guns and rocket launchers. The obvious reference is the codename: agent 077 in *Golden Eyes: Secret Agent 077* (1968, dir. Kamal Sharma), 707 in *Inspector* (1970, dir. Chand), XX7 and 005 in *Spy in Rome* (1968, dir. B.K. Adarsh) or 770021 in *The Great Gambler* (1979, dir. Shakti Samanta). Sometimes even the film's title leaves very little doubt about the hero's provenience, e.g. *Bond 303* (1985, dir. Ravi Tandon) or *Mr. Bond* (1992, dir. Raj N. Sippy). On the other hand, the title *Lady James Bond* (2003, dir. Raju Chauhan) might be misleading, because this production is in fact a B-class melodrama with absolutely no relation to the narrative structure of the 007 film series.

The differences are also very easy to spot. James Bond is a man of the world—a stylishly-suited snob used to luxury and expensive brands. Alas, secret agents from Bombay cannot afford such extravagance. Though they frequently attend lavish parties, they are in fact simple, common people without any particular taste—working class heroes instead of born and bred gentlemen. The Bombay Bond does not ponder existential dilemmas—whether his Martini should be shaken or stirred—because he cannot drink alcohol. The CBFC was rather strict in this matter.

Another important aspect of James Bond's life unavailable to the Bombay agents is sex. In the 1960s the hero of Hindi film had, of course, the right to romance, but only with an innocent, chaste virgin—never with a scantily clad vamp! There could absolutely be no doubt that the lovers were going to be married and their relationship would be consummated no sooner than after the wedding.

Nevertheless, the filmmakers did everything to assure the audience that the Bombay Bonds were irresistible to the opposite sex. The usual method was to show the agents surrounded by beautiful girls during the introductory musical sequence (the CBFC must have thought that the heroes were too busy singing and dancing to even think about any ulterior motives). Another popular trick was a sequence at the swimming pool—the perfect excuse to show some half-naked male and female bodies on the screen without being accused of immoral behavior.

But it would be a serious oversimplification to associate the swimming pool sequences only with some gratuitous nudity. In Hindi films from the 1960s the pools—just like picnics or dancing clubs—served as gathering places for young, attractive people who enjoyed sports and physical activities. The film heroes belonged to this new, modern generation of urban youth who did not remember (or did not want to) the perils of British rule, the atrocities of the Partition and the hardships of building a new, independent country. They were born and raised in a free India and simply wanted to enjoy life. That's why when seen today, the film heroes from the 1960s seem

to be rather boyish with their juvenile charm and arrested adolescence. In today's terms we could describe them colloquially as 'trendy' or 'cool'.

The Bombay Bonds indeed tended to be cool. They even went as far as to perform rock and roll, twist or big beat songs and dances. At first sight this seems to be a nod to the musical hits from Bond franchise; but in fact, the secret agents showing off on the dancefloor disagreed with the image of 007 completely: first, because James Bond does not fit into the song-and-dance routine.<sup>3</sup> Second, despite the rule that every Bond film must include a pop song during the opening credits, agent 007 is a staunch conservatist who hates rock and roll. Let's quote his famous line from *Goldfinger*: 'My dear girl, there are some things that just aren't done, such as drinking Dom Pérignon '53 above a temperature of 38 degrees Fahrenheit. That's as bad as listening to the Beatles without earmuffs!'

The secret agents from Hindi Bond films of 1960s, played by Jeetendra, Sailesh Kumar or Joy Mukherjee, were the antithesis of the aggressive, seductive alpha male that is 007. Biologically, they were grown up men, but mentally, they remained carefree teenagers, innocently unaware of their own sexuality. In case of agent 116 from *Farz*, sex existed only as a subject of juvenile jokes, when one of the female characters spelled his codename as *One. One. Sex*. Even if the hero was wearing only swimming trunks, and around him scantily clad ladies frolicked all over the pool (which is picturized in the song 'Husn Ki Zulfe Kali Pad Gayi Aaho Se' from *Golden Eyes. Secret Agent 077*), this image was not intended to show their sex appeal on screen, but rather focused on their fitness, vitality and youthfulness.

From today's point of view the word *fitness* may sound like an overstatement, because the leading characters from the 1960s did not have such obsessively perfected musculature as Bollywood stars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the contrary: their bodies looked average, natural, with most of the imperfections and defects—saggy arms and pot-bellies were clearly visible. As Sudhanva Deshpande claims, 'Actors like Dilip Kumar, Shammi Kapoor, or Rajesh Khanna never displayed their biceps. Even the angry young man persona of Amitabh Bachchan was not premised on muscular physique. Only real washouts like the wrestler-turned-actor Dara Singh survived by showing off his muscles' (Deshpande 2005, 196). The Bombay Bonds definitely were not athletic, but this did not stop them from exposing their bare chests on screen—like Sailesh Kumar in *Golden Eyes. Secret Agent 077* or Dev Kumar in *Spy in Rome*. In the 1960s, this was still a novelty; in subsequent decades it would become the unbreakable rule.

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<sup>3</sup> For the record: the only known case of 007 singing is Sean Connery in *Dr. No*; Connery also performs an elaborate dance sequence with Kim Basinger in non-canonical *Never Say Never Again*.



### **For your Ankhen only: Secret agents as tough professionals**

It would be too simplistic to say that every Bombay Bond in the 1960s was a trendy teenager at heart. There are some interesting exceptions that are worth a closer look.

First of all, there is Sunil, the character played by Dharmendra in *Ankhen*. At first glance he is just another boyish type because he seems to be genuinely frightened by the idea of love and romance. It is his girlfriend Meenakshi (Mala Sinha) who shows courage and initiative. She literally throws herself at Sunil at every available opportunity, but he is constantly rejecting her charms. In reality, the hero is a mature, level-headed professional, in total control of his emotions and desires. Sunil is a spy and he is aware of the consequences. He claims that there is no place for romance in this line of work and not only because a spy can die at any moment. The problem is that the secret agent by definition forfeits his right to any true feelings based on love, trust and understanding. Sunil's job alienates him from society; that is why he renounces romance completely—which seems ironic because in the 1960s Dharmendra was considered as one of the first male sex symbols in Hindi cinema! In *Ankhen* his seductive power, which should be amplified by the mere fact that he plays India's James Bond, is sadly diminished to absolute zero.

Secondly, Raju, as alias agent 909 (Feroz Khan) in *C.I.D. 909* (1967, dir. Mohammed Hussain). The eponymous hero is assigned to protect the beautiful Reshma (Mumtaz), the daughter of a scientist who invented a mysterious weapon called 'the bomb for peace'. A devilish Chinese named Wong (Rajan Haksar) threatens to kill Reshma if the professor will not give him the formula. Agent 909 eliminates the enemy and retrieves the document. It is obvious that Raju is modeled after Sean Connery's Bond: he is cynical, a little arrogant, and aware of the simple fact that he's irresistible to all women. Raju sees himself as a ladykiller, a conqueror, a lovable rogue full of testosterone. Just like 007 he flirts with his boss's secretary and throws his hat on a coatrack while entering the office. Agent 909 is also aggressive and ruthless towards his adversaries. The introductory scene in *C.I.D. 909* shows the basic difference between Raju and the hero of *Farz*. Agent 116 enters the screen singing a love song and cavorting with Aruna Irani; 909 starts with a desperate fight with an enemy assassin. Of course even this macho man must fall in love eventually, but he treats Reshma rather nonchalantly, just like Bond would do. And though Raju restrains himself only to a song-and-dance routine, it is obvious that he represents intimidating, triumphant masculinity.

Thirdly, Rajesh, as agent XX7 (Dev Kumar) from *Spy in Rome*. His mission is to save Professor Sharma (Brahm Bhardwaj) and his daughter Kamini (Jaymala). They were both kidnapped by the evil Dr. Chang (K.N. Singh). Agent XX7, accompanied by the bumbling agent 005 (Rajendra Nath) and a plastic bag full of gadgets, finds

them in Rome. The mission ends well: the professor is saved, Kamini falls in love with Rajesh and XX7 kills Dr. Chang. This secret agent is, by the way, the most aggressive and brutal of all three Bombay Bonds mentioned here. He resorts to violence at every opportunity and has no remorse for inflicting pain on women. Dev Kumar as XX7 is fairly convincing in the fighting sequences, but fails miserably when it comes to flirting with Kamini (it is significant that in subsequent years the actor made a career switch and played mostly villains). The film implies that their relationship was not just a platonic one—but the details are left to the audience's imagination.

Sunil, Raju and Rajesh were ahead of their time in the 1960s. In the next decade they would have fit perfectly into the new, explosive formula of the entertaining 'masala movie'.

### **The spy with the golden gun: Secret agents as men of action**

In the 1970s violence and unrestrained eroticism literally exploded onto Hindi cinema, as the CBFC became more permissive and liberal. This abrupt change gave way to aggressive alpha males totally aware of their sexual magnetism. One such example is inspector Vijay played by Amitabh Bachchan in *The Great Gambler*, a curious case of a Hindi Bond film that expands the narrative formula of the original series by adding another hero to the plot.

Vijay, as a secret police agent, infiltrates an international gang of terrorists. They have obtained a precious government file called 'K-2' and want to sell it to the highest bidder. Unbeknownst to Vijay, his twin brother Jai (also played by Bachchan) is working for the gang (although Jai is unaware of his employers' nefarious activities). After many chases, shootouts, fistfights and cases of mistaken identity both brothers join forces in the climax, bringing down the gang and saving the country.

As opposed to the meek heroes from the previous decade, Vijay is a real man of action, more focused on fighting terrorists than seducing beautiful women. His romance with Mala (Neetu Singh), the-girl-next-door type, seems to be completely devoid of passion. On the other hand, Jai flirts with the gangsters' moll Shabnam (Zeenat Aman). Still, despite the actress's undeniable sex appeal, it is Bachchan—tall, dark, handsome, fit and manly—who is portrayed as the object of desire. When Vijay shows up on screen for the first time, the audience sees him naked from the waist up taking a shower (*The Great Gambler* is one of the rare productions when Bachchan bares his torso; the actor always expressed his dislike of undressing before camera). The director makes every effort to demonstrate the physical abilities of the star. Amitabh as Jai and Vijay is in constant movement: he runs, shoots, fights and sneaks without a moment's rest. And, what's most important, being 190 cm tall, he literally

towers over the rest of the cast, impressing women and intimidating men—his own body became an important part of his screen persona.

Another notable ‘man of mystery’ in Hindi cinema of the 1970s was the eponymous hero of *Agent Vinod* (1977, dir. Deepak Basry), played by Mahendra Sandhu. His mission is to protect Anju (Asha Sachdev), the daughter of a great Indian scientist (Nazir Hussein) who has developed a formula for a superweapon even more dangerous than the atomic bomb. The professor gets kidnapped by the mysterious Scorpion Gang. When he refuses to give his captors the priceless formula, they threaten to murder Anju. Thankfully, Vinod saves the professor and eliminates the terrorists just in time.

*Agent Vinod* meticulously tries to repeat the key motifs from the original Bond plot formula: briefing with M, obtaining gadgets from Q, wearing a tuxedo at lavish parties... The hero even has his own golden gun as a possible homage to *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1974, dir. Guy Hamilton). And his assistant Chandu (Jagdeep) introduces himself to everyone as James Bond, so the reference would not go unnoticed.

And yet it is difficult to call Vinod an Indian 007 with a straight face. Mainly because even with a maximum dose of good will Mahendra Sandhu could hardly be described as a sex symbol: he is short (and wears padded shoes), overweight, has an out-of-date haircut and his clothes would give nightmares to any fashion designer. If only *Agent Vinod* was an intentional parody of James Bond like *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997, dir. Jay Roach), all this would be justified. But the film in all seriousness shows the unattractive, hapless hero as the invincible secret agent and irresistible womanizer.

And this last aspect deserves more attention. The makers of *Agent Vinod* tried to refer to the fact that in every film Bond romances with a different girl. During the course of the action Vinod and Anju fall in love, but just before the closing credits, when the audience is led to expect a happy ending; however, the hero suggests that he might not be faithful to Anju, because he is only able to love his country. This is a surprising resolution in a Hindi film—and also a harbinger of further changes of morality and ethics in the Bombay cinema.

### **You only love twice: Secret agent as a sex symbol**

A secret agent of the CBI, Gun Master G-9 (Mithun Chakraborty)—Gopi for friends—became the Bollywood Bond of the next generation. He is the hero of two films: in *Surakksha* G-9’s mission is to save the country from the evil Shiv Shakti Organisation that intends to spread terror in India, and in *Wardat* he must thwart the plans of the

villainous Shakti Kapoor (Shakti Kapoor) who wants to destroy India with deadly locusts, genetically modified crops and an acid, which turns humans into hypnotized zombies. Of course, in every film there is a helpful, beautiful girl by G-9's side (they are played by Ranjeeta and Kaajal Kiran, respectively).

Calling Gopi a 'secret agent' might seem debatable because he is in fact quite flamboyant with his profession and codename: in *Wardat* he even rides a car with big bold letters 'GUN MASTER G-9' written all over the vehicle. Besides, G-9 is a sort of local celebrity in Bombay (especially coveted in trendy bars and dance clubs), with an established reputation as a dedicated womanizer. He is not above casual sex with a lady he has just met. And in the morning after he asks her: 'Oh, by the way, what's your name?'

Mithun Chakraborty as G-9 is portrayed not just as an object of romantic desire, but as a symbol of unrestrained sex. He is young, handsome, uninhibited and (which was new in Hindi film at the time) well-built and athletic. He often wears tight T-shirts that underline his musculature. Even Gopi's fight scenes are erotic as the camera focuses on his bare chest, biceps and abdominal muscles, shining from sweat. Gun Master is an icon of threatening masculinity: both to his opponents and to women whom he tames with his brutal, raw physical power—literally, because if a woman slaps him, he does not hesitate to slap her back.

G-9 resembles, in terms of the dominating aggressive male sexuality, the original Bond played by Sean Connery, though visually he resembles him the least. In the late 1970s and 1980s Bombay filmmakers had already found other sources of inspiration, i.e. action thrillers from Hong Kong and Japan or Hollywood blockbusters with Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger. So instead of a tuxedo and bow tie Gopi prefers casual dress: T-shirts and jeans or sports jackets and colourful ties. A visible sign of the changing times is also Mithun Chakraborty's mullet. As opposed to Bond's mature, conservative attire, Gun Master creates an image of the boy-next-door on a disco dancefloor, attractive mostly to the younger part of a female audience.

### **License to chill:**

#### **The Secret agent as an ideal of man**

In the early 1990s the honorary title of the James Bond of Hindi cinema was bestowed upon none other than ... Mr. Bond! The eponymous hero of *Mr. Bond*, played by Akshay Kumar, is an amalgam of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris, John Travolta and Sean Connery as 007 (this last reference seems rather obvious, because the opening scene of the film is taken almost frame-by-frame from the first five minutes of *Never Say Never Again*).

Mr. Bond (we never learn his first name) is assigned to a mission: to locate and destroy the gang of the ferocious Dragon (Pankaj Dheer)—an evil Mandarin-like

villain—who kidnaps innocent children and turns them into slaves. Following a few unsuccessful attempts Bond finally infiltrates Dragon's base and after a spectacular fight he destroys the enemy.

The hero's name is a not-so-subtle nod to James Bond, but apart from that, Mr. Bond has very little in common with 007. In fact, this secret agent is more like a rather newer, better version of Gun Master. He is young, handsome, fit, muscular and also equipped with a mullet—the only difference is Mr. Bond's hairy chest, as opposed to G-9's depilated torso. It is worth adding that the hero is also impervious to pain. In one sequence Bond willingly takes a beating from Dragon's henchmen; he does not fight back because he believes that any resistance from his side could endanger the kidnapped children. Still, apart from a few superficial cuts and bruises Mr. Bond comes away from this predicament unharmed.

Akshay Kumar, just like Mithun Chakraborty, is in top physical form: he performs fight and chase sequences without the help of a stunt double. And he is deliberately portrayed as a sex symbol. Mr. Bond, being a remorseless womanizer, romances three beautiful girls simultaneously (and, as the film suggests, not in a Platonic way!). The ladies know about each other yet show no signs of jealousy. On the contrary, they support one another like fans trying to please their idol. This part of the plot is illustrated by the song 'Handsome Man Jab Se Dekha Tujhko', in which Mr. Bond displays his muscular body at the pool while his little harem admires the physical beauty and the sex appeal of their alpha male.

'Handsome Man...' also shows how radically Hindi films—not only in the Bond genre—had changed during the course of three decades. In the 1960s, women were the objects of the camera's (and audience's) gaze. They were obliged to look absolutely perfect with flawless make-up, hairstyle and clothing style, whereas men could be imperfect with their lack of musculature, saggy arms, pot-bellies and double chins. In the 1990s—the age of New India and booming capitalism—men became the objects. The new esthetics of the consumption culture encouraged them to look *estheticised*, stylized, modeled with professionally-toned musculature. Their bodies were perfected almost to the point of artificiality. And they started to parade half-naked on screen more often than women. Especially in the swimming pools, that, by the way, became the gathering places for a different sort of clientele: the young, rich, pampered people who wanted to demonstrate that even without their designer clothes and sports cars they still looked good and attractive, and most of all, sexy.

### Quantum of curry: Hindi Bond films in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

After the proliferation of Hindi Bond films in 1960s the genre went into decline in the subsequent decades, and in the early 1990s it literally vanished without a trace. The producers from Bombay were no longer interested in remaking the adventures of 007. The Bond series with Pierce Brosnan in the lead turned into an unintended self-parody with such ridiculous ideas as the invisible car in *Die Another Day* (2002, dir. Lee Tamahori), the film that is considered by fans as ‘a leading contender for the worst Bond movie’ (Chapman 2009, 240). Of course the references to the famous British spy were still present in these Bollywood films, e.g. in *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000, dir. Aziz Mirza) where the gangsters’ hideout is deliberately designed like a Bond villain’s secret lair, because the gang’s boss played by Johnny Lever is an ardent fan of 007.

Then, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a new kind of spy thriller started to gain popularity in Hindi cinema. This time they were ‘proper’ spy thrillers, with the leading characters working no longer for the police, but for the Indian intelligence. (Spying for RAW had stopped being a taboo in Bollywood.) The reason is very simple: in late 1990s and early 2000s the Hindu right-wing government supported a wave of jingoist propaganda films such as *Sarfarosh* (1999, dir. John Matthew Matthan), *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001, dir. Anil Sharma) or *LOC Kargil* (2003, dir. J.P. Dutta), which depicted Pakistan as the sworn enemy of India. As Someswar Bhowmik noticed, ‘the country was told many times, and in no uncertain terms, that it faced a clear and present danger from Pakistan. The message was clear and simple: while “we” are victorious, “they” are vile; so the glorification of “our” virtue has to be complemented by a denouncement of, and hatred for, “their” vice’ (Bhowmik 2009, 304–5). That is how the RAW agents were finally graced on the screen. Their job, once ungrateful and dirty, was now shown as a noble, patriotic duty—the end justified the means. It is no coincidence that the most prominent ‘proper’ spy thrillers *The Hero: Love Story of a Spy* (2003, dir. Anil Sharma), *Asambhav* (2004, dir. Rajiv Rai), *Mukhbiir* (2008, dir. Mani Shankar) and *Lamhaa* (2010, dir. Rahul Dholakia) are all about brave Indian agents defeating Kashmiri separatists usually backed by the nefarious ISI (Pakistani intelligence). These films, however, are neither related to nor inspired by the Bond series.

The surprising commercial success of *Casino Royale* (2006, dir. Martin Campbell) and *Quantum of Solace* (2008, dir. Marc Forster) reinvigorated the 007 franchise and encouraged Indian film producers to rely on the British spy once more. In 2012, two Hindi Bond films were made: *Agent Vinod* (dir. Sriram Raghavan; not to be confused with the 1977 film) and *Ek Tha Tiger* (dir. Kabir Khan). Both films are big budget

blockbusters with star casts and high production values. And both eponymous heroes are RAW agents.

Vinod (Saif Ali Khan) is given an order to find a stolen Russian nuclear device before it falls into the wrong hands; failing that, he discovers that the terrorists intend to detonate the bomb in Delhi. With significant help from the mysterious Ruby (Kareena Kapoor), who cooperates with MI6 and ISI simultaneously, he manages to disarm the device at the last moment. The film is undoubtedly a serious effort to make a 21<sup>st</sup> century Hindi Bond film—modern, fast-paced, action-packed and fun. Vinod, just like Bond, is a globetrotter; during the course of one mission he visits Russia, Morocco, Latvia, Pakistan and Great Britain. He is also a man of action, shooting his way out of trouble every five minutes. But surprisingly, he is not a womanizer; despite some tenderness there is no romance between him and Ruby.

Tiger (Salman Khan), on the other hand, almost immediately falls in love with the beautiful Zoya (Katrina Kaif) during a routine operation in Dublin, but the girl turns out to be an ISI agent. They both decide to sacrifice everything for love and flee together, being pursued by their former colleagues from the ISI and RAW. After a violent shoot-out in Havana, Tiger and Zoya run away free, never to be caught again. In this aspect *Ek Tha Tiger* deviates from the original series' narrative structure. The film begins just like an ordinary Hindi Bond production, and then right in the middle of action it changes into a Bollywood version of *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005, dir. Doug Liman). But it does not stop the hero from showing his prowess at fighting and protecting the heroine in the best style of 007.

Tiger and Vinod are muscular, fit and perfectly trained in close quarters combat. They are also impervious to pain and torture—especially Vinod, who gets captured by the enemy all too often and is interrogated without mercy (he is even resistant to the psychotropes)! Tiger, on the other hand, despite getting shot in the back, still manages to ride a bicycle and jumps into a plane during take-off. His abilities, shown in the film, are of course beyond any rational measure. Tiger's completely unrealistic fight sequences (enhanced by CGI special effects) with his devastating punches that send opponents skyward, dodging bullets in slow motion or long jumps that utterly disregard gravity, belong rather to the comic book superhero fantasy than to a 007 spy thriller.

Speaking of which, Vinod and Tiger both make deliberate references to Bond. Vinod restrains himself to only wearing a tuxedo in one sequence (also in a promotional poster). Tiger is much more conspicuous; apart from the tuxedo he wears a blouse with a glittering 007 logo. And in the conversation with his boss (Girish Karnad) he confesses that he's tired of all this secrecy in his life; sometimes he wants to shout as loud as he can: 'I'm a secret agent! I'm a spy! I'm James Bond, damn you!'

Surprisingly, Saif Ali Khan and Salman Khan, playing RAW agents, resigned from exposing their musculature on screen. Saif as Vinod appears only once in a boxer shirt displaying his biceps—and despite the actor's undeniable attractiveness and sex appeal, the hero remains cold and asexual in contact with women. Only once does Vinod become nice, charming and seductive—it is when he pretends to be gay in order to make contact with the terrorists' messenger who is obviously homosexual. Maybe this way, the director tries to tell the audience something important about the character.

In Salman's case the restraint from appearing half-naked is highly unexpected, because the star is famous for exposing his naked torso, especially in fight sequences. As Sudhanva Deshpande claims, 'The joke about actor Salman Khan is that he is the only Gandhian star in India: he has vowed not to wear a shirt so long as the hungry millions in India go shirtless' (Deshpande 2005, 196). *Ek Tha Tiger* breaks this rule (but not entirely: in one short sequence Tiger flashes his bare chest for about two seconds). Salman tries to fit into a character who is too experienced, too mature, too tired (and maybe a bit too old—the actor is almost 50) for showing off his physique. In other words, Tiger is James Bond who no longer wants to be Bond.

*Agent Vinod* was a box office flop, but *Ek Tha Tiger* was the biggest commercial hit of 2012. So it would be reasonable to expect more Hindi Bond films in the near future (two sequels to *Tiger* are already anticipated). It is, of course, too early to predict the outcome, but one thing is certain: James Bond remains one of the finest sources of inspiration for filmmakers in Bollywood.

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