

CONSTRUCTING INDIA: CULTURAL IDENTITY AND POLITICS OF REPRESENTING SHASHI KAPOOR IN THE SELECT MERCHANT IVORY FILMS

*A Thesis submitted
in partial fulfilment for the Degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy

by

JAYALEKSHMI N.S.



**Department of Humanities
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SPACE
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Thiruvananthapuram - 695 547**

July 2018

ABSTRACT

Merchant Ivory Productions, an international collaboration of an American director James Ivory, Indian producer Ismail Merchant and Jewish scriptwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, is renowned for its transnational and cross-cultural themes. From 1960s onwards they started producing films and documentaries on India. While analyzing the initial movies of MIP, *The Householder* (1963), *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965), *Bombay Talkie* (1970) and *Heat and Dust* (1983), we can understand that they share some commonalities. The select films were directed by Ivory, produced by Merchant, script written by Jhabvala, and Shashi Kapoor acts as the protagonist. Domesticity, socio-cultural changes, displacement and class and gender divides in pre and post-Independent India were the recurring themes of MIP, while the popular Hindi films of the time deal with Indian culture and family values.

Through Shashi Kapoor, the select movies portray the different facets of middle and upper class life in India as he acts as an inexperienced householder, a play boy, a chocolate hero and as a Nawab. This thesis critiques the role of Shashi Kapoor as an ironic representation of India, which is moving towards modernity after the troublesome years of colonial invasions. Interestingly these movies were released in the European Union nations. Thus, the main objective of the research is the critical analysis of the hero, as an image of the newly Independent nation. For the analysis, we consider the complicated perspectives of coloniality, post-coloniality, cultural conflicts, anxieties and illegitimacies of miscegenation, and the elements of space, time and nostalgia that shape the identity of the hero. For the study both discourse analysis and content analysis are used, along with literary and film theories like gaze theory, theory of nostalgia, feminist theories, etc.

The first section of the thesis analyses the hero with respect to the various socio-cultural incidents in India between 1920s and 1980s, like the clashes of tradition and modernity, problems of displacement, decline of Elizabethan theatre, the flourishing of Bombay film industry and the various cultural biases and policies on health and hygiene in India. The uncertainty and helplessness of the heroes become a tell-tale narrative of the Nehruvian India, struggling to create a new identity. The next section deals with the analysis of the hero on the basis of his sexual desires and anxieties. The debauchery of the heroes and their rejection of the women of 'public' place make them mouthpiece of India, in the time of high-strung nationalism. The presence of homosexuality and transgender is also remarkable here. The liberated western women are contrasted with the timid patriarchal and misogynistic Indian heroes.

In addition to the former queries, the hero is analyzed with respect to the spatial and temporal dimensions. Here memory and history become the signifiers of identity. Here, the hero is placed in the matrix of geographical and climatic diversities. Ambiguity and confusion of the hero are portrayed here as a reflection of his complex nature. Along with these findings, we can also trace the interconnections between Hollywood and Bollywood films. Thus, the initial infatuation and final rejection of the Western lovers for the sake of Indian traditional women and belief systems make the hero an ironic symbol of modern India.