

# cinema



✱ Deepika Padukone: 'iconic' *Dum Maro Dum*.

## Grinning and baring it

Raunchy 'item numbers' are becoming a quick way to make money and fill theatres,

writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

Indian films were once so shy that they had to manipulate two roses to kiss or wait for two pigeons to peck each other to tell watchers that their favourite hero and heroine were getting amorous.

In all fairness it must be said that the movie fraternity did not really have an option then with India's Central Board of Film Certification playing the nation's keeper of moral standards. The kiss was considered vulgar. Certainly on screen.

Even while Indian cinema continued to hush-hush anything that was remotely sensual, the vamps made merry with their hideously skimpy costumes, garishly painted faces and raunchy dances that were not just crude, but also seemed to indicate social hypocrisy.

The picture is different today. To start with, the vamps have vanished, with some celebrated ones like Helen being pushed off by the heroines themselves.

They are now perfectly willing to tease and taunt viewers through salacious songs and suggestive steps.

Malaika Arora, Katrina Kaif and Deepika Padukone have all got on

the stage and let the cameras caress their scantily clothed bodies. Lewd lyrics prod them into seductive salsas.

Malaika Arora swayed to *Munni Badnam Hui* in *Dabangg*. Kaif had a satin sheet wrapped around her as she got into a trance with *Sheila Ki Jawani* in *Tees Maar Khan*. And Padukone is now to be seen in a daringly short mini-skirt as she gyrates to *Dum Maro Dum*, words that Zeenat Aman once immortalised in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* as she smoked pot in what was then a haven for hippies, Nepal.

Padukone is not a first timer to what is now termed "item number". She already did one in *Billu*. But *Dum Maro Dum* is creating a storm in Bollywood for its risqué lyrics, bawdy moves and a titillating tattoo on her bare stomach. Film pundits predict that this number will beat *Munni* and *Sheila*, and Padukone is tickled to hear that. This number is iconic, she says brushing off the barbs being darted at her.

Padukone, as many others in the industry, know that it is sex that sells these days. It is the easiest way to get people into theatres, and with said-so-many-times-over stories, sluggish scripts and

sleep-walking performances, an item number makes it worth the ticket money for many.

The more coarse the lyrics, the more energetic the pelvic thrusts (some would put Elvis Presley to shame) and the more skimpy the costumes, the greater appears to be the urge among people to get into a cinema.

Otherwise, what could have viewers possibly found in movies such as *Tees Maar Khan* and *Dabangg*? Why is "guest star" Padukone's dance in *Dum Maro Dum* the most important selling point of the film?

Again, look at the advertisements for a riveting movie like Sudhir Mishra's *Yeh Saali Zindagi*, with terrific performances by just about the entire cast, particularly Irrfan Khan. They talk about the 22 kisses between Arunoday Singh (whose character is trying hard to quit a life of crime and incarceration to be with his wife and child) and Aditi Rao (who essays an unhappy wife fed up with a husband on the run and who can only meet her when the cops are looking the other way). This film was not about the kisser and the kissed, but about an absorbing plot scripted with



✱ Malaika Arora Khan: the original item number girl.



✱ Katrina: leaving nothing to the imagination in *Sheila Ki Jawani*.

sensitivity and acted out with feeling.

Mishra would agree with me how skewed the ads were, but his producer and publicist may not. They would ask, but who is going to buy a ticket if the promos promote Khan and Singh.

Create a buzz about the kiss — which still remains a kind of novelty in Indian cinema — and the antennae are up.

Trade analyst Komal Nahata has said that "sex scenes and item numbers draw the audiences' attention."

In the case of *Yeh Saali Zindagi*, the screenplay is complex and viewers did not understand the movie. However, they laughed at all the foul language. And perhaps, relished the kissing sequences and went home thinking that their money was well spent.

Sanjeev K Bijli of the PVR chain of theatres feels that today's viewers would not want to see a kissing scene being "shadowed by a

bunch of flowers". They want to see the real stuff.

The movie that is soon coming, *Murder 2*, is being publicised for its raunchy content. The plot centres on the world of prostitutes, cross-dressers and pimps, and Emraan Hashmi (often referred to as the serial kisser) tries to soften the bawdiness. It is "sensual", but has a strong story line to back it up, he explains. But Jacqueline Fernandez, who plays a pin-up model in the film, throws a wet towel on Hashmi's line. "I have no issues about shedding clothes ... Why am I an actor if I cannot give the best to a role", she quips.

Indian cinema may have learnt a new trick to push up ticket sales, but this cannot ultimately make films great or memorable.

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